# URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES EXCERPT

**DATE:** September 7, 2016

**TIME:** 3:00 pm

**PLACE:** Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall

**PRESENT:** MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:

| | |
|---|---|
| David Jerke | Stefan Aepli (excused for item #1, 2 & 3) |
| Roger Hughes | Veronica Gillies (excused for item #4) |
| Russell Acton | Meredith Anderson (excused for item #3) |
| Ken Larsson | Karen Spoelstra (excused for item #1) |
| Neal LaMontagne | James Cheng (excused for item #4) |

GUESTS:

| | |
|---|---|
| Glenda Bartosh | Kim Maust |
| Mollie Massie | Alan Davies |
| Jenny Sandy | Richard Keates |
| Julia Hubert | Carol Sill |
| Braden Parker | Jan Fialkowski |

**REGRETS:** Meghan Cree-Smith
Muneesh Sharma
Kim Smith

**RECORDING SECRETARY:** Lidia McLeod

| ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING | |
|---|---|
| 4. | 33 W Cordova Street (36 Blood Alley) |

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| 4. | Address: | 33 W Cordova Street (36 Blood Alley) |
| | Permit No. | N/A |
| | Description: | Workshop to discuss a new mixed-use building on Blood Alley. This is a joint workshop with the Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee and the Vancouver Heritage Commission. |
| | Zoning: | HA-2 |
| | Application Status: | Workshop |
| | Review: | First |
| | Architect: | Henriquez Partners Architects (Gregory Henriquez) |
| | Owner: | Westbank<br>BC Housing |
| | Delegation: | Gregory Henriquez, Henriquez Partners Architects<br>Rui Nunes, Henriquez Partners Architects<br>Raymond Kwong, BC Housing<br>Pamon Chang, Westbank |
| | Staff: | Paul Cheng |

**EVALUATION: NON-VOTING WORKSHOP**

- **Introduction:** Paul Cheng, Development Planner, started by noting that this workshop was convened in order to to discuss concerns, gather ideas and problem-solve. Since it garnered non-support from previous reviews with the Gastown Heritage Area Planning Commission (GHAPC) and the Vancouver Heritage Commission (VHC), the applicant requested that a non-voting joint session with the UDP be held so that further explorations could help address concerns heard from the GHAPC and the VHC.

  The site exists on the 0 block of W Cordova Street, which is one of the most character-defining blocks of historical Gastown. It is dimensioned approximately 207' x 92' and considered to be an anomalous site.

  The rear 40 ft. of the block depth is Blood Alley Square, which is owned by the City of Vancouver and operated as a neighbourhood public park. Blood Alley Square is currently undergoing a concurrent process for a new design being led by CoV staff. The design will also be reviewed by the UDP at a later date since it is still to be determined by staff and consultants through a separate public and advisory committee review process.

  There are two historical buildings on this site: The two-storey New Fountain Hotel built in 1899 and the three-storey Stanley Hotel built in 1906. Both buildings originally functioned as short-term hotel rooms with shared bathrooms.

  The site is currently zoned HA-2, one of Vancouver's three Heritage zones. This zone is historically highly mixed-use, commercial retail frontages, warehouse frontages, hostels, hotels, and is the original Granville Townsite from which the City of Vancouver developed and grew. The neighbourhood is a nationally-designated historic district. The zoning's intent is to recognize the area's special status and to ensure the maintenance of Gastown's "Turn of the Century" historical and architectural character.

  The HA-2 Design Guidelines were passed by Council in 2002 and were written in conjunction with the Heritage Density Transfer Program. The intent of these was to encourage sites encumbered with historical buildings to retain the building, and any "unused" density could be banked and sold to other development sites in the downtown peninsula as bonus density.

The following statements in the guidelines support this objective:

> "The objective that underlies this document is that appropriate design guidelines will encourage the conservation of the authentic heritage character and fabric of Gastown, and will also ensure that new development is compatible with and will contribute to that character."
>
> "The objective is to reinforce the original scale of Gastown and the character-defining sawtooth profile"
>
> "The permitted height for a heritage building is its existing height."

Council has since frozen the Heritage Density Transfer Program, due to the lack of available receiving development sites. This leaves short historical buildings, such as the one at 33 W Cordova, economically disadvantaged compared to neighbouring taller buildings, if no more than one inconspicuous storey is permitted to be developed.

The main policy objectives this proposal come under is the through the Downtown Eastside (DTES) plan. The primary focus of this application is the replacement and upgrade of 80 existing single-room occupancies (SROs) into 80 self-contained dwelling units equipped with bathrooms and kitchens. The existing building interiors are considered to be at the end of their life-cycle.

The extra height on this site is being considered because the applicant proposes that it is required to make the project economically viable. As such, Staff have required a pro-forma to be submitted for staff analysis, which is currently under review.

This particular maximum height and massing, with a taller portion to the east, was directed by planning in order to preserve areas of direct sunlight onto the park during the afternoon and late-afternoon hours, especially during the spring and summer months. Planning staff acknowledge that the proposed building creates an increased shadow impact on Blood Alley, and recognize that the site has enjoyed an exceptional solar exposure with the properties due to the southern structure being only two and three storeys tall.

The proposed maximum building height of 110' ft. is expressed along just more than half of the width of the site. It has been accepted by Planning as something that could come in as an application, and be subject to further consultation with the community, the public and the applicable advisory bodies.

The application has to date held a public open house event, and reviews with the GHAPC and the VHC. Comments heard from these two advisory bodies include the following:

- Concerns about its scale in comparison with the historic buildings of Gastown. A more sensitive built form is sought.
- Proposed demolition of two designated heritage buildings, partial retention of only the facades, and a lack of integration with the new structure.
- Concern for the proposed 600-seat performance venue, its impact on the surrounding neighbourhood and Blood Alley square.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicant team started by noting that this is an unusual project but an attempt was made to preserve the site. BC Housing was brought in in order to make the economics work with more SRO replacements and less market residential. This project adds a lot to the area, but a project like this is extremely tenuous due to the financial viability.

There are concerns over the precedent of this height in Gastown, although the maximum heights vary from site to site in this area. An attempt was made to ensure solar penetration into Blood Alley using nooks and crannies in the building to allow for light to enter.

The façade matches with the unit plans behind it, but the larger social housing units being requested have made the proforma less economically viable. What has been created is a collage of little 'buildings' at the top which are independent from the rest of the building below.

Previous concerns have been expressed about the authenticity of the relationship between the new and the old, and the integration of the top with the bottom sections. The new proposal integrates the façade better and uses articulation to denote more respect while retaining density. The essential idea is to maintain the program while still being authentic in respecting the expression of the old building.

The initial scheme allows the most light into Blood Alley. In the revised scheme mass has been pushed away to allow light in by dividing the building into three equal pieces.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
  - N/A
- **Related Commentary:** The panel noted that the punched window and sawtooth character were better for the building. They were also generally in support of a taller, slimmer form in order to maximize light penetration into Blood Alley and into the SRO spaces to increase livability. It is important that the heritage façade be dominant on both sides of the building, which may mean compromising on some of the site planning parameters.

  Design development is needed on Blood Alley both respect to traffic flow and the look of the area. The form needs to fit the neighbourhood, and the materials need to be retained and re-integrated as much as possible. Something also needs to be done in order to activate the alley with more opportunities.

  The panel and guests were split on the heritage retention of the site. Some thought that growth outside the historic guidelines compromises the character of Gastown; so the proposed demands of the site are in conflict with the heritage necessary to the site. Others thought that the increased massing made sense and that the revised scheme would fit the gritty feel of Gastown with some architectural modifications to express the particular response to the policy story.

  Some of the guests thought that the proposed massing feels overwhelming and drowns out the sense of history. The building should be preserved with the approach that the heritage building be the dominant component of the overall built form. More attention is needed at the ground level. There is a need to respect what was there previously, and compromises should be made in order to take a more logical approach to this site.

  One panel member noted that there is no need for additional seating where alcohol is served in Gastown, and that there is a lack of secured parking for the building. Another mentioned that the building has accessibility issues for people with disabilities and seniors. A few panel members suggested re-opening the density bank in order to allow the transfer of some of the required density off-site.

Several members thought that the existing rear façade should be retained and given historical significance. They also thought that the front façade should be completely restored.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant team declined to give a response.

**Adjournment**
There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.