

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: Wednesday, June 10, 2020

TIME: 4:00 pm

PLACE: WebX

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:

Angela Enman

Alan Davies

Walter Francl

Margot Long

Adrien Rahbar

Sydney Schwartz

Muneesh Sharma

Jennifer Stamp

Excused Item 2

Karenn Krangle

Marie-Odile Marceau

REGRETS: Matt Younger
Brittany Coughlin
Michael Henderson

RECORDING SECRETARY: K. Cermeno

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. 2924 Venables Street

2. 524 Powell Street

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1. Address: 2924 Venables St
Permit No. RZ-2020-00007
Description: To develop two 6-storey residential building with 146 social housing units over one level of underground parking consisting of 36 vehicle spaces and 232 bicycle spaces. The maximum building height is 21 m (68 ft.), the total floor area is 10,017 sq. m (107,822 sq. ft.), and the floor space ratio (FSR) is 2.06. This application is being considered under the Hastings-Sunrise Community Vision.
- Application Status: Rezoning Application (SHORT)
Review: First
Architect: Ryder Architecture
Delegation: Warren Schmidt
Jose Lillo, Ryder Architecture,
Rebecca Krebs, PMG Landscape Architects,
William Azaroff, Brightside Community Homes Foundation
- Staff: Marcel Gelein & Patrick Chan
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EVALUATION: Support with Recommendations (9/0)

- **Introduction:**

Rezoning Planner, Marcel Gelein, began by noting, this is a rezoning application from Brightside Community Homes Foundation, a non-profit social housing provider in Vancouver for one lot at 2924 Venables Street located on the se corner of Renfrew and Venables Street. The site is in the Hastings – Sunrise Community Vision Area.

The site is located approximately 600m south of Hastings Street (7 min walk) and along TransLink's Frequent Transit Network. The site has a frontage of approximately 103m (338 ft.) along Venables Street and approximately 42.3 m (138 ft.) along Renfrew Street. The total site area is approximately 4,490 sq. m (48, 329 sq. ft.). There is a significant slope that runs from west to east of approximately 7m. The site is currently zoned CD-1 and developed with a 3.5 storey, 64 unit social housing development for seniors constructed in 1977. The site is surrounded by predominantly RS-1 to the south, east and west. Across Venables to the north, it is zoned C-1 along Renfrew Street including mixed use development one to three storeys in height, 2 blocks to the north at 708-796 Renfrew St. There is a recently approved Affordable Housing Choices project for 73 market rental units.

Rezoning potential for the site is guided by the Hastings-Sunrise Community Vision. Under the community vision, rezoning can be considered for projects proposing social housing.

This proposal is to rezone the existing CD-1 to permit two 6 storey buildings for a total of 146 social housing units targeted for seniors, families and people with disabilities. It proposes a density of 2.06 FSR and a height of 21.0 m (68.9 ft.). The proposal includes one level of underground parking, with access from Venables Street. The applicant is proposing to attain a Passive House certification, ensuring reduced energy use (and associated energy costs).

Development Planner Patrick Chan began by noting the subject-site slopes an average of 6 ft. from the lane to Venables, and nearly 14 ft. from Renfrew to the east PL. Due to this slope, the carpark entry is from Venables. The site is zoned CD-1 currently and allows a 35 ft. height and 0.75 FSR. RS-1 lots with single-family houses sit to the south and immediate east. There is a

two- to three-storey secondary school across Renfrew. North of the subject site, a block of C-1 lots line the east side of Renfrew.

In lieu of a specific prescribed form, other than *The Hastings-Sunrise Vision's* consideration for social housing, one may draw from the surrounding zones to evaluate the proposal. This is not to subject the new building to fit within the existing envelopes, but to make clear some urban design and social-spatial objectives the proposal can respond and interpret. Some of the surrounding zones' objectives are:

- **RS-1:** Generous rear yards and open-spaces between buildings are emphasized. Tree retention is also helps to enhance the landscape provide natural screens between neighbours.
- **C-1:** A general 35 ft. (or three-storey) is anticipated. Characteristic of the C zones is the scaling down of bulk at the building's rear to better transition to the lower scale fabric across the lane. Larger developments should also incorporate breaks, projections, recesses and material changes to mitigate appearance of expansive horizontality and bulk. Larger sites should provide some at-grade open space. Finally, a wider sideyard is expected to ease transition if its sideyard is immediately next to a R-zone.

While the proposed building exceeds the current CD-1, C-1 and RS-1 provisions, aspects of the proposal remain attentive to the urban design objectives addressed above. For example:

- **Massing and Height:** The uppermost two floor step in at both buildings help to reduce the appearance of overall, and especially upper-storey, bulk to ease transition.
- **Character:** The warmer palette used for the first four floors' cladding references the brick used in the area. This brick-base also expresses the building-form as a 4-storey base plus 2 top floors, rather than a full six-storey extrusion. Again, this helps to reduce appearance of bulk.
- **Courtyard Location:** The courtyard located at the rear is substantial open space eases the transition to the single family lots to the south, while aiding tree-retention. Moreover, the possibility to cut through the courtyard to Venables contributes to the area's connectivity and walkability.
- **Generous Setbacks:** The 37 ft. wide east sideyard is a generous buffer with opportunity for substantial planting. The 20 ft. setback along Renfrew aligns the building-face to the houses to its south, while preserving a tree-lined streetscape.

Mr. Chan ended the presentation by reminding the panel this project in providing seniors, persons with mobility challenges and low-income families, with well-considered indoor and outdoor spaces offers a form of socio-spatial equity – to be just in this context is to provide shelter for the most vulnerable. As such, urban design objectives should be interpreted with some flexibility with consideration of the viability of meeting housing unit-count and unit-configurations, program operations, on-site open space, amongst other factors.

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

Massing, Siting + Character

- Interpretation of the urban design objectives expressed in its massing, scale, and articulation
- Transition to the surrounding lower-scale fabric
- Wayfinding strategies

Open Space Planning

- Tree retention to aid screening / privacy

- Courtyard's Permeability to aid neighborhood connectivity
- Courtyard's Usability

Applicant's Introductory Comments:

The applicant noted their client Brightside Community Homes Foundation is the largest not-for-profit society in the City, and its service and is very much needed.

The purpose of the project is to provide affordable housing to a neighborhood that has expressed need. The project is proposing a total of 146 units of studios, 1, 2 and 3 bedrooms. This is an increase of 82 new housing units over what is on site currently.

A key planning consideration of the project is minimize the visual impact on the surrounding neighborhood while providing a robust and energy efficient facility in a cost effective and easily maintainable facility.

Key site constraints include site grade-change, and maintaining porosity and connectivity throughout the site with the grade change. The design is also exasperated by a very high water table with a likely presence of a creek below the building.

Regarding the development of the massing, the applicant noted they have worked with planning over the last 2 years, and aims to address as many concerns/targets from City staff.

The applicant is looking to provide a generous set back to the east (to buffer from the adjacent RS-1 lots to the east) and to the south, which also have RS-1 lots.

The applicant is looking to maintain a simple and robust envelope that is cost efficient but still maintains a strain of elegance. The project's design is inspired by the Vancouver Specials around the site. Durability and tactility is a key driver with the material choices.

The mature trees that line the street are quite substantial; these along with the canopy roots define the setbacks. The amenity rooms are visually connected, and functionally they can also be connected to form a more contiguous space.

The existing trees around all 4 edges of the site will be retained to maintain a green perimeter around. There is a shared courtyard space and a shared communal space. All of the units on the ground floor have their own semi private space.

The staff and applicant team then took questions from the panel.

Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:

Having reviewed the project it was moved by **MR. RAHBAR** and seconded by **MS. LONG** and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

THAT the Panel Support the project with the following recommendations to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Design Development to the overall massing in particular to the treatment of the mass to the South and the East to the adjacent RS-1 zone;

- Design Development to provide further accessibility between the two amenities for a more direct barrier-free connection;
- Consider locating the family units at the ground floor facing the courtyard;
- Design Development to further emphasize the entries;
- Consider planting and low gates to define the courtyard as a semi-private open space both from the lane and Venables.

Related Commentary

There was general support from the panel. There was a lot of support in recognition that more housing is needed. The panel found that overall the project is well handled. The general massing and density appear not to be an issue it is well distributed.

The panel commended the applicant on providing housing for all ages – seniors, families, and all mobilities.

The Panel is appreciating of the site organization and the tree retention strategy. The existing trees aid in reducing the mass.

The panel is supportive of non-market housing; however they have concerns with the scale and mass especially as it relates to the RS-1 zone at the southwest corner. The panel suggested increasing the set back at the south edge of the west building. Furthermore some of the elements are repetitive and the lack of articulation does little to break up the mass.

There was concern with the livability of the ground floor units facing Renfrew as several are lower than the grade of the sidewalk. The panel noted this area will be more compressed with the large tree canopies that can minimize the sunlight.

The windows are small on the north and west elevations. The interface with the lane might be too public, with the many pathways cutting through the semi private courtyard. The panel noted more separation is needed so that courtyard can feel that it belongs to the residents.

A panelist suggested providing a window along the laundry area so there is over sight to the children's play area.

The panel was supportive of the south facing courtyard and the location of the amenity rooms. There were concerns raised about accessibility between the two amenity areas of each building and whether they could be more level with each other. There were also concerns raised about the courtyard being too permeable such that the public may use or cut through the space. One panel member suggested exploring planting and low gates as a means to define the area as semi private, yet still allow views in. The panel also encouraged the applicant to plant some large trees in the courtyard to provide shade and help mitigate the scale of the buildings. The panel also suggested locating the 3 bedroom family units to the courtyard level.

The panel noted the passive house certification is to be commended.

The panel was supportive of the Vancouver Special as the inspiration of the material palette. The panel suggested pulling more from this inspiration and using more than one material at the base of the buildings.

The panel commented that the entry gets lost and could benefit from more pronunciation or articulation.

Applicant's Response: The applicant team thanked the panel for their comments.

2. Address: 524 Powell Street
Permit No. DP-2020-00287

Description:	To develop a 7-storey, mixed-use development with 114 social housing units and retail/ office space and community amenity space on levels 1 and 2; all over one level of underground parking consisting of 20 vehicle spaces and 128 bicycle spaces. The maximum geodetic building height is 25.76 m (173 ft.), the total floor area is 7,445.1 sq. m (80,138.4 sq. ft.), and the floor space ratio (FSR) is 4.38.
Application Status:	Complete Development Application (SHORT)
Review:	First
Architect:	NSDA Architects
Staff:	Derek Robinson

EVALUATION: Resubmission Recommended (5-4)**EVALUATION: *revised June 24, 2020* Resubmission Recommended (6-2)**

- **Introduction:**

Development Planner, Derek Robinson, summarized the project as a mid-block site located approximately a half block east of the corner of Powell Street and Jackson Avenue in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (DEOD) Zone. It is currently occupied by a group of existing two storey buildings utilized by the Powell Street Getaway Resource Centre on the ground floor and Vancouver Coastal Health on the 2nd floor.

The site has a frontage of 150' and a depth of 122' and the lane is approximately 4' higher than Powell Street.

To the west is the Vancouver Buddhist Temple and Oppenheimer park. To the north and east are older 1-3 storey buildings with retail and community health uses. Across the street is a recent 3 storey temporary modular housing project. Across the lane are 2-4 storey buildings, including a recent condo building with a zero setback and units fronting the lane.

The site is in the DEOD sub-Area 2: Cordova Street. The intent is to be a medium density residential area. Rehabilitation of existing residential buildings is encouraged. To upgrade the standard of accommodation available, new units should be self-contained and rehabilitated units should be converted to self-contained units where possible. Permitted uses include residential, micro dwelling, community care facility and uses required to serve local education, culture, health and economic development.

The maximum conditional Height is 75' and the maximum conditional FSR is: 4.5 FSR.

Proposed is a 7 storey mixed-use Social Housing building. The Proposed form is a 'U'-shaped building around a rear courtyard. The west arm proposes a single loaded corridor with 4' lightwell adjacent to the Buddhist Temple. The east arm proposes a double loaded corridor with micro units oriented toward the shared property line with a 13' setback.

The ground level is primarily occupied with Lookout Society's Community Centre, offering programs, classrooms and services for the local neighbourhood, including a commercial kitchen and safe consumption site. Three small CRUs are proposed fronting Powell St. These should house community serving businesses as General Retail is not explicitly permitted in this sub-area.

The 2nd level is office space and levels 3 to 7 are residential with common indoor/outdoor space on levels 3 facing south and level 7 facing north.

114 units are proposed, including 66 micro dwellings, the majority of which are approximately 256 sq ft. in area. FSR proposed is approximately 4.49, with the community resource centre being an excludable community amenity. The height proposed is 84.5', which will require the DP board to support a relaxation in order to be approved.

In addition to the height, the proposal seeks other relaxations, including a reduced front setback from 10 ft to zero including a repurchase of previous road dedication and a reduction in the number of required vehicle, bicycle and loading spaces.

Provision of private outdoor space for all residential units is typically sought for social housing, including private outdoor space for all accessible units and family units (2 and 3-bedroom) in accordance with the High-Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines. Juliet balconies may be considered (typically only for studio and one-bedroom units), provided an enhanced common outdoor space is also provided. No balconies or julets are proposed for any unit in the development. The micro unit guidelines call for a minimum 48.5 sq. ft. of outdoor space per unit, which totals approximately 3200 sq ft. The combined area of the level 3 and level 7 residential common decks is approximately 3290 sq ft., suggesting that the amount of common outdoor space proposed may only be sufficient to serve the micro units.

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

On Massing

- The proposed height and its transition to nearby buildings, both existing and future context anticipated under DEOD zoning.

On Livability + Amenity

- The amount of common outdoor space and its suitability for children and families, as well as the overall suite of outdoor spaces provided, considering no balconies are proposed.
- The livability of the units, with particular regard for the micro units, especially those oriented to the east property line.

On Public Realm

- The success of the public realm interface on Powell Street, considering the proposed reduced front setback, as well as the visual connectivity between the lane and the courtyard.

On Materiality + Character

- The proposed material and color palette as a response to the DTES goal of creating a finer-grain urban fabric.

Applicant's Introductory Comments:

The applicant noted false creek is an important site for the community and city. Powell street provides an opportunity for affordable homes, retail, and office space that will provide free services to the community. The applicant noted they are working at providing affordability while working under financial constraints. All the housing has to be 100 percent social housing.

Since the massing is so long on Powell Street, the project has been setback at the top portion of the 7th floor in order to promote the soft tooth roof line. The office portion pushes slightly outward, this also helps break down the scale of the massing.

Materials include brick, vertical metal panels, two colors on the lane sign, and frititious panel on the lane. Paneling is also used to provide a modern look to the building. The applicant is proposing to have clear 9ft ceilings.

On the east side it has been set back 13 inches so that future developments will be encourage to a have a similar setback to allow for a much bigger courtyard, and to the north great view of the mountains. There is a light well into the corridor.

There are 4 entrances. The community center is located on the ground floor. There are a series of stairs on Powell St and the lane to make the space more accessible. An intention is to have the patio connect and interact with the lane.

The second floor, primary office space, will have continuous windows to the north, east and south to maximize accessibility. There is a small space overlooking the courtyard, east side there is a break out space, provided smallish spaces that can be expanded to a larger area. The third floor, there is family friendly outdoor area located adjacent to a large internal amenity space, to allow easy watching over the children. Around the perimeter there are planters that are buffer to the interior spaces and incorporated small garden plots.

The 7th floor there is a roof terrace that is more adult orientated. Each floor also has a quiet space outside the elevator. In addition there are various balconies and roof decks. Facing to the north there are beautiful views of the north Shore Mountains. There is lots of gathering opportunities with coverage. There are some added trees for shading. Materiality includes providing step lights and lighting on trees for safe passing and an interesting space. The design of the building is that all the amenity spaces are available to all, to encourage accessibility and social interaction.

Affordability was always top goal and to provide as much value in the landscape. There was an initial meeting with Lookout society to see what goals they are hoping to achieve with the landscaping, and one was a nice gathering space with some permanent landscape elements around the perimeter and elements that can be moved around in the center. The sidewalks are qui narrow therefore will keep most of the existing elements with some improvements to the concrete paving and some added bike racks. The applicant noted they did not want to add too much and disturb the circulation. There is a nice balance between hard and soft landscape.

The staff and applicant team then took questions from the panel.

Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:

Having reviewed the project it was moved by **MR. DAVIES** and seconded by **MR. SHARMA** and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

THAT the Panel Recommend Resubmission of the project with the following recommendations to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Addition of balconies on at least some units;
- Design development to improve the quality and programming of the outdoor space;
- Consider strategies to mitigate impact of solid wall on the lane;

- Explore improving the store front and public realm along Powell St;
- Recommend reducing the institutional character of the brick volumes on Powell St;
- Improve wayfinding or signage strategy to make community benefits offered by the building more legible;
- Consider making the courtyard wider by eliminating the window well the west property line.

This motion failed.

The following motion was then moved by **MR. SHARMA** and seconded by **MS. LONG** and it was the decision of the Urban Design Panel;

THAT the Panel Recommend Resubmission of the project with the following recommendations to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Strongly recommend expanding the open space provided in the courtyard and/or explore the addition of at least some balconies;
- Recommend improving the legibility of the community benefits being offered in the building;
- Strongly recommend improving the public realm.

Related Commentary

There was general support from the panel for the massing and height, however the panel noted a lot more can be improved with the project, presently project feels very rushed.

The panel noted concern with the institutional character of the brick volumes especially with the window detailing.

The panel noted concerns with the balconies and roof deck in terms of area provided and programming, either one or the other should be done really well, there is a lack of permanence with the open space, they are not particularly great or substantial.

The courtyard can use further improvements especially at the west property line.

Integration of offices at Powell Street can be improved. Recommend improving community benefits legibility. Public realm and store front on Powell can be greatly improved and impact of solid wall on lane should be significantly mitigated.

Applicant's Response: The applicant team thanked the panel for their comments.