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**NATHAN PHILLIPS SQUARE DESIGN COMPETITION
FINDINGS
Heritage Issues Report**

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarize the heritage concerns that will be incorporated into the Competition Brief for the 2005 Nathan Phillips Square Design Competition.

The discipline of heritage conservation generally acknowledges that change is inescapable and seeks to find appropriate means to manage it. In this context, the challenge is to find the appropriate balance between the need to preserve the heritage character of Nathan Phillips Square and the new functional and technical needs that may be accommodated as the square is revitalized.¹

In an effort to make the definition of the heritage character for any given project as transparent and objective as possible, a system has been developed in Canada² that seeks to identify its heritage character, and then to identify which elements contribute to this heritage character. These aspects, which may be tangible or intangible, are then referred to as the heritage character-defining elements. The City of Toronto uses the term heritage attributes, and the two should be considered as interchangeable.

The statement of heritage character is based upon historical research, which seeks to understand how the object came to be, and how it evolved into its present state.

In the following text, we have provided a brief history of the origins of Nathan Phillips Square; the changes it has undergone; and we have integrated concerns voiced by those stakeholders interested in heritage conservation who were brought together by the City of Toronto in a “focus group” setting and in a workshop round-table.

City staff undertook the research into the original competition and the subsequent construction process. The findings have been incorporated into this text, which has been authored by Julia Gersovitz, OAA, OAQ, FRAIC. She is a partner in Fournier Gersovitz Moss + Associates, Architects, and has been engaged as a technical advisor for heritage conservation issues.

¹ The identified needs, which have been summarized elsewhere, are varied in scope and scale: sometimes concerned with appropriate street furniture; sometimes with broader issues, such as the need for a permanent stage and a better PATH connection.

² This system has been developed by the federal government and forms the basis of The Standards and Guidelines for the Historic Places in Canada, 2003

Background It is not our intention to reiterate in detail the history of the first competition. We will however highlight certain aspects that are critical to the context of the Square and in consequence, to its heritage character.

ORIGINAL COMPETITION

In September 1957, the City of Toronto launched an international design competition for its new City Hall and civic square. Competitors were exhorted to create an “atmosphere” suggesting government, democracy and community.³ (These three words continue to resonate today and are often used when people are asked about NPS. The other word that appears over and over is “dignity”.)

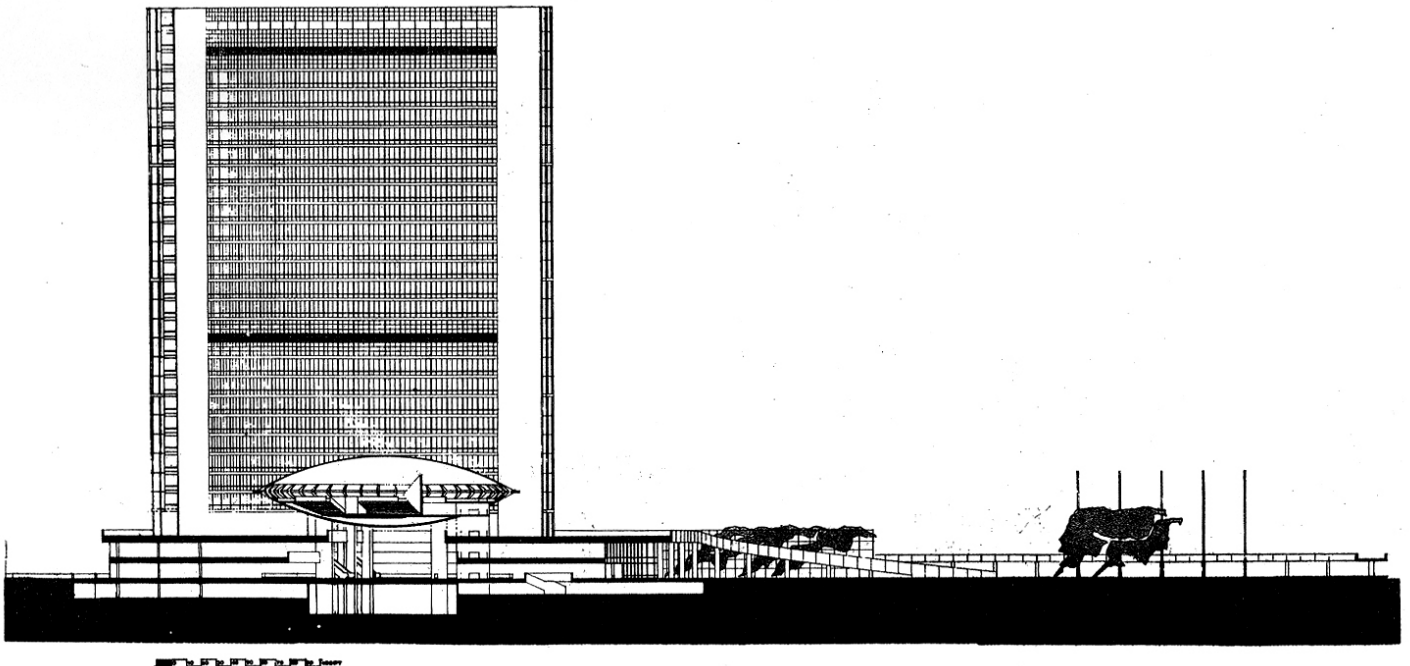
Fundamental to the competition was the square: *“Primarily, the Square will be landscaped open space of great beauty serving as a forecourt to the City Hall and as an open space for the pleasure of citizens”*

In April 1958, a distinguished jury of internationally renowned architects selected 8 finalists from 520 submissions. These 8 were then asked to present a more detailed project and in September, the jury selected the design of the Finnish architect, Viljo Revell as the winner. His scheme is described briefly by reference to its 4 component parts:

1. The Civic Square, with its pool, positioned to reflect both the Old and New City Halls;
2. The Podium, whose roof forms an upper plaza overlooking the square;
3. The Council Chamber;
4. The two Office Towers

³ [A Synopsis of the City Hall & Square Competition for Toronto Canada](#), nd. p.2

The built form was located at the northern side of the site, taking up only 3.5 acres of the 12.75 acre site. This meant that the remainder of the site could be given over to a generous square, providing the civic gathering space that was so important to the competition.⁴



4 The decision did however force the northern façade of the podium to be tight to the street edge and resulted in a bleak environment along Hagerman Street that was not lost on the jury.

A DIVIDED JURY

The decision to award was not unanimous; however the jury members were able to agree that:

(Mr. Rewell's (sic) entry is)...the most original in conception of any of those submitted. The monumental qualities are of a high order and it is a composition of great strength. Its shape is distinctive and dramatic, setting it apart from other structures in Toronto and from administrative and office buildings everywhere..."⁵

Divided as the jury was about the final choice, it was united in its reaction to Revell's design for the square. Both the majority and the minority reports made it clear that the landscaping proposal was cursory at best and while it might be "civic" in its overall gesture, it was lacking in the fine definition that would make it a pleasant place for the ordinary visitor. The following text is reprinted from the Jury Report.

The Majority Report:

The Civic Square has been carefully shaped in its broad lines and is enhanced by the enclosing arcade, which both helps give it definition and provides shelter. The pool has been well placed on the axis of the present City Hall. However, a great deal of the landscaping, trees and surface features detail must be worked out to provide the necessary human interest and it is rather unfortunate that the winner has developed this aspect so little at this stage.

The Minority Report:

The City Square, which in our opinion should hope to attract citizens of all ages in a rich and varied way, still appears in the final stage of the competition as a somewhat stark design. It could be given greater landscape interest and amenity, and a more human scale.

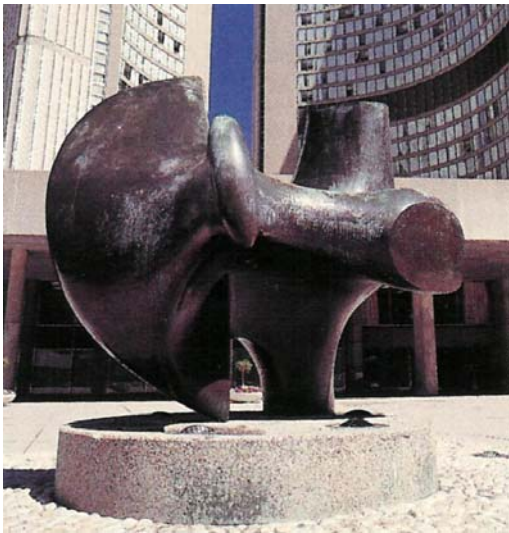
The design team was composed of Viljo Revell, assisted by his Finnish associates, in joint venture with the Toronto based firm of John B. Parkin and Associates. It had to address the jury concerns and develop the competition entry into a buildable project in a relatively short period of time.

⁵ Ibid p.4

REVELL'S UNTIMELY DEATH

As well, it had to cope with the tragic death of Revell⁶ in 1964 while the building was still under construction. This untimely passing meant that some design aspects would be resolved without Revell's guidance. It seems from correspondence by Heikki Castren, one of Revell's associates, that the landscaping details were unfinished at the time of his death.

Perhaps Revell's last decision was the selection of **The Archer**⁷ for the Square. Revell and the artist Henry Moore were friendly and the two men picked the sculpture together on a Friday afternoon. Two days later, Moore read in the newspaper of Revell's death from a heart attack. Although the sculpture was installed in 1966, a year after the official opening, it should be considered part of the original design scheme.⁸

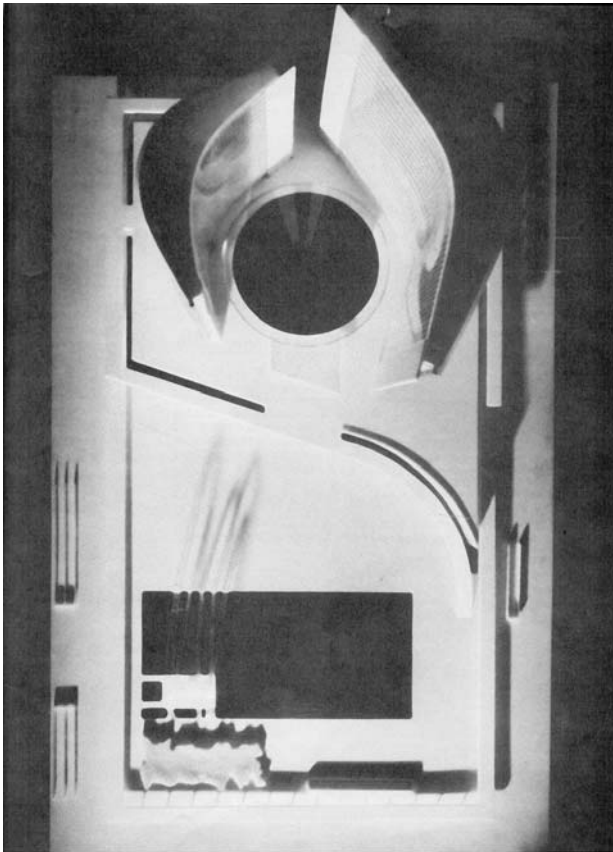


⁶ The competition brought the Finnish architect international fame; it also exposed him to the stresses of modern practice: the city councillors proved difficult clients, unwilling to pay for the type of quality that was necessary and the Canadian tax laws made it impossible for Revell to remain resident in the country.

⁷ Moore titled this sculpture *Three-Way Piece No. 2*.

⁸ It is interesting to note that it was this commission that brought Moore to Toronto and introduced him to the city. He cited it as the catalyst for his association with the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Changes during Construction



Architects Model



Post Construction Model

A comparison between the entry model (left above) and that prepared post-construction (right above) is revealing. Interestingly, despite the technical difficulties in building the concrete towers, they, the chamber, and the podium remain virtually unchanged from the original concept. However, there are noticeable differences in the landscaping components and in the extent of the walkways. As well, changes were made that, while significant, could not be revealed at the scale at which the model was built. These modifications include:

- The position of the pool, which related to the Old City Hall remained unchanged, but the pool itself was reduced in size as an economy measure;
- The treed area was dramatically increased in size and changed orientation;
- Originally, the rectangular geometry of the pool was to be interrupted by an entry pavilion to the garage. In its stead, the present skating pavilion was built, with a 90° change in orientation, isolated from the water's edge and more associated with the adjacent treed area;
- The arches that were said to recall the form of the towers, were reduced in number to three and relocated nearer to Bay Street;
- The walkway along Queen Street was pushed north from the edge of the road, to create a garden space and the walkways in general were not completed. (For a more detailed discussion of the walkways, see "The Elevated Walkways, page 13);
- Revell's suggestion that a restaurant be designed on the Podium was not acted upon;
- The boundaries of the Square itself were modified.

The Boundaries of the Square

The present Square extends from Bay Street (east) to Osgoode Hall/former Armouries (west) and from Hagerman Street (north) to Queen Street (south). These boundaries are different than those originally defined for the 1958 Competition and early correspondence indicates that they were in flux even after work started on the project: In 1959,

"Mr. John C. Parkin requested that within one week the Architect be given an absolutely firm definition of the North and West unalterable limits of the Civic Square, the South and East limits being clearly fixed in principle, now, by the defined limits of Queen and Bay." (Interview Report, April 2, 1959)

Western Boundary: Internal documents reveal that the inclusion or exclusion of Chestnut Street was still unresolved during the early 1960s. It was excluded from the Architects' mandate⁹, while debates continued on whether or not the street should be open or closed to traffic. (At the time of the competition, it was still a through street.) Finally, the street was closed and the present lane created in order to provide a western access road.

Northern Boundary: Although Hagerman Street has always been the northern boundary of the site, its width was an issue. The final dimension resulted in a loss of Revell's pedestrian arcade under the podium.

Eastern Boundary: Bay Street has always defined the eastern edge of the Square.

Southern Boundary: Queen Street was widened and the walkway moved north. This action resulted in the creation of a strip of green space that is somewhat marooned from the Square.

Despite these changes, Revell's design met with enormous critical and popular acclaim. Lester B. Pearson's words, "as modern as the day after tomorrow", which he pronounced on Opening Day still ring true after 40 years.

⁹ Recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Civic Square Design, Board of Control Report 30, November 1963.

Unfinished Business

The Podium Roof: Soon after the complex opened, the City Council began to tackle the issue of the podium roof. In the fall of 1966, The Art Advisory Committee-New City Hall recommended retaining a person or firm to prepare a 5-year master plan for the Podium Roof. The report of The Board of Control noted:

“Undoubtedly in the design architect’s conception of the pedestrian roof area of City Hall Podium, some type of furnishings or embellishments were contemplated to make this an attractive, interesting area that would induce the public to visit and utilize it extensively.

The plans, however, do not indicate what was in the mind of the designer and this is the way the matter stands at present. Obviously, it cannot be left in this incomplete state and some serious thought should be given to providing what is necessary to change this otherwise barren area to create a pleasant part of City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square.”

John B. Parkin was also consulted. His solution to the podium roof was a global one, in that he saw it as being linked to the walkways, both of which he claimed had been left incomplete for cost reasons. In November 1970, he wrote, in a letter to the Toronto Executive Committee:

“As it exists, the roof of the podium stands in virtual isolation...it would be folly to connect certain elements of the City Hall complex without dealing with the whole problem of design and functionality.”

“At the risk of repetition, I would like to further add that in my opinion, the raised walkway between City Hall podium roof and Holiday Inn will have little or no particular value unless the West Colonnade surrounding the Nathan Phillips Square is extended to join the podium roof and stairs provided therein as part of the existing structure and not an appendage thereof.”

However, nothing came out of the correspondence.

The attention of the councillors may have finally been focused on the roof by the problem of leakage on the 158,000 square foot surface. By 1972 the problem was declared fixed and the

next year the Committee on Parks, Recreation and City Property decided to investigate the possibility of

“...providing structures on the New City Hall Podium Roof, such as a licensed outdoor café, other structures and recreation areas, and the provision of windbreaks, such as baffles or plantings to enable more public use to be made of this downtown core area...”

This time, Heikki Castren, a Finnish architect and associate of Revell was consulted. He responded enthusiastically by letter on March 24, 1972:

“...It is necessary to study the Roof as a fifth facade of this building. The roof can be looked at from the City Hall Towers and from some of the major outlook points of the city skyscrapers...”

Whatever new items are planned their scale and proportion to the City Hall Twin Towers are very important. Therefore, these improvements should not be too small. In practice, this means that an overall system of semi-open general structure would make sense

Under some sort of a horizontal louver or grille of, say, prefab concrete beams covering larger areas of the Roof, many different types of smaller things could be placed without disturbing the relation to the towers.

I could see service areas of open air cafes, newspaper stands, souvenir stands, flower shops vanishing under a louver such as this... (with) glass shielding walls....

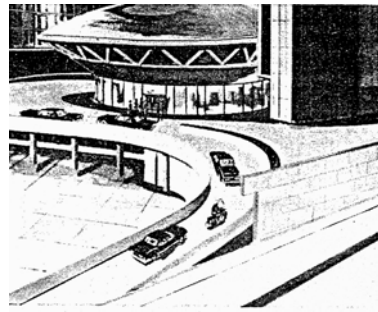
I would like to point out that some permanent part of these arrangements should stay on the Roof during the winter months.

I hope that this basic idea, which, as far as I can understand, quite well would have been appreciated by the late Mr. Revell, could also find some understanding by the representatives of the City of Toronto. .”

In 1973, Jack Diamond, of Diamond and Myers was also consulted, as was John B. Parkin and Associates. Both responded positively. Parkin submitted a drawing that shows an elaborate system of shading devices to be installed in a regular pattern on the roof. . The idea of another competition, targeting only the roof, was initiated, but finally set aside.

As time went by, certain of the original design elements fell out of favour. Originally the east ramp provided a ceremonial means for cars to drop off visiting dignitaries at the “front door” of the Council Chamber. This function has fallen into disuse.

Certain experiments to animate the roof, including a “green roof” project were initiated. Today, however, the Podium Roof remains largely unused; its full potential unexploited.



Revell's original design for the Ceremonial entrance

The Elevated Walkways: It seems clear that the walkways were important elements of Revell's design. They helped to define the Square; they provided a means of framing certain views; they provided shelter from the rain and sun; they provided easy pedestrian and vehicular access to the Podium Roof and finally, they allowed for an upper level view of the activity on the Square below. Initially, as well they were to connect to the (now abandoned) +15-System.

In keeping with their importance, they were to have been furnished with benches and possibly gardens.



Budgetary concerns meant that the elevated walkways were not completed as originally envisioned, neither in their extent, nor in their amenities. The abandonment of the +15 *System* meant that the connection to the Sheraton Hotel was meaningless; it is now closed. The southern walkway, along Queen Street, was relocated from its original placement, so that a sort of no-man's land exists between the road and the Square. The western walkway was truncated and today, its completion would compromise the fire truck access onto the Square.

This being acknowledged, it is still important to maintain the walkways. Efforts should be made to reanimate them and permit their reintegration into the overall design. Consideration should be given to completing them, so that there is an easier flow to and from the Podium Roof.

Additions Other modifications to the square did happen over the next twenty years, largely for symbolic and commemorative reasons. A number of sculptural elements have been added, starting with The Archer.

It should be noted that the placement of The Archer, if not selected by Moore himself, was pronounced by him to be “satisfactory”, in large measure because it allowed the sculpture to be viewed from all angles. Therefore, it should remain in its present location. The other pieces are less specifically linked to their sites, and might be relocated in the redesign. These include, in chronological order:



The Roman Column

Presented in 1957 as a token of good will and friendship by the citizens of Rome to the citizens of Toronto. It was installed in the square in 1967.

It could be relocated.



Sundial

Presented in 1969 to the citizens of Toronto in appreciation of Nathan Phillips and selected by him as a gift that he gave back to the city, it was later relocated to the Peace Garden.

Given its relationship to Nathan Phillips, the Sundial should remain in the square. However, it is not absolutely linked to the Peace Garden and could be relocated separately from the Peace Garden.



Sir Winston Churchill

The statue of Sir Winston Churchill is the work of Oscar Nemon. In 1977, it was installed in the southwest corner of the Square, behind the **Speaker’s Podium**.

It could be relocated.



Freedom Arches

The arches over the reflecting pond/ice rink were officially named "Freedom Arches" in 1989. A piece of the Berlin Wall lies at the base of the centre freedom arch on the south side. There is a plaque embedded in the piece.

The arches are a fundamental element of the original design and should remain in-situ.



Peace Garden

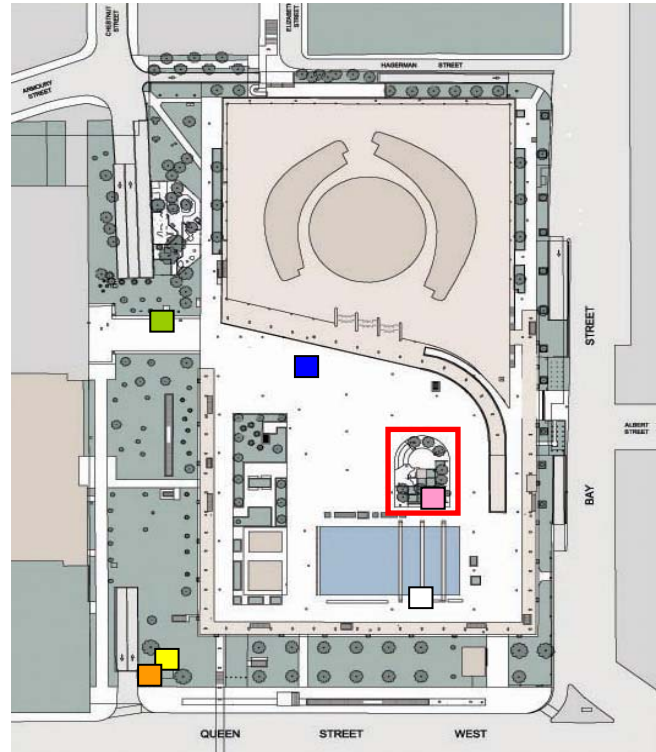
Located in the middle of the Square, the Peace Garden was designed to honour the commitment of Torontonians to the principle of world peace. It was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II and Pierre-Elliott Trudeau in 1984. That same year, it was blessed by Pope John-Paul II.

The Garden is undeniably an "oasis" in the Square. However, its design aesthetic is at odds with the rest of the Square. Its present location often interferes with events in the Square, and equally the events are at odds with the contemplative nature of the Garden. Its relocation is recommended.

The Daycare play apparatus, in the northwest corner of the Square, near Hagerman Street is a recent addition. It is used by the public and by the Hester How Daycare Centre and should be retained, although it can be relocated.

KEY PLAN SHOWING ADDITIONS TO THE SQUARE + THE LOCATION OF THE ARCHER

- The Archer
- Freedom Arches and Berlin Wall fragment
- Winston Churchill Sculpture
- Speaker's Podium
- Roman Column
- Sundial
- Peace Garden



Heritage Designation: Toronto City Hall was designated in 1991 for architectural and historical reasons under the Provisions of the *Ontario Heritage Act* (By-law No. 147-91). The property covered by the designation by-law extends from the east face of Osgoode Hall to the west side of Bay Street, and from the north side of Queen Street to the south side of Hagerman Street.

The heritage attributes described in the designation by-law that are exterior to the City Hall building and within the open space defined as part of this design competition are the following:

- the podium roof and ceremonial ramp leading to it from Nathan Phillip Square;
- the ceremonial ramp leading from the east side of Nathan Phillips Square to the podium roof
- the colonnaded, elevated walkways around the west, south and east edges of Nathan Phillips Square, which defined the boundaries of the Square;
- reflecting pool with three concrete arches and fountains
- two-flat roofed service buildings on the west side of Nathan Phillips Square
- “The Archer” by sculptor Henry Moore located outside of the main (south) entrance doors
- the Peace Garden
- low-level plantings along the Queen Street West edge of Nathan Phillips Square

Any proposed alterations affecting the heritage attributes (exterior, interior and contextual) described in the reasons for designation require City Council approval, following consultation with the Toronto Preservation Board (the City’s Municipal Heritage Committee). Competitors should be required to demonstrate any proposed changes that might affect the heritage attributes would not compromise the integrity of the original design.

Conclusion: The following conclusions have been developed from the study of the history and evolution of the Square, as set out above and from the discussions in the focus group and workshops.

The 1991 bylaw designating Toronto City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square sets out the elements that can be deemed to contribute to the heritage character of the place. These have been listed on page 17 of this report. It is important to note that these elements are all “tangible”. It might therefore be useful to consider what “intangible” elements contribute to the heritage character as well, so that the competition entrants can consider them.

They are, in no particular order:

- Principles of Scandinavian Modernism, which favour clean, bold compositions and gestures
- Legibility of Function as a Design Generator
- Highly Refined Craftsmanship
- The Use of Appropriate, Durable Materials; All new work should follow the same high standards. “Do less if you have to, but do what you do well”.
- Porosity of the Site: there are no axial entrances into the Square; it can be approached from a myriad of directions and access points. There is something inherently “democratic” in this porosity, since it implies a lack of hierarchy.
- Related to the porosity is the notion that the margins of the Square are very important components of its design. It is essential that the connections to the city and the approaches to the square be made as easy and simple as possible. As well, the relationship of the building edge to the Square should be considered;
- A Sense of Dignity

A NUANCED APPROACH

It seems certain that one specific intervention (restoration, renovation, rehabilitation, etc) will not satisfy the complex functional and technical programme that lies at the heart of rehabilitating Nathan Phillips Square. A nuanced approach is favoured that will respond to the singular character and history of the main components of City Hall and the Square. In this scenario, different areas of the square would be subject to different types of interventions, depending on their heritage values. For example, one strategy -of which there are many variants - might be to:

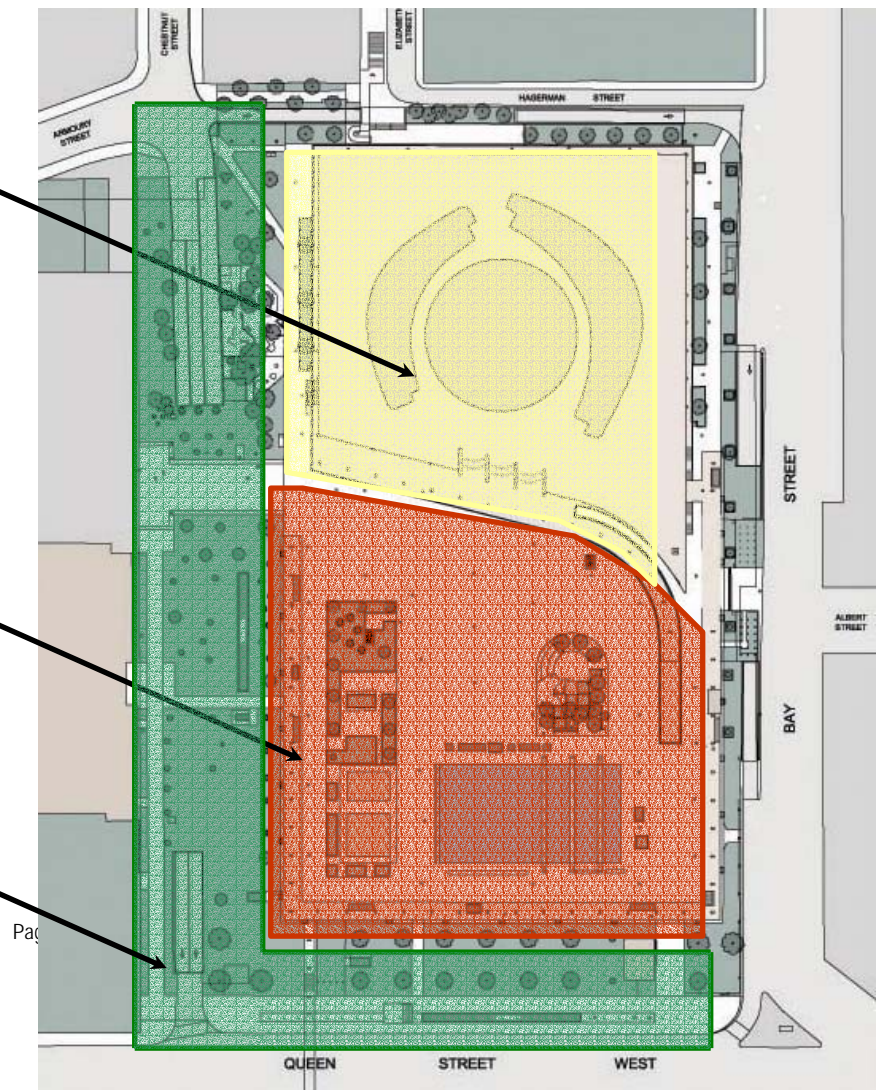
1. *Restore* the legibility of the square
2. *Revitalize* the podium by encouraging major change and new functions
3. *Focus new ideas* on the L-shaped band that lies outside of the walkways.

(Note that the colour blocks are gestural only, and are not meant to represent fixed boundaries.)

ENHANCE AND EXTEND

RESTORE

DESIGN ANEW



There are elements, designated or not, that should be reconsidered. These include:

- **The skating pavilion** (the physical construction, not the use nor location);
- The placement of many of **the sculptures**, which have been added to the Square;
- **The Peace Garden**, which is too complicated in its design aesthetic to co-exist with the purity of the rest of the composition;
- **The podium roof**
- **The elevated walkways**, which are important features of the original design, but which now need a lot of attention and some fundamental rethinking.

It may seem controversial to state that a *designated element* can be changed. After all, the act of designation acknowledges that something is important and worthy of conservation. However, a designation can be challenged if new interpretation brings a shading or greater understanding of an element's contributing value.

For example, as noted above, the skating pavilion is designated. However, recent research has brought to light the fact that the pavilion was not part of Revell's original design. This coincides with the fact that the pavilion is not built to the same design or construction standards as the rest of the Square. It was a later programmatic addition. For a very long time, its use has been linked to an essential public activity in the Square – ice skating. This activity would be compromised if the pavilion were removed. Therefore, one can argue that it is its function that contributes to the heritage character of the Square, and not its architecture – hence the conclusion that it can be rebuilt.

By its nature, a revitalization project must reconcile the heritage needs of the property under consideration with the new functional and technical needs that its users bring forward. Not all the needs may end up being accommodated; however the successful project will be one that accomplishes an admirable and convincing balance.

+ + +