
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: February 7, 2001

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room #1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Paul Grant, Chair
Lance Berelowitz
Tom Bunting
Alan Endall
Bruce Hemstock (excused Item #3)
Roger Hughes
Jack Lutsky
Brian Palmquist (excused Item #3)
Keith Ross
Sorin Tatomir

REGRETS: James Cheng
Gilbert Raynard

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	1225 Richards Street
2.	422 West Cordova Street
3.	1110 Comox Street

1. Address:	1225 Richards Street
DA:	405502
Use:	Mixed (25 storeys, 185 units)
Zoning:	DD
Application Status:	Preliminary
Architect:	Rafii
Owner:	Bosa Ventures Inc.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Chuck Brook, Dale Bosa, Foad Rafii
Staff:	Ralph Segal, Anita Molaro

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-1)

- **Introduction:** Ralph Segal, Development Planner, presented this preliminary proposal for the site at the corner of Davie and Richards Streets in Downtown South. A future Downtown South park is planned for the remainder of this block. The proposal responds very positively to the Downtown South Guidelines in all respects except one: the tower positioning and its height as it relates to the future park. The Guidelines strongly emphasize that there should be no shadow on public open space and this standard has been applied to all other development in the area to date. Staff are satisfied it would not be appropriate for the tower to interlock with the neighbouring tower (The Metropolis) but remain offset. The proposed height of the tower is 230 ft. to the uppermost parapet, increasing to 240 ft. with the mechanical penthouse. Staff acknowledge that the top of the tower has been skilfully sculpted to achieve a high quality architectural expression as well as to minimize shadowing on the park; however, it does still generate shadowing on the park. Staff therefore believe the tower should be lowered 2 - 3 storeys and floor area redistributed at the lower levels. Staff are satisfied with the streetscape, the public realm interfaces and open space configuration. Current floorplate size is 5,600 sq.ft.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Chuck Brook noted their initial response to the Guidelines was that 40 ft. from the property line was not an optimal tower location, and Staff and the neighbours have concurred that the proposed tower location is appropriate. A sketch concept plan of the proposed park indicates the area that would be shadowed at certain times is, for the most part, a treed area and not a principal open space. They therefore consider the minimal amount of extra shadowing to be an acceptable trade-off for a tall, slender tower form. A lower, broader building form does nothing to improve its relationship to its neighbours. It would also have implications on the site across the lane which, at 3.0 FSR, will likely be developed with a 70 ft. mid-rise building. Introducing more mass to the lower levels would impact the livability of this future development. Foad Rafii, Architect, added, a lower, broader tower would also increase shadowing on Davie Street.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted drawings

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel strongly supported the design of the tower which it found to be very elegant. The project is very well handled architecturally and the Richards Street facade is particularly good. The top of the tower has also been very well handled.

The Panel agreed the tower is appropriately positioned on the site. In fact, it seems to be the only suitable location. With one exception, the Panel members supported the proposed height, preferring not to see the tower design weakened as an architectural statement by reducing height and adding

width. While the importance of the park was acknowledged, the Panel felt the issue of shadowing was outweighed by the excellence of the tower design as well as the streetscape and open space treatment. The tower location also maintains the successful chequerboard pattern of towers in Downtown South.

A suggestion was made that, in the event the tower must be lowered, rather than increase the width of the tower there may be an opportunity to relocate some of the massing on the Davie Street elevation by adding an additional floor or two above the retail, facing the park. This would not only recover some of the units lost in the height reduction but also enhance the urban design containment of the park. While the project goes some way to framing the public open space, a fairly substantial low-rise surround in this location would help to strengthen the park edge.

An general observation was made by one Panel member about the scale of townhouses in Downtown South, that they sometimes appear to be at a super macro scale that actually has more to do with the tower than street level townhouses. It relates to materials, the size of windows, and floor heights, etc. It will be important for this scheme to ensure that the base does have the right sense of scale.

The majority of the Panel thought the impact of the shadow on the park was very minimal, only affecting the edge of the park and for a very short period of time at the equinox. The park is a fairly substantial open space with many pockets to it so there will be many opportunities for sun access. A comment was made that while there may be shadow impact for a short period of time for users of the park, residents in the adjacent towers will be affected permanently by the design of this tower.

Some members of the Panel commented that the applicant could have strengthened his case for the proposed height by providing shadow diagrams not only at the March 21 equinox but a week or two later as well. This would have facilitated the illustration of minimal impact at the highest use period. Some Panel members also questioned the use of the equinox dates in applying shadowing standards. In general, the Panel recommended that, at the development permit stage, a more thorough effort be made to justify the requested height to make a stronger case for the part of the building that is impacting the park.

Another suggestion was made that it would have been useful to know what impact lowering the height and broadening the tower would have on the units themselves.

One Panel member commented on the overall urban design parti that is emerging in Downtown South. The concept of the chequerboard of towers is very good and is serving us well from the point of view of overshadowing and view preservation. Given the density in the area, we are managing to minimize the shadow on the park at the same time as preserving the amenity and space of all the towers. Nevertheless, there is a balance and we may never achieve perfection in terms of the overshadowing of the park.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Rafii said the reason they did not increase the floorplate to reduce the height was to achieve the specific program required by the developer. It is not possible to achieve the desired unit sizes by adding area to every floor. With respect to the suggestion of increasing height on the Davie Street frontage, Mr. Rafii noted the Guidelines stress minimizing shadowing on Davie Street, although he agreed an additional floor could be added.

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| 2. Address: | 422 West Cordova Street |
| DA: | 405422 |
| Use: | Mixed (Parkade/Retail) |
| Zoning: | HA-2 |
| Application Status: | Complete |
| Architect: | Neale Staniszki Doll Adams |
| Owner: | Harbour Centre Properties Ltd. |
| Review: | First |
| Delegation: | Larry Adams, Garth Ramsey, Grant Turnbull |
| Staff: | Anita Molaro |
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EVALUATION: SUPPORT (9-0)

- **Introduction:** Anita Molaro, Development Planner, introduced this application. The proposal is to demolish the upper two floors of this existing parkade because they are structurally unsound, and to add two new replacement floors on top of the original parkade. The existing facade along Cordova Street will be revitalized. The two new floors are designed to accommodate offices, communication and data equipment. The proposal generally meets the 75 ft. height limit in the HA-2 zone except at the west end of the site where it exceeds the height limit by about 8 ft. Floor to floor heights of the two new floors range between 12 ft. and 17 ft., much higher than the previous parkade levels. These floor to floor heights are required to accommodate computer equipment. As well, there is a substantial mechanical appurtenance proposed, to accommodate cooling systems for the computer equipment. Staff are advising the applicant to minimize the height in order to minimize shadow impact at the Cordova/Water corner. Staff support the proposed use of brick. There is some concern about the cornice further encroaching over the property line. The existing retail uses are being maintained at the street level. Weather protection has been provided along Cordova and Richards Streets, but limited along Homer Street. Because the existing sidewalks are narrow, Engineering has advised some street trees could be accommodated along Homer and Richards but not on Cordova.

The advice of the Panel is sought in the following areas:

- height relaxation, taking into account the impact of the proposed height on the site, the surrounding buildings and streets, existing views and overlook;
- shadow impact on Cordova Street;
- the affect of the overall design on the general amenity of the area.

Ms. Molaro stressed the Panel's advice on height will be particularly important as the project goes forward to the Development Permit Board.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Garth Ramsey, Architect, noted the design of the cooling tower is not yet fully resolved. The use in the proposed new space will be predominantly for computer equipment which has a very high wattage per square foot requirement and more work is needed to be done on how to achieve the necessary cooling. He explained the top two floors and flanking concrete walls that were added in the 1970's have serious post tension problems, needing repair or replacement. Much of the concrete that is proposed to be retained provides seismic stability to the original 1950's structure. Mr. Ramsey briefly explained the existing encroachment at the upper level, noting there will be a further encroachment at the ends with the proposed addition of brick. He noted there has been some concern expressed by the City about the limited amount of glazing proposed. He explained, 95 percent of the floor space will be for machinery so glazing has been kept to a minimum. The dormers were added after consultation with Staff. Given the shadowing and structural issues, they believe the proposed roof form is a logical response.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted drawings.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application. It is an exciting project and is going in the right direction. It presents an interesting challenge in terms of retrofitting and adding to what is something of an eyesore in the area, and in this respect any improvement to this building will be welcome. The Panel generally thought this would be a welcome enhancement to Gastown.

The Panel unanimously supported the requested height relaxation. It causes no shadow or view issues. It was also thought not to be inappropriate given the context and height of buildings to the east and west, as well as the adjacent zoning height just to the south. In this respect it creates somewhat of a transition between the 75 ft. Gastown height limit and the surrounding Downtown zone.

The Panel thought the Homer and Richards Streets facades needed much greater attention, particularly at street level. At present they look a bit like an afterthought so that the building seems to be treated as a single-sided element. A suggestion was made to extend some of the materials around the sides. Also, to look at playing with some of the materials to enliven the facade in a layered way, perhaps also speaking in some way to the high tech uses inside the building. Weather protection was strongly encouraged on Richards and Homer Streets to help animate that space. It was noted these streets are main entrances into Gastown so some care should be given to these facades at street level. One Panel member suggested street trees are not appropriate in this location, preferring to see only the weather protection and a hard landscape, urban approach to delineating the street edge.

With respect to the Richards/Cordova corner, the Panel thought there was opportunity to strengthen it architecturally; something more exuberant that holds the corner a bit more and differentiates itself from the other corner. One Panel member was opposed to the use of glass block as not being an aesthetic of Gastown. There is also an opportunity to open up and allow views both in and out of the elevator core to the street which would also improve the security of the parkade.

The Panel had no problem with the encroachment created by the cornice. The Panel liked the contemporary expression of the cornice and the way it leads the eye up and terminates the building so that anything above it will largely be unnoticed at street level. The majority of Panel members thought the dormers should be removed from the scheme. It will help clarify the reading of the facade, with the cornice ending the building. With respect to fenestration, one Panel member pointed out that this space could be converted to more typical office space at some time in the future. In this event, natural light into the space will be important and should be dealt with in this application.

The Panel had no concerns about the height of the cooling tower. There were suggestions to make it more sculptural, and to remove its lid because it tends to distort the proportions. A comment was also made that the cooling tower might provide a good opportunity for a modern replacement of the old "W" on the former Woodward's building.

The Panel generally like the proposed roof and there were a number of suggestions to be even more adventurous in its expression. It was felt it could be much more exciting and exuberant, almost as if it were levitating on top of the building as a contemporary statement about the 21st century. The applicant was commended for not "historicizing" the project, given its context. Another comment was that the key to the success of this project will be to create a foil and vitality and difference between the top and bottom of the building.

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3. Address: 1110 Comox Street
DA: 405542
Use: Institutional (Dr. Peter Foundation)
Zoning: RM-5B
Application Status: Complete
Architect: Neale Staniszki Doll Adams
Owner: City of Vancouver
Review: First
Delegation: Larry Adams, Wanda Felt, Colette Parsons
Staff: Scot Hein
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EVALUATION: SUPPORT (6-1)

- **Introduction:** Development Planner, Scot Hein, introduced this application, noting it is a very important project to the City of Vancouver as well as the Mole Hill community. It is the third phase of Mole Hill which is now under construction. The Mole Hill community, bounded by Comox, Bute, Pendrell and Thurlow Streets, will ultimately see 26 houses rehabilitated and restored as “working heritage”. The Mole Hill Master Plan was endorsed by City Council in March 2000. The subject site also includes a heritage house, the last one in the row on Comox Street. The proposed new facility has a residential component of 22 suites in the upper two floors as well as a day centre. Mr. Hein focused his presentation on the facade treatment, noting it has been an interesting exercise in terms of heritage, with considerable effort made to preserve the last house on the street. The house will accommodate nap rooms, administration and some nursing functions, and be linked to the new structure. The Panel’s advice is sought on the approach taken to the treatment of the facade in the heritage context, as well as the treatment, particularly at the ground plane, along Thurlow Street and the lane.

The Heritage Commission had mixed response to the proposal, noting it will be quite prominent at 55 ft. in height. Mr. Hein advised the issues of FSR, massing and program are accepted as a given.

- **Applicant’s Opening Comments:** Larry Adams, Architect, briefly reviewed the process to date with this project, noting they have been working with the Dr. Peter Foundation since 1995, looking at various options for the facility. The land was donated by the City of Vancouver and the project is jointly funded through the Vancouver-Richmond Health Board and BC Housing. Through the process they have had a lot of discussions with the Mole Hill community about the proposal and have attempted to respond to their comments. Public meetings have also been held. The building is essentially at zero lot line, although it has been pulled back as far as possible to align it with the houses along Comox Street. The program essentially fills the site and they believe the building is an honest expression of the program. Mr. Adams noted the land was donated by the City on condition that the heritage house be preserved and used by the facility.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted drawings

- **Panel’s Comments:** The Panel supported this application. A number of concerns were expressed about the tightness of the juxtaposition of the new building with the existing heritage house. It was noted a response has been to skew the north wall and pull the front corner of the new building away from the front corner of the house. This move was supported and one Panel member would like to have seen it skewed even more to give more space. The challenge of accommodating the program while retaining the old house was acknowledged by the Panel and several members suggested going higher in order to give the house more room.

The Panel unanimously agreed that the west facade that faces the house is the most successful resolution. It was strongly recommended that this treatment be carried to the other facades. The Panel supported the very modern approach to this building and urged the applicant to make it even more modern in terms of how it is detailed so that it becomes a more successful foil to the heritage house. The Panel stressed the need to simplify the building. It seems too “busy”, especially next to the house.

Disappointment was expressed that more has not been done with the lane in terms of connecting this project with the community. The water feature could be expressed on the lane side as a gesture to the community and make the lane more appealing. It was also noted the deck is quite high above the lane, with a suggestion to step down part of it to better connect at grade level. Alternatively, to change the interface at the wall and fence to allow people to come to the edge. The Thurlow Street landscape is a nice, clean treatment but seems a bit monotonous. It was suggested the planting might be more interesting in terms of colour and texture, perhaps with some higher shrubs or low trees.

One Panel member made some suggestions with respect to the Thurlow and lane elevations. On Thurlow, it was suggested the plan might be reconfigured to bring out the middle of the five bays, to provide some articulation and break up the monotony of this facade, adding a step in the wall at seating level. It was also suggested that the two exit stair doorways on either side could be recessed a little to reduce their prominence. On the lane side, it was noted the garage doors are oversized, with the suggestion they could be reduced to lessen their visual impact.

A comment was made that the roof seems a little thin and underscaled. Greater strength and articulation was suggested. For the roof and the building to work together, either more has to be done with the roof or a much simpler expression of the facades so that the whole is just simple, crisp architecture.

In general the Panel was very supportive and thought the project was moving in the right direction. The notion of creating two “book ends” to this row of heritage buildings and anchoring the corner was supported.

- **Applicant’s Response:** Mr. Adams said he appreciated the Panel’s comments. They are trying, within the constraints of the Mole Hill heritage context, to do a modern building in terms of its expression. He advised the program precludes going any higher. Some minor massaging can be done to reduce the proximity to the existing house by a very small amount. There has been discussion about the water feature maybe being double sided and contributing to the lane and they are committed to work with the Mole Hill community on the design of the lane. The fence itself is for security. There is only one access point to the project and the exit at the lane will be controlled. Finally, Mr. Adams advised the Mole Hill community does want the Dr. Peter facility to become part of the community and they are working towards this.