

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: March 31, 2004

TIME: 4.00 pm

PLACE: Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Bruce Haden, Chair
Mark Ostry
Larry Adams
Jeffrey Corbett (excused Item 2)
Alan Endall
Marta Farevaag
Steven Keyes
Ronald Lea
Margot Long
Jennifer Marshall
Brian Martin (present for Item 1 only)

REGRETS: Robert Barnes

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	1901 Alberni Street (1900 West Georgia Street)
2.	1001-1015 Denman Street
3.	988 Richards Street

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| 1. Address: | 1901 Alberni Street (1900 West Georgia) |
| DE: | 408291 |
| Use: | Residential (22 storeys, 76 units) |
| Zoning: | RM-6 |
| Applicant Status: | Complete |
| Architect: | Merrick Architecture |
| Owner: | Prima Properties Ltd. |
| Review: | First |
| Delegation: | Paul Merrick, Greg Borowski, Jane Durante |
| Staff: | Jonathan Barrett |
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EVALUATION: SUPPORT (10-0)

- **Introduction:** Jonathan Barrett, Development Planner, presented this complete application, noting that an earlier preliminary application for this site was not supported by the Panel and was refused by the Development Permit Board because it failed to meet the guidelines with respect to tower location. The site is at the entrance to the city and Stanley Park and terminates West Georgia Street. Mr. Barrett briefly reviewed the site context and noted the site comprises a full block, including the Stanley Lodge (Ho Building) which is being retained.

The proposal is for a 22-storey residential tower with 2-1/2 storey townhouses along Alberni Street, 6-storey apartments adjacent to the Ho Building, and a small amenity building at the corner of Gilford and Georgia Streets. The West End Georgia/Alberni Guidelines that apply to this site are quite specific with respect to location of buildings, landscaping and setbacks. The RM-6 zoning permits a maximum density of 2.5 FSR and a height of 210 ft. The guidelines call for the tower to respect the orthogonal grid system in its orientation. The proposal challenges the guidelines in terms of setback from Gilford Street and floorplate sizes. The guidelines seek a setback between 25 and 40 ft. and the application proposes 75 ft. With respect to the floorplate, the proposal exceeds the guideline dimensions by 6 ft. in its width and 12 ft. in its length, and the diagonal dimension, at 141 ft., exceeds the guideline recommendation of 118 ft. Major concerns about view impacts have been raised by the neighbours behind this site.

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

- Whether the proposed tower setback is appropriate with respect to the overall urban design composition and with respect to views of the neighbours;
 - Whether the floorplate dimensions are appropriate in terms of view impacts;
 - Whether and appropriate urban form response to the Ho Building has been achieved;
 - Landscape systems;
 - Whether the general intent of the guidelines has been achieved in creating an urban character of distinction for this important site.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Paul Merrick, Architect, said the proposal is a "resolution response" to the range of influences on this site, the most significant of which is the impact on the buildings which surround it. He said he believes this proposal is the most equitable balance of response to all those impacted by it. Greg Borowski, Architect, briefly described the design rationale, noting the intention has been to create a building that will usher people into and out of the city. He noted there has been discussion with the neighbours with respect to the location of the tower and he briefly reviewed the view impacts of different locations. Jane Durante, Landscape Architect, described the

landscape plan, and the design team and the Development Planner responded to the Panel's questions.

- **Summary of Panel's Key Issues:**

- Strong support for the tower location and floorplate configuration;
- General support for the response to the Ho building;
- The landscape strategy was very positively received;
- Concerns related to design development only.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application. Some Panel members commented that it was a substantial improvement over the previous scheme.

The majority of the Panel supported the proposed tower location. The following supportive comments were made:

- It is probably the best compromise with respect to view impacts for the neighbours behind;
- The additional setback does not negatively impact the tower's formal presence on West Georgia Street;
- It will be a compromise wherever the tower is located;
- Moving the tower back is a public benefit because it creates a visual amenity for the community;
- The garden offers better landscaping for Alberni Street residents;
- Support addressing view opportunities for the otherwise obscured views of existing towers on Alberni Street;
- The further this tower is from the building to the east, the better; it allows this building to stand alone and gives the corner of Gilford and Georgia more breathing space;
- There do not appear to be any negatives to the increased setback;
- This site is close to Stanley Park and West End residential so setting the tower back makes a good transition from the more urban end of West Georgia Street;
- This is a very large block with only one major tower so it is appropriate to move it away from the corner; moving it more centrally on the site also creates two separate landscapes.

While supporting the proposed tower location, one Panel member noted the increased setback does interrupt the alignment of towers along Gilford Street and creates an open space that feels somewhat cut off from the rest of the site. It was suggested that while the small pavilion goes some way to holding the edge it might need a more formal landscape treatment (e.g., a row of trees or reflecting pool) to help define that edge.

One Panel member considered the increased setback to be inappropriate because it impacts the pattern and rhythm established by the guidelines for this end of Georgia Street. It was thought the guidelines should be respected, noting that residents in adjacent buildings would not expect to retain their views under the guideline setback. Two other Panel members also stated a preference for the tower to be closer to Gilford Street because it weakens the Georgia Street corner, but accepted the applicant's proposal as the best solution, recognizing the considerable efforts that have been made to meet all the demands.

The Panel strongly supported the proposed floorplates. The following comments were made:

- The shape of the building should not be driven by view impacts but to create an urban character of distinction;
- The floorplate sizes are reasonable;
- The architecture and overall form should not suffer because of a hard guideline on the diagonal dimension;
- Support sensitive manipulations of the floorplate;
- This departure from the more typical tower shape adds some variety to the downtown;
- The applicant has done everything possible to manipulate the shape of the plate to respect views.

One Panel member had some concerns about the floorplate dimensions and would have preferred a more orthogonal response. Another Panel member thought the expanded width should be reconsidered only if there were strong objections from the neighbours.

The landscape plan was unanimously supported as being very distinctive and interesting. Several Panel members reiterated the advantage of the garden being created by the increased setback on Gilford Street. It is also a more usable space than the landscaping along West Georgia Street which is a more visible resource. Recalling the city's waterfront history in the scheme was strongly endorsed. Some Panel members regretted the abrupt end to the landscape at the sidewalk and wished it could spill over and integrate more with the public realm in some way, if possible.

With respect to the urban form response, the following comments were made:

- The building mass next to the Ho building provides a better anchor to this part of the site;
- Interface with the Ho building works quite well with the exception of the northeast edge which seems somewhat weak;
- It is good to see the Ho building "grounded" by pairing it with a building of equal height and width;
- This is a very prominent site that demands a powerful statement: this is achieved to some degree with the tower but there seems to be a lot happening with the other components that should perhaps be "cleaned up" to help hang it all together;
- The loss of the mural on the Ho building is positive;
- This scheme is less urban than would be expected for this location;
- The amenity building creating the streetwall is very appropriate;
- The fact that it appears to be several buildings is appropriate on this large block;
- The openness on Alberni is a good response in terms of creating view slots from the street;
- The tower has good clarity;
- The openness to West Georgia Street is a desirable aspect of the scheme;
- Overall it is well handled and all the pieces are in the right place but it could use some more detailed study;
- There needs to be another level of architectural handling that ties and blends it all together;
- That this does not read as one large development is very positive.

As to whether this proposal creates an "urban character of distinction" the Panel unanimously agreed it is a very handsome building. Some of the comments were:

- The applicant has been somewhat successful in distinguishing this tower;

- Not convinced the curves achieve “ushering people in” because it won’t be perceived by people driving by;
- It does live up to the importance of the site but could be a little more powerful;
- That the building is not iconic is not a problem;
- The building is nicely crafted and will welcome people into the city;
- All the facades are treated very nicely;
- This site does not require the same level of urban distinction as further east on West Georgia because of its proximity to the park;
- It does provide visual interest at the entry to the city.

Finally, an observation was made that there is little reference in the proposal to sustainability. The architect explained that while they do not propose specifically to seek LEED certification, there has been an attempt to address sustainability in terms of orientation and materiality. The landscape architect noted this scheme is much more careful with water supply than the previous proposal, and careful attention will be given to the choice of plant material.

2. Address:	1001-1015 Denman Street
Use:	Mixed (5 storeys)
Zoning:	CD-1
Applicant Status:	Rezoning
Architect:	Millenia
Owner:	Dr. George Lo
Review:	First
Delegation:	Russ Meiklejohn, Ray Spaxman, Larry Diamond
Staff:	Alan Duncan

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

- **Introduction:** Alan Duncan, Rezoning Planner, presented this application to rezone three West End lots to develop a 5-storey mixed use building. The proposal is for two floors of commercial space, including a rooftop patio, with three floors of residential above (12 units). The commercial use will be street-oriented, with access to the second floor restaurant from the corner of Nelson and Denman Streets. The residential access is off Denman next to the westerly property line. Loading and parking access is off the lane to the south. The two Denman Street lots are currently zoned C-5 and the rear lot is zoned RM-5B.

The advice of the Panel is sought on the following:

- compatibility within the Denman Street corridor with respect to use, form and streetwall;
 - corner treatment at Nelson and Denman Streets and the Nelson Street façade at grade;
 - relationship to the tower behind (Admiral Point);
 - lane impacts to the south; and
 - entry sequence to the residential component, and the landscape.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Russ Meiklejohn, Architect, briefly described the project rationale, noting the driving force of the scheme is the response to two very different contexts: the small scale retail on Denman Street and the Nelson Street greenway. He noted that discussions have been held with the neighbours in Admiral Point to the south who were concerned about impacts on their privacy and outlook. Mr. Meiklejohn commented that, at this rezoning stage, there is still some way to go with detailed development of the project and the Panel's input is welcomed. Larry Diamond, Landscape Architect, briefly reviewed the landscape plan and the proponent team responded to the Panel's questions.

- **Summary of Panel's Key Issues:**

There was strong support for the basic principles of use, density and form of development, with a number of concerns at a detail level, including:

- corner treatment of Nelson and Denman, which would be better as part of the commercial space;
 - concern about the highly textured level of character development, although recognizing it is not a key issue at the rezoning stage;
 - greater consideration should be given to the relationship of the retail characteristics of Denman Street to the building expression, with the suggestion the retail expression should be dominant;
 - concerns about the secondary edges of the building in terms of pedestrian comfort and transparency, both on Denman and the lane;
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- conflicting issues about the relationship of the residential component and the base - it needs to be part of the larger urban design strategy that clearly identifies the role of each component with respect to both Denman Street and the larger pattern of the West End;
 - Strong support for the landscape plan.
- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application for rezoning.

The Panel unanimously supported the use and considered it compatible with the Denman Street retail, with the exception of the corner treatment at Denman and Nelson. The Panel did not support the stair and elevator on the corner, preferring to see more active, public uses in this location. A comment was made that the stair to the second storey restaurant does not need to be so obvious in this neighbourhood and will be equally successful away from the corner. There was also a suggestion that the stairs to the restaurant might be used to resolve the transition to Nelson Street. The Panel agreed that a "corner statement" is not necessary.

Other comments/suggestions about achieving compatibility with Denman Street included:

- It is the small scale fabric of Denman that makes it interesting, so recommend keeping it calm as design development proceeds;
- Would like to see more of a streetwall, although acknowledge the envelope restrictions;
- The Denman streetscape definitely calls for a finer texture to the storefront façade, and this has been achieved;
- Try not to make too many different things happen in one building;
- Question the art murals - better to have a retail expression wrap around the corner, possibly with shallow display windows; alternatively to involve the community in a public art strategy;
- The building seems too much like an object and not as much part of the street fabric as it could be;
- The expression is almost a universal commercial model that could be anywhere in the city and is inappropriate for Denman Street; it needs to be more open ended for possibilities of smaller retail increments, including occupying the corner in a more discrete way.

Some Panel members were concerned about the relationship between the residential component and the retail base and whether the form of the residential is appropriate. One Panel member also cautioned that there may be Building Code issues with respect to the residential floorplate.

The Panel saw no difficulty with the relationship to neighbouring Admiral Point and noted that interface issues can be further addressed as the project proceeds. Some Panel members thought the project would be improved if its form did not emulate that of the Admiral Point building.

The Panel strongly supported the landscape plan and generally found it to be handled very well, particularly at the residential entry court. There was a recommendation to improve the overlook from the third floor which currently looks out onto gravel roof surface, and to pay close attention to lighting at the entrance.

The Panel was generally satisfied with the lane treatment although some Panel members thought it was a little severe for this very pedestrian oriented neighbourhood, suggesting further design development at the next stage of the project.

Other comments included:

- The roof form is too complicated, especially towards the back;
- There needs to be a better understanding of the urban design principles for each of the frontages and the overall form response;
- The success of this project will be determined in the architectural detail and how the overall form is resolved;
- If design guidelines for this zone are preventing the achievement of a well considered, disciplined massing and architectural response they should be reconsidered on this site.

While supporting this project as a rezoning application, the Panel strongly urged that it be brought back for review at the development application stage.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Meiklejohn expressed appreciation for the comments, noting the use and expression of the corner seems to be the basic issue of concern for the Panel. He said he appreciated the Panel's comments about the building expression and stressed it is a long way from being resolved at this point. Ray Spaxman agreed the Panel's advice was excellent and said they look forward to demonstrating at the development permit stage that it has been taken into account.

3. Address:	988 Richards Street
DE:	408280
Use:	Residential (8 storeys, 53 units)
Zoning:	DD
Applicant Status:	Complete
Architect:	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright
Owner:	Chandler Developments Inc.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Martin Bruckner, Peter Kreuk, Colleen Dixon
Staff:	Scot Hein

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (9-0)

- **Introduction:** Scot Hein, Development Planner, presented this application for an 8-storey lower podium residential building located among a number of more typical Downtown South towers. This "orphaned" site, 125 ft. x 120 ft., is in the Downtown South at the corner of Nelson and Richards Streets. The application seeks a ten percent heritage density transfer (approximately 4,500 sq.ft.), and a height relaxation of about 18 ft. above the maximum 70 ft. The site has a cross fall of about 12 ft.

Staff generally support the proposal and seek the Panel's advice as to whether the site can accommodate the ten percent heritage density transfer and whether the proposal warrants the resulting additional height and density.

The Development Planner noted there has been a study of Downtown "orphaned" lots in the Downtown South which has concluded these sites should not be candidates for heritage density transfer and additional height above 70 ft. However, this study was restricted to sites with a frontage of 100 ft. or below.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Martin Bruckner, Architect, noted this is an urban infill project on a relatively small site in the Downtown South and the aim is to create a unique, stepped form building. Materials are predominantly brick at the base with a structural concrete frame and architectural painted concrete. The material and colour palette respond to the neighbouring Yaletown character. Peter Kreuk, Landscape Architect, briefly described the landscape plan and the applicant team responded to the Panel's questions.

- **Summary of Panel's Key Issues:**

- material relationship to ensure the material is not fundamentally decorative but ties in with the structural quality of the building;
- design development needed to enhance the expression of the diagonal plan element at both the entry and courtyard end of the diagonal;
- some concerns about the colour palette;
- relationship to the building to the north (height of the streetwall);
- strong support for the windows on the north façade.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application.

The additional height was unanimously supported because it achieves the terracing at the top of the building. In this context, the building does not appear too massive and is not overpowered by its neighbours. The additional height achieves improved outdoor spaces, making for a much more livable building, and facilitates the variety in the unit types and better layouts, which is very positive.

The ten percent heritage density transfer was unanimously endorsed. Several Panel members questioned the restriction of the "orphaned lots" study to 100 ft. sites. Rather, it was thought that each site should be considered on the basis of whether it can accommodate additional density, noting that site location (corner vs. mid block) is the more crucial urban design issue.

The Panel found the interface with the courtyard and the streetscape to be well handled and the 45 degree axial approach through the lobby very positive, although one Panel member thought more could be done to take advantage of the view into the courtyard. There was a recommendation to consider some cover in the courtyard to make it more private.

Several Panel members expressed some discomfort with the treatment of the corner overhang, suggesting it needs a supporting column, or some illusion of one. Another concern was the heavy brick material above the overhang which seems somewhat foreign to the Yaletown language it seeks to evoke.

Most Panel members had an opinion about the use of brick on this building. Some of the comments were:

- The expression of the brick is foreign, particularly the thin brick elements with the concrete infill;
- A characteristic of Yaletown is a very simple structural organization strategy; the expression of that strategy can be achieved with different materials rather than repeating the brick which tends to diminish the authenticity of the original;
- The facades are a bit "busy"; Yaletown brick facades are more regular and punched;
- There is no real material strategy evident so the use of brick seems somewhat gratuitous;
- The project would not lose anything by having concrete coming to the ground, which would give it a bit more integrity.

Some Panel members were concerned about the relationship of the building to its northerly neighbours, believing it to be too much of a streetwall situation. Consideration of some stepping was recommended.

The Panel strongly supported the fenestration on the north property line and hoped it could be achieved; otherwise some other treatment will be necessary to avoid a blank façade.

Several Panel members found the colour palette on the model to be too dark, preferring the lighter shade on the renderings which gives more opportunity for perceived depth.

Other minor comments included:

- The roof railing on the model is preferable to that shown on the rendering which has more of a cornice appearance;
- From a marketing point of view the entrances to the ground floor units seem a bit mean, with no sense of arrival or formal entry into the units;
- Support for storage space associated with some of the parking stalls;
- The landscape palette is quite rich but recommend larger rhododendrons and boxwood for improved streetscape.