

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: June 14, 2017

TIME: 3:00 pm

PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Kim Smith (Chair)
Yijin Wen
Karen Spoelstra
James Cheng (excused from panel duties)
Helen Avini Besharat
Nell Gasiewicz
Amela Brudar
Veronica Gillies
Neal LaMontagne
Renee Van Halm
David Jerke

REGRETS: Muneesh Sharma
Meredith Anderson

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Camilla Lade

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. Northeast False Creek Area Plan Workshop
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BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Kim Smith called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. A brief business meeting took place before the presentations commenced.

1. Project: **Northeast False Creek Area Plan Workshop**
Description: The Northeast False Creek Area Plan is a transformative project that will result in one of Vancouver's most significant city-building opportunities in a generation. As the last remaining piece of large undeveloped land in the downtown along the False Creek waterfront, Northeast False Creek provides an opportunity to embrace the rich culture and history of the area, local assets, and access to water and to create a new vibrant and resilient community that represents a step forward in city-building. Topics for workshop discussion include:
 - Northeast False Creek Draft Plan
 - Streetscape Design
 - Park Concept Design
 - Development Sites:
 - Sub-area 6B (Canadian Metropolitan Properties/James K. M. Cheng Architects)
 - Sub-area 6C (Concord Pacific/Civitas Architecture)
 - Sub-area 10C (PavCo/Stantec Architecture)
 - Sub-area 6D (City of Vancouver/Perkins + Will)
- Review: First
- Staff: Holly Sovdi, Patricia St. Michel, Cynthia Lau, Peter Cohen & Catarina Gomes

EVALUATION: Non-Voting Workshop

- **Introduction: Northeast False Creek Draft (NEFC) Area Plan:**
 - **Introduction**
Patricia St. Michel, Senior Urban Designer with the NEFC Project Office, introduced the Panel to the NEFC area model providing a brief overview of the context, the opportunities created with the removal of the viaducts, and the key urban design principles guiding the area plan.
 - **Policy Overview and Streetscape Design**
Holly Sovdi, Senior Planner NEFC Project Office, presented further background in a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the area, the project and consultation to date, and concept designs for the streetscapes of the new Georgia Street and Pacific Boulevard Great Street.
 - **Park Concept Design (PWL Partnership)**
Margot Long, Principal with PWL and consultant along with James Corner Field Operations to the Park Board on the new Creekside Park Design and Renewal, presented the conceptual design for the park focusing on three themes: community, nature and the destination park.
 - **Urban Design Principles**
Patricia St. Michel then highlighted the urban design principles for the overall project and each of the four sub-areas: 6b Plaza of Nations, 6c Concord Pacific and City of Vancouver, 10c PavCo - BC Place, and 6d Main Street blocks.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following:

- 1) The Planning Department welcomes general comment and advice from the Panel on the draft area plan and policies for NEFC.
- 2) Georgia Gateway: Could the panel comment on the proposed Georgia Gateway intervention into the Cambie St. and 10th Ave. View cone, allowing an increase from approximately 300' to 425' marking the intersection of the new Georgia St. and Pacific Blvd. intersection.
- 3) A Unique Place and New Building Typology for Vancouver: The draft plan seeks to evolve building typologies beyond the tower and podium of Vancouverism. Panel advice is sought on how well the various development sites meet this aspiration.
- 4) Could the Panel comment on the relationship between the development sites and the places and spaces they form together. Are there locations and opportunities where the various sites could better respond to each other?
- 5) Sub-Area 6b Plaza of Nations;
Does the Panel have any comment and advice on:
 - How the larger compositions of the terraced and 'topographic' building forms could be developed to achieve the objective of facilitating the participation of multiple architects.
 - Building over the proposed new local street.
- 6) Sub-Area 6c Concord Pacific/City of Vancouver:
Could the Panel comment on how the proposal meets the urban design principles, with particular regard to:
 - Shaping, sculpting, stepping back from the park edge and stepping down to the water
 - Shaping and optimizing the height and length of buildings for sun, views and permeability through the site.
- 7) Sub-Area 10c PavCo BC Place:
Could the panel comment on:
 - The relationship of the building to the stadium, the new Georgia ceremonial street extension and Pacific Boulevard.
- 8) Sub-Area 6d Main Street Block West:
 - How the proposed site development responds to its varied context
 - The recognition of the historic shoreline in the landscape and built form

The planning team then took questions from the panel.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:**

Prior to each development proposal presentation Cynthia Lau, Lead Rezoning Planner with the NEFC Project Office, presented the draft policies regarding heights, floor areas and public amenities for each Sub-area

1. Sub-area 6B - Canadian Metropolitan Properties - Plaza of Nations

The applicant team introduced the site noting the unique location of the site and the importance of showcasing the new roof of BC Place. Additional design principles included highlighting spaces between the buildings as important as the buildings themselves. The public realm, particularly the central plaza, would become a connection space. A major design intent is to animate the spaces on the ground plane, connecting public and community spaces.

The design team took up the challenge of designing a different form from the typical point-tower and concluded on a terraced scheme, including the urban forest from Expo 86. The intent is to expand the public realm by creating fine grain spaces that can be explored at human scale.

The promenades and waterfront are placemaking moments of connectivity across the creek, while being connected to the public realm. The building forms include terraces with connectivity between sites at different levels to make upper outdoor terraces accessible to the public.

2. Sub-area 6c - Concord Pacific / Civitas Architecture

The applicant noted from a human experience level, the focus is on the urban design big moves and the forms and the location of the buildings. The aim is to bring the water to Georgia Street. The second idea is to create a seamless flow into the park and beyond. The third intention is to create a waterfront shared space while keeping major traffic out. The goal is to create a pedestrian space and ensure viability of waterfront restaurants and allow universal accessibility.

The intention is to create a permeable, connected, ground plane with a waterfront district as a vibrant new city destination. A different type of dining experience was explored with differentiated retail dining zones with smaller scale, independent business 'start ups' for authenticity and a sense of diversity in the indie lanes. The proposed park frontage has 'relaxed' spaces. The intention is to create differentiated urban edges on park, waterfront and boulevards with greenery on the edges.

3. Sub-area 10c - PavCo/Stantec Architecture

The site is a critical piece to the Georgia ramp and the operation of BC Place stadium, including loading for the stadium. The design is for a single building with a two part parkade to accommodate the construction of the ramp. The stadium functions are meant to be addressed by carving out the ground plane through the podium to allow access/egress to the stadium, while engaging the public realm at grade. The tower form is designed to preserve views to the stadium. On the remainder PavCo land on the other side of the Georgia ramp could be opportunities for another commercial area that may include parking for food trucks and other temporary uses.

4. Sub-area 6d -Perkins + Will / City of Vancouver

The focus of the presentation is the west block and the intent is to repair the urban fabric along Main Street and Quebec Street. The second principle is to reconnect the historic communities of Chinatown, Strathcona, the Downtown Eastside and Thornton Park with pedestrian and cycling routes. The third principle is to create a gateway to Chinatown with a harmonious and vibrant urban realm. The fourth principle is to pursue maintaining water, mountain and park views. The fifth principle is to engage with the expanded Creekside Park. The sixth principle is to engage and respond to the new street network, including the Pacific Boulevard Great Street and Prior Street. The final principle is to recall layers of history on the site in particular the historic shoreline of False Creek that crossed the middle of the block.

The applicant teams then took questions from the panel.

- **Panel Consensus:** The panel was a non-voting workshop.

The panel asked questions of the staff and applicant.

- **Discussion:**

General comment and advice:

The panel appreciated the vision of NEFC as a unique, lively and more public place than other areas of False Creek but thought that more consideration needs to be given to including a greater variety of uses beyond restaurants such as amenities, galleries, cultural uses, varied mix of job spaces, schools, production spaces, artists spaces, etc. to bring energy and vitality to the area.

Further thought needs to be given to how retail mix and design can help restaurants and other businesses survive in the wet, cold seasons. A variety of public spaces that can cater to different programming needs and events is also important to the life of the area.

The panel was very supportive of the park and waterfront design, and encouraged covered areas and pavilions in the park to extend seasonal usage. The idea of the water inlet to Georgia is strong, but the inner 'hinge point' of the waterfront should not be cluttered up with buildings on the water, such as the proposed 'floating restaurant' at the foot of Georgia.. The introduction of water into the park along Carrall is an important concept, and it was suggested that consideration should be given to bringing water even further into the park space and city, alluding to the body of water that used to separate the downtown peninsula from the rest of the land to the east.

New Typology:

The panel discussed the aspiration for a new typology beyond the tower and podium, and thought that new typologies had to explore beyond different building forms to changing the way we occupy buildings. Can we get past the standard double loaded corridor? Let sustainability drive the form of the building. Timeless buildings should be the aspiration. Concern was expressed that greening up the faces of buildings may be current but superficial, and not survive strata council maintenance in the future. It was noted that stepping and complex forms have more technical problems. It was said that a new typology needs to be evolved from the ground up, and noted that the Plaza of Nations was doing this, whereas the Concord approach needs to evolve more.

Reference was made to the beauty of sawtooth forms which create a variety of heights. In general, variety is welcome and needed to help the new areas become a part of the city and less like developments.

More should be done to welcome bikes and make them a more integral part of building design and community, with direct and easy access to bike parking, bike elevators, etc.

Georgia Gateway: In principle, the Panel supported the idea of marking the new Georgia Gateway with taller buildings that exceed the view cone and thought it made sense at the corner. However, the Panel was concerned with the current approach of three buildings all at the same height. Greater variation, dynamic spacing, and a hierarchy in height need to be established. One building at the tallest height would be a marker, two a gateway, but three together becomes a cluster. The three proposed towers will put the Georgia plaza and harbour in too much shadow.

Sub-area 6b Plaza of Nations: The proposed terraced massing and bowl form framing views to the stadium and stepping down to the water was well regarded by the Panel. The terraced and topographic form was thought to fit the site and carry the density very well. The spaces created and the relationships between the forms are comfortable, with the exception of the mid size tower form closer to the waterfront.. To counteract the feeling of a megastructure, the panel thought that the larger masses could be composed as aggregate pieces designed by different architects, and that the challenge of this approach would actually be fun and creative. The idea of bridging over the street depends very much on how well it is done. The Panel encouraged the idea of bringing the public up to enjoy some of the terraced levels. The small tower form at the end of the west block was identified as an element that needed further consideration. The juncture of the promenade building with the central stadium spine and the waterfront was identified as a special place that should be enlivened both architecturally and with uses that attract and engage people.

Sub-area 6c Concord Pacific: The panel thought that the proposed heights and form of development were too unified and too dense with the majority of buildings coming up to the same datum as the view cone. It was commented that the heart of the development was dark, not receiving sunlight, and that the streetwalls were massive.

Cascading heights similar to Plaza of Nations should be considered to provide greater variety in height and massing as well as reducing density.

It was said that the density is challenging in the current form, and the panel discussed going through the second view cone across the site to achieve the needed variety in scale and height. Staff noted that the current proposal was about 10-15% over the density prescribed in the draft area plan. Also discussed was eliminating one of the buildings and shifting density around. It was also commented that the massing at the Georgia Gateway corner was too dense, and losing the reference to Portofino. It was suggested that the park edge needed a greater variety of uses beyond restaurants to be successful and special, such as a market, schools and shops.

Sub-area 10c PavCo BC Place: In general the proposal was well received by the panel, but it was thought that there could be more activation at grade and more height at the base. Activation of the current blank stadium base along Pacific is very important.

Sub-area 6d Main Street Block West: The proposal was well received by the panel. The panel supported the principles underlying the concept, and it was thought that it was a good response to context, including the 25 foot module on Main Street. There was discussion around the response to the park corner and the relative merits of open space versus holding the corner with built form.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.