
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: February 10, 1999

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room #1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Joyce Drohan (Chair)
Patricia Campbell
Sheldon Chandler
Geoff Glotman (excused Item #2)
James Hancock
Peter Kreuk (excused Item #2)
Sean McEwan
Jim McLean
Peter Wreglesworth (excused Item #1)

NEW MEMBERS (NON VOTING THIS MEETING):
James Cheng (present for Item #1 only)
Paul Grant
Roger Hughes
Gilbert Raynard
Keith Ross
Joe Werner

REGRETS: Per Christoffersen
Joseph Hruda
Norman Shearing

RECORDING SECRETARY: Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING
1. Robson Square (600-700 blocks Granville Street)
2. 650 Dunsmuir Street (600 Granville Street)

Business: New Panel members were welcomed, and retiring members thanked for their contribution.
Next Chair: Joe Hruda; Deputy Chair: Roger Hughes.

1. Address: Robson Square (600-700 blocks Granville Street)
Use: Mixed
Zoning: CD-1
Application Status: WORKSHOP
Architect: Architectura
Owner: BC Building Corp.
Review: First
Delegation: Arthur Erickson, Rainer Fassler, Bruce Rasmussen
Staff: Ralph Segal, Gerry McGeough
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Ralph Segal, Development Planner, explained that this project is at the inquiry stage only at this time. It will also be presented to Council in a workshop, prior to a formal rezoning application being made. The Panel is requested to take a very broad approach in its review of the project, focusing on public amenity and urban design issues. Gerry McGeough, Heritage Planner, noted the original courthouse and the annex are "A" listed heritage buildings. The Heritage Commission has reviewed the project twice and is generally supportive. The Commission's main area of concern is with the glass additions on the outside on Hornby Street.

The applicant team reviewed the proposal and responded to questions from the Panel.

After the general discussion and review of the materials, the Panel commented as follows:

The Panel applauded the proposed expansion of the Vancouver Art Gallery and welcomed the prospect of revitalizing Robson Square to live up to its original promise as a major gathering place in the city. Removal of the dark domes was endorsed.

There were several suggestions for expanding the gallery functions to be a much more positive part of the public realm. One suggestion was to raise the sunken plaza and locate the gallery extension underneath it. Others suggested making the sunken plaza a part of the gallery space, perhaps incorporating sculptural pieces and a cafe to provide a more interesting and attractive prospect from above.

The Panel's major concerns related to the retail use in terms of its viability as well as its location and treatment. Notwithstanding the economics of the project, the Panel had serious concerns about the amount of retail being proposed and its potential impact on the civic nature of the space. Of particular concern were the two retail buildings on Howe Street which were thought to be a major impingement on the public realm. Panel members questioned what kind of retail these small units might accommodate, and were not convinced that they would remain as transparent as shown. The second level retail will be especially challenging. If these two units remain, however, it was felt they should be much more closely connected with the lower level plazas. Giving the art gallery a greater exterior presence could go some way towards achieving this.

The retail on Hornby Street was thought to be quite well done, although there were mixed views regarding the erosion of the mound to provide for the proposed steps at the southeast corner of Robson and Hornby. Some regretted the loss of this unique landscape while others welcomed the more open corner. In general, the Panel found the west side of the project much stronger than the Howe Street side.

The sunken plazas were of serious concern to Panel members who felt the programming was not sufficiently compelling to draw people down into the space. The Panel thought the connections down to the space need to be a lot stronger. Successful retail operations will be very difficult to achieve in the sunken plaza area although the art gallery extension into that space will be a very positive way of bringing people down and animating it. It was noted that such spaces are rarely successful unless they are connected to other underground systems.

Several Panel members felt there needed to be better connections across Robson Street, and there were a couple of suggestions to reopen the debate about closing off Robson Street. At the very least, there needs to be a seamless flow across at the ground plane, and a strong link between the north and south plazas will be important.

With one exception, the Panel generally thought the large glass canopy was a very positive element in the scheme. It was thought it could be pivotal in terms of revitalizing the original Robson Square plan and in creating quite a dynamic prefunction area. The Panel also welcomed the weather protection it provides, although there was some question as to its effectiveness in this regard.

With respect to the glass elements in general, the Panel was not convinced that the transparency described will be achievable. The applicants were urged to ensure that as much of the transparency as possible be maintained through the design. The Panel will look with interest at the final resolution of the restaurant. Panel members liked the idea of the conservatory, noting it will require sensitive treatment.

2. Address:	650 Dunsmuir Street (600 Granville Street)
DA:	403922
Use:	Mixed
Zoning:	DD
Application Status:	Preliminary
Architect:	Laurence Doyle Architect
Owner:	Voth Brothers Dev. Ltd.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Grant Turnbull, Larry Doyle, Barry McGinn
Staff:	Mike Kemble, Gerry McGeough

EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (2-4)

- **Introduction:** Mike Kemble, Development Planner, presented this application in the Downtown District. He briefly reviewed the zoning regulations. The site which is located at the southeast corner of Granville and Dunsmuir Streets has 250 ft. frontage on Granville Street and 120 ft. on Dunsmuir Street to the lane. To the immediate south is The Bay, a 6-storey heritage building. At the corner of Granville and Dunsmuir is a B-category heritage building (BC Electric showroom), the façades of which will be retained in this proposal. Vehicular access is not permitted off Granville Street, limiting the site's access to Dunsmuir Street or the lane. The proposal contains 11 theatres on two levels, retail and office uses. The total floor area of approximately 300,000 sq.ft. includes a heritage density bonus. The proposed height is a little over 300 ft. and the podium height is about 120 ft. to match the height of the Bay. The office tower is located to the north of the site and is set back about 80 ft. from the property line. The podium massing is built to the property line on Granville and is set back 2 ft. at the fourth floor level. A glass curtainwall expression is proposed for the tower, with the lower three storeys faced in masonry or stone to relate to the corner heritage building.

The areas in which the advice is sought relate to the tower massing and location; the relationship of the tower with the corner heritage building; treatment of the podium and how it relates to the corner building on the north side and the Bay building on the south; and street level animation.

Gerry McGeough, Heritage Planner, advised the Vancouver Heritage Commission reviewed the proposal in January, at the pre-application stage, and was supportive of the overall treatment and supported the 10 percent density bonus. Heritage staff support the proposed restoration work. Feedback from the Panel is sought on the relationship of the proposed new building to the heritage building, and in particular whether the tower should be shifted away from the heritage building. Comments on the relationship of the proposal to the Bay (which is a municipally designated "A" heritage building) are also sought.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Larry Doyle, Architect, noted they are investigating the possibility of connecting into the project from the Bay. With respect to the office building, he said they felt that a building of this scale requires a lobby and main entry on Dunsmuir Street, which means the core has to be at the north end of the site. They have attempted to make the heritage building read separately from the new office tower and believe it will retain its own identity in the scheme.
- **Panel's Comments:** Following a review of the model and posted drawings, the Panel commented as follows:

The Panel had mixed views on the tower although the majority of Panel members had no problem with its location on the site. It was agreed that access to the office should be on Dunsmuir Street so the primary vertical core must remain as proposed. There was a recommendation to move the parking ramp northward, closer to Dunsmuir Street.

The Panel had a major concern with the relationship to the small heritage building on the corner and the applique approach that is being taken to it. The Panel considers this part of Granville Street to be very sensitive in terms of the number of heritage buildings in the vicinity, especially The Bay which is a significant heritage asset to the city. Therefore, this development must not only maintain the integrity of the BC Electric building it proposes to retain, it must also respond appropriately to The Bay. There was a suggestion to explore a more horizontal building as opposed to the tower-on-podium solution, with a more integrated, solid corner piece.

The Panel saw the solution to dealing with the heritage building focusing on the larger podium. The glass curtainwall is a very schematic solution that should be reconsidered in favour of achieving a greater degree of balance of solid and void in the expression, taking some cues from the texture and permeability of the adjacent buildings, without attempting to mimic. It was stressed that the Bay is by far the stronger heritage element that demands some response. The very strong line that is drawn currently creates a very awkward transition. It was recommended that ways of weaving more elegantly into the Bay be explored.

Given the uses it contains, the Panel felt it was a lost opportunity for this building not to give some expression to its interior functions and activities, particularly the circulation to the theatres. The dynamic movement of people from grade level to the first level of the theatres could create a strong animating element on the Granville Street exterior of the building rather than being set back and buried on Dunsmuir. Providing some clarity and strong presence on the street would go a long way to making this building much more interesting.

While it was acknowledged that signage is dealt with under a separate approval process, the Panel felt its the scale and location were inappropriate as shown. It was stressed that the signage should be related to the street rather than trying to tie the façade to the Bay.

The Panel did not support the application at this time.