
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: May 5, 1999

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room #1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Roger Hughes (Chair)
Sheldon Chandler
James Cheng (excused Item #2)
Per Christoffersen
Paul Grant
Sean McEwan
Gilbert Raynard
Keith Ross
Norman Shearing

REGRETS: Joseph Hruda
Patricia Campbell
Joe Werner

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING
1. 900 Burrard Street
2. 1050 Smithe Street (<i>1050 Haro</i>)

1. Address:	900 Burrard Street
DA:	404053
Use:	Mixed use retail/commercial
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Complete
Architect:	Busby & Associates
Owner:	Plaza Recreation Group Ltd.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Peter Busby, Jane Durante, Robert Lemon
Staff:	Mike Kemble, Ralph Segal

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (8-0)

- **Introduction:** Mike Kemble, Development Planner, presented this complete application. The Panel reviewed a hotel/residential scheme for this site last year, since which time the program has changed to the current urban entertainment centre proposal. The site is zoned CD-1, with accompanying guidelines. Maximum permitted density is 8.145 FSR. However, there is a covenant on the site limiting FSR to 7.5, relaxable with City approval, noting it has always been envisaged that a certain amount of density would be transferred off site. Key views from the Burrard/Robson corner limit the height to 100 ft. at the Burrard/Smithe corner. As well, views from South False Creek limit the height of the main tower massing at the Smithe/Hornby corner to 225 ft. The Robson Square character area guidelines, while never formally adopted, have been used to guide development in this area. The basic premise of these guidelines is that there should be a fairly continuous streetwall around the precinct, and height generally at about 120 ft., although it was recognized that on this side of Robson Square there would be somewhat higher buildings. In 1993, when the former BC Hydro site was rezoned as part of the heritage designation of the building (the “Electra”), the density for the subject site was established at FSR 7.5 + 1.0 (since reduced by subsequent heritage density transfers). At that time, a massing scheme for a mixed use office/residential/retail project was tabled which illustrated the intent of the guidelines.

Mr. Kemble briefly described the site context and reviewed the key aspects of the design guidelines. The main organizing principles are to respect the landmark and heritage quality of the Electra, to provide an appropriate scale transition from the Dal Grauer substation, and to respond to the scale and containment of Robson Square.

The proposed urban entertainment centre includes 16 cinemas and an IMAX theatre, with the theatres stacked on three separate levels (total 3,600 theatre seats). There is a full-height open atrium with access to the theatres. As well, there are 40 bowling lanes above the theatre complex and a rooftop ice skating rink. The complex also contains 54,000 sq.ft. of retail on the lower floors, 24,000 sq.ft. of restaurants, and a small film archive. Total floor space is just under 400,000 sq.ft., 6.63 FSR. Two-way vehicular access is proposed from Burrard and Hornby Streets. A variety of contemporary materials is proposed, with a high degree of transparency.

The Panel’s comments are sought on the following:

- the general massing response to the guidelines;
- general exterior façade treatment;
- interface with the Electra in terms of view impacts and separation from the residential use;

- landscape treatments in terms of the public realm on the sidewalks, plaza and the upper level decks.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Peter Busby, Architect, briefly described the project which was conceived as an entertainment centre offering a range of uses beyond just theatres. It represents an opportunity to bring this type of use to the downtown. He explained, their approach has been to turn the building inside out, with all the circulation around the perimeter. Mr. Busby pointed out that the guidelines do not include the massing diagram referred to by the Development Planner. Rather, it relates to a particular proposal that was developed at the time, for different uses and relationships on site. Robert Lemon, Architect, briefly reviewed the broad urban design aspects of the scheme and Jane Durante, Landscape Architect, described the landscape plan.
- **Panel's Comments:** Following a review of the models and posted drawings, the Panel commented as follows:

The Panel unanimously supported this application. It is a very exciting and ambitious project that would be a credit to any major city in the world. It also represents a major step for the City of Vancouver in that it is a private sector/public use initiative that could have as much impact on the downtown as a major civic building. The Panel also congratulated the architect on the excellent quality of the presentation materials.

The Panel found the relationship with the Electra to be acceptable. Although this is a very large structure, the spatial relationship is satisfactory and its impact is lessened by the building's transparency and variety of roof treatments. One Panel member recommended greater separation at the southeast corner. The Panel appreciated that it is the applicant's intention to look further at the southwest façade elements on the interior side of the building and agreed this does need more attention. The Panel noted that this façade lacks the degree of transparency shown on the other elevations. There was a suggestion to consider introducing a landscaped screen to offer a softer presentation to the Electra. There may also be an opportunity to express the interstitial spaces in the façade and provide some reference on the outside to what is happening on the inside. With respect to the view analysis, a recommendation was made that the impact from the lower floors of the Electra also be demonstrated.

Greater attention to the Burrard Street façade was also recommended, where the breaking up of some of the volumes on Burrard was not fully understood. One Panel member also thought the "book end" approach of the previous proposal should be revisited in this scheme, with the Smithe Street elevation extended westward to Burrard. It was felt the three-storey retail looked "tacked on".

Although it is not yet shown how the mechanical equipment will be handled, it was noted by one Panel member that the mechanical demands for this type of building will be significant, with potential impacts on the façade. Given the high tech nature of this development, the appropriate integration of mechanical systems into the design should be an early consideration.

Some concerns were expressed about the handling of the large volumes of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic that will likely occur in this development, notwithstanding the staggered hours of operation. The Panel would support left-in/left-out on Hornby Street. There was some concern about the through drive, and the importance of the nature of this space was stressed. A comment was made that the loading truck turning radius looks questionable. The Panel liked the corner entries and

supported the concept of bringing the ground plane into the building.

The Panel supported the landscape plan and felt the simple approach provided the building with an element of calmness in the “visual noise”. One Panel member suggested repeating the corner landscaped element shown on the previous scheme.

The Panel strongly endorsed this bold and impressive scheme. However, the Panel’s biggest concern about the proposal was to ensure that the façade treatment being illustrated is carried through to construction. The Panel felt strongly that the transparency of this building is what it is all about, and its preservation and enhancement will be paramount to its ultimate success. One Panel member cautioned that the large glass wall will require some highly technical solutions to make it work and it may not end up as free floating as the model suggests. It was stressed that if the quality of this scheme deteriorates in any way it could result in a major failure for the developer and a “white elephant” for the city. This is clearly a very expensive project. While economic feasibility is not normally an issue for the Panel, in this case, the quality of the detailing will affect the transparency of the building. The Panel will seek assurance in the conditions of approval that the quality of materials and the level of execution of the details are maintained.

- **Applicant’s Response:** Commenting on the Panel’s concerns about ensuring the high quality is maintained, Mr. Busby noted a similar situation occurred on the Wall Centre project where the Panel had stressed the importance of certain design elements. These issues were carried through and made conditions of the approval by the Development Permit Board. Such conditions are powerful and successful tools in the evolution of a project. Mr. Busby stressed they have been very clear in the specification for the glazing. As well, the owners have made a firm commitment to building what is shown on the drawings. Regarding the “book end” approach in the earlier scheme, Mr. Busby noted that proposal went through a longer approval process that allowed for greater flexibility. The issue is the amount of the Electra’s elevation remaining visible from various view locations.

2. Address:	1050 Smithe Street (<i>1050 Haro Street</i>)
DA:	404054
Use:	Hotel (18 storeys)
Zoning:	DD
Application Status:	Complete
Architect:	James Cheng
Owner:	Haro Hotel Development Ltd.
Review:	Second
Delegation:	James Cheng, Dawn Guspie, Jane Durante
Staff:	Mary Beth Rondeau

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-0)

- **Introduction:** Mary Beth Rondeau, Development Planner, presented this application. The site is at the edge of the Downtown District, across the lane from the West End residential neighbourhood. There is a previously approved development application for this site which achieved its maximum 6.0 FSR (approx. 100,000 sq.ft.). The Development Permit Board considered the previous scheme very well resolved. The current application involves a change of program from a hotel/residential tower to a 5-star hotel (184 rooms) with no residential use. The main change involves larger rooms which has brought the building out 3 ft. on the Haro Street side and 2 ft. on the lane. As well, the height has been increased by about 6.5 ft. to allow a mezzanine level for hotel services. The application seeks a 10 percent transfer of heritage density of about 10,000 sq.ft. to allow for the proposed changes. The end of the site contains an underground rectifier station with landscaped open space above. The Panel's advice is sought on the impacts of the increased floor area.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** James Cheng, Architect, noted that the Development Permit Board removed a condition to lower the height of the elevator penthouse and did not consider it to be a view issue. Dawn Guspie, Architect, briefly reviewed the shadow diagrams.
- **Panel's Comments:** Following a review of the model and posted drawings, the Panel commented as follows:

The Panel unanimously supported this application. The increase in height was supported and there were no concerns about impact on views and privacy. The building is elegant and well designed, with each elevation responding appropriately to the context.

There was a recommendation to improve the cladding material on the elevator penthouse. Changing to brick or spandrel glass was suggested.

One Panel member felt the quality of the open space did not match the quality of the architecture of the building. As well, greater attention might be given to differentiate pedestrian and vehicular zones in the drive-through.

- **Applicant's Response:** With respect to the open space, Ms. Guspie noted that the neighbours to the south of the lane are very protective of the original garden space created by the rectifier station and felt strongly that it should remain unchanged.