

325 Carrall St - Design Rationale

Site History

The proposed development 325/333 Carrall is an opportunity to renew one of Gastown's failing historic buildings. The McConnell Block, originally built in 1889, had originally wrapped around the corner of the CPR right of way, and was originally home to the Vancouver Drug Company, and the Vancouver Tea and Coffee Company. By 1896, the use of the building shifted from offices to the Louvre Saloon, and later the Louvre Hotel, which is the best known historic use of the building. The Gospel Mission now occupies the upper level of the building, and has been there since 1941. The original building at 333 Carrall St was built circa 1896 and was the long time home to the Bijou Theatre. The Bijou Theatre was first a small building nested in between the McConnell Block and the Bank, but later expanded to take over the southern section of the Louvre Hotel. The Bijou Theatre was demolished in 1940, and its demolition started undermining the structural integrity of the building. During the restoration of the 1 W. Hastings project, cracks in the existing McConnell Block were discovered which has led to the shoring of the McConnell Facade that is currently in place on site. (Please refer to the attached Conservation Plan from Luxton and Associates for more details).

Building In Gastown

In the early phases of the project, the McConnell Block was identified as a key component of the Gastown Historic Area's streetscape. The proposed development is a balance of restoration of the historic fabric of the Area, and a modern new building typology (residential) that respects the form and character of Gastown. The design team has approached the building in 3 sections: the McConnell Block Restoration, the Infill block, and the Addition above the McConnell Block. Each of these pieces has a unique visual presence on the street, and as such has slightly different aesthetic in order to respond to each unique condition while being a consistent and harmonious composition.

Market Rental with Micro

The proposal is bringing 38 rental units to the market, with at grade retail frontages. The concentration of the rental units on small units, aligned with the CoV's Affordable Housing Strategy, with some of the units meeting the City definition for Micro Units. The typical floor to floor of the proposal allows for tall spaces in order to best align with the guidelines for small space living. The intent of the project is to use the development of market rental units to rent a building that has fallen into disrepair.

Visual Priority & Materiality

The 300 Block of Carrall Street has a number of significant buildings already existing on its streetscape. The Bank at 1 W. Hastings, the Rainier Hotel, and the McConnell Block itself. It is important to understand and respect the hierarchy of the existing building stock, both in form, and in materiality. Our proposal sets the Bank, the Rainier Hotel, and the McConnell Block as the most visually important buildings (in that order) on the block. Our proposal, while taller than any of these buildings, uses a dark brick material that will help the building recede in its context. Dark Ironspot Brick has a non uniform dark brown finish that has warm tones and is slightly reflective. It was chosen as it is a modern, warm finish while respecting the tradition of Gastown brick.

Maintain the McConnell.

The existing McConnell Building represents one of the earliest 2 storey building forms that extends out from the primary Water Street Frontage. This aspect of the building has provided one of the key

conceptual drivers of the project, maintaining the historic 2 storey volume of the McConnell. In addition to the retention and the restoration of the McConnell Street facade, ensuring that the existing form of the McConnell Block is critical to maintain its historic relationship to the street. Further, the original floor levels on L1 and L2 will be retained in order to maintain the historic ground floor quality along Carrall St.

Over the years, the original composition of the McConnell Block primary facade has been slowly degraded through ad hoc renovations. The current state of the facade has lost all reference to the historic storefront at grade. The proposal is to reinstate the original design of the historic storefront under the guidance of Luxton and Associates. The second level, to be used as new residential rental units, will see the upper windows, the brick work and both the upper and lower cornices from the main facade fully restored. The main facade wall will be supported while work is carried out on the bricks, the windows, and the cornices with a focus on accurate historic restoration. The extent of this restoration work will wrap the corner of the McConnell Block around onto the laneway for approximately 12', which corresponds to the length of the return of the original cornices. Further along the alley, the existing brick wall is beyond structural repair. The proposal for the remainder of the laneway is to rebuild the brick wall with salvaged brick where possible.

The Infill.

The design team refers 7 storey apartment block that occupies the former 333 Carrall St (Bijou Theatre) as the Infill Block. The Infill portion of the building is the tallest part of the project and extends up 7 stories, and with its relationship to both the Bank to the south, and the Addition to the North, creates the Sawtooth effect characteristic of Gastown. Separated into the Lower and Upper Facades, as identified in the Design Guidelines, the Infill Block is the part of the project that most prominently demonstrates the new residential typology within the Gastown Historic Area. There are relatively few examples of purpose built new residential units within Gastown, and as such this portion of the building needed to create its own architectural language while respecting the existing Gastown Design Guidelines. Most notably, the new residential typology introduces Juliette Balconies onto the principal facade. The proposal uses a recessed / inset brick balcony to align with the traditional punched window of the office blocks elsewhere in the neighbourhood. This inset balcony allows for the glass railings to also be inset in order to give the priority to the brick massing of the building. The building uses a floor to floor height of 10' 4" which allows the project to respect the 9'6" ceiling height recommended by the Micro Unit Design Guidelines, however in doing so the project extends beyond the Max Height Limit set by the HA-2 of 75'. The building does however stay below the 81' height relaxation allowed within HA-2 when to allow for design and detailing of a strong cornice. Both the Upper Cornice and the Lower Cornice have been designed as a balance between the historic ornate cornices and modern design practice which is more a more minimal approach.

The Addition.

The Addition refers to the 3 storey addition above the McConnell Block, and has the conceptual task of being unique and independent from the McConnell Block, yet also distinct from the Infill Block so as not to overpower and dwarf the historic building below. The proposal for the Addition uses the materiality of the Infill Block so as to maintain a visual relationship but uses a different massing strategy than the infill to respond to its place over the McConnell. The massing of the Addition uses a recessed Level 3 to create a visual break over the McConnell, then further separates each of the two floors into their own masses, so as not to create one larger mass that competes with the McConnell Block. All the levels of the addition

are setback from the McConnell, again ensuring that the McConnell Block has the most prominence/ importance within the proposal. The detailing of the Addition is more modern and minimal, yet still references the Gastown Guidelines through the detailing of the brick, and the incorporation of smaller cornice/ parapet features.

Request for Relaxations

Height: The HA-2 guidelines state the maximum height of the project is 75', but allows a 6' relaxation to accommodate a strong cornice and parapet, in keeping with the area guidelines. Our project uses the full 81' to the top of parapet, however, our top of roof level is beyond the 75'. The decision was made to request a height relaxation in order to allow the project to use the recommended floor to ceiling height of 9'6" (floor to floor of 10' 4") as outlined in the Micro Unit Design Guidelines, as well as maintain the floor to floor heights of the existing McConnell Block. The design was made to not sacrifice neither the clear height of the units, nor L1 & L2 floor heights of the existing streetscape. While the 75' height requires relaxation, the height to the top of the parapet (81') is respected in our application.

Height over the Addition: The height over the addition is currently 3 stories with an portion of the additions roof area being dedicated to a small amenity room. The height of both the Addition and the Amenity have been discussed with the CoV Planners previously. The Height of the Addition is being proposed in order to provide additional rental units within the scope of our project. It has been demonstrated through previous meetings with the City that the small amenity room on the addition is nearly invisible on the streetscape, which is why we are asking for relaxation on this amenity only space.

Horizontal Angle of Daylight: 24 of the 38 Units (63%) comply with the H.A.D. calculations. The Zoning Policy allows the H.A.D. requirements to be relaxed for development within Gastown. The two challenging areas for the project include the areas facing the lane (north), and the units facing into the adjacent courtyard formed with 1 W. Hastings (south). As the existing historic context is creating the challenges associated with H.A.D., the design team is requesting relaxations on this requirement.

We are extremely pleased to present this project to the City of Vancouver for review. We feel that proposal to restore the McConnell Block to create a safe and long lasting restoration of a failing historic building within Gastown and the addition of rental units to the City is aligned with both the Gastown design Guidelines and the City of Vancouver's initiative to increase the rental stock within the City.



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