
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: Dec 11, 2019

TIME: 3:00 pm

PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:

Jim Huffman
Jennifer Stamp
Susan Ockwell
Adrian Rahbar
Karenn Krangle

REGRETS: Grant Newfield
Colette Parsons
Yinjin Wen
Helen Avini Besharat
Muneesh Sharma
Amela Brudar
Derek Neale
Matt Younger

RECORDING

SECRETARY: K. Cermeno

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	728-796 Main St
2.	150 Robson St

BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Jim Huffman called the meeting to order at 3:15 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. The panel then considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 728-796 Main Street
 Permit No. RZ-2017-0025
 Description: To develop an 11-storey mixed-use building with commercial retail units at grade, 19 social housing units on levels 2 and 3, and 75 strata units on levels 4-11; all over 4 levels of underground parking with 67 parking stalls and 195 bicycle stalls. The total floor area is 7,959.3 sq. m (85,673 sq. ft.), the building height is 34.8 m (114.3 ft.), and the floor space ratio (FSR) is 6.68.
 Zoning: HA-1A to CD-1
 Application Status: Rezoning Application
 Review: Second
 Architect: Studio One Architecture
 Staff: Thien Paul & Paul McDonnell

EVALUATION: SUPPORT with Recommendations (4-0)

- **Introduction:**

Rezoning Planner, Thien Phan, noted this site is located on the northeast corner of Main and Union streets, zoned HA-1A within the Chinatown neighbourhood and within the historic Hogan's Alley neighbourhood. The site consists of three lots (107 ft. x 114 ft.) for a site size of 12,844 sq. ft.

The site is zoned HA-1A and includes a number of 90-foot mixed-use buildings to the north and east. To the west is a BC Hydro substation. Further north along Pender Street is HA-1 zoning with a 75 ft. height limit, with the exception of two rezonings at 120 ft. South are the viaducts, planned for removal with plans that anticipate 90 ft. buildings facing Main Street and 120 ft. midblock towards Gore.

- *728 Main Street* — A two-storey commercial building built in 1904, with a pub on the ground floor, the Brickhouse.
- *780 Main Street* — A vacant lot.
- *796 Main Street* — The Creekside Vancouver Student Residence, a three-storey building with 24 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units, built in 1899.
- To the rear of the site is 207 Union Street, one-storey brick building from 1925. It was previously home to commercial activities, including a taxi business, Vie's Chicken House restaurant, and a Jimi Hendrix shrine, erected by the previous owner of this building.

There is a great deal of cultural history here, as it is the gateway to Chinatown and located within the historic Hogan's Alley, a historic neighbourhood of Black Community who were displaced with the building of the viaducts in the 1960s.

Background, Policy Context, and Revisions to Rezoning Application

The original application was submitted on May 1, 2017 under the *DTES Plan and Rezoning Policy for the DTES*. A history of policy changes, Council decisions, and revisions to the rezoning application are provided below.

- **March 2014** — Council adopted the *Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan and Rezoning Policy for the DTES* with heights at 150 ft. for projects that demonstrate a strong contextual fit with Chinatown and Hogan's Alley's cultural identity.
- **May 2017** — Original rezoning application was submitted for a 15-storey mixed-use building containing ground-floor commercial, 19 social housing units, 99 strata residential units, 8.12 FSR, height of 150 ft.
- **June 2017** — At public hearings in June 2017, Council voted to not approve a rezoning application at 105 Keefer Street, which came in under the *Rezoning Policy for HA-1A*. The community raised concerns that the height and scale of this building did not reflect the neighbourhood character.
- **July 2018** — In response to community feedback about height and bulk of newer buildings within Chinatown, policy amendments were made to better reinforce the existing scale and character of the area. Council approved amendments to the *HA-1 and HA-1A District Schedules* and simultaneously rescinded the *Rezoning Policy for HA-1A*. These changes limited building heights in HA-1A to an outright of 75 ft. and a conditional to 90 ft., along with establishing density limits to a maximum of 5.35 FSR.

Since the application was originally submitted at 150 ft. under the now rescinded *Rezoning Policy for HA-1A*, Council allowed the current application to proceed under the rescinded policy. However, Council required also that the applicant shape the proposal to be compatible with its surrounding context in terms of massing, scale, and design.

- **September 2019** — A revised application was submitted for one 11-storey building, ground floor commercial, 19 units of social housing and 75 units of strata housing. The revised FSR is 6.68 and the building height is 114.3 ft.

Revisions to the Rezoning Application

Project statistics are:

- Commercial retail units at grade with mezzanine above (6,099 sq. ft.);
- 19 units of social housing on levels 2 and 3 (13,836 sq. ft.);
- 75 strata residential units on levels 4 to 11 (65,819 sq. ft.);
- Total floor area of 85,649 sq. ft.;
- Building height of 114.3 ft. (to top of parapet);
- 4 levels of underground parking with 67 parking spaces and 195 bicycle spaces;
- Floor space ratio (FSR) of 6.68.

Development planner, Paul McDonnell, noted It is the expectations of the base zoning and the Chinatown design guidelines that new buildings on larger sites should be responsive to the historical context. They should express a sense of incremental development with

narrower frontages (25' - 50') and a stepped or "saw-tooth" street wall height in reference to the historical 25' parcelization pattern within Chinatown. The composition of the facades should reference historical hierarchy but may be more contemporary in terms of their materials and expression.

This project went to UDP in October 2017 at which time RESUBMISSION was recommended.

The previous Urban Design Panel noted that the height and density should only be supported if further refinement of the design is provided. They also commented that the building will read as a gateway building on a significant site, so it should be more distinctive. They felt that the street wall height may exceed 90' to add prominence to the corner as well as a saw tooth profile and a setback to the upper massing may further emphasize the corner.

Since the previous Urban Design Panel's comments, Staff have worked closely with the applicant in revising the proposal to respond to both community concerns and the evolving policy context. The height overage has been reduced to two-storeys above the base zoning in response to staff direction. This is intended to be more in keeping with the context (90 foot height limit along Main for both Chinatown and North-East False Creek) and the expectations of the community with regards to height and built form.

This project also went to the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee (CHAPC) on September 12 2019 which supported the design in principle while requesting improvements to the following:

- a. That as a Chinatown gateway location, the top setback section of the building be integrated into the main building mass, to create a strong expression at the top; not weakening through receding;
- b. Replacing glass balconies with a material aligned with Chinatown heritage characteristics;
- c. That the design of the entrance to the lane facing commercial unit be expressed with architectural prominence and be treated as the main entrance.

With CHAPC's comments in mind;

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought in regards to how successful the current application is at addressing the previous Urban Design Panel's comments, which were as follows:

1. The form should respond to the corner condition noting the site is a gateway to Chinatown.
2. Provide a vertical connection between the building base and the portions above 90'
3. Provide more texture and variation to the facades, including varying the street wall height with a sawtooth profile.

4. Consider reversing the stepping on the north for improved daylight access.

The planning team then took questions from the panel.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:**

The applicant noted from the first UDP application to the present building form, the guidelines and bylaws are very restrictive and do not leave many options for an alternative building design. The applicant worked with planning in hopes of getting some leeway with the upper part of the building.

The applicant noted they reshaped the building and made several different designs, in the end they lowered the building to 11 stories, causing a significant loss in density.

The applicant noted that it would be beneficial to the project if they could extend the corner element up to the 11th floor, -instead of stepping back at the top two floors

The applicant also commented that materials have been upgraded in the laneway; the paving history contributes to the history and importance of location. The second and third floor small amenity areas have a planting area. The roof has an opportunity to provide landscape and amenity space.

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. Krangle and seconded by Ockwell and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

THAT the Panel **SUPPORT** the project as a rezoning with the following recommendation to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Design Development to extend the brick massing at the corner element to the top of the building to create a stronger corner expression;
- Design Development of balconies guards and façade glazing details.

- **Related Commentary:**

The panel generally supported the project.

The panel generally supported the height.

The panel noted the rezoning application is on track and will benefit from further design development. The panel agreed with CHAPC comments that the project should have a more solid corner expression. The variation of architecture on the façade is nice.

A panelist noted to continue the expression down to the commercial base as much as possible.

Detailing views at street level are great, you can feel the character.

Strengthening of the saw tooth elements is more characteristic of Chinatown and Hastings Street. A panelist noted the applicant captured the proportion on the vertically well.

Consider the treatment of the gap between the brick masses. The panel noted the corner at grade has potential as a gateway.

The panel noted the rendering of the brick going at full height is stronger.

The panel noted to look at the fenestration (presently repetitive) details.

The panel noted to look at details of railings of the balconies and how it comes down to the ground.

The panel noted the amenities have potential and landscaping on the roof would be nice.

A panelist noted not sure the canopy levels work well.

Keep in mind the planters against the guardrail, the guardrails will jump in height.

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

2. Address:	150 Robson St
Permit No.	DP-2019-00809
Description:	To develop a 29-storey mixed-use building that includes a hotel, retail and services uses at grade, and 131 market housing units in the residential tower. The proposal includes retention and restoration of the existing Northern Electric Building Facade. The total floor area is 23,345 sq. m (251,228 sq. ft.), the maximum building height is 88.5 m (290 ft.), and the floor space ratio (FSR) is 10.08.
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Complete Development Application
Review:	Second (First as DP)
Architect:	GBL Architects
Delegation:	Daniel Eisenberg, Architect, GBL Architects Roberto Podda, Architect, GBL Architects Grant Brumpton, Landscape Architect, PWL Partnership Robert Lemon, Heritage Consultant, Robert Lemon Architect Inc.
Owner/Developer	Chris Quisley, Amacon
Staff:	Kevin Spaans

EVALUATION: Support with Recommendations (4-0)

- Introduction:

Development Planner, Kevin Spaans, began by noting that this is a DP after rezoning located on a double-fronted site on Robson St with Cambie St to the west and Beatty Street to the east. The project originally came to the Urban Design Panel on June 28, 2017, and received the support of the Panel with the following recommendations:

- Re-consider the relationship of the tower to the base and the overall massing strategy;
- Recommend solar response to orientation of all facades and incorporate this in the narrative;
- Consider the public realm design on the corner of Robson and Beatty be designed to support more active and vibrant uses, and;
- Consider relocation of the trees, benches and the public bike share.

The building is located to the west of BC Place and Terry Fox Plaza and the adjacent context is a mix of hotel and residential use up to 36 storeys to the north and character warehouse conversions up to 5 storeys to the south. The building falls within the Downtown ODP.

Proposed are a max 290 ft. tall mixed-use hotel / strata residential building with a density of 10.07 FSR. Height and density are compliant with the CD-1 bylaw.

The building is divided into 4 massing components:

The first is a 6 storey hotel block at the corner of Robson and Beatty. At rezoning, this block was expressed as a series of shifting planes with minimal visual or physical permeability facing Beatty St. The design has subsequently been refined into the proposed simplified unarticulated extrusion with a glazed corner entry.

At grade is a hotel lounge / lobby with outdoor seating area vertically separated from the adjacent public realm by stairs that wrap the East corner. The public realm itself is presented as a hardscaped circulation plaza.

The second primary mass is the 29 storey tower with hotel use up to Level 4 and strata for the remainder. At rezoning, the tower was articulated with large outdoor balconies arranged in a pattern, but these too has been simplified into a regularized arrangement, with additional articulation provided in the form of horizontal and vertical expressions on the north and the south, and vertical glazing bands providing for articulation on the east and west.

The tower is clad in fibreC concrete skin with dark grey aluminum windows.

The third building component is the 1928 and 1947 Northern Electric building to be designated upon enactment of the CD-1 bylaw. The three storey building is being maintained on three facades and includes hotel restaurant and bar space fronting Robson and Cambie St, and hotel rooms above. The residential entrance is located fronting Cambie St.

The fourth component is the “glass connector” which is intended to bridge the three elements. This element is anticipated to be highly hierarchically secondary in nature, particularly as it interfaces the heritage building which is intended to be the architectural focal point of the site. The proposed materiality is SSG curtain wall but it is not clear whether or not this will include visible mullion clips or silicone butt joints.

The public realm is generally expressed as hardscaping with existing deciduous trees being maintained along Robson and at Cambie St. Above grade landscaping consists of extensive green roof areas facing Robson and Cambie St at level 4, a shared hotel / residential amenity area at Level 7, an extensive green roof on the hotel block roof, and private roof decks on the roof of the tower.

Advice from the Panel is sought on the following:

1. Please comment on the legibility of the heritage Northern Electric building as a distinct building component, with consideration given to the performance of the “glass connector” as a hierarchically secondary building element.
2. Please comment on the applicant’s response to the UDP recommendations at time of the rezoning review;
3. Please comment on the quality of the materiality with due consideration given to the importance of the heritage building as a defining element of the architectural expression of the site.

The planning team then took questions from the panel.

- **Applicant’s Introductory Comments:**

The applicant noted they are coming in with a slightly different proposal from what had previously been presented to the Panel; the new direction being the result of the City Planning Department challenging some of the original design ideas. The new proposal

better responds to the existing context and the heritage building, with the intent to relate to context in a contemporary manner.

The requirement to set back the 6 storey block has been eliminated and the building is expressed without stepping in the façade. The applicant proposes silicon butt joints with no caps on the curtain walls to make the glass connector component appear as light and smooth as possible. Further, the applicant is proposing shadow boxes in place of typical spandrel panels to further reinforce the clean appearance of the glass connector.

On the Beatty block the volumes have been simplified and aligned. The applicant noted they looked to provide for a stronger relationship with the tower block and the heritage frontage, and to relate more closely to the rest of the heritage facades along Beatty St.

There is new opportunity to open the corner and bring the public realm in at level one and create a better interior and exterior relationship.

To provide the heritage façade with its own identity the gap between the buildings has been increased to better allow the individual building elements to have their own distinct expression.

Three facades of the original heritage building will be retained; the applicant noted they will be using decorative stone to match the original.

The new façade of the north façade is designed to relate to the heritage façade in a more contemporary way.

Regarding landscape, 5 trees on the site have been reviewed by an arborist and will be preserved in place. There are planters along Robson St with terracing along Beatty St. The outdoor amenity area is shared by the hotel and the residential programs in the building.

In order to improve the sustainable performance of the building, the tower has improved in wall to window ratio and balcony areas have been reduced. Measures to mitigate thermal bridging at the balconies are being explored.

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. Stamp and seconded by Ms. Krangle and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

THAT the Panel **SUPPORT** the project with the following recommendation to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Design Development to provide for continuous other otherwise improved weather protection;
- Design Development of the hotel roof with consideration given to overlook from adjacent towers;

- Design Development to strengthen the architectural expression and character of the tower.

- **Related Commentary:**

There was general support for the project.

Some Panelists noted that the residential opening on Cambie gives consideration to the street and that the canopy and entry is slick and modern.

The Panel felt that the treatments of the east and west side, and the inset balconies on the south side are successful. Further, the hotel portion is well done and much more successful than before. Panelists recognized the architectural benefits of the simple building form.

Panelists agreed that the restored heritage Northern Electric building is successful. Overall the Panel felt that the heritage building is strong, the ground relates to the architecture.

The Panel commended the applicant on the quality and size of the rooftop amenity area but one Panelist expressed concern about universal access between the pool level and the remainder of the amenity area.

Panelists felt that the corner at Beatty St and Robson St is well treated, and noted that the public realm on Beatty St set the stage for vibrant uses. A Panelist noted that the planters and retained trees could be an impediment to the flow of pedestrian traffic and regretted that the sidewalk couldn't be wider around the development. There was also concern that plants within these planters will get trampled during high-traffic times.

The panel noted that great care was given to restore the heritage facades, which is reflected in the materiality of the buildings.

Some Panelists expressed concern about the architectural expression of the tower, noting that the tower as currently proposed is less successful than the original proposal at the time of Rezoning. A Panelist felt that the glassfibre reinforced concrete panels on the tower were not successful and that the form of the building does not live up to the successful presentation of the other parts of the development. It was suggested that the tower could benefit from more variability in terms of color and materials.

The Panel recommended that particular attention be given to the detailing of panel joints and reveals, and to give more consideration to more relief in the tower façades.

A Panelist noted the LED lights are not necessary and detract from the rest of the development.

There was concern that the roof of the 7 storey building has not been designed in consideration of overlook for the tower, and the Panel suggested that design development should be explored to improve the outward appearance of the roof. Strategies such as a trellis enclosing mechanical units on all sides and improved planting were suggested.

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