
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: January 23, 2002

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room #1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Tom Bunting, Chair
Walter Francl, Deputy Chair (Items 2 and 3)
Lance Berelowitz (Items 1 and 2)
Jeffrey Corbett
Gerry Eckford
Alan Endall
Bruce Hemstock
Richard Henry
Jack Lutsky
Maurice Pez

REGRETS: Joseph Hruda
Sorin Tatomir

RECORDING SECRETARY: Vivian Guthrie, Raincoast Ventures

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	1133 Seymour Street
2.	400 Beach Crescent
3.	822 Seymour Street

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| 1. Address: | 1133 Seymour Street |
| DA: | 405395 |
| Use: | Mixed Retail/Residential (22 & 33 storeys) |
| Zoning: | DD |
| Architect: | Hewitt & Kwasnicky |
| Owner: | Amacon-Omni Management |
| Review: | Second |
| Staff: | Ralph Segal/Anita Molaro |
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EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

Introduction

Chair Bunting advised that a response to the 'prior to' letter had been distributed on the table.

Ralph Segal, Development Planner, introduced the application noting that it had been previously viewed by the Panel and had been approved in principal by the Development Permit Board with conditions. He noted that the application brought new life to the area that could lead to improvements for the downtown Granville corridor. Referencing the project model, Mr. Segal led the panel in a detailed review of the project in the context of the surrounding area.

Previous Panel concerns were reviewed and it was noted that the bulk of both towers has been reduced while the height of the second tower has increased to maintain floor space. Mr. Segal noted that separation of the towers had improved, as had the design of the podium element to become more of a statement. He noted that in addition to providing an additional townhouse the design had created office space at ground level connected to the residential above.

Mr. Segal requested the Panel's comments regarding:

- porte-cochere elements and loading areas;
- 3-D resolution and evolution of the tower geometry;
- separation at the base of the assemblage at plaza level between podium and tower;
- overall expression of the podium;
- break in the street tree planting to announce entrance of the film centre;
- treatment of the street corner at Seymour and Davie; and
- quality of the public realm interface on ground level especially with respect to the relationship between the plaza and park.

In response to questions, Mr. Segal provided information on the downtown vision and the establishment of the greening of the streets, felt to be paramount to public realm, by virtue of the double row of trees. He advised the park design had received public input and advised that the Vancouver Park Board had established programmatic ideas regarding active and passive areas of the park. He advised that the podium façade supports a large screen to be used for projection purposes for announcements, cultural events, etc., and that the trees would block views of the screen from the park.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Donato Decotiis and David M. Hewitt joined the Panel for consideration of this Item.
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Mr. Hewitt discussed the means by which the Panel's previously raised concerns had been addressed and commented regarding changes made to the project, including:

- book end framing of project by entrances;
- pipe railings link different uses;
- two porte-cocheres providing retail loading docks and public access to the film centre;
- reduction in light 'pollution' to direct light out to park and not focus on adjacent residential buildings;
- private open spaces café area between film centre and residential component;
- checkerboard pattern on plaza mimics Hollywood squares;
- 4th floor blocks out overview, and allows public weather protection;
- retail component on Davie has been reduced to 25 foot elements; and.
- sweeping curve of the film centre provides a dramatic approach.

In response to questions from the Panel, the applicants provided additional information regarding the influence of geometric elements, with the film centre being key and other elements providing counter point and 'stepping-off' energy. It was noted that the corner element of the towers related to views and the sun, and that the plaza's hard surface would be comprised of different textures and colour with a concrete and sparkle characteristic to add to the 'film star' ambience. The Panel was informed that, at the corner of Davie and Seymour, the designers proposed a similar pattern linking the hard surface areas, but without imposing a character on the retail stores.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted materials.

Panel's Comments

Panel members strongly endorsed the public animated edge of the building projection screen with the park and public realm in general. Most felt that it would be preferable to encourage public views to the screen from the park while understanding staff's reservations regarding the double tree planting without a commitment on behalf of the applicant to provide the screen. A few members suggested that it might be better to plant the trees and consider removing them once the screen was in place. In general, the Panel was in favour of some rearrangement/removal of the trees for this particular opportunity to have the project's screen more visible. Staff and the applicants were urged to engage the Vancouver Park Board in full discussion of this public benefit opportunity.

Several members suggested a refinement of the 'portal' element at the retail level at the lane. Another member felt that the curve along Davie invited public use of the park. In discussion of the ground plane materials, the applicants were encouraged to use simple materials to achieve a bold, sophisticated manner.

Members commented that the semi-private open space had improved but that this area and the roof top design was challenged by scale and exposure issues. A suggestion was to carry the film theme throughout. A more intense program with more programmed space was also suggested.

The application was commended for the very creative loading resolution and dual use of the area.

In general, the Panel considered the application to be a handsome, vital project that would bring an exciting cultural dynamic to the area. There was some support for the revised geometry of the towers, but several members felt that the design of the towers could be simplified to achieve a slimmer profile and that a simplification of the tower form was needed in general, as it was still too fractured and overly complex, especially for the taller tower. Several members felt the base of tower 1 (taller tower) was still unresolved or not strong enough to match the strength of the tower.

Some more detailed attention is needed at the Seymour public realm. It has improved, but was not felt to be up to the strength of the rest of the project. One member commented that the tower design was energetic and powerful.

Applicant's Response

Mr. Hewitt expressed appreciation for the Panel's comments and suggestions. He noted how the building design had incorporated the portal element to hide the service area of a neighbouring building and how the complexity of the towers reflected a design preference to treat balconies as an extension of the form as well as an opportunity to step back massing elements. The applicant looked forward to a dialogue with the Vancouver Park Board.

MOTION

It was moved by Mr. Berelowitz and seconded:

That the Urban Design Panel recommend to City Council and the Director of Planning that the Vancouver Park Board be encouraged to enter into a dialogue with the applicant for 1133 Seymour Street to develop the potential interface of the film centre with the future design of the park across the street. It is also recommended that the dialogue not be a condition of the application's approval.

- CARRIED

MOTION

It was moved by Mr. Eckford and seconded:

That the Urban Design Panel recommend to City Council and the Director of Planning that the Vancouver Park Board be requested to present plans for proposed new and redesigned parks in the urban centre to the Urban Design Panel for its review and comment.

- CARRIED

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2. Address: 400 Beach Crescent
DA: 406387
Use: Residential (18 & 24 storeys)
Zoning: CD-1
Architect: James Cheng
Owner: Concord Pacific Group
Review: First
Staff: Jonathan Barrett
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EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (2-7)

- **Introduction**

Jonathan Barrett, Planning, referenced the model and discussed the context of the complete development application with other projects under construction in the area. The application is comprised of two towers (24 and 18 storeys), with 8, 5 and 4 storey flats and townhouses. Located beside George Wainborn Park, the site also has the benefit of facing the waterfront. It was noted that the application does not meet some of the guidelines for the Beach neighbourhood and requests a density transfer of approx. 20,000 sq. ft. from the larger neighbourhood of which it is a part.

The Panel's comments were sought with respect to the Beach Neighbourhood Guidelines, as follows:

- the scale of a continuous low-rise along the waterfront;
- Beach street elevation 6-storey streetscape;
- gaps in the perimeter of the development;
- tower floor plate size creating shadow onto park and narrowing view corridors;
- up to 8-storeys facing the park;
- access to grade level units from public realm (Stanley Park);
- one point for access to parking and drop off; and
- added density on site.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments**

Carl MacDonald, Terry Mott, Chris Phillips and Fred Roman joined the Panel for consideration of this Item.

Mr. Mott explained in detail the design rationale of the project and the attempt to meet the guidelines for the area. He specifically addressed the desirability of public access 'slots' into the 'secret' garden and the use of water in the landscaping for ambience as well as security. An attempt had been made to lower the scale of the project at the corners and some buildings had exceeded the number of stories to address site slope and scale issues. He also discussed the primary access for visitors and the difficulties in providing direct access to the park and foreshore walk. Mr. Mott demonstrated by use of diagrams that shadowing by the tower elements is an issue in the morning but quickly moves out of the park towards noon. Also noted were difficulties with circulation in residential units and accessibility to different levels.

Mr. Mott commented on the disposition of massing and the livability of suites obtained by orientation. He noted that vehicular access allows pedestrian and cyclist transitions, and that two access points have been provided for fire trucks.

The Panel reviewed the illustrated guidelines, model and posted materials.

Panel's Comments

The Panel acknowledge the difficulties of the site; the onerous prescriptions of the guidelines and bylaw but admitted discomfort with considering the project as a full development permit application.

In general the Panel considered the breaks in the perimeter to enhance the public experience and applauded the use of water in the landscape. One member queried the relative size of the waterways to the buildings and whether more private open space would be desirable. While security was a consideration, it was felt that access to the park and seawall at grade was a missed opportunity. Panel members suggested that a more direct access for pedestrians would be beneficial, as would a safer design of the cycle and pedestrian path to the waterfront walk.

There was no opposition to the low-rise buildings proposed for the perimeter of the site. Several members commented that the towers and flats would be less foreign to the neighbourhood if provided with a 'shoulder' or a wider base towards ground level. Members commented that a more pleasant relationship could be achieved between the building mass and the foreshore park.

It was noted that the 'dog leg' design and elevator core blocked views and sun, compromising the livability of some interior suites. Further, it was suggested that the southeast corner townhouses seemed underdeveloped (stripped down), and that the connection to the tower from 8 storey was not architecturally convincing.

The Panel considered the syncopation and modulation of the massing somewhat successful, but were not convinced that the project could support the extra density successfully. Some felt that the width of the floor plate spread too far on the city side and infringed on the views of the towers behind. The Panel gave some consideration to market demands as well as to the established guidelines for the neighbourhood. Some members suggested the design could be more complimentary to neighbouring projects that conformed to the guidelines. One member suggested this was a site that could challenge the guidelines.

The application was commended for its well-executed architectural scheme, detailing and thoroughness of presentation. It was generally thought that breaking up the massing with the view corridors and water feature enhanced the project and the modulation of low-rise to hi-rise worked well. However, it was recognized that fundamental levels of urban design had not been addressed, and that some of the particular massing did not relate well to other developments.

Applicant's Response

The applicant expressed appreciation for the Panel's thorough evaluation.

3. Address: 822 Seymour Street
DA: 406340
Use: Mixed
Zoning: DD
Architect: W. T. Leung
Owner: D.T.K.H. Robson Dev. Ltd.
Review: First
Staff: Anita Molaro

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

· Introduction

Anita Molaro, Planning, referencing the project model, introduced the proposal for 822 Seymour Street in the context of the surrounding area. She advised that the project is for a mixed-use commercial and residential development consisting of underground parking, retail on ground and second floors, offices on the third floor and 85 units of residential rental apartments on the upper floors. Although not required to, the project meets setback offsets as prescribed in Downtown South guidelines and is massed to achieve a slim tower to the west side of the site, minimizing shadowing impact. Ms. Molaro further noted the high quality in architectural form empathetic to the pedestrian environment and skyline.

The Panel's comments were sought with respect to the application's overall massing, shadow impacts on Robson Street, quality of finish elements, and the adequacy of residential greenspace.

In answer to questions from the Panel Ms. Molaro advised that there was no application of any relaxations, the residential urban space was not prescribed in the downtown area, and that the commercial and office level had substantial greenspace while such space was minimal in the residential component.

· Applicant's Opening Comments

Jane Durante, Barry Krause, Wing Ting Leung, and Darren Swift joined the Panel for consideration of this Item.

Mr. Leung referencing the design rationale noted that the underlying idea of the design was to sustain a vibrant extension of Robson Street while integrating a simple form with sculptured visual clues to the residential tower (e.g. balconies) with other buildings in the Downtown Core. The residential entrance off Seymour is accessed through green landscaped terraces, creating a green visual space. While not an active open space, the concept suggests an experience of walking through landscaping.

Ms. Durante discussed the project's landscape design and commented on the additional greening.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted materials.

· Panel's Comments

The Panel expressed its enthusiastic support for the project and commented that while current elevations of the retail space were considered elegantly appropriate, further detail to the street level would enhance the unique flavour of Robson Street. Likewise, the streetscape along Seymour could use a richer level of detail. The Panel suggested that further consideration be given to the

plaza area at Robson and Seymour.

The greenspace allotted to the residential area was deemed sufficient given the location of the site. The Panel commented on the successful treatment of the entry sequence, and noted that careful consideration should be given to the type of plants in the residential entry given the possibility of shadowing by future buildings.

Members commented on the effective massing of the project that complimented larger commercial buildings in the area and noted that the architect had used the best orientation of the tower to preserve views. Suggested improvements were offered related to the detailing of the blank concrete wall on the lane elevation as viewed by pedestrian and vehicular traffic travelling north. The overall quality of materials was considered to be very good.

Applicant's Response

Mr. Leung thanked the Panel for its comments and advised that in his consideration design continues past the development permit stage and assured the Panel that the project would evolve to enhance and compliment Robson Street complexities.