
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: November 28, 2001

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Tom Bunting, Chair
Lance Berelowitz
Gerry Eckford
Alan Endall
Bruce Hemstock
Richard Henry
Jack Lutsky
Sorin Tatomir

REGRETS: Jeffrey Corbett
Walter Francl
Joseph Hruda
Maurice Pez

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. Lot 7B - The Viaduct Site - False Creek North
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1. Address:	Lot 7B (The Viaduct Site) False Creek North
Use:	Residential
Zoning:	FCN - CD-1
Application Status:	Rezoning
Architect:	James Cheng
Owner:	Concord Pacific
Review:	First
Delegation:	James Cheng, Bill Steinberg
Staff:	Jonathan Barrett, Michael Gordon

WORKSHOP

- **Introduction:** The Development Planner, Jonathan Barrett, presented this preliminary rezoning proposal. He first reviewed the context of this very large site, bounded by Expo Boulevard and Beatty, Georgia and Dunsmuir Streets, noting also that part of the overall concept is to ultimately provide a strong pedestrian connection on the axis of Georgia Street. Among the challenges for the site are that it becomes part of the Downtown entry and egress, and continues the city grid. Since over 1,000 residential units are proposed, both market and non-market, the project also seeks to create a residential neighbourhood. Another major aspect of the proposal is the road system. The attempt is to "tame" the Dunsmuir and Georgia Street viaducts with the introduction of traffic signals and pedestrian crossings to reduce the speed of traffic. A fairly complex pedestrian system is also anticipated, noting the existing conditions of the large crowds associated with the adjacent BC Place and GM Place stadiums as well as the connecting bridges to the ALRT station. These bridges will be relocated with this development. Another important consideration is the open space systems - public, semi public and private space.

As well as general commentary, the Panel's advice is sought in the following specific areas:

- the proposed Costco at the Expo Boulevard level given the public objective of making city streets interesting, and animated and with a good interface, notwithstanding the current less than ideal conditions that exist on Expo Boulevard;
- the tight relationships between towers;
- how to acknowledge the Armoury at Beatty and Dunsmuir which is not part of this site;
- the two options shown for the road system.

Following a question and answer period, James Cheng, Architect, described the proposal in greater detail. He noted this proposal evolved as a continuation of the Northeast False Creek Study, some of which the Panel has already reviewed. The Study has identified that International Village, Chinatown and, to some degree, Gastown, are currently isolated communities, not connected to the rest of the city fabric, and one of the goals of this project is to start to link all the precincts together. Mr. Cheng noted the proposal is for approximately 1.2 million sq.ft. of development which was established in the original zoning. At that time, the ODP envisaged two very large office towers on this site, which has since been reconsidered. A general discussion followed Mr. Cheng's presentation.

- **Panel's Comments:** Following are some of the points that were made:

General Comments:

- this is a really difficult site and staff and the applicant are to be commended for what has been achieved to date;
- if this is as good as it gets because of some rules that weren't intended to do this, then maybe the rules should be reconsidered, i.e., view cones;
- the site is like a peninsula jutting out over an escarpment. It is in an unconventional setting and needs an unconventional approach which may need to have some rules broken;
- what will make it work are the things the strong expression of street walls, the strength of materials, and strong edges;
- a great development and going in a very positive direction;
- this is a really challenging site which has to try to correct the mistakes of the previous generations of planners;
- this development may have the potential to find a way to make the transition, both physically and visually, from the Beatty Street escarpment down to Expo Boulevard;
- not willing to say this site can't take this density, but what is shown right now does not show that the site can take the density given all the constraints it has with height and with the way it's treating the escarpment;
- support breaking the height limitation with a special tower. This is as good a site as any to do it because it is so challenging;
- the Costco footprint is determining much of the urban design of this site with its enormous footprint, which may be denying a lot of the potential uniqueness of the site.

Use:

- Costco use is a good and appropriate use for this site given the grade differential;
- question the residential townhouse units facing Georgia and suggest something more commercial or work/office use, particularly at grade, would be more workable in this high traffic location;
- agree Costco is an appropriate use. While it does generate increased traffic to the site, something as big as this is needed at Expo Boulevard. Something projecting up to the upper level as a boutique of Costco operations which would lead people to go in might benefit;
- this development should be emphasized as a transition from the more family oriented residential to the more work related central business district. This is an ideal live/work location - if any site deserves to be considered for flexible zoning or special building code considerations as a live/work site, this is a great location;
- not convinced that Costco is the best use, but this is the appropriate way to deal with it;
- this is a good place for a more "entertaining" Costco - it doesn't have to be traditional.

Expo Boulevard/Costco Interface:

- would like to see developed further a more identifiable, publicly oriented presence along Expo Boulevard for Costco. While most people will arrive by car, there is also potential for a large urban gesture which would help identify the store for motorists as well as allow for the potential of some people arriving on foot. This space could be treated as a fairly major pedestrian-oriented public space, moving away from the more formula approach for this type of store;
- do not think you can engage Expo Boulevard through potentially very marginal uses at either edge with the narrow stairs beside the big ramps, but with something much more generous. This would go towards addressing some of the questions around engaging Costco at the upper level, somehow tying it back in spatially, functionally and programmatically. Perhaps there

- should be a way of moving down to the lower level through the site, cutting out a bit of the Costco floor plan at the eastern end;
- there are so many opportunities to keep pedestrian traffic and keep the neighbourhood intact by using the existing connections and reinforcing those connections, that to go down and try and make something out of Expo Boulevard, which is and will remain a loading area, doesn't seem to make a lot of sense;
 - Costco is a great store for this location; it fits beautifully. There is opportunity to think outside the big box to fit within the city fabric;
 - the Costco presence on Expo Boulevard will be good; it will enhance and bring greater security to the place;
 - whatever can be done to vitalize Expo Boulevard will go a long way to energizing the whole area including the Keefer Circle and International Village;
 - question somewhat the exclusive nature of Costco and its reliance on automobile traffic; wonder if there could be some ancillary, more publicly accessible, less exclusive commercial use that could benefit the stadiums, for example, that could help to vitalize in a pedestrian manner;
 - the type of function Costco offers won't draw from the vitality of the central business district but could be a complementary function;
 - maybe a more mixed frontage along Expo Boulevard in the future could be a very positive way of making a more positive pedestrian gesture.

Tower Placement/Residential Livability/Height:

- agree with establishing an urban residential precinct on this site. It is quite workable;
- increasing density in the streetwall may give some freedom to explore further shaping of the towers. The tower placement, albeit at a very preliminary stage, appears somewhat random. More could be done to help define the residential precinct and make the towers "talk" to one another and have a little bit more variety in the way they are formed;
- there are too many towers on the site. They are too similar, too squat, too close to each other, and too randomly placed relative to the street grid;
- have a problem with how the towers are placed, e.g., the northwest tower set back into the site away from either Beatty or Georgia Streets;
- the view corridor is somewhat arbitrary and should be challenged. This is the kind of project where a legitimate case can be made to Council to penetrate the view corridor;
- the height limitation is really squashing down the site and making it very hard for the applicants to come up with a diagram that is compelling as an urban design. Suggest the applicant explore with staff to see if there is a way of consolidating two of the towers into one, with increased density of streetwall on Georgia, Dunsmuir and Beatty, perhaps centralizing and expanding the green common and finding a more meaningful way of getting down to the lower level;
- there may be too much density on the site given the current planning constraints;
- perhaps the towers should be reconfigured, combining two towers into one with a third more of a slab than a point tower. There are too many towers, too much density or they are too close together;
- the towers will need to have a signature element - they will be highly visible and will need to be visually exciting;
- the notion of an urban residential precinct is really positive;
- re-think the location for the non market building because non market buildings tend to not look as good as market buildings;
- from a residential livability point of view this is no different than conditions elsewhere in Downtown South; I see quite a bit of slack in the site;

- the Armoury is a beautiful building which should be kept as it is and, if possible, used for a neighbourhood facility;
- Armoury itself has potential as a central feature/public element, like the Roundhouse; there must be a way to allow this historic centrepiece to become a part of this emerging community; it's too important to ignore.

Road System:

- if the intent is to "tame" the viaducts - accepting they will stay for the foreseeable future - then maybe the entrances to and from the site north and south should actually cross them and provide a cue for connecting back to BC Place Stadium to the south and to the skytrain station to the north. Perhaps there should be something at the Dunsmuir viaduct level, right off the station, with a reconfiguration of how to get from the intermediate platform level in the station onto Dunsmuir Street and across into the site. If that begins to be conceived of as part of the front door, not only to the ground plane at Beatty but also down to the Costco level, the site could start taking advantage of the escarpment and the "found" infrastructure on the north and south sides;
- there is over redundancy built into the parking layout and driveways, notwithstanding the amount of traffic that both Costco and the residential uses will generate;
- the ramp down through the parking garage will never be perceived as a public street but is driven by achieving optimum throughout for Costco. Do not agree that we a public street system through this site to bring public traffic from the upper level down to the Expo Boulevard site. Suggest eliminating the parking entrance off Beatty and using the new roads off Dunsmuir and Georgia;
- the whole vehicular circulation system is overly complex;
- the parking and roadway system seems a little too complex; do not think this site should be encumbered with the requirement to solve the problem of getting traffic from the upper to the lower level internally - it is compromising the ability to do a good job with the towers;
- don't know why we should tame Georgia Street as an exit from downtown;
- I question the parking access off Beatty - having a major vehicular entrance ramp is very problematic there;
- appreciate City's objectives of extending the grid. On the other hand this is the one place where the city does change and maybe some of that uniqueness needs to come out in the urban design. One way would be to deal with the pedestrian travel between the upper level and the lower level. It would be very interesting to see a major urban design statement made in coming down the escarpment, and that being part of the parti of how this whole site works. It seems like the Costco footprint is disabling this from happening and it would be nice if there was more flexibility there;
- from a traffic point of view this is a very straightforward site, with an upper site and a lower site. Keeping it very simple is probably the best approach.

Streetwall:

- the scale of the streetwall along Georgia, Dunsmuir and Beatty should be amplified;
- the streetwall situations should be increased. The context of Beatty Street should be driving the streetwall along Beatty Street, and it's certainly a taller profile than is being shown. A taller profile could be accommodated on all three fronting streets;

Open Space:

- prefer Option A (as shown on the model) for the central open space. It is more successful in defining and establishing a setting for the Armoury and as well giving a common open space to all the market residential areas;

- regret there is little information given about the form of the connection from the Georgia viaduct down to Expo Boulevard and onto False Creek. While it is not part of this proposal, it is a key element;
- respecting the view corridor has resulted in an open space network that forces the massing to be quite fragmented;
- the central common area, which is quite compelling in theory, is not substantial enough, being barely wider than the roadways around it. It will be experienced and perceived more as a traffic island;
- suggest looking at a green space system that comes right through the site, that plants its way from north to south from Beatty all the way across the site, right through the centre and down to Expo Boulevard in a more dramatic and meaningful way;
- prefer Option B with a more consolidated open space because the central green space needs to be very grand; Option A, in which the central common is no wider than the roadway, is not as defensible as Option B. It also provide greater opportunity to relate to the Armoury;
- the treatment of the internal street is a key element because I like the idea of it feeling like a big neighbourhood courtyard as opposed to a part of the city;
- prefer Option A, and like the idea that the greens of the courtyards for each of the buildings face onto the central common. This is not unlike Techpark where the road surface is different than the city road surface, the green in the middle is different than the city green, and the whole thing reads together as a big open common space;
- there are some major hurdles to overcome with respect to the landscape, e.g. tree planting on viaducts which is very difficult and very expensive;
- the green space configuration is somewhat fractured. Can't help think there is a more effective way of consolidating that green space in a way that also contributes to mitigating the escarpment barrier between the upper and lower levels;
- prefer Option B because I see that extended green space is potentially more functional. Families are not likely to live here so perhaps the green space should be consolidated in a park like gesture as opposed to a turnaround and a couple of little areas of green.

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