
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: September 22, 1999

TIME: 4.00 p.m.

PLACE: Committee Room #1, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Joseph Hruda (Chair)
Patricia Campbell
James Cheng
Paul Grant
Sean McEwan
Keith Ross
Norman Shearing (Late arrival; abstained from voting)

REGRETS: Per Christoffersen
Sheldon Chandler
Roger Hughes
Gilbert Raynard
Joe Werner

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Louise Christie

ITEM REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1	599 Columbia Street - Chinatown Pagoda

1. Address: 599 Columbia Street
DA: 404462
Use: Pagoda/Teahouse (7 storeys)
Zoning: HA-1 (Chinatown Historic Area)
Application Status: Complete
Architect: Joe Y. Wai Architect Inc.
Owner: City of Vancouver
Review: First
Delegation: Joe Wai
Staff: Mike Kemble, Development Planner
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EVALUATION: Support (5 - 0)

- **Introduction:** Mike Kemble, Development Planner, introduced this application. It will go to the Development Permit Board for consideration of the height relaxation. In Chinatown, the maximum height allowed is 65 ft. The Pagoda is proposed to be approximately 105 ft.

The octagonal Pagoda is proposed for the south east corner of the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Park, which is beside the Chinese Cultural Centre. Adjacent to the park on the west side is the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Classical Chinese Garden. To the north is the recently completed museum for the complex. Across the street is a parking facility, and Keefer Street forms a triangular area because of its realignment. A public art piece is to be displayed on this City property but it is on hold until the Pagoda proposal goes forward.

The ten foot high wall which surrounds the park is traditional. It is proposed that the Pagoda straddle the wall on the south east corner, adjacent to the east entrance gate where there is a flat area. This part of the park is relatively undeveloped. Chinese gardens traditionally have a mixture of contextual buildings that define and enclose various spaces. An anonymous donor is funding the project and the Vancouver Park Board, being responsible for maintenance, security, etc., has endorsed it.

The Pagoda is proposed to be seven storeys with a small tea house on the ground floor. Elevators take patrons to the sixth level, and there are stairs to the seventh where there is an observation area. Its height is approximately 105 ft. requiring a relaxation from 65ft. to 105 ft. It tapers toward the top, the ground floor being about 1,500 sq. ft. and the top floor about 400 sq. ft. The design is partly based on a 12th century pagoda but incorporating modern seismic up-grading with new materials of steel and concrete, and other materials, such as tiles, which will reflect the old.

The Panel was asked to comment specifically on:

1. Height relaxation: the use of Section 3.2.4, the hardship clause of the By-law, given the unique character of this building.
 2. Street level interface of the Pagoda with existing park design and Columbia Street.
- **Applicant's Opening Comments:** Joe Wai, the architect, explained they had been working on the proposal for more than a year since the anonymous donor first walked in with a model of a 12th century pagoda. Originally, pagodas had a religious purpose but now, 700 years later, it is seen as a landmark
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or icon of Vancouver's Chinatown. It will complete the south east corner and be built with modern materials, with an elevator, washrooms, etc. The plan has changed from the original, through discussion with the Park Board as to maintenance, access and security issues, as it must be safe for visitors. The Dr. Sun Yat Sen Garden Society of Vancouver, who help run the Garden, will also operate the Pagoda. There will be tours with interpretive views from the top. It could contain social amenities, like a tea house and washrooms. Careful consideration will be given to positioning it in the context of the adjacent buildings, in consultation with Engineering. It will be another new point-of-interest for the old Chinatown and build on that historical area's strength of character.

Also, close scrutiny is being given to ensure the development is within budget. Building the Pagoda in contemporary materials is more economical as replicating the stone marble facing of the original would be prohibitive.

- **Panel's Discussion:** Following a review of the model and posted drawings, the Panel queried the rationale for the Pagoda alignment which is not in alignment with the existing park walls. In response, the architect noted that the alignment is based on utilitarian issues. The option for placing the entire structure within the park wall was discarded, due to the extremely restrictive space available in the park. Some members suggested it be moved further out toward Columbia Street. One Panel member noted that it is eight sided and asked why it is rotated at that angle, and the applicant's reply was that it seems the "right thing to do". The applicant was asked how it integrates into the experience of the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Park and how the existing landscape reacts with it. He explained that part of the idea was to hide the base within the gardenscape and, on the street side, make the whole base visible. The impact on public access with paid admission was questioned. The applicant explained that on this issue, an agreement must be arrived at involving the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Garden Society and the Park Board. The land is not dedicated to park and is still owned by the City. The applicant explained that there is concern about uncontrolled access into the building and that has to be addressed. There would be no charge to enter the tea room but there is an entrance fee for the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Classical Garden and there would be tours to the Pagoda viewing platform. Initially, it would be operated for a few years to find out what the traffic patterns are, then the details would be worked out. The Panel wanted to ensure public access, with no charge for the public portion.
- **Panel's Comments:** The Panel unanimously supported this application. They supported the height relaxation, essential to the proportions, with some concern expressed about fine-tuning how the Pagoda is sited in the park, which is important. It will be a significant addition to this area of the city, and visible from a distance. Lighting at night should be considered. There was positive panel reaction to the exposure of the Pagoda structure to grade level as perceived from the street outside of the park.. Consideration should be given to paving patterns of the mini-plaza space in front and on the street side, i.e. outside the park wall to the edge of Columbia Street. A further suggestion was made to accommodate the tea room and washrooms on the main floor inside the wall and preferably within the footprint of the Pagoda structure proper, and there were questions as to whether the elevator machine room could be located below grade as the foundation will be below grade in any case.

The Chair noted the positive comments with support for the height and location of the tower straddling the park wall. He stressed the importance of dealing with the design of the public open space located between the park wall and Columbia Street and suggested that perhaps the park wall could be located further eastward, thereby expanding the park context of the Pagoda.

- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Wai appreciated comments from his colleagues which come from fresh

points of view. Consideration will be given as to how to incorporate some of their ideas, particularly concerning the plaza in front, i.e., the portion east of the Pagoda to Columbia Street.