

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with information, analysis and recommendations for a Development Permit with Variances Application for the property located at 780-798 Fort Street and 1106-1126 Blanshard Street. The proposal is to construct a 20-storey hotel with office and ground floor commercial uses and to heritage designate and upgrade the existing, three-storey Montrose Apartments. The variances are related to an increase in height and a reduced side-yard setback.

The following points were considered in assessing this application:

- The application is generally consistent with the Design Guidelines referenced in DPA 2 (Heritage Conservation): Core Business, that are contained in the *Official Community Plan, 2012* (OCP). This is achieved by retaining and protecting the existing Montrose Apartments through heritage designation and a rental housing agreement and by advancing a design that shifts density to where it has the least impact, using a unique slender tower form, that minimizing shadowing and liveability impacts.
- The proposal is consistent with the vision for building towers and podiums outlined in the *Downtown Core Area Plan, 2011*, by taking height and material cues from the retained Montrose Apartments.
- The redistribution of density into height rather than into the podium, where it could block view to the landmark building, and the slender tower, together with the marginal impacts illustrated in the shadow analysis, make the proposed height variance supportable.
- The side-yard setback variance is also considered supportable given that it is relatively minor and the angled building form mitigates potential impacts.
- The proposal also advances public realm objectives to formalize and improve safety in the surrounding public pedestrian network.

BACKGROUND

Description of Proposal

This Development Permit with Variances Application is to construct a 20-storey hotel, composed of a seventeen-storey, slender tower on a three-storey podium with commercial uses. A separate building but part of the proposal is the existing Montrose Apartments to the north. A south facing, 200m² glazed atrium is proposed to anchor the south and east facing portions of the podium, and includes a ground-floor café, a retractable glass façade and significant interior planting. The new podium extends the brick and metal vocabulary of the Montrose Apartments, the horizontal rhythm of vertical pilasters, as well as the street alignment and scale of the historic building.

The proposal includes the following major design components:

- retention of the Montrose Apartments and construction of a corresponding podium wrapping around Fort and Blanshard Street
- a 17 storey, slender, tower in a 380m² floor plate above the new three-storey podium
- a 200m² three-storey, glass-enclosed, south-facing, open space with an atrium commercial area
- office uses at levels two and three

- a green roof with a small patio above the third floor
- three levels of underground parking
- 21 rental residential units within the Montrose building with retained commercial units below.

Heritage designation of the Montrose Apartments is an important part of this proposal and will be brought forward to Council via a concurrent heritage report. Other background information pertaining to this proposal can be found in the concurrent Rezoning Application report.

ANALYSIS

The analysis below focuses on the form and character of the proposal and provides an evaluation against the relevant *Official Community Plan* and *Downtown Core Area Plan* policies and design guidelines.

Official Community Plan

The *Official Community Plan, 2012* (OCP) identifies this property within DPA 2 (HC), Core Business. Objectives of this DPA, that this application advances include:

- revitalizing the central business district with a high-rise commercial building and the retention of a low rise residential mixed-use building
- conserving and enhancing the heritage value and characteristics of this area through the heritage designation of the Montrose Apartments and a considered design approach
- enhancing the area through high quality architecture, landscape and urban design while responding to its historic context.

The Development Permit Area objectives also call for development to be balanced by protecting views of heritage landmark buildings from public vantage points. St. Andrews Cathedral is located one block to the north which triggers a consideration of Heritage Landmark Radius policies.

Heritage Landmark Radius

The Heritage Landmark radius guidelines generally look to ensure that new buildings contribute to the place-making goals around heritage landmark buildings. Specific policies speak to ensuring that views are maintained to heritage landmark buildings from the public realm. A number of view studies provided in the submission package illustrate how views to the church are maintained and satisfy this specific policy.

Other attributes of the application that contribute to the place-making goals around heritage landmark buildings include:

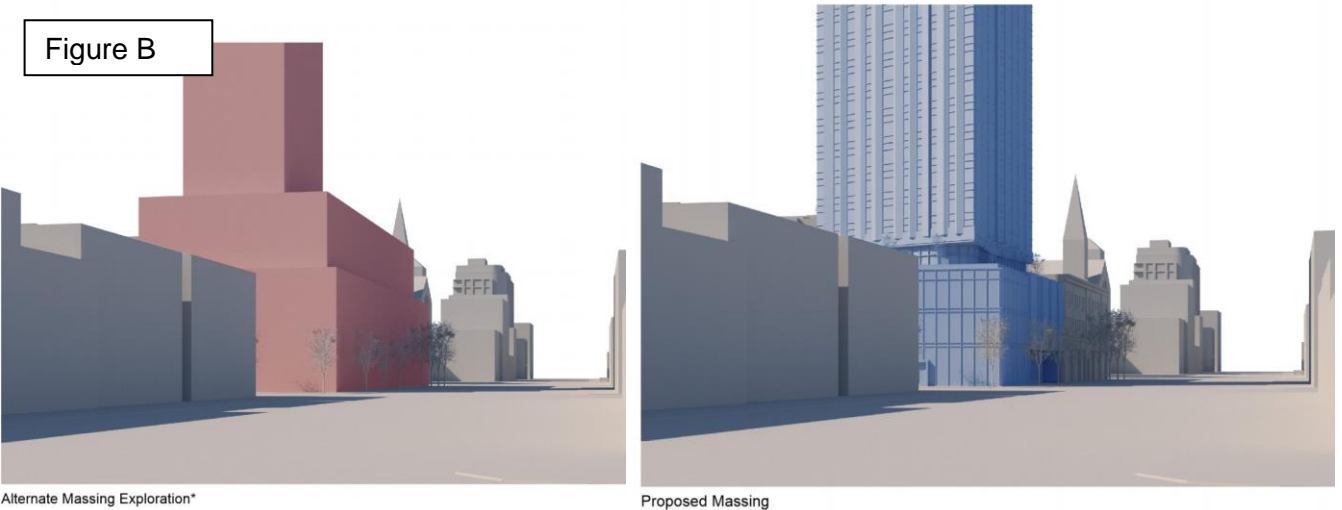
- similarly employed high quality design and architecture
- contemporary interpretations of heritage features and proportions
- a density shift away from the landmark building.

Downtown Core Area Plan

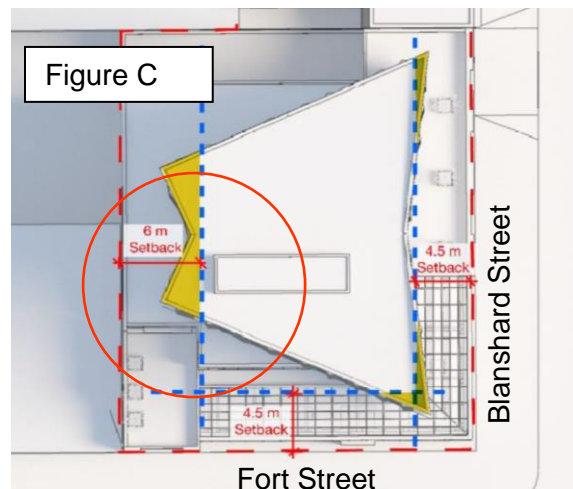
The *Downtown Core Area Plan, 2011* (DCAP) provides guidance on the overall form and character of proposals and is used to evaluate the impact and suitability of proposals for their ability to help achieve the plan's goals. Form and character considerations for this application relate to an assessment of the application's height and building setbacks at the east, west and south property lines.

In both instances, where the proposed building massing infringes into the setback-plane, the slender tower floorplate and triangular shaped floor plan mitigates concerns around bulky building forms. Additionally, given the tower location, at an intersection on the north side of Fort Street, the infringement on the east elevation does not increase shadowing and is not anticipated to have a negative visual impact. Increased shadowing is anticipated from the infringement on the south elevation, however, again, because of the tower location, the narrow floor plate and the width of Blanshard Street, these impacts are negligible.

The proposal provides a 4.5m setback above the third storey and maintains this consistent setback to the top of the building. This results in a narrower building closer to the street, directly above the podium which creates a complementary podium height to the Montrose Apartments and increases views to St. Andrew’s Church to the north. The benefits gained by reducing the height of the podium is illustrated in Figure B (below) which shows how building setbacks consistent with DCAP (shown on the left) diminish views to the church.



Portions of the proposal also infringe into the six-metre DCAP building separation guideline on its west boundary, by roughly 3m above the ninth storey (circled in Figure C below).



The intent of the building separation guideline is to ensure privacy between adjacent towers and to maximize light access between towers. In this instance, only a minor portion of the proposed tower infringes into the building separation. The angled walls also reduce direct sightlines between the proposed tower and a potential future tower, and the infringement occurs at the narrowest portion of the floor plate, further minimizing potential overlook impacts. In terms of the shadow impact, because the proposed tower is located on the south side of the block, the shadow is predominantly cast onto buildings to the north, rather than the public realm.

With the slender nature of the proposed tower, it is recognized that achieving the six-metre building separation guideline would further reduce an already very small floor plate, and likely render the project infeasible. And, while the City is revising its guidelines to increase building separation requirements, there is an acknowledged benefit to being the first tower on the block. That said, the benefits a combined site bring to the overall distribution of density, as well as the retained heritage building, in this instance, outweigh the potential risk of a narrower building separation and on that basis this discrepancy is supportable.

Advisory Design Panel

The Advisory Design Panel (ADP) reviewed this application at its meeting of January 13, 2021. Minutes from the meeting are attached, and the motion is below:

- consideration of the treatment to the Montrose building roof with some type of roofscape
- group tropical trees into larger planters for better chance of long-term survival
- consideration of a through route for pedestrians to be able to enjoy the atrium.

The applicant has agreed to address the relatively minor issues raised by the Panel and wording in the motion is provided to address aspects of these recommendations that are germane to the Development Permit Application.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposal takes a comprehensive approach to the site, facilitating the retention and heritage-designation of the Montrose Apartments while introducing a slender 20-storey tower at the corner of Fort and Blanshard Streets. The uniquely narrow tower, angled to increase views while minimizing privacy impacts, realizes the intent of the design guidelines in a novel and context sensitive way. Similarly, the proposed three-storey glazed atrium adds to the distinct character of the district, while the podium takes cues from the immediate existing context. For these reasons combined, the proposal is considered consistent with the intent of the relevant design guidelines.

Areas where the application differs from specific policy are either mitigated or improved upon through the unique design approach and a number of objectives outlined in the Development Permit Area are advanced. To that end, staff recommend the application be supported.

ALTERNATE MOTION

That Council decline Development Permit with Variances Application No. 000580 for the property located at 780-798 Fort Street & 1106-1126 Blanshard Street.

Respectfully submitted,

Miko Betanzo
Senior Planner - Urban Design
Development Services

Karen Hoese, Director
Sustainable Planning and Community
Development Department

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

- Attachment A: Subject Map
- Attachment B: Aerial Map
- Attachment C: Plans date stamped November 20, 2020
- Attachment D: Arborist Report dated November 16, 2020
- Attachment E: Letter from applicant to Mayor and Council dated January 26, 2021
- Attachment F: Community Association Land Use Committee Comments dated January 31, 2021
- Attachment G: ADP minutes and motion dated January 13, 2021
- Attachment H: Correspondence (Letters received from residents).