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URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

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**DATE:** Friday, June 20, 2003

**TIME:** 9.00 a.m.

**PLACE:** UBC Robson Square, Lecture Theatre 300

**PRESENT:** MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:  
Stuart Lyon, Chair  
Helen Besharat  
Jeffrey Corbett  
Bruce Haden  
Reena Lazar  
Kim Perry  
Sorin Tatomir  
Ken Terriss  
Mark Ostry  
Jennifer Marshall

**GUEST MEMBERS:** Ken Yeang  
Adrian Smith  
James Hancock  
Paul Merrick

**REGRETS:** Brian Martin  
Eva Lee

**RECORDING  
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

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ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	1120 West Georgia Street

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1. Address: 1120 West Georgia Street  
Use: Mixed  
Zoning: CD-1  
Application Status: Rezoning  
Architect: James K.M. Cheng Architects  
Owner: WestBank Projects Corp.  
Review: First  
Delegation: James Cheng, Dawn Guspie, Chris Phillips, Jennifer Sanguinetti  
Staff: Phil Mondor, Jonathan Barrett, Michael Gordon, Gerry McGeough
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**EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-5)**

- **Introduction:**

The Chair briefly reviewed the Panel procedures.

Phil Mondor, Rezoning Planner, introduced the application and briefly reviewed the rezoning process. This application seeks a height of 600 ft., a floor space ratio of 11.0, and residential use.

With respect to use, the Central Area Plan seeks to reshape the core commercial district and expand housing opportunities surrounding the core, subject to clear criteria, with the intent that the Central Business District (CBD) maintains its commercial office capacity, except where a use change is supported by a heritage effort. The proposed density is about 15 percent above the permitted 9.00 FSR in the CBD, and is based on the preservation of the adjacent heritage Coastal Church. Additional density may also be considered in exchange for the provision of community amenities, but not if the additional density is derived from heritage effort. A view corridor crosses this site, which must also be considered. As well, there are emerging policy initiatives in the areas of sustainability and accessibility, and issues such as micro climate and soundscape are also beginning to be considered. Mr. Mondor stressed that staff are still in the very early stages of assessing this rezoning application and much of the information is unavailable at this time.

The Development Planner, Jonathan Barrett, briefly described the site context, noting that West Georgia Street is the city's major ceremonial street.

James Cheng, Architect, briefly described the urban design concept. In addition to achieving an economic building, the goal is to make a social and cultural contribution to the city and to explore what can be done to contribute to a sustainable environment. There will also be an architectural/urban design contribution in terms of the evolving design of this building type. Mr. Cheng explained that the Coastal Church is an important aspect of the overall design of the streetscape and the intent is that the heritage church expresses itself. An attempt has been made to create pedestrian interest on West Georgia Street as well as respond to its ceremonial nature. For this reason, the public art component and public galleria are located on West Georgia Street where they are visible to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The entry lobby of the proposed boutique hotel will also be located on West Georgia Street to enhance the pedestrian experience. The entry to the proposed food store is on Alberni Street, away from the galleria space. The residential entrance will also be on Alberni Street. Above the Alberni Street entrances there will be access to a green podium roof which will accommodate restaurant terraces as well as provide a green overlook for the building residents. Mr. Cheng explained, the architectural concept is evolving from the ground plane considerations and is governed by the view cone which crosses the site. The intent is for the building to look different on all three sides but at the same time have a

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unified character in the skyline. The Georgia facade is more formal, the Thurlow facade has more punctuation and the south and southwest facade are the most open. The proposal is to extend the green of the ground plane up the side of the building, culminating in a two-storey roof garden on the rooftop, surrounded by windscreens. The proposal is for the roof garden to be illuminated at night so that it becomes a beacon in the skyline. Mr. Cheng noted that wind tunnel testing is being undertaken and a preliminary report indicates that the ground plane is satisfactory, subject to detailed testing.

Chris Phillips, Landscape Architect, said the intent is to animate the ground plane as much as possible. He noted the proposed public art space is in partnership with the Vancouver Art Gallery which will provide a changing, non-permanent exhibit. There will also be a major focus on sustainability in the landscape.

Jennifer Sanguinetti, Manager, Sustainable Building Services, Keen Engineering, briefly reviewed the sustainable aspects of the project and noted an energy model has been prepared to identify the key elements of energy performance. She briefly reviewed some of the key sustainability initiatives, noting that, as well as minimizing energy as much as possible, trees will be planted to offset the CO<sub>2</sub> produced by the building.

Mr. Barrett highlighted the areas in which the advice of the Panel is sought, namely:

- whether the proposal achieves architectural excellence given it will likely become a Vancouver icon. It needs to be a building of our time, our place, our culture, and our future. It will be key in the legibility of the downtown;
- whether the building responds appropriately to its existing neighbours and to the existing skyline;
- the proposed building character and materials;
- whether the proposed lower scale performs appropriately; its relationship with the Coastal Church and the surrounding streets, principally West Georgia and Alberni Streets;
- public realm connections.

Mr. Barrett stressed there are very high expectations for this project and the purpose of establishing this special Urban Design Panel is to ensure that these high expectations are met.

Staff and the applicant team responded to the Panel's questions.

- **Panel's Comments:**

- Use**

- The Panel unanimously supported the proposed use. One Panel member commented that it will be unusual for such a tall building to be residential use rather than commercial, but it is appropriate in this location. Another comment was that the live/work spaces are very adaptable and can be changed to respond to future demand.

- One Panel member recommended a better integration of the different uses and suggested that public access to the building would help to achieve this. A glazed elevator to the rooftop would

allow the public to view the exhibits of the resident artists.

### Density

The Panel strongly supported the increase in density to 11.0 FSR and a comment was made that the prevailing 9.0 FSR in the central area is somewhat modest compared to much of the world.

One Panel member recommended that the City investigate the long term economic impact of allowing more height and density in the downtown core, taking into account the trade-off with public benefits and issues of supply and demand of office space.

A question was raised as to whether this project might be the death knell for surrounding development.

### Height

With one exception, the Panel supported the proposed height. Comments included:

- it's fantastic that we're trying to break through the height limit;
- not sure that this tower will create the domed skyline but eventually, if there are a couple of other towers built over the next ten or twenty years, it will create a bit of a dome - you have to start somewhere;
- don't think Vancouver needs an icon tower and I don't see this tower as trying to be an icon; it's a very simple, classic shape;
- like the idea of Vancouver becoming a domed skyline;
- concern about the view from Cambie Bridge. It may be too high in that it visually interferes with the view of the Lions and is very close to the ridge of the north shore mountains. Support height beyond 450 ft. but not sure it deserves to go up to 600 ft.;
- the height is absolutely acceptable, probably desirable and maybe could even be a little higher;
- the height is appropriate given the view corridors limit the opportunities for other buildings to create a significantly different skyline;
- raising the point of the dome to 600 ft. is probably going to be adequate to help to create a more interesting dome-like skyline to the city;
- because it will have such a major influence on the downtown and the city, the City should revisit the established view cone criteria and the dome affect after this building constructed;
- this building , because of its height and location, is going to be an icon, whether we want it or not. That's why applying the highest order of architectural excellence to this site is critical. It's going to be an icon so it should be treated as an icon;
- I like the dome approach but whether you like it or not you won't get the dome effect straight away. It will be a landmark building until other buildings get built around it. In that sense this building will have a major impact on the city;
- If it's going to affect the city I don't think you should do things in a reticent way but do something bold - do it bravely or not at all;
- for this project to do well there should be no half measures but make it something that the city will instantly be proud of, not something that is demure and insignificant;
- why 600 ft.? Why not 602, or 605, or 700 ft.?
- whether you like it or not, this building will be iconic, no matter what it looks like. It will give identity to the city. Think seriously about it because it will be seen around the world;
- at some point the view cone policy need to be reviewed and reassessed as to whether we are achieving our goals or whether it is actually negatively impacting what could happen downtown;
- I don't quite understand how the city is going to achieve its dome objective, except in the extremely long term which probably requires demolishing buildings on other sites.

### Massing

- to evaluate architectural excellence it must be either strongly innovative or the detailed resolution of the highest order. The fundamental massing is very strong but is restricted by the view cones;
- the basic shape of the building certainly has the possibilities of being architecturally excellent but it is absolutely dependent on the resolution of the skin. The rezoning should be predicated on a skin mock-up. The tallest building in the city deserves to have the best skin application in the city;
- the strongest elevation is the more formal elevation on Georgia Street and my sense is that the architectural integrity of the building at the form level is critical above the grade. I don't think it needs to respond to different formal conditions surrounding it above grade level. It needs to have integrity as an object when seen from a distance;
- the weaker facade is the west facade which is more broken up;
- regarding the relationship between the tower and the base, I don't think the base is either quite tall enough or big enough to visually support the tower;
- I have a major problem that this project seeks benefits based on its architectural excellence;
- the project is driven by a kind of abstract idea (the view cone). There should be some way to give some kind of relaxation based on actual site conditions on these perimeter edges of the corridor;
- I don't consider this to be a building of the future but the last of the current phase;
- the character of the building, its multi uses, its sustainability, etc., is not reflected in the tower. It seems more like a larger than typical Concord Pacific building with some sort of skin on it;
- I think the building could be much more vital and interesting;
- I agree with some of the public comments that the building seems a little boxy and bland but it could be that, in the development of the building, that blandness turns into subtle sophistication and a provocative piece of architecture: that takes great finesse and great work to achieve;
- what troubles me a bit is the two facades. Lower down there is interest at the first two or three levels but beyond that it relies heavily on the quality of detailing and the nature of the wall;
- what is being shown is an all glass wall with minimal articulation of mullions and no operable windows;
- It is not clear whether it is a double wall or not but given the desire to have an all glass wall a double wall could be a way to achieve that;
- the presentation is showing a translucent skin but I know it is not going to be a translucent skin;
- a building of this simplicity requires a cohesive elegance to the skin;
- question how you are going to achieve that elegance in a transparent world. It implies a differentiation between the one surface and the other, where the plainer surfaces of the wall are very sheer, very taut and perfect, and it reveals into an inner surface which perhaps reveals the true workings of the building itself. How do you achieve that in reality?
- this is probably not a landmark building but it also is probably not that important that it be one - it's not significantly high enough. This height is not going to create a sense of awe. The more important aspect would be that its calling card be that it is an exquisite, subtle spire and a beautiful piece of architecture. There are moves here that begin to do that but it could go further in subtle ways to develop a more interesting series of elements. This is a good start;
- I believe the case for architectural excellence, given the premises of this building, has not yet been made and will require additional detailed development;
- with the right detailing and special attention to the skin this could be an elegant building;
- this building could be built anywhere.
- I don't think the tower at the present time earns the highest order of architectural excellence;

- it would be great if you could expose and showcase the structure of this building, both on elevations and even at the top of the building;
- the work today has great significance because it will affect the next generation of tall buildings in Vancouver. It will become a model for future submissions;
- this building is a marker that defines the edge of the Central Business District and it should be expressed in the facade;
- I support the low base massing because it's good for sun penetration and it relates very well to the church;
- the building will, in reality, be much more transparent than shown on the model. How do you deal with window coverings that will be visible from the outside? It is an important issue that needs to be addressed for the visual quality of the building;
- this project will set a precedent for the next generation of high buildings in Vancouver. We have to be very careful as to how we evaluate it against the highest order of architectural excellence that other high buildings will also have to meet;
- for a long time this building will be an icon and a destination place so we need to balance the height and density with the public benefits;
- the building fails to achieve architectural excellence because it does not actually generate an architectural concept that is independent of the building's economics and response to the view cones;
- this rezoning should obtain from the applicant at this stage a commitment to the resolution and refinement of the architectural details, specifically the envelope and skin of the building, which is what this building primarily relies upon for its architectural merit;
- the tower and base need to be unified a little bit more in response to its urban form, which is primarily generated by the view cone;
- it's a shame that such a public roof garden is actually taken off the public realm and would primarily be used by people who would be going to the restaurants. I don't know how truly accessible it would be for pedestrians to enjoy that space, that refuge from the city;
- the garden area should be closer to grade, perhaps not right on grade but closer for greater public accessibility and enjoyment;
- to become an exemplary piece of architecture the building needs to reach beyond its context;
- while the facades themselves may have somewhat responded to their context, the plan of the tower is very static;
- my basic concern over this process is that we are judging whether the project is exemplary but so much of this project is hanging on the skin design of the details which are not yet available;
- look more carefully at building community within the tower itself in maybe a more radical way than is being dealt with right now;
- in this case, the view corridor and the place it puts the main element on this site is fortuitous, not just because it maintains the corridor that is now decidedly well established, but because it lets sunlight into the balance of the site in a very real way for a good part of the day.

### **Rooftop**

- with the dome concept a significantly different top would probably not be appropriate;
- I evaluate rooftops as either framing or piercing the sky in some level, and having a sense of inhabitation. An elevator penthouse doesn't do that but a great illuminated room does. With detailed development, this could potentially be what I would consider to meet the criteria of a great rooftop;
- it will be difficult to achieve in a residential tower, but a great public benefit for the tallest building in Vancouver would be to allow the public to get to the top. Anything that could be done to integrate some sort of public space at the higher levels of the building would be a good public benefit for Vancouver residents and tourists;

- the greenery moving up through the building is interesting and intriguing;
- question whether the landscape at the top will be successful;
- it can go further than extending the glass and hiding trees at the top of the building and putting some light up there;
- it should be accessible by the public;
- I quite like the idea that the mechanical penthouse is concealed completely and becomes more of beacon of light;
- wind issues can be mitigated and I like the idea of the roof garden;
- public access will probably require a dedicated elevator;
- it should be more than just a garden but a park in the sky. It's not easy to do because of the wind speeds at the top of the tower;
- the building could be a flat top but the idea of a park in the sky is really powerful concept. Maybe it could be two or three levels of park in the sky;
- when this building is complete everyone will want to go to the top, so provision for public access will become inevitable. This could be the public benefit;
- maybe provide a dedicated high speed lift to access it - it could be something attached to the outside;
- consider putting a gallery there or some unconventional use which does not have a commercial return but would give pleasure to people when they go to the top of the building;
- I agree that people will want to get to the top of this building and I think there should be some consideration given to the roof being a public space in the sky;
- this building is going to exist in two eras. In its initial era it will be a sort of signature tower but in the future, when more taller buildings are developed, it will become just part of the family which makes up the dome. So it does have to address its initial state as a signature tower and then its future state as part of the dome. For that reason, the top of the building should not be some kind of spire and it is appropriate that it is relatively muted;
- for the most part, the city's tower tops are seen as places of privilege, not as places for the public, which is a shame. There are bigger and greater cities than ours that have a better attitude towards this and I think we could benefit from it;

#### Ground plane treatment

- one of the questions is where the green courts on West Georgia stop, and this building will provide a kind of end place for that formal language. This is an appropriate place to stop the green courts;
- at the ground level the weakest part is that it doesn't provide a short-cut to anything;
- I think there is a possibility of creating a link between Georgia Street and the corner of Thurlow and Robson, which is actually quite crucial in order to animate the space. Otherwise, the space won't be sufficiently dynamic;
- my concern is that having a public space with a hotel entry immediately across from the artwork will set up a situation where it will be seen as a hotel forecourt. Investigate the option, of putting the entry to the hotel on Georgia Street and quietening down the facade that creates the east face of the public court;
- it is essential to minimize the Superstore image on West Georgia Street - issues of signage would have to be handled with great care;
- the language of the restaurant feels a bit wilful;
- it's important that the Alberni side and Georgia side are treated differently. It is very tight to the street;
- there is opportunity at the first five levels to have greater linkage;
- the retail that enters off Thurlow Street could be much more integrated with the ground floor. I think it should be publicly accessible from the plaza;



- the hotel drop off at the lower level should be day-lit space;
- consider a system of circulation that links to lower levels down to the retail at the lower level to the hotel lobby drop off and to the plaza, through the art gallery space. This could work its way up to the rooftop of the food store which could extend by bridges across to the health spa on the third floor podium. In this way you would extend the ground plane both upwards and downwards;
- I like the idea of the overhangs on Thurlow Street, Alberni and Georgia, but maybe they could be much more bolder, if City regulations allow;
- a bold building like this needs a strong sense of arrival. I'm not sure which is the entrance to the building;
- the two corners are extremely important opportunities;
- I have some questions about the experience of getting down to the hotel/residential arrival point by that very narrow, curved ramp;
- I agree very much there ought to be some light coming down, maybe much like the community centre at Coal Harbour;
- there is an opportunity to link the very pedestrian corner of Thurlow and Robson to Georgia Street by maybe taking advantage of the anchor that has been created by the view cone;
- the whole public realm at grade needs to be looked at in a little more detail because it seems to be given over to the grocery store which could exist at a different level and provide more of a refuge for people in the space;
- the ground plane needs to be more proactive and bold and integrated into its context. So far, it is like band aid treatment with inappropriate siting of the ground plane elements;
- consider some way for the ground plane to exist on the different levels - the lovely rooftop garden is totally disconnected to the street;
- it would be great if the ground level space could be larger and have better integration at the second level which is really very much occupied by non accessible spaces;
- a project that is trying to accomplish so much and push the envelope deserves much more landscape at grade;

#### Food store

- look at setting the entrance back a bit;
- the food store is a wonderful and appropriate use but it doesn't necessarily need to consume streetscape. It may be possible that it could be somewhat subjugated at grade;
- the interface with the food store is weak and should be better integrated;
- I do have a little concern about the food store. I think it needs to be carefully programmed;
- I question the grocery store as an appropriate use on Georgia Street.

#### Heritage church

- the separation of the church from the tower is fine. The scale of the church and this project are so different that to try and integrate it into the project would be very difficult;
- if you are going to save a heritage building I think it should be given some kind of a setting;
- the location of the driveway next to the church is not appropriate;
- the facade of the church is very handsome and it may be more appropriate to bring that facade into the urban landscape of the ground plane;
- having a parking lot next to this important building is a lost opportunity. I understand the difficulties of the site but somehow I'm sure isn't another solution - maybe the ramp should not be exposed;
- the public plane needs to address the edge of the church. It would be a great backdrop to a public space in this location;

- the church does not need to be addressed in any kind of reverent way but it needs to be respected. The way it's treated right now with the driveway entrance is ignoring its context. The driveway entrance could also be a much better experience. It's being dealt with in a far too pedestrian way;

#### Art Galleria

- adding and articulating the art on this site is a fantastic opportunity. I hope it is taken further to incorporate contemporary art in every single aspect of this project, including handrails and signage;
- the galleria and public space will be inviting to the public, both on West Georgia and Alberni Street;
- the upper plaza/restaurant area should not be intimidating for the general public to enter;
- not sure the connection between the lower and upper plaza is as successful as the lower plaza;
- the place provided for the galleria looks like a thoroughfare. It should be a destination;
- the galleria should be much bigger. For the floor space ratio being sought an attractive destination plaza should be provided;
- it should not be located mid-block but better located. It should be a refuge;
- the space seems somewhat gratuitous in its scale;
- the location of the sculpture court is inappropriate from a solar access perspective. It's the most important public space on the site and has been given the worst space. This is where people will come to eat their lunch - it should be destination quality;
- incorporating public art in this project is absolutely great and, as the design moves on, I would hope that there is very strong design relationship between the project designers and the artists so that it works really well as an outdoor gallery;

#### Sustainability

- it doesn't have a particularly innovative green design agenda;
- the basic design moves are not based on sustainability. It seems like an afterthought;
- all sides of the skin should not be treated the same;
- it should be raised from LEED certification to at least LEED silver;
- the sustainable issues have not been studied in great detail;
- the facade design is not very clear. The southwest will get very hot in the summer unless it is shaded. Compensating with low e glass is very expensive, and you will have glare entering the building. The level of insulation into the spaces inside needs to be taken into consideration;
- you need to look at the ground conditions and take sewerage into consideration;
- in a private sector building such as this, who is responsible for maintaining the green courts that are relied upon for sustainability?
- it is becoming evident that as more and more buildings try to achieve LEED certification, that will become baseline for sustainability. This In project has to exceed the baseline and really be innovative in this respect and go beyond the minimum;
- at this point the "green" seems like applique and not imbedded.

#### Parking

Several Panel members questioned the amount of parking being proposed. It was felt the population of the building may be sufficient to support a private rental pool.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Cheng thanked the Panel for some very thoughtful insight that will provide much food for thought for the next stage. He said he appreciated the difficulty of

discussing architectural excellence given the diversity of opinion that exists on the subject. He stressed that what they are trying to achieve is a building with integrity. He said he hoped the building would ultimately be evaluated by how well they resolve all the issues so that it is not just a fashionable building for today but one that is more timeless. Mr. Cheng added that this project will contain about 260 units which is not likely to drain development potential in the immediately neighbourhood.

The meeting adjourned at 11.55 a.m.