

## URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

**DATE:** April 13, 2005

**TIME:** 4.00 pm

**PLACE:** Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

**PRESENT:** MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:  
Larry Adams, Chair  
Nigel Baldwin  
Robert Barnes  
Shahla Bozorgzadeh  
James Cheng  
Marta Farevaag  
Ronald Lea  
Margot Long (excused Item 2)  
C.C. Yao

**REGRETS:** Alan Endall  
Edward Smith  
Peter Wreglesworth

**RECORDING  
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

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| ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING |                           |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.                             | 1501 Robson Street        |
| 2.                             | 1055 Canada Place (VCCEP) |

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| 1. Address:         | 1501 Robson Street          |
| DE:                 | 409145                      |
| Use:                | Mixed (6 storeys)           |
| Zoning:             | C-6                         |
| Application Status: | Complete                    |
| Architect:          | Hywel Jones                 |
| Owner:              | Pikson Enterprises Co. Ltd. |
| Review:             | First                       |
| Delegation:         | Hywel Jones                 |
| Staff:              | Bob Adair                   |

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**EVALUATION: SUPPORT (5-4)**

- **Introduction:** Bob Adair, Development Planner, presented this application for a 6-storey mixed-use development containing ground floor retail commercial use with residential above and a two-storey townhouse on the north side of the site at the lane. The 66 ft. x 131 ft. site is at the northwest corner of Nicola and Robson Streets in the C-6 zone. There is a 7 ft. building line along Robson Street. The main residential entry is off Nicola Street and parking access for both the residential and commercial uses is at the rear, together with a surface loading bay adjacent to the townhouse. The building is a concrete structure and materials include brick and metal panel. The townhouse is brick and stucco.

The proposed use is approvable in the C-6 zone. The zoning allows an outright height of 60 ft. with some height angle restrictions. The application seeks a minor height relaxation at the western edge of the site as well as some relaxation of the height angles. Outright density in this zone is 2.5 FSR and the Development Permit Board may allow a further ten percent from the heritage density bank. The application seeks the maximum 2.75 FSR.

Staff generally support the proposed use and overall massing and seek the Panel's opinion in the following areas:

- whether the site can accept the additional ten percent density, the overall handling of the additional massing and any impact it may have on adjacent sites;
  - the proposed height relaxations, including the height angle relaxations on the north and south property lines and the minor relaxation of the outright 60 ft. at the westerly property line;
  - Robson streetscape, in particular the retail expression;
  - appropriateness of the corner retail unit, noting its high visibility on Robson Street;
  - treatment of the southwest corner and relationship with the raised terrace of the adjacent 6-storey building;
  - Nicola Street elevation;
  - treatment of the rear lane.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Hywel Jones, Architect, briefly described the design and responded to questions from the Panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
  - 2.75 FSR fully supported;
  - Height relaxation over 60 ft. and slight intrusion into the height envelope also supported;
  - Concerns about the Robson streetscape. Design development suggestions included strengthening the apparent retail frontage by relocating the exit stair; introducing continuous weather protection to both increase the separation between the retail and the residential and add pedestrian interest; consider improvements to the paving to enrich the pedestrian experience; and add a street tree if possible;
  - Nicola Street façade generally supported, with some concerns about extending the landscape and paving out to the street line;
  - General consensus that there could be simplification of the palette of materials, possibly eliminating one of the materials;
  - Major concerns about the entry sequence in terms of safety and security and generosity of the entrance;
  - Design development recommended to the townhouse with suggestions to increase the size of the courtyard and add density to the townhouse; also consider fenestration to the stair;
  - A sustainability strategy should be considered.
  
- **Related Commentary:**

The Panel unanimously supported the requested 2.75 FSR and did not believe the ten percent density transfer would have a negative impact on the building or the neighbourhood.

The Panel unanimously supported the requested relaxation of the 60 ft. height limit. The height angle relaxations were also strongly supported and it was noted there are no significant shadow impacts since the building is on the north side of the street.

The Panel had no concerns about the retail wrapping around the corner onto Nicola Street which provides added pedestrian interest.

The Panel supported the application but had a number of concerns. A comment was that that the FSR has been successfully maximized but it has been to the detriment of the scheme in some areas.

There were major concerns about the entrance to the residential tower which the Panel thought needed greater definition and sense of entry as well as a much higher level of security. In general, the Panel found the entry sequence undeveloped and needing considerable design development. The doors conflicting with the main entry were a concern, as was the conflict with the entry to the small coach house on the lane. The entry courtyard should be much less circuitous to improve wayfinding and security. There was a suggestion to consider relocating one of the stairs in favour of a shared stair for the commercial retail units and eliminating the need for doors onto the courtyard. The applicant was urged to strengthen the concept for this aspect of the scheme to make it a delightful spatial experience. The lobby itself should be much more generous and inviting. There were serious concerns expressed about the safety aspects of inviting people to enter between two blank walls and it was noted that, even if gated, it will feel unsafe, especially at night.

The Panel also had concerns about the Robson streetscape and the lack of differentiation between the commercial retail space and the residential component. In general, the Panel found that, with the exception of the coach house, the project had little residential expression. A number of suggestions were made for improvement, including high quality

canopies which would serve to differentiate the two uses and offer continuous weather protection for pedestrians. There were comments made that the building design relies too heavily on the retail tenants to make it an interesting pedestrian experience. Signage, while outside the purview of the development application, will be critical and should be carefully considered. The Panel recommended relocating the exit stair to the corner to provide a more continuous retail frontage on Robson Street and create a corner transition. A strong response at the corner to the building to the west was not recommended because that will likely change in the future. There were also recommendations to further explore the sidewalk paving pattern on Robson Street which currently looks somewhat truncated. The addition of at least one more street tree on Robson was also strongly recommended.

Most Panel members supported the inclusion of the coach house in the scheme. They liked the element of surprise it provides and that it screens the loading bay and garage entry from Nicola Street. However, further design development is needed to make it a more delightful aspect of the scheme. There was a suggestion to consider adding fenestration to the blank wall of the stair to give more interest on the street. There was also a suggestion to consider making the house larger, with at least two bedrooms, noting that a subtle redistribution of density would allow the retail units to be set back by about 3 ft. to create a better courtyard. It was strongly recommended that the coach house should have its own entrance rather than off the corner of the entry to the main building. It should also have a residential garden expression appropriate to the scale it presents to the street.

In general, the Panel thought the materials needed to be simplified, possibly eliminating one of them. The Panel thought either the brick or the metal panel could be made to work, but not both together on this small building. One Panel member also questioned whether the Alucabond and the brick should be identical in their expression, as shown.

Design development to the lane was recommended. It was noted the lanes in this part of the West End are very well used and deserve careful attention. The Panel strongly recommended extending the trellis to cover the entire garage entrance driveway and loading bay, noting this area is overlooked by residents. A comment was made that the area needs to be designed as a series of spaces and properly landscaped.

Finally, it was recommended that consideration be given to providing a green roof, both for sustainability and overlook.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Jones thanked the Panel for the comments. He acknowledged the Panel's comments about the stair and noted they did consider relocating it but thought it strengthened the retail corner in its current location. With respect to achieving a stronger retail expression, he said he did not favour a retail podium with residential set back above. He noted the retail tenants themselves will bring some life to the street.

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| 2. Address:         | 1055 Canada Place  |
| DE:                 | 408490   |
| Use:                | Convention Centre Expansion  |
| Zoning:             | CD-1   |
| Application Status: | Complete after Preliminary   |
| Architect:          | Downs Archambault/MCM  |
| Owner:              | VCCEP  |
| Review:             | Fourth   |
| Delegation:         | Russ Anthony, Ken Grassi, Jim Brown, Frank Musson,<br>Bruce Hemstock |
| Staff:              | Ralph Segal  |

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**EVALUATION: SUPPORT (4-3)**

- **Introduction:** Ralph Segal, Sr. Development Planner, presented this application. The Panel has reviewed the project several times previously, including two workshops in 2003 and 2004. At that time, the Panel indicated that the folded land form approach, if properly executed, was a worthy design concept. In June 2004, the Panel reviewed the preliminary development application and did not support it, the major issue relating to the roof which was thought not to be sufficiently dynamic. There were also concerns about the treatment of the Burrard Street end. In September 2004, the preliminary submission was approved in principle by Development Permit Board, subject to a lengthy list of conditions. In November 2004 the Panel reviewed, in a workshop, the applicant team's response to the Panel's earlier input and the Board's conditions. The Panel indicated there had been good progress on the roof design and responded positively to the "weave" concept presented, the landscaping and introduction of a plaza restaurant which also contains a smaller version of the "living roof". The introduction of retail at the north Thurlow plaza edge was also welcomed, along with improvements to the northeast corner. It was also thought that the "skin" of the building was headed in the right direction. The concerns identified at that time related primarily to the various roof edges. There were also comments about the southeast edge and the entry at the Burrard Street end and the connection of the Thurlow plaza to the waterfront walkway at its north edge.

In an unusual departure from normal procedure, VCCEP requested an interim review by the Development Permit Board, prior to submission of the complete application. This took place on February 28, 2005 when the Board reviewed the scheme based on the submission seen by the Panel in November 2004, with some further refinements. The Board indicated it believed the current design was going in the right direction to satisfy the preliminary conditions. The complete application will be considered by the Board on June 6, 2005.

The current complete submission incorporates refinements to the November 2004 design. The "transition zone" from Harbour Green Park to Thurlow Plaza, including the future Park Board restaurant, has been substantially reworked and staff are very pleased with the work done in this area. The application no longer includes a northeast corner elevator and the third floor restaurant has also been removed from the program.

Mr. Segal noted the following areas in which the advice of the Panel is now sought:

- roof edge treatment (the various edges including lower structures);
- waterfront walkway edges around the perimeter, including the northwest corner commercial;
- the "transition zone", noting the Park Board restaurant is not yet designed;
- Burrard Street end/entry;

- detailed public realm treatment;
  - landscape design, including hard surface, soft landscape, features and sense of arrival;
  - the "sense of place" for:
    - Burrard Plaza;
    - Thurlow Plaza;
    - Seawall walkway/bikeway;
    - Canada Place; and
    - Various links.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Russ Anthony, VCCEP, noted that in addition to the design refinements they have advanced the process for selecting a proponent for the water-based development. The RFP will close at the end of May. Jim Brown, Architect, said they are excited to be at this stage after two years of design work. He briefly reviewed the basic concepts of the project and fundamental guiding principles. Bruce Hemstock described the living roof and the open space plan and the proponent team responded to questions from the Panel.
  - **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

**Roof Edge Treatment:**

- The roof edge needs further design development. It needs greater clarity and the architectonics should be pushed a bit further to achieve a more dynamic expression;
- Reconsider the vertical panelling;
- The roof edge will be a very critical component of the building, as has been stressed in previous Panel reviews.

**Walkway Edges:**

- These are much more successful but they need more clarity in the details - possibly a further differentiation in material between the walkway edges and the roof edge.

**Transition Zone:**

- This area deserves more design development;
- Much of the success of the transition zone relies on the Park Board restaurant, which is outside the purview of this project but should be carefully considered by the City;
- Concerns raised about the detailing of the portal/drop-off area with suggestions to explore issues of paving and glazing.

**Burrard Street End:**

- The Burrard Street end and entry deserves more attention. There should be some recognition that this is an important junction, including within vertical elements and paving.

**Canada Place Way:**

- Concerns expressed about the Canada Place Way elevation in terms of issues of transparency and light and the relationship between interior convention centre activities and the public realm as well as the lower entrance and the public at the street level, coupled with the vertical circulation.

**Public Realm:**

- Richness in the public realm is required and it must be of the highest quality;
- Features such as public art and interpretation of the green roof must not be overlooked;
- It is very important that the building is treated as being part of the public realm;
- The success of the building will be in the details and the budget.

**Exterior Skin:**

- Further design development of the skin of the building is required;
- The structural glazing system could be pushed further, noting it will be a major element that the public will be able to see and feel: it must be truly unique and part of the sense of place of the building.

**• Related Commentary:**

The Panel complimented the applicant team on the high quality of the presentation and the work achieved to date. The Panel has seen the project evolve through the process but acknowledge that it has also maintained its conceptual clarity. In general, the Panel found the changes made to the scheme have improved it, with some exceptions.

The Panel's comments and suggestions included:

**The Roof and Roof Edge Treatment:**

- the applicant's rationale is a good way to give consistency to the building but it gets lost in terms of the overall depth of the roof edge and the lack of dynamic treatment;
- it would be more interesting if the roof edge diverged from the rationale for the building and took on a character of its own, with greater interest and stronger architectonics in the expression of the elements;
- expressing the three elements is good, but is not enough;
- the choice of materials is interesting and the addition of the dimples adds another level of interest;
- it would be nice to have a distinction between the roof edge, the building edge and the building base edge; perhaps more clarity so that lay people can more easily understand the building;
- where the roof is canted to reinforce the thrust over the water, question whether consideration might be given to having a reverse cant at the south edge to create some interest;
- the third floor balcony on the north side fails to reinforce the folded plane image;
- the theory of the three parts is good but in reality it is quite unpoetic and expedient;
- a non vertical roof edge can be resolved architecturally;
- the concept of the three parts is quite interesting but the least important part is the structure and the most important is the green roof;
- focus on one concept that would work: for instance, project the roof edge out, exposing what is important and downplaying the rest; this cannot be done vertically but could be resolved and look much better with a projecting thin plate top;
- the solid zinc roof edge panels expressing precisely the truss depth is weak and lacks character;
- would like to see a lot more public roof access;
- horizontal rather than vertical striations would make the edge feel thinner, as would setting back the green roof from the edge;
- the roof edges in the lower plaza are much improved;
- some challenging design development is required where planes intersect each other;
- the vertical edge seems heavy and could be made a lot more dramatic with a non vertical edge, especially at the prow on the northeast corner;
- encourage you to carefully consider how the convention centre will be seen at night, especially with the overhang thrusting out over the water: it could be an opportunity to really make it an icon on the water;
- very disappointed that the opportunity for the public to go into the building and the restaurant has been removed from the package - it was a nice gesture for the public to be able to go in the building.

**Walkway:**

- the waterfront walkway edges have improved;
- there are good inside/outside connections;
- the bikeway/walkway on the north side is much improved; the success of the space will depend on the retail components on this edge;
- paving can go a long way with respect to wayfinding;

**Transition Zone/Thurlow Plaza:**

- the transition zone and Park Board restaurant is much improved; all the restaurants will work well;
- the stair joining the two levels together is interesting and the connection on the north face is equally successful in the way that the plaza reaches that point in the project;
- the strong curve of Harbour Green Park where it meets the grand stair is not well resolved; the power of the Harbour Green Park curve must not be diminished and with some refinement it can be achieved; the power of the curve seems to be ignored;
- no details are shown about how the ground plane ties in with the Harbour Green Park treatment with respect to railings and lamp fixtures, etc.;
- lighting is very important in this area;
- the Park Board should be given some guidelines for its restaurant because if it is not done properly it could be a serious detriment to this project;
- the portal to the underground parking at the drop-off might take clues from what is proposed on Burrard Street and Canada Place Way, i.e., there may be an opportunity next to the restaurant to introduce the same glass treatment for natural light;
- Coal Harbour Park ends unsuccessfully at its west end and there is a danger it will end unsuccessfully at the east end as well: this junction deserves something more;
- the design of the Park Board restaurant will determine the success of the entry to the underground walkway. The City must gain control over the urban design aspects of this restaurant;
- careful attention to sightlines should be given in redesigning the edge of Harbour Green Park because with so many trees in there people might not be able to experience the green roof from the park;
- some really nice moves have been made on the Thurlow Plaza design but there are a few elements that are not generous or grand enough. As well, the skylights seems random and could be stronger and better integrated; the stairs to the restaurant roof should be a bit grander and not spiral;
- this was seen as a gathering place for the city for special events and programs and it is important that this role is supported;
- disappointed the public will not be able to access convention centre washrooms. They must be provided somewhere in the plaza.

**Burrard Street**

- where the Thurlow entry plaza has great interest in terms of the view down Thurlow, the Burrard street end is lacking; it should have a terminus, whether in the form of public art or a plaza, but more than just a meeting point of the various directions of travel;
- the piece connecting the Pan Pacific to the underground access needs to be given more thought; it could be stronger and contrasting with the Pan Pacific to become more iconic;
- the paving pattern at the end of Burrard could be better resolved with respect to the different geometries coming together.

**Canada Place Way**

- the building will be perceived as having a front door on Canada Place Way but the presence of the building on Canada Place Way is diminished by the lack of public place, notwithstanding the escalators with views down;

- suggest moving the escalators inward to allow people to look down. Consider the interior space from the convention floor level all the way up; treatment of this wall will be very important;
- Canada Place Way suffers because there is no activity on it; suggest pulling back the green roof at this point (30 - 40 ft.) and making it a glass roof. It currently feels like the large green roof is being dragged into the city where the scale is inappropriate; there is also a problem getting light into the lower entrances, so suggest you accept that it's about vertical circulation and getting light down below; if the roof can be pulled back, this is the place to do it;
- the Canada Place Way canopies are fairly understated and should be reconsidered.

### Sustainability

- Assume the principles presented previous remain very much a part of the building.

### Public Realm

- Burrard plaza feels a bit bland compared to Thurlow;
- Richness of surface treatments is required for wayfinding and durability. Texture can also slow down bicycles and roller blades;
- it is incumbent on the City to make sure that where people are invited it be of the highest quality - I have a major concern that there is a move to reduce the quality of the materials for the public realm to simpler, less expensive and less rich, because much of the success of the public realm will be in the quality of its detailing;
- there should be consideration of public art and some nice details and interesting features for the public, including interpretation of the green roof.

### Exterior Skin

- the vertical surfaces deserve much more time and study, and probably budget, than they have been given. It is the least convincing aspect of the building and it will be the most visible. From most places a lot more of the walls than the roof will be seen;
  - disappointed with the detailed design - the skin feels like an inert material
  - the building is described in terms of bold, sculptural, iconic forms and these qualities are also required in the walls.
- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Brown stressed it is not intended to diminish the quality of the finishes of the public realm to create a special place and a cultural facility. Frank Musson, Architect, pointed out there is a public art program for the project and the process is now underway with a public art consultant.