

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: March 30, 2005

TIME: 4.00 pm

PLACE: Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Larry Adams, Chair
Nigel Baldwin
Robert Barnes
Shahla Bozorgzadeh
James Cheng (present for Items 1 and 2 only)
Marta Farevaag (excused Item 4)
Ronald Lea
Margot Long
Edward Smith (excused Item 4)
Peter Wreglesworth

REGRETS: Alan Endall
C.C. Yao

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	5541 Willow Street
2.	5616 Fraser Street
3.	298 East 11th Avenue (2725 Sophia)
4.	160 West 49th Avenue (Langara Campus)

1. Address:	5541 Willow Street
Use:	Residential (3 storeys, 35 units)
Zoning:	RS-1 to CD-1
Application Status:	Rezoning
Architect:	Stuart Howard
Owner:	Mosaic Homes
Review:	First
Delegation:	Stuart Howard, Chris Barbati, Ron Rule
Staff:	Michael Naylor, Dale Morgan

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-2)

- **Introduction:** Michael Naylor, Rezoning Planner, introduced this rezoning application in the Oakridge/Langara area near 41st Avenue and Oak Street. The proposal is to rezone six single family RS-1 lots on Willow Street to CD-1 to permit a townhouse development with 33 townhouses and parking at 1.6 spaces per unit. Across the lane to the west is the transit bus yard which is expected to be redeveloped in the near future. The subject site is in a transition area between the single family neighbourhood and the future denser development in the bus yard site. Willow Street also contains a number of schools including Eric Hamber Secondary School, a proposed French high school and a Jewish high school now under construction. This site is in a high priority sub area identified for rezoning in the Oakridge Langara Policy Statement (1995) and a number of other sites in the area have also been rezoned for townhouses. There is little in the policy statement with respect to the adjacent 14 acre bus yard site and it will undergo a special planning process when it comes forward for redevelopment. It is anticipated to about 1.0 FSR gross density, with at least one acre of park. The subject site is also at the southwest corner of the Riley Park and South Cambie planning initiative that will consider the impacts of the proposed RAV station at 41st and Cambie.

Dale Morgan, Development Planner, briefly described the form of development. It was noted that Willow Street has an unusually wide boulevard of approximately 22 ft. from the front property line to the street curb. The adjacent 2-storey medical office building (CD-1) at the corner of Willow and 41st is also residential in character with a low pitched roof and wood finishes. The site has two lanes on the south and west. It shares the south lane with the medical office and the westerly lane faces the bus barn site. While the exact nature of the development of the bus barn site is as yet unknown, it is expected that the built form at the edges will be low rise (2 - 3 storeys), which is compatible with the subject proposal. The townhouses are all ground oriented with a 40 ft. wide courtyard which extends the length of the site. There are three clusters facing Willow Street, two facing the lane and three smaller buildings facing the south lane. The Willow Street townhouses are two storeys in height (approximately 30 ft.) with front door access from Willow Street and rear yards facing the courtyard. The units facing the lanes are three storeys in height (35 ft.) and have front door entries facing the courtyard. Policy guidelines allow for heights up to 30 ft. but building heights up to 35 ft. have been recently approved. Features of the courtyard include a gazebo element ("folly") at the centre and a fountain at the north end. Parking is a hybrid solution comprising underground spaces for the Willow Street and south lane units and below grade individual garages for the units on the westerly lane. An earlier scheme which was not supported by the Planning Department proposed all parking at grade with cars accessing the centre courtyard from the lane. There is a parking ramp off the south lane which has been integrated into the architecture of the coach house unit in this location.

The advice of the Panel is sought on the following:

- Use;
- Density;
- Form of Development, including comments on:
 - building massing, height and site plan, and the architectural expression given the well developed design at this stage;
 - whether the development provides a satisfactory transition in scale and massing with its immediate neighbours; and
 - treatment on the public realm along Willow Street and the lanes, the semi public realm courtyard space, pedestrian connections into and through the site, the relationship of the front units to the rear units, and the proposed courtyard space and landscape design.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Stuart Howard, Architect, noted the site has been identified by the City as a transition zone to allow for this form of development. The proposal is at 1.0 FSR, 35 units per acre. He indicated they received a fair amount of support for the proposed form of development at the public information meeting; the neighbours concerns related more to other uses in the neighbourhood. Mr. Howard described the design rationale in greater detail and responded to questions from the Panel.
- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

Support for use, form and density, with the following comments on the form of development:

- architectural expression supported;
 - the majority of Panel members thought there was an appropriate transition to the neighbours;
 - the public realm is suffering somewhat and it was noted there is some flexibility in the courtyard space, e.g., it could be narrower either to increase the setback at the lane and to the street, or both;
 - concerns expressed about the south elevation both in terms of planning and with respect to the unit over the ramp and the height and massing of the southeast unit;
 - strong consensus that there is some City responsibility with respect to redevelopment of the bus barns site, i.e., providing some direction with respect to connections to that site and how the lane might be treated in the future;
 - questions about whether the parking for the rear units could be located underground in a double loaded parking structure which would provide greater flexibility in the lane;
 - given the proximity of the new RAV station, the City should be looking at decreasing the use and visibility of vehicles in the neighbourhood and promoting cycling and walking;
 - living rooms facing Willow Street would be a neighbourly gesture and provide "eyes on the street".
- **Related Commentary:**

The Panel strongly supported this application. The use and density were considered very appropriate. One Panel member also suggested that once the bus barns site is redeveloped it might be found that this site could have taken even greater density. The Panel thought the development would provide a satisfactory transition from the single family neighbourhood as well as a good transition of building heights within the development itself.

The relationship to the neighbouring single family house to the north was considered to have been satisfactorily addressed. One Panel member questioned the massing of the northwest unit and the resulting awkward relationship to its neighbour, suggesting a three storey alternative with a larger side yard might be considered.

The Panel strongly endorsed the architectural expression which was thought to have a nice Vancouver quality that will be good for the area. It is a very well crafted scheme with the details of each unit nicely executed. The choice of materials was strongly supported, particularly the texturing on the upper floor.

In general, the massing was thought to work quite well with the exception of the south elevation where the units seem to be “squeezed” and have an awkward orientation to the courtyard. The three storey massing of the unit at the southeast corner was also thought to be negative, with recommendations to reduce this unit to two storeys to match the rest of the massing along Willow Street. Another suggestion was to absorb the south units into the front and rear rows, which would also allow the creation larger gaps and east-west links through the site.

The Panel generally found the Willow streetscape to be well handled and there were no strong objections to tightening up this frontage but some suggestions that it could be increased by a couple of feet and reducing the rear yards. With respect to unit layouts there was a concern that the units on Willow should have their living rooms facing the street to provide “eyes on the street”.

There were some concerns about the adequacy of the private open space for the lane units and the arrangement of the interior spaces of some of these units. The addition of roof decks for the lane units was strongly recommended.

Several Panel members thought the lane treatment was a missed opportunity given the future redevelopment of the neighbouring bus barns site. The Panel suggested the City should be providing some guidance to developers as to how this lane is expected to function in terms of interface with the neighbourhood, particularly since this project will likely set the tone for the area. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of ability for the public to move through this site from the bus barns site and the nearby schools, noting that pedestrians will likely try to find a way to get through this site anyway. It was suggested such a route could easily be provided at the north end of the site.

Some Panel members thought that, depending on what City policy might be developed with respect to the lanes in this area, entrances off the lane to create a mews could be a good alternative since it would alleviate the challenges posed by having rear yards and front yards facing each other. However, it was generally agreed that this depends on City initiative and is not the responsibility of this developer.

Concerns were expressed about the treatment of the courtyard which has relatively small pathways going through it and little in the way of a gathering space, including seating, for the residents. From a community building point of view the provision of such a gathering space was strongly recommended.

There was differing opinion about the size of the courtyard relative to the front and rear setbacks but it was generally agreed that there is sufficient flexibility with this generous courtyard to increase the setback on the lane to improve that environment and/or increase the Willow frontage.

A question was raised as to whether double loading parking had been considered, which would improve the outdoor spaces for the rear units.

The importance of considering sustainability at the rezoning stage was stressed, noting that opportunities for reducing environmental impact are best pursued at the beginning of the design stage of a project.

- **Applicant's Response:** Responding to the Panel's comments about the lane, Mr. Howard noted the medical building at the corner has its parking access off the south lane and will have for the foreseeable future. The north-south lane to the west also services and provides access to a number of buildings that are expected to remain for some considerable time. As well, the plan for this site, which envisions this forms of development, has been in place for ten years and a number of similar rezoning applications have been approved in the area which use the lanes. Mr. Howard said it is not within their ability to change the way the lanes work, even on a small scale. He said they have had discussions with City staff about access through the site but it is not something that the City is requiring or recommending. He said they believe 39th Avenue, which dead-ends into Willow Street nearby, seems to be a more reasonable point of access. Mr. Howard stressed that the parking arrangement is a hybrid solution and they have considered both fully underground and fully surface parking. He noted the unit layouts are still in flux at this stage. With respect to the single unit over the parking ramp, Mr. Howard noted it is a way to conceal it somewhat and generally improve its appearance. Restricting vehicular activity to the south lane also satisfies some of the concerns of the neighbours about additional traffic in the area. With respect to the courtyard, Mr. Howard noted there are security concerns in a townhouse development such as this where there is not a good street overview of the interior space. He also stressed that the "folly" is intended to be a gathering place. The generous width of the courtyard will also provide good sun access.

Chris Barbati noted that parking was discussed at length with staff before they arrived at this solution. They believe that if the back row of townhouses is reduced in height it will require a larger setback from the lane which in turn will have a significant impact on the courtyard, noting they believe the 40 ft. wide courtyard will work very well.

2. Address:	5616 Fraser Street
DE:	408451
Use:	Special Needs Residential Facility (4 storeys)
Zoning:	C-2
Application Status:	Complete
Architect:	Davidson Yuen Simpson
Owner:	BC Housing Management Commission
Review:	First
Delegation:	Dane Jansen, Gerry Eckford, Mark Smith
Staff:	Bob Adair

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

Note: James Cheng was present for the discussion and provided his comments and support for the application, but was not present for the vote.

- **Introduction:** Bob Adair, Development Planner, presented this application in the C-2 zone. The site is 104 ft. x 104 ft. and is located on Fraser between 39th and 41st Avenues. He briefly reviewed the immediate context and described the proposal which is for a 4-storey special needs residential facility (SNRF) containing 30 dwelling units on the upper three floors and office, program and meeting space on the ground floor. Six surface parking spaces and a courier/loading space are provided at grade along the lane along with an enclosed garbage room and transformer. Materials include giant brick, hardi panel and stucco. The dwelling units are designed to provide accommodation for persons with mental health and addiction related problems but who are drug and alcohol free. The facility will be owned by the City and operated by Triage-Emergency Services and Care Society in accordance with The Vancouver Agreement. The facility was supported by Council following a series of public hearings in December 2004, subject to a number of conditions relating to 24-hour staffing, security concerns and strong community liaison. Because of its controversy in the neighbourhood, the application will be considered by the Development Permit Board on April 18, 2005.

The advice of the Panel is sought on the relaxations being requested and on the urban design aspects of the scheme. The principle relaxation being sought relates to minimum dwelling unit size. The regulations permit a minimum of 400 sq.ft., which may be relaxed to 320 sq.ft. at the discretion of the Development Permit Board. The proposed units range between 330 sq.ft. to 450 sq.ft., with the majority at approximately 375 sq.ft. The units as proposed are supported by the City's Housing Centre and Social Planning Department. A relaxation of FSR is also requested from the outright 0.75 to about 2.3 FSR which is below the maximum permitted 2.5 FSR. The Panel's comments are sought on the general massing along Fraser Street and whether the streetwall massing could benefit from further strengthening on the upper floors. Comments are also requested on the treatment at grade along the lane with respect to landscaping and screening of the parking and transformer areas. General comments on materials are also requested.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Dane Jansen, Architect, noted it is a very straightforward building without elaborating further on the scheme. Gerry Eckford briefly described the landscape plan and the applicant team responded to questions from the Panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - unit size supported;
 - increase in density to 2.3 FSR supported;
 - support for the massing, with the following suggestions:
 - consider design development to fill in the "gap" along the Fraser Street frontage to strengthen the linearity of the streetwall, which would in turn facilitate articulation of the lane façade;
 - strong recommendation to simplify the massing;
 - the indented areas needs to be addressed in some way or screened off;
 - treatment of the lane is appropriate with the exception of treatment of the kiosk building which should be improved either with richer materials or extending the trellis over it;
 - the success of the lane treatment will depend on the quality of the detailing;
 - strong consensus that the location of the common space in the building is unfortunate;
 - design development recommended to try to create more outdoor access - balconies for all units recommended;
 - a sustainability strategy should be developed and incorporated into the building.
- **Related Commentary:**

The Panel unanimously supported this application.

There were no concerns about the size of the units given the social benefits provided by this development. There was one suggestion to delete the kitchen islands to improve the livability of the units.

The proposed density was unanimously supported and a suggestion made that increasing density to 2.4 FSR also would be acceptable if it facilitates adjustment of the front façade and the provision of more space either inside the units or in additional balcony space.

In general, the Panel thought the Fraser Street façade should be simplified and strengthened by eliminating the central indent and continuing the materiality of the flanking sides. There were concerns that this massing solution is unnecessary and imposes a forced symmetry to the building. A comment was made that the street would benefit from a simpler, flatter streetwall which would in turn allow the lane massing to be better articulated for the benefit of the neighbours. Increasing the french balconies to full size balconies would also improve the Fraser façade. One Panel member found the entrance to be not very well defined and the canopy too small. There was also a recommendation to locate the street trees to frame the entrance rather than being off centre.

In general, the Panel thought all the units should have a full size balcony and stressed the importance of private outdoor space for the smaller units in particular. Roof access should also be considered if possible.

The Panel also thought the lane façade could benefit from simplification. It was suggested it could be treated more sensitively to be less obviously the back of the building. There was a recommendation to introduce greater separation of the individual program spaces in the rear, and the inclusion of seating to promote conversation among residents. The Panel strongly urged that the kiosk building should be more neighbourly, with an improvement in materials and/or extension of the trellis over it. The trellis over the parking was strongly supported but

it was stressed that the success of the rear outdoor spaces will depend on the detailing. Sensitive lighting in this area will also be very important.

Panel members expressed concern about the indented space in the rear and suggestions were made to provide a permeable screen.

The Panel was very disappointed that the resident lounges do not take advantage of the views across Fraser Street to the north and concerns were expressed that the optimum layout has been compromised through the negotiation process with the neighbours. Comments were made that there is little difference between being overlooked by an individual unit or a communal lounge space, and locating the lounges in the rear is a big loss to the residents of this building.

Given this building is a health facility and a City project, the importance of incorporating sustainability into the development was stressed noting its benefit to both the residents of the building and the neighbourhood as a whole. A question was raised as to whether treatment of the glass had been considered, noting the smaller units have a lot of glazing which will cause heat gain in summer and be cold in winter. The dark red colour might also be reconsidered in terms of heat gain impacts.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Jansen thanked the Panel for its comment.

3. Address:	298 East 11th Avenue (2725 Sophia)
DE:	409126
Use:	Residential (8 storeys, 81 units)
Zoning:	C-3A
Application Status:	Complete
Architect:	Linda Baker
Owner:	675716 BC Ltd.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Linda Baker, Peter Kreuk
Staff:	Mary Beth Rondeau

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

- **Introduction:** Mary Beth Rondeau, Development Planner, presented this application at the corner of Sophia Street and East 11th Avenue, separated from Kingsway by a triangle of open space. There is an existing funeral home across Sophia Street for which this development provides 24 underground parking spaces. The proposal is for an all-residential building containing 81 units over 2.5 levels of underground parking to a height up to 82 ft. The site currently contains two older houses which are not on the heritage inventory. The Planning Department is seeking the removal and relocation of one of these houses.

The Panel's advice is sought on whether the project earns the requested height and 3.00 FSR.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Linda Baker, Architect, described the scheme in greater detail and sought the Panel's advice on the treatment of the corner, currently proposed with a transparent vertical element. Peter Kreuk, Landscape Architect, reviewed the landscape plan and the applicant team responded to the Panel's questions.
- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - Support for the height and density;
 - Explore opportunities for roof decks on the 4th floor while still maintaining privacy for the adjacent unit; possibly also explore additional amenity space at this level;
 - The building entry is too deep. Design Development recommended to make it more welcoming and possibly also improve the wellness walk;
 - No concerns about the glazed separation which can be addressed with a reveal rather than a setback of the façade.
- **Related Commentary:**

The Panel unanimously supported this application and commended the architect on a very legible presentation. The Panel thought the project responded well to its neighbours and unanimously considered that it earned the requested height and density. One Panel member also suggested the 3.0 FSR was well earned by its appropriate design response alone, without the need for additional features such as contributions to the wellness walk. The provision of parking for the neighbouring funeral home was commended and it was found to be very well located in the scheme. The early consideration of sustainability was also applauded.

Several Panel members said they found it a beautiful project, very rich and nicely layered and the townhouses well integrated into the scheme. There was a recommendation to increase the size of the patios for the townhouses on 11th Avenue.

Some Panel members found the main entry on the north side to be too deep and dark, with recommendations to enlarge it and bring the building out to the face which would also improve the streetscape. There was also a recommendation to consider reducing the entry area in favour of offering more to the public at the corner, suggesting more than a bench might be considered if this is to be a "hub" for the wellness walk.

Panel opinion with respect to the treatment of the corner was inconclusive with suggestions ranging from; leave it the way it is to preference for a 90 degree corner. There was also a comment that the glass does not need to change planes but can be broken with a reveal, which might be simpler to handle in terms of providing some differentiation from the glass beside it. There was a concern about the ability to achieve the corner windows as shown, suggesting it would be better to have mullion corner windows expressing the spandrels.

It was recommended that the trees on the north façade are brought out more; they are very close to the building as currently shown.

Concerns were expressed about the rear amenity space and the somewhat relentless nature of the east-west walkway and a suggestion that this could be relieved with better articulation.

There was a general opinion that more could be made of the 4th floor roof deck by providing a landscaped amenity for the residents while ensuring the privacy of the adjacent unit is not compromised too much. There were also concerns about the large blank wall.

- **Applicant's Response:** Ms. Baker said the Panel's comments were very well taken and can be satisfied.

4. Address:	160 West 49th Avenue (Langara Campus)
DE:	409179
Use:	Library
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Complete
Architect:	Teeple/Hancock Bruckner
Owner:	Langara College
Review:	Second (first as Workshop)
Delegation:	Jim Hancock, Steven Teeple, Chris Phillips, Laurie Schmidt
Staff:	Anita Molaro

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (6-0)

- **Introduction:** Anita Molaro, Planner, presented this application for a new Langara College Library which is the first phase of a long-range (25 years) expansion program for the college. Last year, the Panel reviewed the expansion plans in a workshop and a Policy Statement was subsequently approved by Council. The Policy Statement serves to guide how the campus should expand, including the phasing strategy. Later this year, a rezoning application will be considered to allow future buildings on the site (creative arts building, multi purpose building and expansion to the gymnasium). The current CD-1 zoning allows for the library to proceed prior to a further rezoning. The library is a keystone building around which everything else will be constructed. It also sets a framework for circulation systems, both external and internal, as well as the organizing principle of the site around the quadrangle and the development of other exterior open spaces.

Immediate context comprises single family residential to the north and east, Langara golf course to the south, a YMCA building to the west. There is also a strip of land between the YMCA building and the campus site which is owned by the provincial government and managed by the Park Board (Langara Park). Other features include the Ontario Street bikeway, the Langara Loop and a community centre at 51st Avenue and Main Street.

Ms. Molaro briefly reviewed the principle site planning objectives of the Policy Statement and noted the role of the library is that it must function well on its own given the long range phasing plan. It is not intended to be the main entry to the campus which is envisioned to be part of the future creative arts building. Other objectives are connectivity and permeability.

Staff are generally pleased with the application in terms of its response to the Policy Statement and seek the Panel's comments on the following:

1. Overall architectural expression
 2. Materials
 3. Building facades and their relationship to the quadrangle and forecourt
 4. Animating quality and uses at the pedestrian entry, especially the nodes
 5. Experience of the cantilevered component particularly on the south side
 6. Resolution and treatment of open spaces and the interim edges.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Steven Teeple, Architect, reviewed the design rationale and Chris Phillips, Landscape Architect, reviewed the outdoor spaces. Mr. Teeple described the sustainability strategy which he stressed is fundamental to the conception of the building and not an "odd on".

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - Strong support for the overall architectural expression, materiality, building facades, animation and cantilevered components;
 - Some discussion about the open spaces, the edges and interim uses;
 - Some discussion about the entrance off Cambie Street and the need to better resolve desire lines;
 - The understated entrance and the lack of entry on 49th in this phase;
 - Concern that the excellence of the architectural design is carried through to the detailing and construction to make it a worthwhile addition to the city.
- **Related Commentary:**

The Panel unanimously supported this application and was generally very complimentary about the scheme. The complexities of the project were acknowledged noting the many issues that need responding to. The Panel also appreciated the applicant's explanation of the project which it found very clear and interesting. The building was described variously as "beautiful", "delightful", and "a poetic statement".

The Panel strongly supported the project's approach to sustainability.

Comments about the scheme included:

- the building succeeds in terms of the way it addresses 49th;
- the variation from the rest of the campus (its simplicity and materials) will give it freshness;
- it fits in the campus;
- the plaza with the pond at the street is a very interesting entry to the building but could be its weakness because it has a formality that diminishes the sense of entry;
- the quad needs to be strengthened;
- the quadrangle space will benefit from the later removal of the student union building;
- the quadrangle is weak in terms of its size for such a large campus. It needs a central gathering space and it must be in the quad. Therefore look forward to it improving over time;
- the quadrangle could break down the north-south/east-west connectors further because they are too strong in their literal approach to this area of the quad. The quad would benefit by extending into the connectors;
- the building is forming a wall but is not really penetrable from the quad. The decision to turn the courtyard is visually interesting but loses something in terms of animating the plaza. That would be my one criticism of choosing the west circulation spine - that it is essentially turning its back on the rest of the campus;
- question whether the front lawn needs to be as large as it is;
- the eco garden could be larger and simpler and would be more interesting on the street;
- there is an accessibility issue in the 49th forecourt that should be addressed;
- the diagonal desire line from the new RAV station has not been recognized;
- the building facades are very bold and probably what this campus needs, but they could be a bit overpowering if not detailed very carefully;
- legibility and wayfind is critical in any campus. If the building is so understated it is difficult to easily recognize how to get into it. While the main entrance is expected to occur in one of the future buildings, if that never happens it could be a potential problem;

- the pedestrian spine starts to provide direction but it is not quite resolved;
- there is great potential for animation of the spaces and the interface with the rest of the open space;
- the cantilevered space along the spine is fine;
- the connection to Langara Park is difficult because of the road around it but the park should feel more like it is an extension of the campus.

One area of concern for the Panel related to its costing. It was noted the building appears currently to be quite unfettered from any restraints and the concern was that for a project of this nature where funding is not always assured there is a danger that the excellence of the design will not be carried through to its execution.