
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: October 3, 2001

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room No. 1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Tom Bunting, Chair
Jeffrey Corbett
Lance Berelowitz
Gerry Eckford
Alan Endall
Walter Francl
Bruce Hemstock
Maurice Pez
Sorin Tatomir

REGRETS: Richard Henry
Joseph Hruda
Jack Lutsky

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Carol Hubbard

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	1716 Robson Street
2.	798 Granville Street

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| 1. Address: | 1716 Robson Street |
| DA: | 406086 |
| Use: | Retail (2 storeys) |
| Zoning: | C-5 |
| Application Status: | Complete |
| Architect: | Kasian Kennedy |
| Owner: | Canada Safeway Ltd. |
| Review: | First |
| Delegation: | Gerry Kennedy, Scott Douglas |
| Staff: | Jonathan Barrett |
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EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-1)

- **Introduction:** Jonathan Barrett, Development Planner, presented this complete application to redevelop the site at the corner of Robson and Denman Streets. The site currently contains a Safeway store, a liquor store and surface parking. The proposal is for a new liquor store and commercial retail units (CRUs) on the ground floor and a new Safeway grocery store on the second level. There is parking at grade level as well as one level underground. The number of parking spaces will likely be greater than currently exists and will meet the requirements of the Parking By-law. The Guidelines call for reinforcing smaller-scale shopping, diversity of pedestrian activities and interest along the street, and continuous weather protection. Some external design guidelines in the District Schedule also apply. These refer to display windows, direct pedestrian access to retail, screening of garbage containers and enclosure of mechanical equipment.

No major issues have been identified to date, with minor concerns about the treatment of the lane. The Panel is asked to comment on the proposal's overall suitability in terms of the guidelines. Mr. Barrett noted some concerns have been expressed by neighbours about the treatment of the lane wall, operational times for loading and garbage pick-up, the extent of the roof and its treatment, and noise from mechanical equipment.

- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Gerry Kennedy and Scott Douglas, Architects, had nothing to add to Mr. Barrett's presentation. They responded to questions from Panel members.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted materials.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel strongly supported this application. A number of Panel members commented that the redevelopment of this site is long overdue and a strong architectural response is very appropriate for this prominent corner of the West End. The development will be a very worthwhile addition to this end of Robson Street, having the potential to become a true anchor for the neighbourhood. It will certainly be a vast improvement over what exists now on this site. The Panel noted its concerns were minor and relatively easy to address.

The Panel strongly supported the street level CRUs wrapping around the corner, and locating the Safeway on the second level. The Panel found this to be a very appropriate response to the city's number one retail street. It addresses issues of retail continuity and street animation.

Most of the Panel's comments focussed on the Robson/Denman corner, dealing both with the identity of the major tenant and CPTED issues. With one exception, the Panel supported the strong architectural element proposed for the corner. However, most Panel members thought there was some ambiguity or confusion in the identity of the main access to the Safeway. One Panel member also suggested the Safeway signage along Robson Street could be exacerbating this confusion. The Panel

was divided as to whether the main entry should actually be at the corner but in any event it was felt it should be close to and identifiable with the corner. One suggestion was to reconsider the location of the stair on Denman, flipping it with the back area of the corner CRU. This would bring the presence of the stairs closer to the corner and help to clarify the entry at the corner, also making it more generous and open. Concerns were also expressed about the location of the elevator, with a suggestion that it would be better located in the large, visible corner element. Having the elevator in this space and accessible from Robson Street would create a much more powerful entrance.

Concerns were also raised about security, particularly at the internal 'down' movator where there is a blind spot. Also, the access ramp from the southwest corner of the site which will have another blind spot, despite the glass box CRU given these retail units are never transparent once the walls are used to display merchandise. The area at the top of the stairs was also identified as a possible security concern.

With respect to the roof, it was felt it needed to be dealt with in a way that would compose it a little more for the benefit of people overlooking it. The Panel did not disagree with a clean simple approach to the roofscape but felt it needed a little more animation, possibly a simple graphic on the roof surface. As well, the roof could be broken up a bit more and some of the areas of mechanical equipment brought together in one element. Another recommendation was to make sure the materials used for the flat and curved portions of the roof are different.

The Panel thought the lane needed greater attention in terms of detailing to provide some texture and animation. The lane wall as shown was thought to be far too blank, prompting comments such as "long and brutal", and "scary". Suggestions included varying the paint colour for the recessed portions. Also, to consider some cut-outs to allow natural light into the parking lot, small and high enough not to cause a security problem.

One Panel member thought a somewhat warmer colour palette would be a more appropriate response to the neighbourhood context.

It was noted by one Panel member that the glazing along Robson Street does not quite cover the parking entry. As well, the effectiveness of the exterior space at the corner of Robson and Denman was questioned. It was suggested a planter around the edge might be a better alternative, softening the corner and introducing an interesting landscape element to that edge.

There were some questions about the signage and the need for it to be an integral part of the design. It was felt the signage should be thoroughly thought out and made part of the development application in a project such as this.

One Panel member had concerns about the dark, solid wall along Robson Street, suggesting it be made more transparent in some way. There were also comments about the lack of urban landscape in the project, with suggestions that both Robson and Denman could take more greening other than street trees.

Overall, the Panel found the proposal to be excellent in design and concept. Several Panel members commended the applicant on the scheme and welcomed the uncharacteristic way it deals with the functional form of a "box" grocery store in a highly urbanized, fine grained context. Safeway is also to be congratulated for embracing this non-traditional approach which could become a prototype for other large-scale retail development in the city.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicants had nothing to add. Mr. Kennedy thanked the Panel for its well thought out commentary.

2. Address:	798 Granville Street
DA:	406153
Use:	Retail (4 storeys)
Zoning:	DD
Application Status:	Complete
Architect:	Studio One
Owner:	Bonnis Properties (Robson) Inc.
Review:	First
Delegation:	Tomas Wolf
Staff:	Scot Hein

EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (2-6)

- **Introduction:** The Development Planner, Scot Hein, introduced this complete application to develop the site at the northeast corner of Granville and Robson Streets, noting the maximum permitted density and height in the DD zone is 9.0 FSR and 450 ft., respectively. The Zoning and the Guidelines emphasize ground oriented retail uses and weather protection. The Granville Street Handbook also offers guidance on facades and signage. Following a brief description of the site and its immediate context, Mr. Hein described the proposal which is for commercial uses throughout in a 3-storey building, with single tenants on the second and third floors. The program has been organized for demising of eight commercial retail units (CRUs) fronting Granville Street and a single CRU fronting Robson Street. The proposal also includes two levels of underground parking, with 114 excess parking spaces to be covenanted to the 800–block Granville Street. Proposed FSR is 3.8 and the height is 73.1 ft.

The application proposes a prominent and transparent corner with vertical circulation positioned to animate. The CRUs on Granville are a 22 ft. module with a bay module of 44 ft. A punched window expression and some subtle heritage references are proposed for the Robson Street facade. Proposed materials are steel with concrete, glass and spandrel including a structural glazing system for the corner. Continuous weather protection is proposed, with a prominent corner canopy.

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

- the design response generally, given both the prominence of the site and the City’s aspirations for a high quality development at this corner;
 - the corner’s approach to form/materials/detailing;
 - the Robson Street elevation including materials and detailing;
 - the Granville Street elevation including the 44 ft. bays specifically with respect to detailed execution and “substance”, and the approach to separation of the bays;
 - the Granville Street elevation’s transition to the Vancouver Block;
 - signage and banner systems; and
 - lane treatment.
- **Applicant’s Opening Comments:** Tomas Wolf, Architect, briefly reviewed the design rationale and responded to the Panel’s questions.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted drawings.

- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel was unable to support this application. It was generally thought to be a missed opportunity for such an important intersection of the city. The proposal was considered very appropriate in terms of its retail uses on Robson Street where it meets the more entertainment/retail nature of Granville Street. As well, the simple approach to the site was considered appropriate, including the CRUs along Granville Street which offer good flexibility. One Panel member commented that the proposed big box retail use seems to be a rather suburban response for such a highly urban corner of the Downtown, suggesting to both the applicant and the City that perhaps it should be designed in such a way as to take something more at some time in the future. Certainly, a more complex building program would make for much more interesting architecture and a stronger statement on this corner.

Overall design response: Given the prominence of this corner the Panel thought the design response was not yet satisfied. Reference was made to the three different facades - Robson Street, the corner, and Granville Street - and while it was felt it could be made to work, this assemblage of pieces fails to satisfactorily address the problems. Overall, the majority of Panel members found the response to be far too timid. While it shows some interesting ideas the strength of these ideas somehow falls short.

From an urban design point of view the building has a key role to play in improving Granville Street and encouraging pedestrian traffic and for this reason quality needs to be emphasized. It is the one opportunity to divert pedestrians off Robson to Granville Street: if this is achieved it will be doing the city a great service. The images in the Granville Street Design Handbook illustrate well the intention for this part of Granville Street. This proposal, however, fails to meet the promise of the highly energized, active and brightly lit street shown in the illustrations. It was noted that this proposal will also need to provide enough sparkle to counter the unfortunate blank facade of the Eatons building.

In general, the Panel urged that the overall design response be more exuberant and sophisticated and finely detailed.

Robson Street elevation: The majority of Panel members found the Robson Street facade to be the most successful of the street elevations. Most also found the historicist response supportable although, again, too timid. Suggestions were made to create more relief and shadow within the concrete detailing, in keeping with the finely detailed buildings along Robson Street.

Granville Street elevation: While the Granville Street facade assumes a very contemporary glass approach, there were comments that it falls short in terms of its fenestration pattern. The concern was that this glass treatment will not be as sophisticated as the applicant envisages in its execution. It was questioned why the Granville Street facade has gone away from the concrete frame used on Robson, suggesting these bays should relate to the materials used on Robson Street while expressing the glass very differently.

The Panel generally found the Granville Street elevation to be rather weak. There were questions about what is dominant and what is recessive in the Granville Street facade, with the suggestion that it needs to either come out and frame the building at the parapet as it does along Robson Street, for example, or perhaps they need to be reversed with the glazing recessive and the piers brought forward to develop a stronger frame and perhaps a stronger cornice line as well. Another recommendation was for a more layered approach to give more depth to the facade.

Concerns were expressed about the nature of Future Shop and how its merchandise is displayed. It was recommended that serious consideration be given to screening - at the same time as achieving transparency - to avoid seeing backs of displays of appliances from the street.

The Panel had much to say about the corner element. While it is the most exuberant piece of the building it shares virtually the same cornice line as the other two facades which was viewed as a missed opportunity. As well, it contains an elevator which is also glazed but has no differentiation from the rest. Most Panel members thought the corner should be significantly taller or have something that breaks the cornice line and more strongly articulates the corner expression. The corner element should at least meet the Eaton's facade in some way to frame the view up Granville Street.

In general, the Panel found the approach to the corner to be too timid given it is a transitional piece that will be clearly seen from both Robson and Granville Streets. While an icon or statement is not necessary on every corner of the city, an intersection as important as this needs something stronger and much more dramatic. A recommendation was made to better integrate the elevator tower into the corner element which would help make the turn onto Granville Street, which is the weakest facade, and create something more sculptural (similar to the Orpheum). Another recommendation was to move the elevator further back rather than in the centre, creating a clear vertical break between the rhythm of the Granville Street bays. As well, the angle either needs to be straight or much more acute than shown.

In general, the corner needs to be more prominent. The Panel agreed with the structural glazing approach and making it highly transparent but its success will be in the fine detail and handling of the architectural detailing.

Transition to the Vancouver Block: The Panel did not support the handling of the transition to the Vancouver Block and did not believe a different glazing pattern set back an additional 1 - 2 ft. constitutes a strong transition or differentiation. Suggestions included considering something solid at that point or take the material of the Vancouver Block itself and render that as a solid at that point as a differentiation. It need not be as wide as currently presented - it could be narrower and still have the appropriate affect. The transition piece should be substantially different, both vertically and horizontally. As well, the fenestration patterning makes no real acknowledgement of the Vancouver Block, and the cornice line has an awkward relationship to the cornice line of the Vancouver Block. One Panel member preferred butting the building up to the Vancouver Block and blocking some of its lower windows.

Signage and banners: The Panel did not support the signage as shown and felt that much more thought needs to be given to integrating the signage into the project. In general, it was felt it does not meet the expectations of the illustrations in the Granville Street Handbook. One comment was to consider the whole facade in terms of signage. As well, to consider things such as fibre optics, neon, and projected images.

Lane treatment: The Panel was generally very complimentary about the lane elevation which it found to be a very interesting and animated collage of elements. One comment was that it is a good example of how to make a difficult, blank facade interesting. The architect was commended on this aspect of the design.

Landscaping: Some comments were made about the lack of landscaping in this proposal. One Panel member suggested the City should be discussing with the applicant such things as replacing the sidewalk and considering materials and hard landscaping, as well as street trees.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Wolf said he was disappointed the Panel found the glass facade too timid. With respect to signage, he noted their initial submission included a very large video screen at the corner but this was discouraged by City staff because it did not meet the requirements of the Sign By-law. The signage as proposed, which will be neon, is at the extreme limit of what would be allowable. Mr. Wolf said they considered various alternatives for the corner and concluded it was not necessary to make a statement on this corner, noting it is not visible from a block away. With respect to street trees, Mr. Wolf questioned why the application should address what is City property given the development levies that will apply. Regarding the transition to the Vancouver Block, he said the intent was not to do anything that would compete with it.