

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: October 21, 2009

TIME: 4.00 pm

PLACE: Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Martin Nielsen, Chair
Jane Durante
David Godin
Richard Henry
Oliver Lang
Vladimir Mikler
Mark Ostry
Maurice Pez
Douglas Watts

REGRETS:
Gerry Eckford
Steve McFarlane
Bruce Haden

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Lorna Harvey

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. 338 West 6th Avenue
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BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Nielsen called the meeting to order at 4:15 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. There being no New Business the meeting considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 338 West 6th Avenue
DE: 413219
Description: To construct a 2-storey plus basement public utility building for Pleasant Area Substation at this site.
Mount
Zoning: I-1
Application Status: Complete
Review: First
Owner: BC Transmission Corporation
Architect: Genivar
Delegation: Ian McKay, PBK Architects
Dan Van Haastreht, Durante Kruek Landscape Architects
Marcel Reghelin, BC Transmission Corporation
Sean Kennedy, Genivar
Staff: Bob Adair

EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (3-5)

- **Introduction:** Bob Adair, Development Planner, introduced a proposal for the site at the corner West 6th Avenue and Alberta Street. Mr. Adair described the context for the area noting the heritage B listed brick masonry apartment building and other residential buildings. Most of the massing is taking up with switching gear and there will be three transformers at the south end of the site. Because the transformers have to be changed occasionally there will be knock out panels so workers can get to the equipment. There is a sixteen foot landscaped set back along Alberta Street. Mr. Adair described the proposed materials noting the dark grey masonry, copper standing seam metal cladding, aluminum panels and tinted glass in various locations around the building. The applicant is planning on using a colored photographic image element on the Alberta Street elevation. Mr. Adair noted that this was a very necessary piece of public infrastructure and has been in the works for a long time. There are lots of connections to the electrical grid around the city and across the lower mainland. The use and size in the location are appropriate for the zoning. The applicant has tried to break down the scale of a very large building with the articulation of the massing and a good choice of materials. Staff asked them to reduce the impact on the surrounding buildings and to look at potential sustainability measures.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following:

- General form and expression of the building;
- The choice of materials and colours being proposed;
- The treatment of the elevation on Alberta Street as well as the panels, the treatment of the landscape area, and whether or not it is programmed in a way that adds the most to the site and the neighbourhood; and
- Sustainability initiatives.

Mr. Adair took questions from the Panel.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** Ian McKay, Architect, further described the proposal noting that they had stepped the massing down to the lower scale residential properties. Mr. McKay described the color palette and materials noting that the materials need to be

durable so the building won't require a lot of maintenance. On the Alberta Street side, window elements have been added that are reflective. Mr. McKay described the green wall to help preserve the view from the residential house. The stairwells have been treated as a visible element but for a security point of view the interior will be a solid wall.

Dan Van Haastrecht, Landscape Architect, further described the landscape plans. There will be bands of shrubs and ground cover that relate to the architecture of the building. A seating area is planned for the Alberta Street side of the building. Rain gardens are planned to get the storm water off the streets. Mr. Van Haastrecht described the planting materials that are proposed.

The applicant team took questions from the Panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

- Consider expressing the building's use more directly in the massing;
- Design development to simplify the massing;
- Design development to the art component to express the workings of the building;
- Consider reducing the number of cladding materials being used and also consider using natural materials;
- Explore capturing the waste heat in the building and tying it in to Southeast False Creek neighbourhood utility.

- **Related Commentary:** The Panel did not support the proposal.

The Panel said they appreciated the need for a new public utility building but felt the overall building design was unsuccessful. They thought the expression should reflect the industrial character of the building. The Panel also thought the massing wasn't successful as there are too many boxes and thought the program should express itself in the volume. Most of the Panel thought the applicant had gone too far in breaking down the massing and suggested a more simple industrial building design. Panel suggested the volume should get smaller as the building get closer to Alberta Street to reflect the smaller residential scale.

The Panel thought there were too many conflicting materials on the building. A number of the Panel members thought the colour palette was too dark and suggested a more neutral or lighter colour choice. Several Panel members were disappointed that what looked like wood would be plastic and the copper was actually paint and not copper panels.

The Panel thought the Alberta Street elevations was interesting with the use of the removeable panels. They did have some concern with the artist's panels as they didn't think they were reflecting the building's use and they also thought there wasn't much clarification on the art program being proposed.

One Panel member suggested there was a missed opportunity in not having green roofs on the building. Although the Panel appreciated the applicant pursuing a LEED™ Gold certification, they noted that LEED™ was not tailored to this type of facility. One Panel member suggested that the applicant make use of the waste heat that will be rejected from the plant. It was also suggested that since there is a district energy system for southeast False Creek at the end of the street, that the applicant see if they can be tied to that system. Another Panel member acknowledged that it was low heat that was being released but it was still a lot of energy that could be given back to the grid.

Since Vancouver has a proud history of having exuberant substations in the city (Main Street has an art deco theme), several Panel member suggested that the proposal might want to be more reflective of the type of sustainable architecture that is being designed in

the city at the moment. They noted that since utility buildings don't get built very often, it was important to express what is happening inside the building and to take advantage of the assets. One Panel member noted that the public have an expectation of this type of building having a presence in the city. Several Panel members thought the building should say something to the community as to what it is and thought that there should be some interactive approach to the building. A couple of Panel members thought the building should have some lighting to express it at night.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. McKay stated that their intent was to break down the mass of the building but agreed that it could be simplified. He noted that with the Alberta Street side they were trying to relate to the residential component and considered some lighting but thought it might impact the residents. Mr. McKay said he was intrigued with the Panel's comments regarding waste heat but didn't feel they could hook up to the False Creek Neighbourhood Energy Utility (NEU).

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.