
URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: September 4, 2003

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

PLACE: Room C680, UBC at Robson Square

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Stuart Lyon, Chair
Helen Besharat
Jeffrey Corbett
Bruce Haden
Reena Lazar
Eva Lee
Jennifer Marshall
Brian Martin
Mark Ostry
Kim Perry
Sorin Tatomir
Ken Terris

GUEST PANELISTS:
Peter Cardew
Christoph Ingenhoven
Richard Henriquez
Rocco Yim

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Rae Ratslef, Raincoast Ventures

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

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| 1. 550 Bute Street (1133 Melville Street) |
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1. Address: 550 Bute Street (1133 Melville Street)
DA: 407110
Use: Mixed
Zoning: DD
Architect: Hewitt & Kwansnicky
Owner: Wentworth Properties (Melville Inc.)
Review: Second
Staff: Ralph Segal, Anita Molaro, Michael Gordon
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EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (0-15)**Introduction**

Ralph Segal, Senior Development Planner, Urban Design and Development Planning Centre, referencing display models, introduced the application in the context of the surrounding neighbourhood. The Panel was informed that the preliminary design had been previously reviewed by the Panel and the Development Permit Board and had received approval in principle from both. Information was provided on the comments and considerations raised by each, and the composition of the complete application was compared to the preliminary design.

The Panel was asked to comment on how well the application responded to previously raised concerns and design conditions and whether it provided maximum community benefit; and to consider whether the tower had achieved architectural excellence.

Mr. Segal responded to questions regarding the existing and intended future character of the surrounding neighbourhood, and confirmed that the site's present zoning did not allow for live-work.

Applicant's Opening Comments

Dave Hewitt and Willem Doesburg of Hewitt & Kwansnicky Architects Inc., and David Rose, PD Group Landscape Architects, joined the meeting for consideration of this item.

Mr. Hewitt indicated that there had been substantial changes to the application since the preliminary. He discussed the building as viewed from a distance, from the skyline and on the approach, and commented on how it functioned within the urban fabric. As well, Mr. Hewitt advised that the tower had been designed in a punched form to move away from typical glass forms in the area; commented on its response to minimize view impacts; and discussed how its triangular design responded to the Pender and Melville street grids.

Mr. Hewitt noted that the placement of the hotel accommodated an 80 foot separation between the two buildings on the site, and blocked the starkness of the neighbouring building, and noted the responses to changes in grade, including the skewing of the facade and the creation of a corner plaza with retail. As well, Mr. Hewitt discussed the design of the parking lane entrance to the site, and indicated the rear entrance to the hotel.

Mr. Rose discussed the project's landscape design addressing the Bute Street elevation and the public realm possibilities. He noted that effort had been made to open the whole of the frontage to the public, discussed responses to the street grid design, and indicated use of a water feature to animate the north end. Various pedestrian opportunities offered throughout the site were also noted.

In response to a question, Mr. Hewitt advised that features of the tower and hotel did not specifically relate to sustainability. Mr. Segal added that the City's zoning did not pursue sustainability under development applications at this time.

Mr. Hewitt also responded to questions concerning the building materials, and discussed the facade of the hotel in relation to the lane noting that its design was partly in response to fire restrictions and to the limited view possibilities. Also, it was noted that consideration had been given to saving the concrete building on the site but that options for this had not proven to be economically viable.

The Panel reviewed the model and posted materials.

Panel's Comments

The Panel considered the direction given by the Development Permit Board for the design of a tower that had achieved the highest order of architectural excellence. Panel members agreed that, while the tower was very compliant, it was not special, unique, sophisticated or advanced, and that its quality needed to be significantly increased in order to justify its height. Given this, support was expressed for allowing increased height, beyond the approved 400 feet, for a more superior tower design.

In further consideration of whether the tower had achieved architectural excellence, many members commented that the tower lacked a conceptual basis or intention, i.e. environmental responsiveness, civic connections, etc., and needed to pursue a higher level of architectural enquiry. Panel members further agreed that the building design was not anchored to the site and/or community and needed to go further in its design to the extent that it would be impossible to imagine the tower being located anywhere else.

Several panelists commented that it seemed that very little had been done to make the tower seem slimmer, and offered that a change in materials could assist in achieving this objective. It was also encouraged that local materials be used to create a stronger connection with Vancouver, and was offered that the present use of materials was very heavy and not joyous.

Concerning the issue of sustainability, it was suggested that, as a minimum requirement, the building should speak to and demonstrate measures of sustainability. It was offered that incorporation of sustainable elements would elevate the quality of the project, and was emphasized that buildings of this stature had a responsibility to demonstrate sustainability. Further comment was that a commitment to sustainability would impose factors on the building's design that would change its image to become more dynamic and more sensitive to exposure views, sunlight and daylight.

In considering the design of the tower top, specifically the three lantern design, a member commented that any increase in architectural expression was hampered by the uniformity of the design. Also, others offered that the design needed to be more integrated with the tower itself so that it did not seem applied.

With regard to the landscape design, Panel members suggested that it needed reworking to fit more into the urban context, and commented that the moat design separated the street from the building, did not engage Bute Street, and was an inappropriate response. It was generally agreed that the design did not contribute to the quality of the street environment, and that effort should instead be made to make a stronger social contribution to the urban setting, i.e. providing covered surfaces for sitting and being less naturalistic so as not to compete with the surrounding natural beauty.

Comment was offered that the courtyard offered a strange relationship to the hotel with guests being able to look at but not use it, and it was suggested that the tower's ground level suites' marketability and livability could be enhanced by allowing direct access to the courtyard. Encouragement was offered to seek alternative programming that would animate common areas, i.e. shared food facilities.

Several members commented that they were not in support of entrances off of lanes in general and emphasized that lanes were intended to serve as service corridors. However, it was offered that, if the lane was intended to function as a front entrance it should be dealt with accordingly.

Regarding the existing accountant's building on the site, many Panel members commented that it appeared as an afterthought and required much more attention and stronger presentation as part of the application. It was suggested that it was inappropriate to consider the existing building in the context provided and with so little detail. Suggested improvements to the hotel included opening the views to the north and improving its integration with the accountant's building.

Several members offered that the siting of the buildings was somewhat curious, and suggested that the massing solution could be improved with a different relationship between the residential and commercial. It was noted that the massing scheme seemed driven by view corridors from uphill developments and encouragement was offered that the architect consider other, more natural, massing solutions.

Concerning the possibility of a neighbouring site becoming a park, it was offered that this would be unfortunate as it would border a lane and was a space that allowed for smaller developments in the context of the city. However, encouragement was offered that the existing concrete building on the site should be studied as an opportunity for presentation of the 40's architecture.

Applicant's Response

Mr. Hewitt expressed appreciation for the Panel's comments noting that some were contradictory; that some were in direct contravention of city bylaws, conditions or directives and therefore should not have formed a part of the discussion; and that the remainder had been fruitful and informative.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.