
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: Feb 05, 2020

TIME: 3:00 pm

PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:

Jennifer Stamp (Chair)
Adrien Rahbar
Karenn Krangle excused from item 1
Muneesh Sharma
Alan Davies
Angela Enman excused from item 2
Walter Francl
Margot long excused from item 1
Sydney Schwartz

REGRETS:

Brittany Coughlin
Michael Henderson
Marie-Odile Marceau
Matt Younger

RECORDING

SECRETARY: K. Cermeno

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	2336-2366 Charles Street

2. 601 West Pender Street and 443 Seymour Street

3. 750 Pacific Boulevard (NEFC Plaza of Nations)

BUSINESS MEETING

Chair, MS. Stamp, called the meeting to order at 3:15pm. The panel then considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 2336-2366 Charles Street
 Permit No. RZ-2019-00007
 Description: To develop a 6-storey mixed-use building with 62 strata residential units and commercial uses at grade; all over two levels of underground parking consisting of 64 vehicle spaces and 119 bicycle spaces. The maximum building height is 21.2 m (69.5 ft.), the total floor area is 5,026 sq. m (54,099 sq. ft.) and the floor space ratio (FSR) is 3.2. This application is being considered under the Grandview Woodland Community Plan.
 Zoning: RT-5 and C-1 to CD-1
 Application Status: Rezoning Application
 Review: Second
 Architect: Human Studio Architecture and Urban Design Ltd.
 Delegation: Bruce Haden, Architect, Human Studio
 Andrew Lockhart, Architect, Human Studio
 Ken Larson, Landscape Architect, Connect Landscape
 Rupert Campbell, Cape Group
 Staff: Kent MacDougall & Susan Chang

EVALUATION: Support with Recommendations (5-1)

- **Introduction:**

Rezoning Planner, Kent MacDougall, began by noting the proposal is a 6-storey mixed-use development consisting of 62 strata-titled residential units 60% of which are family-oriented units meeting the requirements of the City's housing mix policy. The proposal also includes 5 ground floor commercial retail units fronting Nanaimo Street. The site is a 4-lot assembly located at the southwest corner of Nanaimo Street and Charles Street. The site is currently zoned C-1 and RT-5 and occupied by single-family houses. The application is being considered under the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan (GWCP). The subject site is located within the "Nanaimo" sub-area of the GWCP; specifically within a Plan designated "Shopping Node". The goal of these nodes are to enhance small, local-servicing retail and service nodes to provide better services closer to home. At the Charles Street shopping node location (as well as Nanaimo St and Broadway & East 1st Avenue) the Plan allows for consideration of mixed use developments up to 6-storeys with a density of 3.2 FSR.

In terms of surrounding context, immediately north of the site on the west side of Nanaimo is currently a 3-storey mixed-use development which the Plan allows for consideration of up to 6-storey mixed-use. To the east of the site, across Nanaimo, are currently single-storey commercial retail developments where the Plan also allows for consideration of 6-storey mixed-use development at this location. It was highlighted to the Panel that since the consideration of the original application, amendments have been made to the Plan/zoning in the immediate surrounding area. The changes include:

- South of the site, currently single-family houses, has recently been rezoned to C-2 allowing for 4-storey mixed-use development.

- Immediately west of the site, currently single-family houses, has recently been rezoned to RM-8A allowing for 3-storey townhomes.

Development Planner, Susan Chang, began by noting Nanaimo St. (although an arterial) is a predominantly residential street with 3 shopping nodes. This is a corner lot within one of the shopping nodes that is currently oriented towards Charles Street and is reflected in the lane location. This mixed use proposal will change the orientation towards Nanaimo with the west interface as the rear yard. This orientation will be reinforced by the recent changes to zoning on neighboring sites, C-2 (to the south) and RM-8A townhouse zone (to the west).

The GW Plan seeks on deeper corner sites, an L shaped configuration. 6 storeys with anticipated 4 storey street wall and resulting shoulder setbacks and a 4 storey wing facing the flanking street. A 6,500 sf floor plate limit is anticipated on the 5th and 6th storey to reinforce the 4 storey streetwall. Site is 122' x 139' along Charles with the southeast corner as the high point and sloping down approximately 4.5' to remaining corners. The proposed courtyard form varies from the anticipated form of development as the sectional illustration seeks a 30' rear yard setback with a lane and floor plate limits on the upper storeys. We can consider alternatives however livability for all housing on the street including the neighbouring sites should be ensured.

This is the second review by Panel. Resubmission recommendations from the previous Panel (May, 2019) include:

- to increase the neighborliness of the buildings on the western face by minimizing the overlook and scale on the western block;
- development of the courtyard to maximize daylighting and use;
- improve the sociability of the amenity area;
- maximize daylighting into the dwelling units;
- development of the physical character to address the finer grain to the neighborhood;
- improve overall livability and use of private exterior space;
- improve the overall form, expression and character of the building
- better balance community and privacy.

Summary of the revisions:

- increase to west setback approx.. 4.5' to an average 14.5' to the third storey and 4&5 reduced by 1' to a 21' setback
- FY reduced along Charles St. from 10' to 6'-8"
- Angled windows originally proposed facing the neighboring property (larger setback) revised with screened windows.
- Amenity room has been moved from south face to north face.
- shoulder setback above 3th storey revised to 4th storey with reduced shoulder setbacks.
- Height lowered by approximately 4'.

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

Taking into consideration Grandview Woodland Plan's anticipated form of development and surrounding zoning changes, has the revised proposal successfully addressed previous Panel recommendations, in particular:

- a) Impacts to the west neighbouring property in terms of overlook/privacy and scale;

- b) Overall form and physical character to address the finer grain scale of the neighborhood;
- c) Overall livability, and use of private outdoor space;
- d) Courtyard in terms of maximized daylighting and use.

Is the revised courtyard form of development supportable in terms of neighborhood fit.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:**

The applicant noted their intent to increase housing that supports social interaction, by proposing a courtyard model in a zoning that it is not typical of this model. In response to the previous Panel recommendations, Nanaimo Street has been improved while respecting the neighbors, courtyard setbacks have been increased and enhancements provided to the retail frontages. The proposed application breaks the massing into two forms for a better relationship to the neighborhood. The public realm is a bit more shadowed but it does rotate to different places. Overlook has been addressed with screening, fritted windows and larger trees to buffer as a green screen. The applicant noted there previously was a corridor that has been removed. Regarding the architectural quality, there is more building envelope which has cost implications so looking for a materiality that really works. Brick is proposed to replace Zinc. The applicant noted they performed a daylighting study. 60 percent of the units are 2 and 3 bedroom units. Units are getting interval views including City Mountain views to contribute to the day to day livability.

Concept of the courtyard is a fundamental core of the project. The courtyard narrows at the top to support the setbacks. The slab has been depressed to get sufficient soil volume. There are tall columnar trees proposed at the west side. The street front is capitalizing on the large trees and there is simple furniture.

The 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. Davis and seconded by Mr. Rahbar and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

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

- Increasing the floor to floor height to provide a more viable retail height, reconsidering the saw tooth roof at the Nanaimo building as a means to potentially increase the floor to floor height to the 10ft;
- Consider simplification of form, material palette and fenestration;
- Explore opportunities to widen the courtyard at the upper two levels.

- **Related Commentary:**

There was unanimous support of the courtyard form, the concept of through units and cross ventilation. The project has improved. The panel recommended simplification of the courtyard to be less articulated which would benefit the energy requirements. Facade expression could be calmer. The programming of the courtyard is successful however there was concern with the tallness and narrowness of the courtyard due to the overhanging upper stories. Other comments by panelist include, vertical circulation within narrow units could be reduced, and

horizontal expression facing Nanaimo interrupted by vertical bays felt top heavy, and provides lane townhouses with their own patio instead of a stoop.

Overall comments

Support density, use, and height and massing, courtyard scheme is the right approach.

Question A

Overall support for the proposed revisions.

Additional setback on the west is great.

No need for fritted glass panel on the west – the proposed trees along west PL will do the job.

No concerns with overlook, particularly now that the properties to the west have new zoning (townhouses).

West elevation could use some breaking up/articulation to the brick mass.

Scale of the building works, no issue with height.

Appreciate the sensitivity to the west as it increases the livability of the units on the west.

Question B

Perimeter of the building is successful.

Retail edge wrapping the corner is good.

Calm down material palette - the articulation and form give it interests so no need for so many material changes.

Consider changes to the façade on Nanaimo –middle (levels 2-4) and top (levels 5-6) – top reads heavy.

Saw tooth roof on the Nanaimo building adds to perceived height – nix and have flat roof - this will achieve greater floor to floor heights.

Simplify and calming down façade expression.

Good neighbourhood fit.

Like laneway treatment.

NE elevation – concern with blank walls – consider a change in fenestration – seems out of sync with the random patterning of windows.

Question C

Design of outdoor space is successful.

Overhang in courtyard feels oppressive.

Courtyard design is welcoming to mingle.

Relocated amenity space is great, great landscape design for courtyard.

Unit types need simplification.

This kind of project is needed in the neighbourhood.

Support 6" per floor increase in height.

Narrow units but they work.

Not convinced of the split level units – lots of floor area is taken up by stairs/circulation.

Thru units are great for cross ventilation.

Give the lane townhouses a patio not a stoop – move the planting to the back of sidewalk.

Question D

The courtyard daylight studies are helpful to understand the access to daylight.

Courtyard daylight supports viability of the space.

Better use with direct sunlight.

Concern with how tall the courtyard is and the overhangs contribute to it feeling narrow.

Overhang feels oppressive.

Other

Clear height at retail (north end) needs to be increased by 2'.

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

2. Address:	601 West Pender Street & 443 Seymour Street
Permit No.	RZ-2019-00075
Description:	To develop a 29-storey commercial office building with retail units at grade; all over eight levels of underground parking consisting of 201 parking spaces, 5 passenger spaces, 6 Class A loading spaces, 2 Class B loading spaces, and 246 bicycle spaces. The proposed building height is 102.87 m (337.5 ft.), the total floor area is 40,909.85 m (440,350 sq. ft.), and the floor space ratio (FSR) is 22.9. This application is being considered under the Rezoning Policy for the Central Business District (CBD) and CBD Shoulder.
Zoning:	DD to CD-1
Application Status:	Rezoning Application
Review:	First
Architect:	Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates & Chris Dikeakos Architects
Delegation	Steven Wagner, Architect, CDA Marianne Kwok, Architect, KPF Bryce Gauthier, Landscape Architect, EGLA Joanna Kwan, Reliance
Staff:	Thien Phan & Carl Stanford

EVALUATION: Support with Recommendations (7/0)

Rezoning Planner, Thien Phan began by noting the proposal seeks to redevelop the site with a 29-storey commercial-office building with At-grade commercial retail units (14,455 sq. ft.) along Pender & Seymour St. The total floor area proposed is 436,465 sq. ft. The proposed height is 102.87m/ 337.6 ft. to the top of mechanical. The building will have underground parking consisting of 8 levels of underground parking containing 242 vehicle parking spaces, 220 Class A bicycle spaces, 6 Class B bicycle spaces, and 13 loading bays, accessed from the lane.

The subject site measuring 47.4m (156') by 36.5m (119' 10") is located in the core of the Downtown District zoned DD in Sub Area B on a rectangular site at the Northeast corner of 443 Seymour Street and 600 Pender St with the "Alley Oop" lane to the rear and an approximate site area of 1,738 sq. m (18,705 sq. ft.). The site is presently occupied by one 6-storey 1960s parking structure with commercial at-grade and vehicle access from the lane.

The context is a mix of commercial buildings and more recent office development. Additional nearby context includes Granville and Waterfront stations, Delta Hotel, Ramada Hotel, and the landmark building, the Harbour Centre Hotel at 28 stories. The surrounding blocks include:

- West: 470 Granville (Rogers Building), a 1912 10-storey office Heritage "A" building.
- East: 438 Seymour (Conference Plaza), a 31-storey strata building; 602 Hastings, an 8-storey office building; 510 Seymour (PAI Health), a 10-storey office building.
- South: 515 Seymour (Cambie Hostel), a 1930s 3-storey commercial/hostel building; 500 Granville (SFU Segal Graduate School of Business), an 11-storey office building.
- North: 655 W Pender (Alexander College), a 10-storey commercial and office building attached to surface parking; 413 Seymour, an 8-storey office building,

Governing policy for the site includes the:

- *Downtown District Official Development Plan (1975)*
- *Downtown (except Downtown South) Design Guidelines (1993)*

- *Rezoning Policy for the Central Business District (CBD) and CBD Shoulder - Area B*
- *Metro Core Jobs and Economy Land Use Plan (2007)*
- *View Protection Guidelines (2011)*
 - *View cones 9.1, 9.2.2, 12.2, and E1*
 - *Queen Elizabeth view cone which limits the height of a building, including all appurtenances, to 337.79 ft.*
- *Green Building Policy for Rezoning (2018)*
- *Community Amenity Contributions through Rezoning (2018)*
- *Making Space for Arts and Culture, Cultural Infrastructure Plan (2018)*
- *Public Art Policy and Procedures for Rezoning Developments (2014)*

The basic height limit (Central Business District Area B) for the project is 91.4m (300'); with an ability for the Development Permit Board to increase the basic maximum height to 137.2m (450') while the maximum discretionary height is 137.2 m (450 ft.).

Development planner, Carl Stanford began by this application proposes to redevelop 601 West Pender Street and 445 Seymour Street from DD to CD-1 within Area B of the Downtown Official Development Plan (DODP). This proposal is situated adjacent to two heritage 'A' listed buildings to the west the Rogers Building, and to the North west the former Bank of Commerce/ Birks Building). To the north is a well activated public space at the rear lane, and to the east is a residential tower the Conference Plaza, 438 Seymour St across Seymour Street.

Alley Oop formed part of a laneway improvement project that Council approved in 2016 that included the conversion of up to three laneways into more dynamic, inviting, programmable public spaces as part of the 'More Awesome Now Laneway Program'. This was a partnership between Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, HCMA Architecture and Design, and VIVA Vancouver to transform downtown laneways into vibrant, welcoming public spaces. The average number of visitors to the alley has almost tripled since its launch. Alley Oop has become recognized as an icon of Downtown Vancouver with thousands of Instagram posts associated with the geolocation/hashtag, music videos filmed, and three major public events hosting upwards of 5,000 people.

The Site is under View cones 9.1, 9.2.2, 12.2 and E1. The site maximum height is impacted only by the Queen Elizabeth view cone which limits the height of a building on this site, including all appurtenances, to 103m/ 338ft or geodetic height 125.6m/ 412 ft.

Under the existing DODP, the density permitted on a site in Area "B" is a floor space ratio (FSR) of 9.0. This application proposes an overall floor equivalent to 23.33 FSR. This increase in density is consistent with the intent of the Rezoning Policy for the CBD and CBD Shoulder.

A 5.5m/ 18' SRW setback is required from the back of curb to up face of the building on both the south and east elevations. The setback on West Pender is 7.2m/ 23.6' and is 6.8m/ 22.3' on Seymour Street. The proposal exceeds the 25% minimum provision of retail frontage (it is appx. 80%) along both West Pender & Seymour Streets. Separation distances for residential to office buildings are recommended as minimum 18m/ 60' and the proposal satisfies that requirement at ~75'. There is no guideline for office to office separation but best practice ideally recommends 20' from the PL where appropriate. The applicant has provided 12.5'.

Max height under current zoning is 91.4m/ 300'. After considering the criteria, the Development Permit Board may increase the basic maximum height to 137.2m/ 450' however the site is restricted by the Queen Elizabeth view cone which limits the height including all appurtenances to 103m/ 338ft. This project proposes a height of 102.87m/ 337.6'.

The building entry is located at the corner of West Pender Street and Seymour Street. The Retail is located on both West Pender and Seymour separated by the office lobby. A secondary office entry is located on West Pender adjacent to the Rogers Building.

Amenity spaces are provided at the uppermost levels at L29 with a health and wellness amenity at L28. The application proposes a building that steps slightly in floor plate size from approximately 1,395m² /15,025sf to 1,535m² / 16,526sf at the base(to L5) and crown. The loading dock and parking entry is located on the North of the site off the public alley Alley Oop. The facade is made up of curtain wall glass and a grid of metal elements along its frame that fold in two directions to create a weave effect pattern. The curtain wall consists of triple framed glass, with the metal frame given an alternating perforated and smooth warm metal texture to add visual and tonal interest. Landscaping is incorporated at grade, along the canopy, at the uppermost levels and at the roof. The curtain wall in the main body of the tower is flat/ orthogonal, but at the bottom it steps inward in plan to open up areas for views into the retail and amplify the public space respectively. At the crown the curtain wall folds in and out to create terraced gardens and open slots to the sky.

In terms of sustainability the aim is to achieve the requirements of the Low Emissions Green Building pathway and a LEED Gold certification.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following questions.

1. Please comment on the architectural expression, & articulation of massing of the project with particular consideration of the below:
 - a. Is the scale and relationship with the neighboring buildings appropriate and does the articulation of the proposed form establish a clear base, middle and top consistent with the character of the area?
 - b. Consider the expression, colour, reflectivity, shape, proportions, fenestration, material treatment, and detailing with regard to the above.
2. Please comment on the contextual fit and neighborliness of the project with particular consideration of the below:
 - a. Does the proposal adequately demonstrate the mitigation of substantial impact on the visual privacy of those living in nearby towers and their access to daylight?
 - b. Does the proposal adequately minimize the disruption of views from surrounding sites, and provide attractive views for existing adjacent developments?
 - c. Is the separation of the new building from the adjoining "Primary Evaluation 'A' Heritage structure, 'the Rogers Building' satisfactory in its relationship?

- d. Consider whether the articulation of the new building succeeds in a successful integration with the historical context of the streetscape including the “Primary Evaluation ‘A’ Heritage structure, ‘Rogers Building’.
3. Please comment on the success of the public realm interface with particular consideration of improve how the building transitions to and interfaces with the ground plane.

To summarize we are looking for commentary on architectural expression, contextual fit, & the public realm interface.

The planning team then took questions from the panel.

- **Applicant’s Introductory Comments:**

The applicant noted their intent with the design was to reinterpret the existing grid of the heritage streetscape. The project picks up on this in its articulation with references to the historic heights and adjoining neighbors via setbacks and articulation.

At the base of the building, the first 5 floors are setback from the main frame and the upper stories there are setbacks with folding glass elements. The materiality of building consists of glass and metal cladding with a warm copper or brass tone and color. The material finish is intended to have a textural quality to it. The metal grid has a diagonal faceted quality to it.

The base of the building works within the constraints of the public area requirements and guidelines. The paving pattern at grade picks up on elements of pink stone and colored material. It has an angled orientation and is designed to encourage social interaction referencing Alley Oop lane.

The ground plain has a significant grade and all attempts have been made to try to align an access point with each CRU. The applicant noted that a focus of their design was to create nodes of resting area with benches maximizing accessibility while avoiding tripping hazards. Alley Oop lane is referenced and preserved with the loading bay design optimized to provide opportunities to hosts events after working hours.

The amenity space is designed to be a restful yet social space for all those who work in the building. The spaces include furniture area, planting on the edge and great views. There is an upper level green roof. The project is compliant with the Green Rezoning Policy and there is an integrated waste water management system.

The 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. Francl and seconded by Mr. Sharma and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

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

- Design development to the canopy, the solidity and opportunities for light at the ground plain and conflict with street trees;
- Reconsider the proposed relationship and gap to the Rogers building at levels 4 and 5 at the west, its setbacks and neighborliness.
- **Related Commentary:**

There was support for the project.
The commercial use is a welcome addition to the neighborhood
The buildings are a good fit; it has a neighborly appropriate scale.
Respect of the heritage comes through in the expression. The top 2 floor and lower floors have subtle historic references. Consider relationship to Rogers building pulled down 1 floor – to the datum line on the Rogers building
Consistency of the form is welcome.
The panel supported the expression - color, weave, exoskeleton and proportions.
The materiality is quite unique and handsome and there is an attention to detail.

Question 2

There were concerns with the proximity of the proposed building at levels 4 and 5 to the Rogers building the panel noted to have a bit more breathing space, a gap above the datum canopy line. It was suggested to pull floors 4 and 5 back to the last vertical bay.
There is a concern with the views between the buildings – suggest a further setback from the Rogers building between floors 7-12.
Many members noted they did not have any concerns regarding privacy as there was no residential nearby.

Question 3

Panel members suggested some small retail.
The panel noted there could be more of the roof top amenity.
There were some concern the street trees would be conflicting with the canopy.
Like seating and sidewalk treatment. Don't stop the paving at the PL. The panel recommended the applicant work with the city to make the paving at the public realm ground plain and unifies surface, this would make the area feel larger.
Like amenities on top of the building – more of it would be good for a commercial use.

The landscape is handled well; street level seating is a good way to handle the grade change. The panel supported the Alley Oop and encouraged the applicant and city to work together to continue making it a successful public space as indicated on the landscape drawings – catenary lighting, canopy.

Other:

Like atrium and corner entrance.
Canopy is interesting.
The building is very beautiful.
The bike ramp is great.
There were concerns with the canopy, large, solid, deep, and darkening the ground plane (poor light at the retail frontage and public realm). Suggest making some of it glass. Also it appears to be conflicting with the street trees. There were concerns with how the canopy planting is maintained.
The panel noted concern with how the planting at the top of the building is maintained.

Pursue passive strategies.

Applicant's Response: The applicant team thanked the panel for their comments and will take the comments into consideration for further improvement.

3. Address: 750 Pacific Boulevard (NEFC Plaza of Nations)
 Permit No. DP-2019-00571
 Description: To develop the site with a mixed-use development consisting of 3 terracing towers varying in heights of up to 30 storeys; with Commercial, Office, cultural and Residential Uses (including Social Housing, Market Rental, and Market units); a Civic Centre including, but not limited to a new Community Centre, ice rink, Child Daycare Facility; and a rooftop open space; all over 4 levels of underground parking.
 Please refer to the following links for supporting materials/resources:
 • NEFC Area Plan <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/northeast-false-creek-plan.pdf>
 • RZ Design Guidelines <https://council.vancouver.ca/20180620/documents/rr2bAppD.pdf>
 • Minutes from the Public Hearing <https://council.vancouver.ca/20180710/documents/phea20180710min.pdf>
 Zoning: CD-1
 Application Status: Complete Development Application
 Review: Second (First as DP)
 Architect: James KM Cheng Architects
 Delegation: James Cheng, Architect, James Cheng Architect
 Chris Phillips, Landscape Architect, PFS Studio
 Kevin Welsh, Leed Consultant, Integral Group
 Owner: Daisen Gee-Wing, Canadian Metropolitan Properties Corp.
 David Negrin Canadian Metropolitan Properties Corp.
 Staff: Patrick Chan, Cynthia Lau, Patricia St. Michel, John Freeman

EVALUATION: Support with Recommendations (8/0)

- Introduction:

Rezoning Planner + Project Facilitator Summary

John Freeman, Project Facilitator and Cynthia Lau, Rezoning Planner, gave an overview of the Preliminary Development Permit (PDP) Process. The Preliminary Development Permit or PDP is a stage between the Rezoning and the Development Permit or DP processes. The level of detail is still at a master planning stage in order to more effectively deal with the large scale of the proposed development. The conditions of approval being considered by the Development Permit Board will be applicable to each subsequent Development Permit Application. Additionally the conditions approved by Council at the public hearing on July 10, 2018 will also continue to apply throughout the development process at [750 Pacific Boulevard](#) (Plaza of Nations), Northeast False Creek Sub-area B.

The PDP will serve as an important reference tool where key aspects are identified and ultimately approved for further detailed design development. These would include, but are not limited to: density distribution, form of development and massing, anticipated uses as per the CD-1 By-law, provision and distribution of non-market and market housing units, and the delivery of a Civic Centre to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning, General Manager of

Engineering Services, General Manager of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, General Manager of Real Estate and Facilities Management, General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services, and the Director of Legal Services.

Senior Urban Designer's Summary

Patricia St. Michel, Senior Urban Designer for the Northeast False Creek gave overviews of the Northeast False Creek Plan to set the context for the Plaza of Nations' development.

St. Michel noted that the replacement of the Georgia Viaducts with a more resilient at-grade street network was crucial in reconnecting this part of the NEFC to the wider downtown context, as well as to Chinatown as well as the Viaducts land which once housed the city's Black Community. It will also be an opportunity for reconciliation with First Nations, particularly through the design of a future park and shoreline. From a public realm improvement perspective, the future Georgia Street will slope down gradually 50 ft. in elevation height and terminate at the water edge in a new Georgia Plaza. This is a conscious effort to connect the urban with the natural.

St. Michel then noted there is also a change from how pedestrian and cycling movements are planned in the subject site. In a departure from the rest of the creek – the seawall cycle path moves away from the water's edge through the park, and in the Plaza of Nations site, along an active waterfront pedestrian only promenade.

Concluding her section, St. Michel noted this project also pushes for exploration of different typologies that go beyond the typical tower-podium form. The stepped and terraced building forms are intended to bring green and access up the levels and are shaped to frame and preserve valued views to the iconic spire lights of the stadium from False Creek.

Development Planner's Summary

Following from St. Michel's overview of the Northeast False Creek Plan, Development Planner Patrick Chan introduced the project's overarching design directions:

Bow and Terrace:

Two parabolic bows float over the site – a larger bow located along Pacific Boulevard, and a smaller one over the central-plaza. The bows help to ensure views to the stadium are less impactful, but more importantly act as envelopes that produce the terrace form, which defines all three buildings on site.

The terrace form help achieve a number of urban design objectives:

1. New Typology: It inserts itself as a new typology against Vancouver's typical tower-podium backdrop, thus adding to the overall visual-spatial distinctions in the skyline.
2. New Relation to the Water Edge: Tapering down to the water-edge, the terraces present a new interface between the buildings and the water-edge – a smoother transition from the vertical building to the horizontal ground or water plane.
3. Substantial Above-Grade Planting: The terraces lend an opportunity more substantial plantings to occur. This helps reinforce one of the key design concept of the greenery being extensive from the ground-plane to the buildings.

4. Improve Natural Lighting: Shifting the massing away from the water-edge helps reduce the amount of shading onto the Central Plaza and other at-grade publicly accessible spaces, compared to using the typical tower-podium form.

Diversity in Architecture:

While the Bow-and-Terrace shapes the overall massing, Chan pointed out the three buildings are still much larger than the typical buildings in Vancouver. As such, care should be taken to ensure the buildings do not appear as undifferentiated monoliths. To this end, the concept of “Diversity in Architecture” was introduced in the Rezoning Design Guidelines. The intention is to break up excessive bulk and expansive horizontality by segmenting the blocks and their wings into more discrete vertical volumes. The following are some strategies that may help achieve this:

- Flex Zone: This is a 6 ft. zone to accommodate the push and pull of wall-planes, cantilevering volumes and balconies to break up bulk.
- Special Elements: These are projecting volumes to add variety to the wall-planes.
- Varied Façade Treatment: Primary façades can be treated differently – variations in texture, balconies, slab-edge expressions, wall-plane undulations, etc.
- Varied Ground-Floor Façade: The first few floors where the pedestrians interact most with should feature enough variety to bring distinction to different building identity and program. This will also enrich the public realm.
- Vertical Green: Different planting / planter sizes with varied tree types can be used to break the regularity of the terraces, especially at the terrace-edges.
- Portals and Bridges: Portals and bridges can be used to punctuate the building faces at the ground-level, thus adding visual interests to the pedestrian realm.

Legibility of Diversity at Different Scales:

It is important that what ultimately is expressed as Diversity in Architecture will be legible not just at a close-up distance to the buildings, but also at bigger scales. To this point, Chan introduced three scales to attend to in subsequent iterations of the buildings:

- City Scale: This pertains to how the buildings are perceived from across the Creek. This asks how the undulations, fold, creases and varied slab-edge and balcony treatments remain perceptible and not fade into the overall terrace-mountain mass.
- Block Scale: This pertains to how this diversity is presented when viewed from two or three blocks away, along Pacific Boulevard, the Boardwalk and Cambie Bridge.
- Building Scale: This pertains to how diversity and variation work when viewed at the ground-plane level. For instance, how can the larger planar shifts continue or transition to a finer pedestrian scale.

Chan summarised this project as one that can achieve diversity within the parameter of the bow-and-terrace form – unity in diversity.

Landscape Planner’s Summary

While Chan focused more on the buildings, Landscape Planner Ding Yu addressed the public realm, landscape design and sustainability measures.

Key Public Places:

The large site provides many opportunities for new kinds of public and semi-public spaces to be created. For example:

- Central Plaza: This is the central axis that provides not just an event space but is the connector linking the Stadium's future Pacific Boulevard entry to the new Waterfront.
- Waterfront Plaza: The boardwalks coming in from both the east and west widens into the new Waterfront Plaza which is also the terminus of the central plaza axis. This Waterfront Plaza provides the space for additional programming and steps down to the water where non-motorised watercrafts can dock.
- Grand Stairs: The most apparent public space feature is the Grand Stairs that lead from the Waterfront Plaza up to a second-level semi-public deck, as well as to a bridge to cross to the Civic Centre. The Stairs form a clear line of movement connecting the ground-plane to the upper-levels.

Sustainability Measures:

Ding also pointed out that many of the architectural and public realm treatment are hinged on the Northeast False Creek Plan's high standards for sustainability, resiliency and biodiversity. For example:

- Planting on Upper Levels: Adequate growing medium is important for substantial planting to proceed. A diversity of trees and layering can help break the massing and horizontality. However, the maintenance of these planters and decks needs to be thoroughly planned in order for their intended effect to occur.
- Shoreline Treatment: A mix of soft and hard landscapes that interweaved is provided – the boardwalk and plaza that transitions into the legacy Forest. The landscape treatment at the water edge also takes into account Sea Level Rises and the sustaining of marine life.

Questions for Urban Design Panel

Development Planner Patrick Chan brought the City Staff presentation to a conclusion with a series of questions. The questions, Chan pointed out, were aimed at:

1. Evaluating how the project's current stage has responded to the directions in the Design Guidelines and Rezoning Conditions; and,
2. Evolving the Design Guidelines through the subsequent individual Development Permits.

The questions themselves are divided into three groups: First, relating to massing and character, particularly how "Diversity in Architecture" is expressed. Second, relating to the public realm, particularly how the above-grade publicly accessible spaces are programmed and connected. Lastly, about livability, usability and maintenance. The panelists were then asked to comment on:

Massing + Character

- Expression of distinct volumes to reduce appearance of bulk and expansive horizontality.
- Vertical green elements in punctuating the regularity of the terrace-edge.

- Opportunities for upper-floor articulations to improve building identity and city skyline.
- Buildings' interface with and transitions to its surroundings as well as with each other.
- Perceptibility of architectural diversity at a City, Block and Building scales.

Public Realm

- Connection between at-grade and above-grade gathering spaces.
- Framing of public space between buildings, at the podium level.
- Legibility from Boardwalk and/or Pacific Boulevard to Central Plaza.
- Clarity of key entrances.

Livability + Usability

- Design of the terraces to help maintain the vertical green elements.
- Unit layouts with regards to livability, adjacency to above-grade open spaces, and privacy.

The planning team then took questions from the panel.

Applicant's Introductory Comments:

The applicant noted the inspiration is rooted in Vancouver's relationship with the mountains. The central idea is to look at how the mountain form can be evolved into a series of terraced gardens on different levels for everyone. As such, to have access to nature all around. This terrace form leads to a departure from the typical tower and podium form commonly seen in Vancouver. The terraced form also allow most units to have outdoor spaces that are south-facing and open to a view of the creek.

The applicant reminded the audience the previous Urban Design Panel's comments were to focus on the design guidelines, improve development on the western edge of the westernmost building, and improve access to the water edge. The applicant then demonstrated how they have addressed these concerns.

The applicant noted they have broken the site into character precincts. The intent is to have special moments unique to the character of each precinct. The aim is to develop a guiding framework for future architects to work from. Connections throughout the site is also important, and to this, the applicant highlighted how the Central Plaza will be a major destination as well as the key connector bringing pedestrian movement from Pacific Boulevard to the Waterfront Plaza. And from the Waterfront Plaza, one can move onto the Legacy Forest and the wider spans of boardwalks. The plazas could be activated with activities such as food vendors. Noting the connected multi-level public spaces, the applicant also spoke of the Grand-Stairs which connect the Waterfront Plaza to the upper-level public deck at Block C. From there, one can cross over to the community centre.

This idea of multi-level connection is also addressed in the terraced form which are lined with planters that link the ground-plane vegetation all the way up the buildings. The idea is to express a connected ecology, and a rainwater management system that is partly used to irrigate the plantings demonstrates one aspect of this connected ecology.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:

Having reviewed the project it was moved by Ms. Schwartz and seconded by Ms. Davies and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

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

- Design development to provide further articulation of the buildings such as they read distinctly but exhibit a familial relationship. This is tied to demonstrating unique architectural expression. Further articulation would apply to not just the Pacific Boulevard elevation but other portions of the development;
- Design Development to the ecological story and the sustainability strategies;
- Consider ease of maintenance to those green spaces so they contribute to the legacy of the project (i.e. green parameter planters and terraces).
- Consider removal of a small portion of the marina for better access/views for non motorized boats.

Related Commentary:

The panel supported the project with recommendations.

The panel commended both city staff and the applicant for all the work/thought that went into the project.

The design is exceptional, so different. It is a unique typology for Vancouver.

The project is much improved in terms of moves to the massing since the rezoning. Like the movement and the curvature and the articulation. It adds more dimension to the project – continue to take it further.

There were no concerns with the adjacent context; the panel noted it was a good response to the existing context especially on the end of Georgia but also to BC place.

There was support for the terrace concept.

The panel noted the following concerns.

Massing + Character:

The roof top is not very clear what the functions are amongst the broader goals. Will there be access up there. The tops of the building feel like a 'buzz cut' at the view cone, consider how the mechanical pieces will be dealt with given the visual prominence from the street/water level. The planters add to the bulk of the building especially on the courtyard side, consider whether or not they are to be shaved down.

The façade along Pacific Boulevard reads as flat boxes and do not break up, the street wall is unrelenting. The box elements on Pacific Blvd. do not go far enough to break the mass/flatness.

The consisting quality of the terracing and greenery at the inner courtyards on the east and west building are a bit relentless.

Consider distinct identities of each building, this goes between the buildings and down to the commercial level and civic functions so they are more legible.

Like bold form and framing of BC Place.

Like departure from tower + podium.

The vertical boxes and greenery break up the mass.

Cinematic in how the forms change as one moves through the site.

Buildings will feel large because of the terracing.

Green makes it feel bigger, more massive – break up greenery especially the north buildings (west and east).

Terrace concept works well for building 1 but maybe not for all – it doesn't make each building unique enough.

Façade treatments are just texture – there is not a big articulation.

Can't pursue passive house with this language and massing.

There are some distinct identities for each building – retail and music space.

Pacific Blvd building boxes – consider more types or differentiation.

Where are the entries to the buildings – they need to be distinguished – civic, residential, and parkade.

The top floor of each of the building feels like the massing got a buzz cut. The need more meaning and habitat or some use.

The long horizontal runs of planting on all of the buildings, especially on the interior west/east sides of the "U" shaped buildings, feel institutional or office like.

The tops of the building are cut off, consider can one get access to the very top of each building, how much of it will be mechanical equipment.

Regarding articulation, consider a more familial in approach.

Mass is pushed up on Pacific Blvd. – consider undulation terracing.

The presented material proposes a blanket approach to green terraces on the buildings.

Public Realm:

The public realm is very well handled. There is a great variety of active and passive outdoor spaces. Great active/well programmed public realm.

Connects well to context, both immediate and beyond.

Other comments included consider breaking up the commercial space at the central plaza to a finer grain. There is a missing connection between the ecological and sustainability factors of the building.

Considering the scale of what is envisioned consider providing more breathing space to the bikeway and sidewalk adjacency along Pacific.

In regards to the marina consider moving the small sections that is adjacent to the grand stairs.

Consider the extraordinary canopy over the central plaza.

Consider a double row of street trees on Pacific Avenue; it supports this as a great street.

It is not clear how the accessible routes work. Consider incorporating ramps and make elevators on the outside of buildings so the vertical connections are more legible.

Previously the legacy forest was planted with too little soil volume resulting in it not thriving, consider providing more than 10 cubic metres of soil volume per tree especially in the central plaza. The panel noted the effort to engage the water front and provide nodes for relaxation and socialization was successful.

The panel liked the portals and noted they need public art.

Consider making the central plaza more organic and less rigid. Canopy over central plaza should be removable. Great to open up to the water's edge.

Push the lighting and paving pattern.

Like grand stair and floating stage but the stage may be too close to the bird habitat/forest.

Marina – remove small section closest to the floating stage so there is a stronger connection to the water and better visual access for non-motorized boats on the water to navigate a way to shore.

The panel supported how the boardwalk is wider than the street.

Like the rewinding of the legacy forest.

The proposal is missing a connection between the ecological factor and sustainability – for example the green roofs – what is their function. Water movement and soil depth. Biodiversity from the private roof decks down to the water.

The amenity strip between the bikeway and the sidewalk on Pacific Blvd. is 0.6m wide – there's no furniture. Consider widening this strip so it feels like the great street it is supposed to be.

Livability + Usability:

The outdoor spaces for the social housing feels tight, consider acoustic units along Pacific.

Overall livability of project is successful.

Minimal overlook between units is good.

Outdoor space for social housing feels tight.

Acoustics of social housing on Pacific is not great.

Applicant's Response: The applicant team thanked the panel for their comments and provided further clarifications.