

**CITY OF VICTORIA
HERITAGE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES
September 10, 2024**

Present: Alissa Wrean
Imogen Goldie
Jim Kerr (Chair)
John Boehme
Valerie Lindholm
Veronica (Nikki) Strong-Boag
Liberty Brears
Deniz Unsal

Regrets: Lorenda Calvert

Guests: **Rezoning Application No.00873 for 603 Pandora Avenue concurrent with Development Permit with Variance Application No. 00269**
Erica Sangster (D'Ambrosio Architecture & Urbanism), Donald Luxton (Heritage Consultant), Franc D'Ambrosio (Architect, Dau Studio), Josh Harvey (Project Designer, DU Studio), Francis Mairet (Owner, Mairet Consulting), Nick Askew (Owner, DU Marketing), Deane Strongitharm (Engagement Consultant)

Staff: Kristal Stevenot, Senior Heritage Planner
Miko Betanzo, Urban Design
Laura Saretsky, Heritage Planner
Kamryn Allen, Heritage Secretary

The Chair called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m.

1. Adoption of the Agenda

Moved: Veronica (Nikki) Strong-Boag **Seconded:** Deniz Unsal

Motion: That the September 10, 2024, Heritage Advisory Panel Meeting Agenda be approved.

Carried Unanimously

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the July 9th, 2024, Meeting

Moved: Liberty Brears **Seconded:** Valerie Lindholm

Motion: That the July 9, 2024, Heritage Advisory Panel Meeting Minutes be approved.

Carried Unanimously

3. Business Arising from the Minutes

- In response to a report from a panel member last meeting that members of the public had been contacting them, staff reported that they had been advised that panel members can either direct the public to get in touch with staff or delete any emails without replying.
- The panel discussed forwarding any correspondence to the whole panel or at least to the chair, and it was agreed any future correspondence from the public should be forwarded to the chair who will decide if it needs to be sent on to staff.

4. Announcements

None.

5. Rezoning application No. 00873 for 603 Pandora Avenue concurrent with Development Permit with Variance Application No. 00269.

Staff provided a brief introduction to the Panel with a presentation.

Erica Sangster (D'Ambrosio Architecture & Urbanism) and Donald Luxton (Heritage Consultant) Provided a presentation.

Panel Question and Comments

- Its interesting that the height limits/ guidelines set in the OCP and the Oldtown Design Guidelines come back to this 15 meter (5 story) line, but we know there is buildings lower and higher then that. However, increasing the height to 38 + meters is a significant increase in height.
- We would ask Erica and their team to justify in terms of architecture fitting into its historic context.
 - When we started on this project five years ago, we did not anticipate on getting to twelve storeys tall and due to economic cases, that caused us to look at more program than this, the room target was 200. One approach we had was a podium and tower approach to look at that street wall scale and than have the bulk of the building set back further east in the City.
 - Instead, we have a more Edwardian approach and to acknowledge we didn't want to create very tall blank walls at the ends of the building. They're not primary facades so we don't feel we need to put extensive glazing on those from a programme perspective, we also didn't think we needed this kind of upper storey setbacks from DCAP where it is a primary façade. We were trying to find the balance between more traditional Edwardian massing and adjustments acknowledging this is a taller massing, very visually prominent, and needed to so some subtle transition in height to scale down to the street wall and have solid blank walls on the sides.
 - The shift went stylistically from following a Victorian principle that derived from Gothic into Edwardian that was caused, by an economic and socio shift in Victoria which is what pushed us to making it a realistic viable size.
 - We looked at the change in architecture and it was the technology, it was about the development of high-speed elevators, and it was the development of steel and concrete construction that drove what happened in the 1908-1913 period, example being the Hudson's Bay building.

- 1975 Post office on Government Street, had the same approach in terms of modernist, cage form, articulating, masonry and then letting the window expression be reflection of that technology.
- We tried a few design aspects that just became distracting to the clarity of what the building is rather than actually adding something to the mix.
- Question about the actual height of this building being twelve storeys? Concern is, if that's all we do in life is build new buildings based on a business cases, what makes Old Town worth it in the end? Is it always going to be rationalized? Even if this is completely out of scale? I'm not interested in Edwardian vs Victorian; it is really about the height and size that towers over Old Towns principles.
 - Mainly it has to do with location and not just any location in Old Town but at the end of Government Street and acknowledgement of Centennial Square as well as Chinatown, and also how we shape the building to engage and shape a really successful public space. We think is a very important aspect of this and can contribute to Old Town.
 - Creates a new gateway public space, but it is the gesture that would have been in a 90-degree corner that existed prior to 1940's closure of Cormorant. It actually bends and marks the corner with a much bigger, bigger gesture, we actually are following the principles that created Old Town that everybody knows and loves.
 - The other point is the phenomenological part of the architecture and the urban design of this area we believe will be much more compatible than looking at an isolated dimensional difference in height. It would be very difficult to judge between a seven-storey building and a twelve-storey building unless your focusing on it and measuring it. The experiential part of our ground floor is the way it meets the ground where the entrances are. The nature of the uses of the ground floor and how those are presented to the public realm, as where this building will be.
- The policy framework the City has in place is now colliding with reality as the projects are coming in so big and they're not what we anticipated. I've also said number one, there should be a *transfer of density policy* in downtown. We must have buildings and people to make Old Town work.
- I'm speaking to the massing, density and height again, they are well outside the limits set in the community plan and I think it is important to recognize that Edwardian buildings of any significant height are really outside of the boundaries of Old Town and if anything, are located in a very small area between Government and Douglas, deserve special consideration here.
- Why are we allowing twelve storeys?
 - The program that needed to be accommodated would not fit into a massing smaller than twelve storeys, so we focused on the program and shaped it and articulated it in a way that is respectful of the context as we can and try to balance those priorities.
- Expectation that density and height have no positive argument how twelve storeys can be "ideal" in the Heritage context, its coming from an economic prerogative for the project.
- Reference to the panel material but no clarity to what it is. What is this product material that is being referred to for the exterior?
 - It is a cement based high quality product, higher density through body material so it is able to be sandblasted and given different finish textures because it is not a painted finish. We would've looked at terracotta like we used on our project at 1515 Dougals, but the majority of the cladding will be installed on those hotel room units in a factory which had a positive in terms of giving us the ability to

specify in a higher quality material than may have been looked at before.

Terracotta is quite expensive and brittle to be traveling. So, the cement is quite similar to terracotta in terms of the finish, except we have the ability to have some variability that comes from textures as well as sign of panels.

- Fiber C is the product.
- Where is it made?
 - I'm not sure.
- Proposal without merit, the proposal suggests no respect at all for Heritage guidelines, we understand economic factors are important but there are Heritage guidelines that apply to this area that we're considering, and they have been derided in almost every conversation. The proposal itself is without merit and aggrandizing.
- Do they see any merit to Heritage guidelines?
 - We have taken the question of guidelines very seriously and have tried to react, they are not proscriptive there, we are attempting to follow the principles of the standards which is not to mimic- *Standard 11*. If you do not agree you don't agree.
- *Guidelines 5.3.5* is a general alignment of floor heights, the mid cornice lines, windowsills and top edges of those adjacent Heritage buildings. Its obvious that the new proposal that first floor is actually 1 ½ times the height of the already over height first floor to the adjacent Heritage property. Wondering if you can speak to whether there was any work done to kind of mitigate this visual diminishment of the Heritage building.
 - The structural approach to floor ratio is something we could look at as we go.
- Wondering if there was any thought about a colour change or anything along the Government wall to break up the shop fronts?
 - Yes, we want to make sure that the rhythm of those bays is appropriate to the context, rather than trying to unify to of the different buildings put together.
- Question about timing, why this proposal should be allowed at this particular time, without a more fulsome review of policy. Exceptions on occasion may-be legitimate but exceptions to rules should not become the rule, there has not been many exceptions in Old Town. Sometimes we need to wait until we see the right proposals come through and as discussed, the advance of updating policy would benefit this.
 - The policy framework is what we have right now because the transfer of density policy is not going to show up tomorrow, however, if it was available, it would shift the use for sure. But the issues are broader, and your comments are correct, the problems in terms of policy changing, is economic viability still rules and so the site would remain vacant and that's not doing anything for Old Town.
- What will happen if it doesn't go ahead at twelve storeys?
 - We started on this five years ago and it was a seven-storey proposal, but it was not viable, so we had to go back to the drawing board and came up with the twelve-story proposal.
 - When we first purchased the site, it has a 4.57 FSR and I believe it was going to be an eight-storey residential development. Post fire, construction costs bloomed and same with interest rates after COVID, so we sat back and thought, what's best for us and the City? It is to see a project there and not just leave it as a vacant site, so we looked at all sorts of different construction methodology, concrete and construction was an absolute no go being about \$550 per square foot at cost so we looked to a modular construction, and we found it was about \$100 less.
 - It would not be feasible for us to only do three levels or so because we need to make it make sense from an economic standpoint.
- Concerns that there would be an exception to these rules.

- I did not see anything mentioned about the potential for archaeologically significant areas that could be disturbed.
 - The previous building has a basement so already the top level has been disturbed but it hasn't been an issue that's come up when we excavate for the deeper parkade. We have not been asked to do an archaeological assessment.
- You can make a sensitive twelve storey building within modularity which also comes with its drawbacks.
- If we keep on growing the City the pressure is going to bare on Old Town, and this panel is here to consider current policy but not what's right around the corner, our attitude needs to be based on current policy for Old Town right now.
- Agreed, that the application must be denied, not an expert on building exteriors but polymer fibre is a type of plastic. My concern is the experience of others in the buildings around would be negatively impacted by something of this height.
- Some projects need more time, I think this is a project that can wait and needs more time, we don't just have to build because its an empty slot or empty place. Our role as Heritage Panel is to make sure that requirements are imposed on the City.
- The design interrupts the Heritage landscape of the City, it really draws attention to itself, it will also increase the traffic in a part of the City which is already congested.
- Perhaps this is the wrong site for a 200-room hotel, maybe even East of Douglas or North of downtown could handle this size of a building/ hotel which would still be accessible to Old Town.
- Find some irony on the fact that the twelve story building hosting travellers would take away from there the Old Town view.

Moved: Jim Kerr (Chair)

Seconded: Valerie Lindholm

Motion: That the Heritage Advisory Panel recommend to Council that Development Permit Application No. 00269 for 603 Pandora Street does not sufficiently meet the applicable design guidelines and polices and should be declined (and that the key areas that should be revised include:)

- The general adherence to the Old Town Design Guidelines is critical to the OCP objectives of protecting and revitalizing Old Town while ensuring new infill development is compatible with existing historic buildings and streetscapes
- The proposed building size, height and massing are excessive for Old Town, and if approved would set a radical precedent for future Old Town development which would jeopardize its long-term future.
- The panel recognizes the 23.1-meter height limit as per the existing zoning and would support and/ or could support a 7-storey building.

Key areas where this proposal fails to meet include but are not limited to,

1. **Guideline 5.1.5:** Ensure the main façade height of a new building does not exceed the façade height of a directly adjacent lower scale Heritage building by more than three storeys to avoid drastic changes in scale along the street.
2. **Guideline 5.1.2:** Design new buildings to reflect the established proportions, compositions, and spatial organization of adjacent historic facades

3. **Guidelines 5.3.2:** Base, middle and top need to be distinguished and this needs to be clear. The base is clear, but the top is not, needs to be further distinguished. Needs to be more than just a material change
4. **Guideline 5.1.4:** Distinct roof line in the building design through such measures as they simplified or contemporary cornice or parapet. It needs a bit more emphasis at the top.

Carried Unanimously

6. Adjournment

Moved: Deniz Unsal

Seconded: Valerie Lindholm

Motion: That the Heritage Advisory Panel September 10th, 2024 Meeting Agenda be adjourned at 2:07pm.

Carried Unanimously