

## URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: Wednesday, March 4, 2026

TIME: 1:30 pm

PLACE: In Person, Joe Wai Room, Vancouver City Hall

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

Peeroj Thakre (Chair)  
Bob Lilly  
Tracey Mactavish  
Tony Osborn  
Nic Besseling  
James KM Cheng (Guest Panelist)  
Walter Francl (Guest Panelist)  
Matthieu Grady (Guest Panelist)  
Stefan Krummeck (Guest Panelist)

**RECORDING SECRETARY:** M. Sem

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>501-525 W Georgia St, 619 Richards St, and 500 Dunsmuir St,</b></li><li>2. <b>575-595 W Georgia St and 620-692 Seymour St.</b></li></ol>

Chair Peeroj Thakre called the meeting to order at 1:30pm. The panel then considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

- 1. Address:** **501-525 W Georgia St, 619 Richards St, and 500 Dunsmuir St**
- Description:** To rezone the subject site from the DD (Downtown) District to CD-1 (Comprehensive Development) District. The proposal is to allow for the development of a 79-storey (south) and a 63-storey (north) mixed-use residential building, and it includes: 1,288 strata residential units and 273 rental residential units; commercial space on the ground floor; a floor space ratio (FSR) of 31.29; and a building height of 271.0 m (889 ft.) with additional height for rooftop amenity space. This application is being considered under the Downtown Rezoning Policy. This application is being processed and reviewed concurrently with the application to rezone 575-595 W Georgia St and 620-692 Seymour St.
- 2. Address:** **575-595 W Georgia St and 620-692 Seymour St**
- Description:** To rezone the subject site from DD (Downtown) District to CD-1 (Comprehensive Development) District. The proposal is to allow for the development of a 68-storey hotel building, and it includes: 920 hotel rooms with conference facilities; commercial space on the ground floor; observation deck; a floor space ratio (FSR) of 24.13; and a building height of 315.0 m (1,034 ft.) with additional height for rooftop appurtenances. This application is being considered under the Downtown Rezoning Policy. This application is being processed and reviewed concurrently with the application to rezone 501-525 W Georgia St, 619 Richards St, and 500 Dunsmuir St.
- Zoning:** DD to CD-1
- Application Status:** Rezoning Application
- Review:** First
- Architect:** Henriquez Partners Architects
- Delegates:** Gregory Henriquez, Architect, Henriquez Partners Architects  
Rui Nunes, Architect, Henriquez Partners Architects  
Kelty McKinnon, Landscape Architect, PFS Studios
- Staff:** Nicholas Danford, Rezoning Planner  
Kevin Spaans, Senior Development Planner
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**EVALUATION: Support with recommendations (9/0)****Planner's Introduction:**

Nicholas Danford, Rezoning Planner, began by noting that, although two separate applications are under review, they form a single comprehensive development and are therefore being presented and considered together. Nicholas introduced the projects with an overview of the existing site context, followed by summary of the existing policy framework as well as the anticipated direction under the Downtown Rezoning Policy. Nicholas concluded with a description of the site and a summary of the rezoning proposals.

Kevin Spaans, Senior Development Planner, provided an overview of the neighbourhood context in relation to the proposals, described projects as proposed, and further design refinement undertaken by the applicant after application. He noted that the scale of the development significantly exceeds both established precedent and the form of development currently anticipated by policy, and that the City does not have established guidelines for towers of this height. He further noted that the application has been submitted in advance of anticipated updates to the Higher Buildings Policy and, as such, will likely inform and influence the direction of that work. Kevin concluded with a series of questions to the Panel.

**Applicant's Introductory Comments:**

Gregory Henriquez and Rui Nunes noted the objectives and gave a general overview of the project. Kely McKinnon gave an overview of the landscape strategy.

**Applicant and staff took questions from Panel.****Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following:****1) Urban integration and context**

- a. How well does the proposal integrate with its immediate and emerging context, including anticipated pedestrian movement patterns, adjacent built form, and the role of the site within the downtown structure?
- b. Does the building base adequately mediate between the extreme height of the towers and the pedestrian scale of the public realm?

**2) Public plaza strategy**

- a. Is a plaza at this location desirable and supportable?
  - b. Is it appropriately sited, scaled, designed, and activated?
  - c. Between the options presented, does one approach perform better?
  - d. Alternatively, should additional building mass be introduced to strengthen the street wall on W Georgia Street and intensify sidewalk activation?
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**3) Building separation at extreme height**

- a. The proposal introduces multiple towers exceeding approximately 600 ft. Staff are considering whether increasing separation distances above this height may be warranted.
- b. Would greater separation:
  - Improve access to daylight and sky views from the public realm;
  - Reduce the perceived mass and bulk of the tower cluster at a city-wide scale; and
  - Result in a more coherent skyline composition?

**4) Technical considerations of supertall form**

- a. What additional performance factors should inform the design and evaluation of buildings at this scale (e.g., wind, structural expression, sustainability systems, constructability, maintenance)? Are these factors being treated ambitiously enough?

**5) Skyline and long-range identity**

- a. How will the project read in the skyline from near and distant viewpoints, and does the composition appropriately contribute to Vancouver's emerging high-rise profile?
- b. Does the project sufficiently signal civic importance and public benefit?
- c. Do the proportions of the towers feel appropriately slender?
- d. Does the tower grouping read as a coherent composition?

**Applicant and staff took questions from Panel.**

**Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

Having reviewed the project, it was moved by **Tracey Mactavish** and seconded by **James KM Cheng** and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

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

- 1) While the plaza is located in the right location, explore opportunities to improve porosity and integrate the lane in the overall functionality and design of the site.
  - 2) Refine the podium to be more responsive to the streetscape around the project
  - 3) Explore adding more uses to create a dynamic environment and consider the future adaptability for the tower floorplates.
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- 4) Consider more separation between the towers.
- 5) Consider ways to celebrate the sustainability of the project and reduce the impact of mechanical systems on public spaces.
- 6) Consider deeper ways to indigenize the project.
- 7) Consider more creative ways to integrate the heritage façade.

### **Panel Commentary.**

The Panel generally supported the overall composition and ambition of the proposal, noting that the arrangement of towers is logical and may be supportable in the current context. However, Panel members cautioned that, if adjacent sites redevelop at a similar scale without improved tower separation, the area could become overly concentrated. The proposal was recognized as potentially setting a precedent, and Panelists emphasized the importance of carefully considering its implications for future development in the area.

The Panel encouraged exploring a looser tower arrangement, including the potential for fewer towers with increased height and improved spacing, to enhance livability, access to light, and long-term urban performance. Concern about the floor plate size and shape to 1) accommodate a hotel and 2) future flexibility for other uses.

At grade, the Panel strongly supported the evolution of the plaza design, noting that it has become more engaging and better connected, particularly with the integration of the SkyTrain interface and through-connection to Richards Street. However, further improvements to permeability and porosity were encouraged, including stronger connections through the podium, to the lane, and along all street frontages. Several Panelists suggested that the public realm could be further enriched by introducing more landscape and softscape elements to create a more comfortable and restorative urban environment. Consider widening the lane for better vehicle/ tour bus access, pick up/drop-off and to celebrate arrival.

The Panel encouraged a more diverse and robust mix of uses, noting that the current program of primarily residential and hotel uses may result in limited daytime activity. The inclusion of office or other employment-generating uses was recommended to support a more complete, mixed-use environment and reinforce the site's role as a central destination.

With respect to the podium, Panel members noted that the current expression appears overly continuous. Greater variation, finer-grained articulation, and a more contextually

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responsive approach were encouraged. The Panel also highlighted opportunities to activate all sides of the podium and improve its relationship to the surrounding public realm.

The architectural expression was generally well received, with Panelists appreciating the clarity of the tower grid and the conceptual reference to the organic form of the glass sea sponge. However, further refinement was encouraged to strengthen the relationship to both the city and the natural context. Specific comments included enhancing the expression of the hotel at grade, reducing visual busyness in the residential tower façades, particularly with respect to balconies, and further developing the identity and presence of the residential towers.

The Panel supported the continued evolution of the façade language, including opportunities to embed Indigenous design approaches more meaningfully in the architecture. Panelists noted that Indigenous expression should extend beyond surface-level gestures or artwork and be integrated more deeply into the design process, including long-term strategies for engagement, employment, and cultural representation.

The Panel encouraged further exploration of vertical connectivity and shared amenities within the tower composition, including opportunities for connections between towers at upper levels. These spaces were seen as potentially community-building elements that could contribute to a more integrated, “vertical neighbourhood” experience. The inclusion of publicly accessible or shared amenities at the tower tops was also supported, both as a civic gesture and as a defining feature of the project.

Sustainability strategies were supported and should be further developed, including consideration of solar heat gain, thermal comfort, and the integration of building systems. Panelists encouraged expressing sustainability features more visibly within the architecture. There were some concerns about humidity control at the top of the building.

Additional comments included: exploring opportunities for outdoor access and animation along the Richards Street façade; strengthening the functionality of the hotel at grade including access and loading; considering more integrated indoor-outdoor relationships; exercising caution with deep heritage retention to ensure authenticity is maintained; and enhancing landscape strategies, including more ambitious planting approaches.

Overall, the Panel expressed strong interest in the project as a significant and precedent-setting proposal, noting its potential to influence the evolution of downtown Vancouver. Panelists encouraged the applicant and City staff to approach the project as an opportunity to advance more flexible, performance-based design guidance and to articulate a clear and aspirational vision for the future of the city.

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**Staff's Response:** The Staff team thanked the panel for their comments.

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