

Minutes of the Design Review Panel Meeting 2 – February 11, 2014

The Design Review Panel met on Tuesday February 11, 2014, in Committee Room 1, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, Toronto, at 11:30am.

Members of the Design Review Panel

Members Present

Gordon Stratford (Chair): Architect, Senior Vice President, Design Director - HOK Canada	
Michael Leckman (Vice Chair): Architect, Principal - Diamond and Schmitt	✓
Carl Blanchaer: Architect, Principal – WZMH Architects	✓
Calvin Brook: Planner, Architect, Principal - Brook McIlroy	✓
Ralph Giannone: Architect, Principal - Giannone Associates	
Charles Hazell: Heritage Specialist, Architect, Principal - Taylor Hazell Architects	✓
Brian Hollingworth: Transportation Engineer, Director – IBI Group	
Alun Lloyd: Transportation Engineer, Principal - BA Group	✓
Joe Lobko: Architect, Principal – DTAH	✓
Jim Melvin: Landscape Architect, Principal - PMA Landscape Architects Ltd.	✓
Adam Nicklin: Landscape Architect, Principal - PUBLIC WORK office for urban design	
Roland rom Colthoff: Architect, Director – RAW Design	✓
David Sisam: Architect, Principal – Montgomery Sisam Architects	✓
Sibylle von Knobloch: Landscape Architect, Principle - NAK Design	✓

Confirmation of Minutes

The Design Review Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting which was held on January 11, 2014.

DRP Coordinator

Hamish Goodwin: Urban Design, City Planning Division

Meeting 2 Index

- i. Parks Plan 2013-2017 (Information Item)
- ii. 177 Front Street East, King-Parliament Neighbourhood
- iii. 2799-2815 Kingston Road, Cliffcrest Neighbourhood
- iv. Albert Campbell Square Extension, Scarborough Civic Centre

Parks Plan 2013-2017

Introduction

Parks Forestry and Recreation staff provided a presentation of the Park Plan 2013-2017. Questions and discussion followed

Chair's Summary of Key Points

The comprehensive presentation on the Parks Plan 2013-2017 was appreciated by Panel, in particular the areas of major change and investment, new ways to connect with needs of current users, and the finer grain understanding of Local Parkland Assessment Cells. Since panel has been reviewing high density residential projects for almost 7 years, highest interest was in how the City should be acting now, with a long-term metropolitan-scale vision, to secure large spaces for the next generation of parks in current and future high density areas. Panel was also interested in metrics associated with provision of parkland: it was noted that whereas Toronto spends approximately \$60 per person for maintenance, the average in the US for comparable cities ranges from \$120 to \$200 per person. As well, Panel was interested in space allocation ratios, based on built form type, walking distance access, and density, that would help identify park space requirements and plan for it. Panel is seeing some areas of growth that appear wholly underserved by parks; remediating the issue requires foresight and bold planning.

177 Front Street East	
Planning Area	King-Parliament Neighbourhood
Design Team	Hariri Pontarini Architects; The Planning Partnership
Application Type	Rezoning Application
Review	First
City Staff	Myron Boyko, Urban Design Mark Chlon, Community Planning
Conflict of Interest	R. rom Colthoff, RAW Design
Vote	Refine – 0; Abstain – 1; <u>Redesign - 5</u>



Introduction

City staff outlined the area context, history and area policy priorities and sought advice on the following:

1. Is the proposed building form appropriate given the special character of King-Parliament, the existing planning framework and evolving built form context for this area?
2. How well does the proposed built form, site plan layout and articulation respond to the neighbourhood character (base building treatment, materiality, servicing etc.) and the City Wide Tall Building Design Guidelines?

The consultant described the design rationale and responded to questions from the Panel.

Chairs Summary of Key Points

Panel was near unanimous in its appreciation of the podium component of 177 Front Street East. Streetscape improvements were welcome, form and articulation of the base appeared effective, and the breaking up of the perimeter block showed promise. There were many concerns about the courtyard, however, as Panel members felt it would be dominated by car and truck movements and cease to perform as a public realm asset to either the development or the City. Panel was equally unanimous in their critical view of the height, placement, and number of towers on the podium. While the design incorporates significant set backs from the south and north edges, these are done at the expense of tower separation distances, which are well below Tall Building Guidelines; as well, Panel observed that height and tower proximity to each other would result in a reading of a single mass, for the most part obscuring sky view, and aggregating as a single shadow impact. Most significantly, the proposed building heights bring into question the question of context. As this project is so much taller - by a factor of 2 - than nearby approved projects, it so greatly exceeds the original intent of the transitions between surrounding context and the original 10 blocks, that Panel found the proposal wholly incompatible with historic and approved built form.

Related Commentary

Is the proposed building form appropriate given the special character of King-Parliament, the existing planning framework and evolving built form context for this area?

Members were of the unanimous opinion that the proposed building form did not present a suitable fit in terms of responding to the regulatory framework, nor to the emerging context as represented by recent OMB approvals. The effect of these recent approvals upon the neighbourhood was evident to Members, with applications getting taller and taller. Members felt that this trend would lead to a negative impact upon the special character of King-Parliament, and suggested that an appropriate response to context was more than relating proposed heights to recent approvals. Further, it was also suggested that these recent approvals should not be seen as the new "norm" in terms of a starting point for subsequent negotiations. A sample of specific responses from Members on this issue follows:

- My impression of this scheme is that it is caught in an opportunistic and messy dichotomy between city vision and OMB-approved projects
- I would want to see compliance in this proposal with heights of recent approvals, e.g. 18-20 storeys
- It is really important that we draw the line on heights in this area
- My overall impression from the imagery is that the proposal is too big and bulky; it feels very massive and unfriendly from a pedestrian scale
- We should be seeing buildings that are supporting public life
- Indications of over capacity are represented by incursions into the courtyard, tower heights, floor plate sizes...all of which suggest reconsideration of the proposal is required.

How well does the proposed built form, site plan layout and articulation respond to the neighbourhood character (base building treatment, materiality, servicing etc.) and the City Wide Tall Building Design Guidelines?

Built Form

Panel felt that the clustering of towers would create a "wall" effect that would have serious negative impacts on the public realm in terms of limiting views to the sky, and sunlight on the street. They felt this was not a positive direction for the Neighbourhood, and subsequently were not supportive of the proposed built form.

Site Plan

The proponent was encouraged to seek further efficiencies with the proposed loading arrangement through the consolidation of parking ramps, and to ensure that this arrangement fully accommodates the "back of house" food store functions on the site.

Articulation

Overall, Panel was complimentary of the building expression and architectural ambition. Members felt the scheme exhibited good use of materials, both within the base and the tower, and suggested this expression would enhance the nature of the community. They welcomed the modulated massing of the base to create a rhythm of bays, indicating this was a successful move to break up the scale of the base. They also welcomed the 20-metre tower step-back on The Esplanade as a means of reducing pedestrian perception of this tower.

On Sherbourne, the applicant was encouraged to push this modulated move further to avoid an overly repetitive rhythm on the proposal's longest façade. On Front Street, Members portrayed a vision of ceremonial grandness that is emerging through significant investments in the West Don Lands and at Union Station. They felt more work on this elevation was required – both in terms of massing and expression - to provide a suitable response to the street's growing importance.

Tall Building Guidelines

While mindful that the Tall Building Guidelines are "guidelines" and should be treated with a degree of flexibility, Members felt the proposal was pushing the envelope of non-compliance in too many directions. In the redesign of the proposal, they indicated a desire to see:

- a reduction in floor plate size and increase in tower separation distances, closer to the standards established within these guidelines; and
- an increased tower setback on the Lower Sherbourne St tower.

Combined with a desire to see a reduction in height, as outlined above, Panel felt a primary objective was for the proposal to reduce the cumulative effect of shadowing and loss of sky view. Some Members noted that this may mean the proposal becomes a 2-tower scheme.

Pedestrian Realm

Noting that people are walking more and more, and relying less and less on automobiles, and even transit, Members suggested the proposal should strive to provide the very best possible pedestrian amenity around the building: wide generous sidewalks that accommodate high pedestrian volumes as well as trees, continuity of sidewalk dimensions, and frontages which are not overly "privatized".

Landscape Design

Panel generally welcomed the selection of plant material, but suggested greater coordination of these materials with the built form program was required. As an example, one Member noted that building overhangs on The Esplanade will protrude into the growing space required for the elm trees proposed along this elevation.

Courtyard

Panel felt much more was required from the internal courtyard if it was to suitably supplement the parks and open space network. Members felt it was too singularly focused on vehicles, and not sufficiently providing a human balance. In addition to comments noted already within Site Plan, other comments about the courtyard were as follows:

- The space needs to evolve into a lot more:
 - o it needs more richness
 - o it needs to provide a nice welcoming moment of "pause"
 - o Lake Shores are more than just waves/wave patterns; they contain many more elements
 - o It needs to be a truly fine space
- There is a need to further understand how the wall on the north side of the drive court will impact this space

Briefing Materials

The following materials were required for subsequent Design Review:

- Pedestrian perspective along Lower Sherbourne Street
- Front Street perspective placed in context with approved and proposed building

2799-2815 Kingston Road	
Planning Area	Cliffcrest Neighbourhood
Design Team	Zanjani Architect Inc.
Application Type	Rezoning and Site Plan
Review	First
City Staff	Jeffery Sinclair, Community Planning Xue Pei, Urban Design
Conflict of Interest	none
Vote	Refine – 2; <u>redesign</u> - 6



Introduction

City staff outlined the area context, history and area policy priorities and sought Panel's advice on the following:

1. Does the building design and expression reflect the character of the surrounding character area?
2. How can the transition between the building and the neighbourhood to the south be improved to mitigate the effects of overlook, visual impact and privacy?
3. Please comment generally on the proposed streetscape and landscape design with particular regard to the proposed streetscape and landscaping along the existing public streets.

The consultant described the design rationale and responded to questions from the Panel.

Chairs Summary of Key Points

Panel members prefaced their observations of 2799-2815 Kingston Road by underlining their appreciation of the responsible approach taken by the project team in undertaking this proposal for a mid-rise project. Drawings were legible, as were strategies for compliance. There were many comments on the finer grain of site plan development and massing, however the most crucial were those relating to conformity of the massing with the angular planes requirements for the site. Panel strongly recommended that the designers work within already defined angular planes without modifying them. To do so, the mass of the building would have to move north, and the south façade would likely change. The resulting form, likely a massing which steps down and out on the south side, did not appear to Panel to yield any less buildable area for the project than the current proposal. Panel felt that a proposal redesigned on this principle would much better represent the light access and neighbourhood transition objectives of Mid-Rise and Avenue projects.

Related Commentary

Panel was pleased to see this Avenues project coming forward, noting it was the type of development the City has been encouraging for years, and as such, that it was a good news story. However, while Members identified many good qualities with the proposal, they felt redesign was warranted to deliver an exemplar project. Their primary issue of concern was that of rear transition, however other issues for improvement were also identified:

Does the building design and expression reflect the character of the surrounding character area?

Members noted that mid-rise buildings in Toronto rarely take up the length of a full city block, and felt that the scheme would benefit from greater variation of built form and expression. Particularly, it was suggested that a finer sense of grain, scale and rhythm, would help break down the singular nature of the object, and bring more variety into the urban setting. One Member suggested this could be done through a mid-point break in the massing; others suggested that variation could be provided through architectural expression. Specific comments further to this are below:

- 320 feet of street wall all at same height will be jarring
- The expression currently contains big horizontal moves
 - o Pursue more vertical expression to help interrupt length
- Variation of built form will bring variation of sunlight as it hits the street
- The repetition of elements is OK; a very long bldg can still be done elegantly
 - o However, examine a less repetitive balcony arrangement at the rear
- Push western edge of the building closer to Kingston Road to respond to proximities
 - o This movement in massing will introduce opportunities to develop the architectural language
- There are two scales of interaction with the building that need to be explored/expressed:
 - o A finer residential experience to the rear; and
 - o The Kingston Road experience
- The current vocabulary appears too sleek and cold

How can the transition between the building and the neighbourhood to the south be improved to mitigate the effects of overlook, visual impact and privacy?

The issue of compliance with the rear transition performance standards was critical for the Panel, with one Member describing it as "the backbone of the Avenues policy". They felt the applicant's approach to this transition was a non-starter, and encouraged them to reconfigure the design to respond more closely to the transition Performance Standard. Members felt strongly that this could be achieved without losing much density, primarily by increasing density at the lower levels and reducing it from the top. Additional comments expanding upon this were as follows:

- Reconsider the 3m buffer on edge of laneway; it is too generous and is impacting the transition
- The front setback is also possibly too generous
- Explore the possibility of the building "turning the corners"
- Explore the possibility of an overhang on the Kingston Rd frontage, with the upper floors extending back out above a recessed ground floor
- Increasing the area of the lower floors will increase the size – and rents - of retail units

Please comment generally on the proposed streetscape and landscape design with particular regard to the proposed streetscape and landscaping along the existing public streets.

Members were supportive of the objective to animate the frontage through retail uses, and to create a pedestrian-friendly environment through the inclusion of street trees, soft vegetation, and seating.

General comments for refinement were as follows:

- Refine all entrances, to ensure they reflect levels/patterns of usage
 - o For example, the primary residential entrance: is its size reflective of the number of residents that will use this as a front door?
- Pursue an unencumbered space for landscaping, including trees, so that there is ample space for pedestrian movement and seating
- Reconsider café seating on north-east and north-west corners
 - o The intake and exhaust fans are located here; bike parking might be a better program for these spaces
 - o Alternatively, move the exhaust functions to the rear to provide conditions for a fully vibrant and animated frontage

Site Plan Design

Retail and Parking

Some concern was raised over the viability of proposed retail given the absence of convenient surface parking. Members felt the 12 dedicated below-grade retail spaces were unlikely to provide the quick/convenient access that the retail uses here will likely require. The applicant was subsequently encouraged to maximize "convenient" parking, with the rear drop-off identified as one possible area where this could be provided. The City was also encouraged to pursue on-street parking for Kingston Road, to help facilitate the Avenues vision. Finally, further examination of the bike parking sequence was also suggested, to ensure access to P1 for cyclists is safe and convenient.

Laneway and Loading

- There was some question amongst Members as to whether the proposed Type G loading arrangement would function adequately. A development near Balmoral and Yonge was identified as a successful precedent for the applicant to examine and take cues from.
- There was some suggestion that the laneway be designed as a shared space, where pedestrians are comfortable and safe to move about.
- Some concern was raised with the mis-alignment of the proposed laneway with the laneway to the east.

Sustainable Design

The applicant was encouraged to pursue the Tier 2 TGS target.

Albert Campbell Square Extension	
Planning Area	Scarborough Civic Centre
Design Team	City Planning, Urban Design / The MBTW Group
Application Type	Landscape Concept
Review	Design Development
City Staff	Robert Stephens, Urban Design
Conflict of Interest	na
Vote	Na (discussion with direction)



Introduction

City staff outlined the area context, history and area policy priorities and sought Panel's advice on the following:

1. Will the conceptual design create an appropriate urban public space for an emerging civic centre?
2. Does the design provide an appropriate complement to the existing Albert Campbell Square?
3. What additional design elements do Panel members believe should be considered during the Design Development Phase of the project?

The consultant described the design rationale and responded to questions from the Panel.

Chair's Summary of Key Points

Panel was appreciative of the presentation of the concept design and the design development for the Albert Campbell Park Extension, by the City and the consultant teams. The consultant's analysis of available sunlight, informal pathways, and edge conditions provided meaningful enhancements to the concept design. The material development of the concept was thoughtfully developed and well presented. Comments from panel focused largely on two areas: context and scale of gesture.

Panel felt that the scheme would benefit from being drawn again, comprehensively, in a much larger context, that of the Square and adjacent spaces, for a variety of reasons: Panel struggled to understand the relationships of the main circulation paths, internal paths, materials, planting strategies and patterns to the larger, monumental scale and articulated edges of the Square. Considered drawings of the design in context should help clarify and focus the design choices. Secondly, Panel felt the project should be simplified and intensified. There was a strong sense that a) the extension was not big enough for all the proposed gestures; and b) the appropriate direction for the design was the creation of an immersive complementary space.

Related Commentary

Will the conceptual design create an appropriate urban public space for an emerging civic centre? Does the design provide an appropriate complement to the existing Albert Campbell Square?

Panel felt design of the extension was not an appropriate complement to the existing Square. This was a unanimous position amongst Members, and was based on their feeling that an appropriate compliment to the vastness of the Square (and the spaces beyond) would be a space that provides an escape to this. Words such as "immersive" and "intimate" were used frequently to describe the type of contrast that they felt was warranted. Members also felt the plan would benefit from a more simplified design, with fewer gestures and fewer strategies. Specific suggestions in relation to these points are below.

What additional design elements do Panel members believe should be considered during the Design Development Phase of the project?

Scale: Immersive / Intimate

Panel felt this space should provide people with an opportunity to "get away" from the large open spaces that are typical in the civic centre, and from the urban environment, more generally. Instead of more open sight lines with views all around, they felt more intimate spaces and places that provide respite from this environment were warranted: dividing walls; smaller spaces and pockets; "rooms" for quiet contemplation and exploration; an environment of relief.

Pedestrian Connections, General

Panel felt the plan contained possibly too many options for movement through the space, with the two paths proposed within the scheme being in addition to two existing paths in the same direction. They felt this placed too much emphasis on movement through the space, further detracting from it as a place to pause and linger. Some Members suggested the plan should rely on the existing east-west pathway to the north as the main pedestrian thoroughfare in this direction.

Pedestrian Connections, Diagonal Spine

Majority Members indicated uncertainty with the strong diagonal spine as an organizing element; this largely stemmed from a lack of understanding of what was driving this gesture. Comments provided about this element are summarized below:

- Shaping the spine makes it into an object, rather than a connector
- There is no sense of place
- There is an opportunity to establish it as a place on its own, such as with a pergola and seating
 - o Something that gives it character, for where you might stop and pause
- What will the experience be passing through? Will it feel like the Square just goes on forever?
- The spine might preclude movement along more direct desire lines (also see Context Analysis, below)
- Big trees along the spine would provide it with a sense of being a promenade, but this will be difficult with limited soil depth

Relationship to Concourse Retail

Panel felt the plan was not creating suitable interaction between park users and the adjoining colonnade retail uses, citing the diagonal spine – which suggests a priority of movement through the park - as an example. Instead, Members felt the design should encourage interaction with

these retail spaces; providing them with the best opportunity for success would benefit the park itself by creating more active uses and increasing animation.

Greenness

Members were supportive of the "greening" strategy, suggesting that all attempts to green the space – through trees, shrubs, perennials – would help provide the contrasting character that they felt was warranted. Further "big moves" to soften the space were encouraged, such as the use of trees rather than grass in the amphitheater area.

Dog Run

While noting that dog runs are good "animators", Members did not feel this use was warranted here. One reason cited was that it would compromise soil and growing conditions in an area where plant growth should be the highest priority.

Ribbon Garden

One Member was particularly appreciative of the angular planting, and how it provides cues to Scarborough's agricultural heritage.

Context Analysis

Members expressed reservations with the design process, and were uncertain that it was suitably informed by an analysis of context. Some of these reservations resulted from a lack of contextual information within the briefing package and the presentation. Specific comments and concerns are as follows:

- The project appears to have been drawn in isolation from context
- Connection to the south is key, as outlined within the Public Realm Plan
 - it is not clear from the plan how this connection will work

Children's Area

One Member provided the following comments about the play area:

- Ensure there is sufficient seating and shade
- Give consideration to material selection, and how they function under varying environmental conditions (e.g. stainless steel furniture heats up in the summer)

Briefing Materials

The following additional information was requested by Panel:

- Context analysis
- Rendered plans and pedestrian level perspectives
- Analysis of broader connections and destinations
- Further explanation of the role of the water feature (is it interactive, is it to mask noise?)