

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: June 9, 2004

TIME: 4.00 pm

PLACE: Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Bruce Haden, Chair
Larry Adams
Robert Barnes
Jeffrey Corbett
Alan Endall
Marta Farevaag (excused item 3)
Ronald Lea
Margot Long
Jennifer Marshall
Brian Martin

REGRETS: Steven Keyes
Mark Ostry

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	1885/95 Venables Street (VECC)
2.	2851 Heather Street (Nurses' Residence)
3.	800 West 12th Avenue

Business:

The Woodward's Workshop has now been rescheduled from June 21 to July 21, 2004 (a regular Panel meeting date).

The Chair reminded Panel members to be succinct in their commentary and to avoid commenting on detailed items, particularly on the larger projects.

1.	Address:	1885/95 Venables Street (VECC)
	Use:	Theatre & Ancillary Use
	Zoning:	CD-1
	Applicant Status:	RZ
	Architect:	Proscenium
	Owner:	City of Vancouver
	Review:	First
	Delegation:	Hugh Cochlin, Duncan Low, Sara Getz
	Staff:	Sailen Black, Alan Duncan

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-1)

- **Introduction:** Alan Duncan, Rezoning Planner, introduced this application to rezone the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (VECC) site at the northwest corner of Victoria Drive and Venables Street, from RT-5 to CD-1. The site comprises four 49.5 ft. x 124 ft. lots. The VECC building, built as the Grandview Methodist Church in 1909 but not fully completed, was used as a church until 1968. The building was listed in the 'C' category in the Heritage Register in 1985 but was removed a year later. Because the City owns the property it is not possible to rehabilitate the building under a Heritage Revitalization Agreement, hence the subject rezoning application. All properties immediately adjacent to the site south of the lane are zoned RT-5 and north of the lane, RM-5.

The VECC has been in operation since 1973, although it has never been a conforming use and has many challenges as a performing arts facility. It is currently developed slightly beyond the 0.6 FSR permitted under RT-5 but is below the maximum permitted site coverage. It contains a maximum of 384 seats and the Green House, originally the manse for the church, is now loaned to the Green Thumb Theatre, separate from the main building. Parking for about 20 vehicles is located between Victoria Drive and the building and has access from the lane.

The proposal is to redevelop and expand the facility to address its current challenges and to better fulfill its mandate. The intent is to rehabilitate the exterior, replicate the massing of the existing Green House and retain and rehabilitate significant interior elements. These elements, which will be designated, include the balcony guard rail, the curved wooden stairs, the balcony and the colonnaded balcony structure. The theatre will reduce its capacity to about 300 seats and the front-of-house area will be further west than at present. The Green House will be replaced with an addition to the east which will feature an 80-seat studio theatre that will also share the front-of-house facilities. The addition to the east on the existing parking lot will accommodate increased stage area, back-stage facilities, rehearsal hall, green room and administrative functions. An elevator tower is proposed where there was originally to have been a church steeple. The new development will not exceed the height of the existing VECC; overall density is 1.4 FSR and site coverage about 61 percent. Parking for 24 vehicles is mostly below grade.

The Development Planner, Sailen Black, presented the design issues and sought the advice of the Panel on the relationship between the existing building and the new additions, and pedestrian amenity. The Panel is asked to comment on how the new structure relates to the existing private dwelling to the west, the relationship between the hip roof mass of the existing structure and the proposed contemporary additions, and the appropriateness of the existing corner element. Comments are also sought on the pedestrian quality along Venables Street and Victoria Drive, noting the current large parking lot and mature trees on the corner together with the front yard setback create a buffer between the arterial roads and the existing theatre building.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Hugh Cochlin, Proscenium Architecture and Interiors, briefly described the history of the VECC and the rationale for the proposed expansion. They propose to keep the front lobby as transparent as possible to reveal a sense of the massing of the main building, and to restore the currently blocked-off windows along Venables. With respect to the landscape, the trees along Venables will be retained along with the large cedar at the corner, and the Victoria Drive edge will be replanted. The front planting area attempts to align with the adjacent houses and create a soft planted edge.

The applicant team and staff responded to the Panel's questions.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

The Chair noted the following key issues arising from the Panel's commentary:

- General simplification of architectural expression, with particular attention to a greater visual clearance with respect to the existing roof element;
- Improve the landscape integration with the architectural strategy of the building, particularly on the Victoria Drive side.

- **Related Commentary:**

The Panel strongly supported this application and acknowledged the challenge of fitting the program onto a constrained site while preserving the architectural and cultural heritage of the much-loved "Cultch".

The Panel unanimously supported the modern, contemporary architectural expression of the new additions. This is much preferred to any kind of historicist approach which would be strongly resisted by the Panel. Panel members were, however, concerned that the new additions seem to be "pinching" the original structure, and the general massing of the additions appears to be fighting with the form of the original building, particularly on the easterly side. The need for height for the fly tower was acknowledged but the applicant was urged to look at ways to give the existing roof form more breathing room and to simplify the architectural expression as much as possible. One Panel member suggested lightening up the canopy as a way to create some transparency into the new building. Some Panel members questioned the appropriateness of the roof peak on the studio addition because it competes with the original roof form, and there was a recommendation to ensure the horizontal expression is continued around to the rear elevation. With respect to the Victoria Drive façade, one Panel member found it rather blank and disappointing and suggested looking at ways to introduce some openings to enliven the street. A comment was made that it seems a lost opportunity not to provide some view into the rehearsal studio. A member of the Panel observed that a positive feature of the existing VECC is its indoor/outdoor spill area and recommended looking at ways to maintain it.

The Panel had no concerns with the relationship to the existing house to the west which it generally found to be quite successfully handled.

The Panel generally supported the pedestrian quality on the Venables and Victoria frontages. Some Panel members found the landscape in front of the east wing to be somewhat suburban and suggested it should better complement the modern expression of the addition, possibly with more hard landscaping. Another comment about the landscape was that the planting plan at the westerly end seems very institutional in character where a more residential approach might provide a better transition to the residential neighbours.

A Panel member suggested that further consideration be given to the treatment of the lane at grade level and noted the disabled parking access seems a bit awkward.

The Panel requested that the application be returned for review at the development application stage.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Cochlin advised the Panel's suggestions are all workable. He noted there are some programmatic problems; for example, the need to avoid windows into the rehearsal space.

2.	Address:	2851 Heather Street (Nurses' Residence)
	DE:	408504
	Use:	Residential/Daycare/Community Use
	Zoning:	CD-1
	Applicant Status:	Complete
	Architect:	Nigel Baldwin
	Owner:	Vancouver General Hospital
	Review:	First
	Delegation:	Maurice Pez, Nigel Baldwin, Peter Kruek
	Staff:	Scot Hein, Tom Phipps

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

- **Introduction:** Scot Hein, Development Planner, introduced this development application to renovate and extend the existing VGH Nurses' Residence to provide a daycare, community rooms and a fitness centre at grade in the renovated building, and residential in the remainder of the project. The project also requires a Text Amendment to address some technical aspects of the existing CD-1 zoning.

Tom Phipps, Planner, provided some background to the project. A significant rezoning of the entire VGH site occurred in 2001 in order to accommodate medical technical development in the precinct within a series of new buildings. The overall plan included the redevelopment of the subject Nurses' Residence to either multiple dwelling or congregate residential use. The intent of permitting the conversion of the Nurses' Residence is to fit within the surrounding residential use. Two options were proposed by VGH at that time: either to retain the existing building and convert it to either use, or to demolish it and build new.

The proposal includes a 6-storey component along 12th Avenue and retention of the portion of the existing building fronting Heather Street. The existing wing along 13th Avenue will be demolished and not replaced. There is also the intention to have a pedestrian corridor through Willow Street that would connect towards Broadway and extend the corridor through the public open space framed by 10th and 12th Avenue, Heather and Willow Streets, linking the precinct into the neighbourhood.

Mr. Hein noted that this application and that for the adjacent power plant are in advance of an application for an overall master plan for the VGC precinct which is expected to be submitted shortly.

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

1. the approach taken to massing and siting, including the retention of a portion of the existing building;
 2. comments on the west elevation;
 3. architectural language of the daycare and the degree to which the buildings relate to or differentiate from each other;
 4. the adjustment in grade at the southeast corner;
 5. comments on the Text Amendment application to allow an increase in height from 17 m to 19 m to deal with the ground plane and ground oriented entry, and to permit an extension of the existing height for the double loaded corridor to complete the typical floorplate.
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- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Nigel Baldwin, Architect, noted the existing zoning suggested that a partial retention of the building was possible. They have tried to save the best of the old building and balance a number of criteria, one being the retention for sustainability. It is possible to retain only the structure and the cladding of the building and this proposal saves about 40 percent of the structure. It has been retained to a depth of 35 ft. and extended by the addition of a double-loaded apartment building. Discussions with Planning staff have concluded that a 6-storey building on 12th Avenue is an appropriate scale given the master plan for the site. The building steps down to five storeys at Willow Street, then to three storeys along Willow. Vehicular access is off 12th Avenue with nine drop-off spaces provided on-site for the daycare. Mr. Baldwin briefly described the rationale for the architectural expression.

The Landscape Architect, Peter Kreuk, briefly reviewed the landscape plan and the design team and staff responded to questions from the Panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - design development to simplify the west end of the 12th Avenue building and retain the autonomy of that building as a simple "bar" building;
 - design development to enhance the livability of the exterior southeast corner;
 - design development to enhance the formal logic of the green spaces, with particular emphasis on the auto court. This includes further clarification of the design and detailing strategy of the site with respect to the integration and contrast between both of the adjacent walkway and the power plant site;
 - explore the possibility of a green roof.
- **Related Commentary:** The Panel unanimously supported this application and applauded the re-use of the Nurses' Residence building. Preservation of the existing façade on Heather Street was considered to be a good gesture to the city and the Panel liked the way it has been handled. The height on 12th Avenue was considered to be appropriate.

The Panel found the architectural language very appropriate and supportable: sufficiently different while complementing the existing building. Some Panel members questioned the stepping of the massing on the west side as being too small a gesture and unnecessary because it takes away somewhat from the regular shape of the two buildings. There was a recommendation for greater consideration of how the west façade comes to the ground to make it more pedestrian friendly.

The Panel strongly recommended further design development to the southeast corner of the daycare where the recess is rather severe.

A need for greater attention to the auto court was noted, not only greening but in terms of way finding for pedestrians. In general, the Panel thought further work was needed on the open green space, possibly adding more program elements that might help the transition to the easterly building. There was also a suggestion to consider relocating some of the trees that need to be removed.

Given the Nurses' Residence building does have some overlook, a suggestion was made to consider a green roof. One Panel member questioned the livability of unit 2B3 in terms of daylight access, and a suggestion was made that the entry canopies may be a little understated.

There were no concerns about the requested Text Amendments.

- **Applicant's Response:** Maurice Pez advised they will look at the opportunity for a green roof and said they do intend to develop the auto court. Special attention will also be given to the base of the west elevation.

3.	Address:	800 West 12th Avenue
	DE:	408368
	Use:	Steam Plant
	Zoning:	CD-1
	Applicant Status:	Complete
	Architect:	Tom Bunting
	Owner:	Vancouver General Hospital
	Review:	First
	Delegation:	Brent Alley, Con Buzunis, Tom Bunting, Chris Phillips
	Staff:	Scot Hein, Tom Phipps

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-0)

- **Introduction:** Tom Phipps explained it was anticipated at the rezoning stage that there would be an underground power plant, to be located in the park towards the corner of the Heather Building. However, it is now proposed to locate it further south, displacing a 4-storey medical technical building. This relocation is supported by Planning staff noting it increases the amount of overall open space adjacent to the pedestrian corridor.

The Development Planner, Scot Hein, noted the original master plan did not contemplate this use of the site. The Panel's advice is sought on the use and location of the exhaust stacks as well as general advice on the landscape concept, including any CPTED concerns. Mr. Phipps added, all this district is zoned for hospital use. In addition to the development application, a Text Amendment is required because the power plant will also serve the Women's and Children's Hospital and is therefore no longer an ancillary use.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Tom Bunting, Architect, noted that 95 percent of the proposed power plant is below grade. He briefly described the project. The building has a simple, modern expression with the industrial use below. Chris Phillips briefly reviewed the landscape plan and the design team responded to questions from the Panel.
- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - Further clarification of the design and detailing strategy of the power plant site with respect to the integration and contrast between both of the adjacent walkway and the park;
 - Design development to enhance the relationship of the parkade edge with respect to landscape and building integration.
- **Related Commentary:** The Panel unanimously supported this application.

The Panel found the project to be very playful and dynamic. There were no concerns about the use, and the location of the stacks was considered appropriate. The public art was thought to be well integrated and exciting and a good counterpoint to the lawn across the street. One Panel member questioned whether it might be possible to use LED technology with changing colours in the lighting strategy. One Panel member questioned whether the stacks could be something other than stainless steel, suggesting a colour might add to the playfulness of the scheme.

It was noted there are some mid-block linkage issues between this project and the adjacent Nurses' Residence that need to be resolved. There was also a question about the relationship of this park to the proposed linear greenway and whether there could be more of a connection in terms of entry locations, etc. The applicant was urged to coordinate the

landscape plan with the adjacent Nurses' Residence project. As well, the relationship between the walkway and the adjoining park should be clarified as there may be an opportunity to enhance the separation of these roles.

The Panel had no concerns about safety and security. One Panel member expressed the hope that the project would not be over-lit in response to CPTED concerns, preferring the use of ambient and background lighting to create the perception of safety as opposed to a lot of pole lighting in the centre. One Panel member questioned the quantity of trees between the stacks and the parkade in terms of it being a place where vagrants could camp out. Lighter landscape, possibly with paths through, might be considered.

A suggestion was made that the diagonal entry for fuelling on 12th Avenue may be too generous and encourages jaywalking.

There was a recommendation to build on the healing aspects of the scheme for the benefit of both patients and staff.

It was recommended that mock-ups be built prior to implementation of the public art program to better understand some of the structural dimensions and mechanical-electrical requirements, etc. There was also a recommendation to consider an education component - plaques and signage to indicate what is going on inside and underneath to educate the public on the benefits of the power plant.

There was a recommendation for further design development to the entry lobby to make it less like a building and more of a simple sculptural object in the plaza. Also, to give some consideration to overlook onto the pavilion roof from surrounding buildings.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Bunting thanked the Panel for its comments.