
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: November 3, 1999

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room #1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Joseph Hruda (Chair)
Patricia Campbell
Sheldon Chandler
James Cheng (Excused from Item #2)
Paul Grant
Roger Hughes
Gilbert Raynard
Norman Shearing

REGRETS: Sean McEwan
Keith Ross
Per Christoffersen
Joe Werner

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Louise Christie

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING
1. 1239 Cordova Street - Harbour Green Neighbourhood
2. 500 Nicola Street

1. Address:	1239 Cordova Street - Harbour Green Neighbourhood
DA:	404441
Use:	Residential (28 storeys, 103 units)
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Preliminary
Architect:	Hancock Bruckner Eng & Wright
Owner:	Delta Land Development Ltd.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Jim Hancock, Chuck Brook of Brook Development Planning Inc. and Bruce Langereis of Delta Lands Ltd.
Staff:	Mike Kemble, Ralph Segal

EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (2 - 5)**Introduction:**

Mike Kemble, Development Planner, introduced this project in sub area 2 of the Harbour Green Neighbourhood, which extends from Bute Street to Jervis Street. This is the first of these sites to come forward, the first phase of a two tower scheme, and there are important issues, particularly with the height, that will set the precedent for the other towers that will line the south side of Harbour Green Park. They may be designed by different architects. The site is an irregularly shaped parcel which slopes down to the west. There is an extensive set of guidelines which has specific reference to tower height. While the Coal Harbour ODP notes the possibility of approving a maximum ten percent height increase, there is no reference in the zoning or guidelines to this. The design parti for this row of towers is a transition in height being a 'swoop' from the highest at either end, which are at the maximum allowed, to the lower three towers in the middle, which are higher than in the original Guideline's scheme. This scheme also encouraged tower shoulders up to approximately the twelfth floor, with additional terracing on the bottom storeys. For this proposal, the shoulders were dropped because of the view shadow and opening the views to the water. The maximum tower floor plate in the Guidelines is 595 m², longer in the north-south direction, and the maximum width is 29.6 m. There is a strong objective to achieve continuous townhouses along the street and park edges. This proposal raises the 28 storey tower about one storey above the podium and they are seeking a 14 percent increase in height (269 ft. versus 236 ft.). The tower width is about 10 ft. less than the Guidelines maximum of 97 ft. There is a shared parking system with access from Cordova Street, and 12,000 sq. ft. of amenity space for a total of 103 units. Comments are sought on four areas:

- overall urban design, particularly in terms of the proposed height increase and its effect on views of the surrounding neighbours, including the crescent or 'swoop' of building heights and whether it is compromised with the increase in height;
- tower massing and expression;
- the massing of the lower level townhouses and their interface with the street and park; and
- open space and landscaping, in particular as it relates to the family units.

Mr. Segal mentioned that comments are already coming back from the recently mailed notifications. Clearly, views will be one issue and, also, the amount of 'swoop' to the towers versus the Guideline which anticipated more of a gradation. In terms of tower proportioning, traditionally, the Panel has generally taken the attitude that higher and slimmer is better than shorter and squatter which would improve the views for neighbours at lower levels at the expense of the views for the upper levels. Staff also asks your comments on the non-traditional tower shapes from a pure design perspective. This is an ambitious endeavour in terms of floor space available. The Board may wish to refer this to

Council for advice. The Guidelines may need to be re-written.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:**

This site is very prominent, especially as it is perceived as the gateway to Vancouver for many who approach the city from the water. To achieve the FSR, there is a need to use all the bulk permitted. An exhaustive view analysis shows how thinner and taller towers, with wider spacing between, open the views. The nine ft. floor-to-ceiling height is appropriate on this waterfront row of Coal Harbour. In order to redistribute the mass, there would have to be height relaxation on the middle three, but the two end towers' height would be as approved. The envelopes are so tight and the implications of doing the sculptural approach and achieving the density requires the height relaxations.

The Panel then took time to review the model and posted plans.

- **Panel's Comments:**

The Panel's commentary was full of contradictions, as the proposal tries to achieve a density which may be too great for this site. The increase in height was seen as supportable by some panel members as narrowing the towers appears to have a positive effect on the views of the majority of neighbours, but the higher middle towers distracted from the concept of the 'swoop'. The interesting form and shapes of the applicant's 'maritime' scheme were found to be captivating but may distract from the design 'parti', or be too much of a good thing. It was asked if they should be presented as a design unit, rather than as a series of icons. The buildings will be expensive to build and will entail careful detailing. It is hoped that they would be perceived as a family, rather than individual trophies on a shelf. It was commented that the applicant's theme of the 'Regatta' completely sets this ensemble apart, yet the original Guidelines related the buildings back to the texture of the city. The view corridor to the city should be considered as an important benefit of the existing Guidelines to be preserved. It was suggested that the Guidelines would have to be rewritten.

Other panel members did not support the additional height as it detracted from the more dramatic 'swoop' massing of the Guidelines. In addition, because the proposed tower forms eliminated the lower stepped portion of the towers facing the park, the sense of edge definition and spatial containment of the park would be negatively affected. The pointed blade tower edges do little to achieve this spatial definition objective for the park.

One member felt that Vancouver does need icons as a world class city but also needs benefits at the street level. This is the first building that is to provide a frame for Harbour Green Park, which is formal and symmetrical. The townhouses do relate to the park with their entries but the proposed towers do not. With this theme of sails, the mass never seems to come to the ground meaningfully. The slenderness of the towers should be pursued but the relationship at the lower levels is most important. The high retaining walls are unsuitable, creating more of a fence than an edge. There is an opportunity here to create variety and more open space within the courtyard at grade. The bigger courtyard has a simplicity that works well and was seen to give a strong welcoming presence. Unfortunately, it has been taken over by cars and loading trucks. There is a need for more green space, particularly a play area for children. The access points are a little wide and perhaps alternate ones could be considered in the next phase. The location of the loading bay was considered potentially harsh.

Generally, the Panel thought the architecture and the maritime theme was exciting but it would be complicated to achieve successfully, becoming a tradeoff between exciting tower forms and a more strongly defined base in the context of the neighbourhood and a clearly defined park edge.

- **Applicant's Response:**

The applicant thanked them for the excellent discussion. This could arguably be one of the finest development sites in Vancouver - the Coal Harbour Waterfront, a very rare opportunity to do something really special. To do this, the proposal has to challenge to a certain extent the Official Development Plan, the Guidelines, the building envelope limitations and the traditional form of development in the downtown in order to do something remarkable and distinctive. There has to be careful detailing and rigorous perusal of each building.

- **Concluding Discussion:**

The Chair, noting that this is an application for only one building, commented that, because it is such a clear departure from the Harbour Green Neighbourhood Guidelines with such wide-ranging implications for that whole waterfront space, the Guidelines would have to be seriously amended. That being the case, should the Panel vote or defer. Some panel members noted their discomfort of discussing this in the absence of understanding what this meant for the Guidelines and the implications for the other buildings changing as a consequence. Mr. Kemble responded that what could happen is that one of the conditions of the approval with the preliminary application would be that the Guidelines be re-written, and the Board may also seek direction from Council. The Board can approve variations to the Guidelines. They are not written in stone.

Mr. Hancock replied that they made a conscious decision to respect the maximum permitted height in the CD-1 zone, which in the case of the two westerly buildings is 99 m and in the case of the three easterly is 108 m. Therefore, their two outboard towers do not exceed the maximum permitted height.

The Chair noted that the Board has the ability to approve heights greater than the Guidelines, and asked the members whether there was a strong feeling about voting or deferring. The Chair concluded it should simply vote on the application to make a strong statement recording its reservations about their concerns, indicating their request for more information about what the implications of this are in terms of revised guidelines for the Harbour Green Neighbourhood.

One panel member expressed concern that if they voted for this project on its own, would it have any influence on the remaining four towers as time goes on. If the Panel votes on this in isolation, it may not see the follow-up in the other four towers being developed in the future. He wanted assurance that, if this tower was supported, the remainder of the site would develop as a matched set.

The Chair replied that, as there was no guarantee of this, he was calling for a vote, support or non-support.

2. Address:	500 Nicola Street
DA:	404521
Use:	Mixed (26 storeys, 182 units)
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Preliminary
Architect:	James Cheng
Owner:	Hillsboro Development Ltd.
Review:	First
Delegation:	James Cheng, Dominique Dumais and Bob Pearce
Staff:	Mike Kemble

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (6 - 0)

- **Introduction:**

Mike Kemble, Development Planner, introduced this project by differentiating between two schemes being presented as option A, the original submission with an open, water courtyard on Hastings Street between the towers, and option B, with the same towers but changes to the base treatment on Hastings Street to add townhouses and consequently, more ‘green’ areas to the interior courtyard. Option A is the application and option B was put forward for comparison. The project is situated on a large, irregular site of approximately 80,000 sq. ft. sloping down to the waterfront, surrounded by social housing, rental towers, a community centre with park under construction, and the newly approved “Pumphouse Mews” site across the street. There are five degree street end view corridors so the building tapers toward the waterfront, consistent with the Marina Neighbourhood Guidelines which suggest a lower ‘street-base zone’, with setbacks on the third and fourth levels, and the towers lined up with the street grid. The two tower heights of 22 and 25 storeys are within the CD-1 guidelines which also dictate slim towers with the floor-plate and width maximums. An important objective, from the City’s point of view, was a strong residential street character with townhouses lining the streets and entrances from the street level, and this block is key in the neighbourhood, especially with the number of required family units and their need for children’s play opportunities.

The applicant prefers option A with a crescent shaped driveway bordered by a cascading water feature which occupies the courtyard area. In this scheme, the townhouses are grouped in a double corridor with a commercial, retail area at ground floor on the waterfront walkway. Panel’s comments are requested on the street level treatment along Hastings Street and the lower level massing on the other streets as option A’s design does not fully comply with the guidelines.. Staff are recommending option B, their concerns being consistency with the guidelines’ intent of residential eyes-on-the-street, and the courtyard having more private, usable open space. Comments are also requested on the shaping and massing of the towers and the podium level with the two entries from Hastings Street, a local street at this point. Policy does not encourage extensive drop-off areas, and the open space treatment in terms of the amount of water versus green space and the usability by a number of various users, is questionable.

- **Applicant’s Opening Comments:**

Mr. Cheng explained that this project was designed in response to other projects in the area, like the existing Avila and Bauhinia, where the fences and railing cut off the townhouse interface with the street. The lower massing of the towers is designed with the currently existing buildings in mind, as bringing the towers down would present a better pedestrian scale. With the recently approved Henriquez project across the narrow street, there was concern that a dark alley would be created and it

was necessary to create a flow-through for the open space. They learned from the Georgia Street townhouses that, though they are moved back, there is still a strong perception of the residential from street level. The two rows of trees on Hastings Street makes the pedestrian experience pleasant and it is animated by the water feature and the visual link through to the waterfront, created with a bigger space than that required by the guidelines. The round corner tower massing at street level would be amenity spaces, like a library or a place to wait for a taxi.

The Panel took time to review the models and posted drawings for options A and B.

- **Panel's Comments:**

There was overwhelming support for option A, a very safe and conservative proposal, in spite of the fact that it is not in keeping with the Marina Neighbourhood Guidelines of residential streetscape. The deviations were in response to the narrowness of Hastings Street at this point and the appropriate openness to the south. Moving the townhouses to a double row at the back works, especially with the commercial/retail space and the transparencies in the covering which carries the vital animation through the project. The towers come to the ground well though one Panel member thought their massing was 'busy'. The sense of scale works well but the two round corners were seen as too small and low and not relating to anything else. The expression was appropriate moving from north to south - the four storey base expression, reinforcing the shoulders, proceeding down the street to the two storey townhouses on the waterfront walkway. The Panel generally felt that there was too much emphasis on hard edge formality in the courtyard and recommended that the large surface of water which should be reduced in scale in favour of more greenery, and the vehicular access should be removed entirely to augment the pedestrian experience along Hastings. The Chair suggested an option C was necessary, with a tower set on a strong podium base with a stronger continuous expression of town houses along Hastings as opposed to the token small groupings in Option B. This would be a more contextual response to the Henriquez project across the street and respect the guidelines for this neighbourhood, which differentiate it from the Harbour Green Neighbourhood.. Another panel member felt it was important to carry the dynamic and interesting streetscape of the area's residential character through this project and that option B had a much higher livability factor with its street vitality.

- **Applicant's Response:** He thought the comments were good but responded to the one about a strong base by pointing out the requirement of the guidelines is to cut a slot through the townhouse base. The Chair responded by noting that a strong base could still have a slot cut through it.