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URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

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**DATE:** February 6, 2002

**TIME:** 4.00 p.m.

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

**PRESENT:** MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:  
Tom Bunting, Chair  
Jeffrey Corbett  
Lance Berelowitz  
Gerry Eckford  
Walter Francl  
Bruce Hemstock  
Maurice Pez  
Sorin Tatomir

**REGRETS:** Alan Endall  
Richard Henry  
Joseph Hruda  
Jack Lutsky

**RECORDING  
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

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ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	687 Howe Street (801 West Georgia Street)
2.	1050 Smithe Street

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1. Address:	687 Howe Street (801 West Georgia Street)
Use:	Mixed
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Rezoning from DD
Architect:	Bing Thom
Owner:	Reunion Properties Inc.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Bing Thom, Jim Mouzourakis, Arno Matis, Chris Doray
Staff:	Ralph Segal/Phil Mondor

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### EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-0)

- **Introduction:** Phil Mondor, Rezoning Planner, introduced this application which involves the Hotel Georgia site. The Hotel Georgia is a very significant building, designated by City Council in 1998. The subject rezoning proposal is not very different from what was previously approved by the Development Permit Board in December 1997. This was followed by a Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) which was also approved by Council. The subject rezoning application is as a result of changing market conditions whereby the owner now wishes to have part of the tower contain residential use. A rezoning is necessary because the Central Area policies with respect to this sub area of the DD do not permit residential use except for a commitment to heritage retention. The HRA approved in 1998 provided for a heritage bonus of 174,300 sq.ft. that could be transferred from the Hotel Georgia to another site. The subject proposal seeks to move that density to the proposed adjacent new tower, as well as a hotel bonus. Further, because these bonuses have already been approved, they do not qualify for the consideration required by the rezoning. The applicant therefore had to find some additional heritage benefit to be brought to the table.

The principal benefit is an acceleration of the heritage sensitive seismic upgrade of the Hotel Georgia. Although the seismic upgrade was part of the earlier HRA there was no timeline identified for it. Given the current hotel market it is therefore likely that the parkade would remaining standing for a number of years and there would be no seismic upgrade of the building for some time. Staff conclude that this proposal would be consistent with the heritage retention requirement, to consider and approve on the parkade site a building that could be constructed now rather than some years hence. An additional heritage benefit is that heritage bonus density elsewhere in the Downtown will be purchased and moved to this site to provide some additional floor area which is needed to provide above-grade parking. While above-grade parking is an unusual proposition in the Downtown it is considered acceptable because it is difficult to provide all of the required parking on this site. The project also includes parking below the city lane which is so far acceptable in principle to Engineering Services. Ultimately, the FSR on this site would amount to about 18.0, about 9 percent above the 16.41 FSR approved in 1997. The rezoning is also required to request a height of 465 ft. from the present maximum of 450 ft. With respect to the amount of parking, some relaxations are being requested but not to the extent approved in 1997.

Panel members, staff and the applicant team assembled around the model for a review of the form of development, led by the Senior Development Planner, Ralph Segal who outlined the issues identified by staff on this application. This was followed by general discussion and questions and answers.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application and was quite excited about the tower in terms of its potential as a stunning piece of architecture in the downtown.

The height of the tower was not an issue for the Panel. The 15 ft. relaxation being sought was considered to be virtually irrelevant in terms of its impact on the 12th/Cambie view corridor. The Panel unanimously supported the height and considered it well earned by its elegant slimness, the

attractiveness of the facade and modulation of the massing. The Panel thought greater emphasis should be given to the importance of the quality of the architecture as an exciting addition to the skyline than to a minor encroachment into the view corridor. Several Panel members also strongly supported the tower being even higher and were disappointed that the floor-to-ceiling height is being compromised in order to keep the overall height down, noting that a taller building would present an even more elegant profile, particularly at the top. The Panel had no concerns about the spire element, although one Panel member suggested there should be more than one, given the random nature of the building's termination.

The Panel commented that a re-examination of the City's assumptions about view corridors is long overdue. Reference was also made to the skyline study that was undertaken a few years ago which identified several downtown sites where it was considered the height could go to 600 - 700 ft.

The proposed use, density and heritage bonus were fully supported. The benefits of this project earn the relaxations required to put residential on the site. The residential use was thought to make perfect sense and it won't detract from the downtown commercial. Furthermore, adding residential use into the CBD, adding more life to the downtown, without compromising density, is an excellent precedent.

One Panel member recommended having the tower built to hotel standard from the beginning in order to respond to a future change in market conditions.

The Panel strongly supported the parking under the lane. It is an innovative solution that should be used more often.

While acknowledging that this is at the rezoning stage and considerable design development is still to be done, the Panel had some concerns about the ground plane treatment which shows none of the promise of the tower. Something that supports the pedestrian realm a little more is needed. It was noted that hotel frontages add little to the street but there are ways to deal with this as the project moves forward. The Panel will therefore look for much greater development and attention to the ground plane at the next stage.

Most Panel members supported the proposed above ground parking and thought its negative aspects had been carefully handled. One Panel member had serious concerns, however, about the precedent that could be established for above grade parking in the downtown, notwithstanding the very elegant solution being proposed by this applicant.

While the Panel enthusiastically supported this proposal there were some reservations expressed about how well such a sophisticated approach could be attained. A lot of work remains to be done to ensure the facade works in terms of its animation while also addressing issues such as lighting and privacy, etc. However, several Panel members commented that such an innovative approach is exactly where architecture should be going in Vancouver. They said they were prepared to "take it on faith" that the building will achieve the promise of the drawings and looked forward to seeing it at the next stage of development. It was stressed that the results will be extremely dependent on the quality and finish of the metal and glass that will be applied to this building. Staff were also commended for trying to make it happen from a planning point of view.

- **Applicant's Response:** Bing Thom, Architect, said it is a project they take very seriously because it is such an important site in the city. The Panel's comments will be very helpful when they go forward to Council because it gives them more ability to address the issue of height. Clearly, it will be expensive for the project to succeed and for the developer to achieve a great building. Unfortunately, while the negative attitudes towards height in the city may have changed, the regulations have not. Council must be convinced to simplify the process in order not to stymie innovative development in the city.

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2. Address:	1050 Smithe Street
DA:	406228
Use:	Residential
Zoning:	DD
Application Status:	Complete after Preliminary
Architect:	Studio One
Owner:	Haro Hotel Development Ltd.
Review:	Second
Delegation:	Tomas Wolf, Kerry Bonnis, Jonathan Losee
Staff:	Mary Beth Rondeau

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### EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-0)

- **Introduction:** Mary Beth Rondeau, Development Planner, presented this application which the Panel reviewed and supported at the preliminary application stage in October 2001. Ms. Rondeau briefly described the site context and noted the site contains a BC Transit rectifier station, mostly underground, for which there is an easement. She briefly reviewed the issues raised by the Panel at the preliminary stage. Staff are satisfied the complete submission has an improved public realm and a better relationship to the street. There is some concern about the extent of public area at the narrow end of the site. Proposed density is 6.0 FSR plus ten percent heritage density transfer which is allowable in this zone and was previously approved in a previous application in 1999.

The applicant team described the project in greater detail and responded to questions from the Panel.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application.

Most Panel members thought the tower had been improved since the preliminary stage. There has also been some effort to address the Panel's previous comments about responding to the visual axis of Smithe Street. Some attention is still needed to detailing the base of the building and its presentation to the street, to improve its tactile quality.

Some concerns remained about the entry plaza, with some Panel members still finding it a bit awkward. Others found it improved and simplified since the last review. There may be opportunity to reintroduce water at the entry, which will enhance the way the building comes to the ground.

The major issue for the Panel was the handling of the public space at the ground plane. The amount of public open space at the eastern end of the site appears to have diminished and the setback along the street edge is not considered to be adequate compensation. The Panel thought there should be a more meaningful space next to the trees that are being retained. It was thought that the benches along the street edge won't be used and it was suggested they be moved to the corner, back from the street. The strip along the street edge needs only to "feel" public and a bit more open. The extra space will also help the building come to the ground a bit more gracefully.

One Panel member suggested the electrical room is in the wrong place and recommended flipping it with the amenity space, with access to an outside deck. This will not only improve the amenities for the residents but add some interest for passers-by.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Wolf thanked the Panel for its comments and said they will be doing more work on resolving the ground plane.