CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL
MINUTES: MEETING 5 – May 9, 2019

The Design Review Panel met on Thursday May 9, 2019, in Committee Room 2, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, Toronto, at 12:00pm.

Members of the Design Review Panel

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<td><strong>Dima Cook</strong></td>
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Design Review Panel Coordinator
Meredith Vaga: Urban Design, City Planning Division

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES
The Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting which was held on April 12, 2019 by email.

MEETING 5 INDEX
i. Retail Best Practices (1st Review)
ii. 5425 Dundas Street West (1st Review)
**Introduction**
City staff outlined the project history, existing and future context, and planning framework. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. Could the Panel identify and share successful examples of local and international retail buildings/districts/manuals that would be relevant and useful for our team to know about?

2. Are there other "elements" that should be included in the Manual's Draft Table of Contents?

3. As this is not a typical guidelines document, what recommendations would the Panel Members provide to ensure the Manual is used, conveyed and shared most effectively with stakeholders (e.g., developers, architects, planners etc.)?

**Chair's Summary of Key Points**
The Panel would like to thank the proponent team for their timely focus on a complex and challenging use that is such a critical element in many projects that have come before the Panel. The Best Practices Manual has considerable potential to elevate the quality of retail (and in turn the public realm) in Toronto, and further work in the following areas is encouraged:

**Response to Context (including local character and heritage)**

- See Comments to City.
- Focus efforts on addressing retail for the following context in the City:
  - **Starter Streets**
    - Streets that are new or existing ones that are just transitioning supporting a retail environment.
  - **Established Streets**
    - Streets that have moved beyond Starter status and beginning to achieve retail environment momentum.
  - **Mature Streets**
    - Streets that are long-standing, recognized retail environments.
- Include case studies (in Toronto and elsewhere) that highlight examples of the types of context outlined above.
• In terms of graphics precedents look to recent existing City of Toronto booklets; which offer a clear, concise and informative format.
• Define and highlight examples of "great retail in Toronto" context that can serve as exemplars.
• Identify how to achieve and enable non-traditional "entrepreneurial retail".

Site Plan Design

• Include guidance regarding:
  o Full spectrum of retail scale and type; from mom/pop up to big chain anchor store.
  o How to ensure an animated, active street level.
• Address retail servicing best practices.
• Emphasize provision of flexible/agile space that is easily convertible to multiple uses.

Pedestrian Realm

• Focus on synergistic relationship between retail and the public realm.

Built Form (Massing, Height, Articulation, Heritage Conservation)

• See Site Plan Design.

Landscape Strategy

• Include focus on synergistic relationship between retail and landscape (including street scape).

Sustainable Design

• Identify sustainable strategies that are relevant to achieving successful retail environments.

Comments to the City

• The DRP's archive of projects could be an excellent source for precedents and case studies.

Panel Commentary

The Panel thanked the study team for their presentation. The members thought the topic was very worthy of study and many Panelists were glad the work was being undertaken. Some members noted that retail was an important, challenging issue that spoke to the evolution of the grade level of cities. The Panel was interested in seeing how the work would develop.

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)

Address Retail in More Specific Contexts

The Panel advised addressing retail in more specific contexts. Many members felt that if the future document was limited in scope to just built form thinking it would be an incomplete manual.

Several members suggested, particularly when dealing with larger typologies, looking at retail in context of scale. Many members thought the retail response should be driven by the local retail context including:

- starter streets with no pre-existing retail context
- streets that are in the process of being filled in and established
- established or mature streets
- opportunities to take advantage of laneways and nooks

Future of Brick & Mortar Retail
Many members commented that achieving good retail is a "mind numbingly difficult" and "fragile" endeavor, with one member noting that succeeding is "magic" or "alchemy".

The Panel advised looking more at how to achieve successful retail spaces given the potential future of retail. These included the idea that retail both facilitates making purchases and can provide an experience in a brick and mortar store people want to go to.

The Panel wondered how physical retail spaces could become a locus of experience and what that would mean for retail in general. A few members noted that some retail leaders are already embracing the next round of retail development.

**Look At Strategies for Successful Non-Traditional Retail**

The Panel thought the document should look at strategies for successful non-traditional retail including maintaining and supporting entrepreneurship and businesses that are not part of a developer team.

**Graphic Precedents**

Many members suggested looking at City of Toronto Urban Design documents for graphic precedents. The Tall Buildings Guidelines and Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study were both suggested as having "pretty terrific graphics" that are able to distill content a get ideas across successfully.

Some members commented that having precedent documents was very important.

**Include Case Studies**

Some Panel members felt there were issues with the way the case study section had been approached. These members noted the success of documents that started off very loose and then later were formalized and made statutory. They wondered if a best practices model could follow a similar route.

Looking at case studies from other cities, members variously mentioned Paris, Copenhagen, as well as suggested looking at examples of different building typologies other than towers. The Panel recommended having examples where things were not successful as well.

**Local Examples**

The Panel shared many local examples of successful retail. By and large the members felt the standout areas were the exceptions. Several members noted that the ambition helped define retail in Toronto.

Many members felt a strength of Toronto was that is a plural society with plural retail. Some specific places mentioned included:

- Union Station
- Box Park Container (noted to have defied many formulaic models for success)
- Distillery District (huge heritage framework is an asset underlying the success)
- Queen West and other areas that have grown organically
- The initial retail start for the West Donlands, especially the Canary District
- Yorkdale Mall
- Various projects that have come before the Panel (East Harbour, Golden Mile etc)

**Heritage Retail Fabric**

A few members noted that the good retail experiences mentioned were primarily not in new builds. A Panel member pointed out that the 19th century city fabric has a very strong, fine grained scale. They felt that currently development blocks are being implemented very quickly and there was a need to be mindful of the impacts. They felt this new model was creating some of the retail issues.
Site Plan Design

Develop Guidance for Different Scales & Types
Several Panel members pointed out that retail cannot exist everywhere and that all ground floors are not equal. Toronto's east west main streets such as Gerrard St were noted as an example of an established street that was not exclusively retail.

The Panel advised that there would not be one "elixir" to achieving successful retail and suggested developing guidance for the different retail scales and types as well as different locations in the city.

Speaking to scale, one member wondered whether there was a way to strategically accent smaller retail to respond to the increased families living in condos. Other members pointed out that while it should not be a prescriptive document, there are some prescriptive measures guiding such things as successful signage or lighting.

Site Plan Challenges
Some members felt that a larger question was the overall approach to main streets and the tendency for developers/the City to put active frontages and retail everywhere. Other members noted that many site plan considerations, such as how many retail doors are incorporated on the ground floor can be a generic design solution in the service of selling units above.

Economic Factors
The Panel thought that the future manual needed to key into other economic issues. Some members felt that, while still important, the physical or built elements contribute to about ≤20% of the success of retail. These members thought economic elements along with such factors as timing, market and location contributed a great deal to the viability of retail.

Some members suggested developing the document with the precedents, framework etc. and then folding in other documents that looks at economic factors. Several members pointed out that retail is market driven and that developers want to lease retail space that will be successful.

Consult Further with Industry
The Panel advised speaking with residential and commercial developers as well as "visionary" developers who are interested in "good retail" to understand their modus operandi. A few members noted that large retailers know what they want for their spaces, such as regarding column grids etc. One member felt there should be an incentive to putting in smaller retail. Another member pointed out that the basement retail entrances in the Mirvish buildings allowed for different retail occupancies because the rent was lower.

Public Realm Animation
The Panel felt the document should reinforce important urban design issues that relate to retail at grade and the character of the street. The members thought that ensuring animation of the public realm was crucial. Many members noted that location, continuity and accessibility were important metrics for the success of at-grade retail.

Several members felt that one of the major retail improvements was the concept of a double entrance, particularly street related front doors. Many members felt that these elements that would improve the public realm were what should form any future guidelines.

Retail Servicing
Many members pointed out that one of the issues of a lot of retail in the city is the servicing. These members felt it should be addressed in the document, including through the provision of precedents showing successful retail servicing.
Flexible Space
The Panel advised that successful retail spaces required flexibility and adaptability. They felt the need for flexibility for future proofing and resiliency was important. The members pointed to the radical changes for retail that are taking place.

A member noted that the Design Research (or D/R) store in Cambridge, Massachusetts by Ben Thompson has been repurposed for retail several times. Many members felt that the document should avoid an overly prescriptive zoning approach.

Adaptability
Looking at adaptability, the Panel was interested in community use, retail, commercial, residential and live/work use. They wondered how these different uses would practically work. The Panel felt that delivering good buildings with robust retail spaces would mean the buildings can become future heritage in the city.

Pedestrian Realm
The Panel felt that the meeting point between retail and the public realm was very important and should not be forgotten. Several members commented that there was a sense that this connection had been neglected, particularly in how sidewalks have become ancillary and in the way the building meets the public realm.

Landscape Strategy
Many members commented that retail is heavily impacted by landscape design. They felt the document should focus on the potential of this connection.

Sustainable Design
The Panel advised that sustainability strategies needed to be a part of retail design. Many members felt the notion of diversity and resiliency with respect to retail was interesting and the Panel felt they seemed central to the document.
Introduction
City staff outlined the project history, existing and future context, and planning framework. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

Response to Context:
1. Contribution to the planned context of Etobicoke Centre and proposed design response to the western gateway location, as well as public views from Dundas St. W. resulting from the creation of a new public street connection and two new public parks.

Built Form Massing, Height & Articulation:
2. The overall composition of tall buildings, proposed tower forms, sustainable design considerations and contribution to the skyline character of Etobicoke Centre.

Landscape Strategy and Sustainable Design:
3. Proposed design response to significant changes in grade, pedestrian level wind conditions, potential POPS and public art locations and green infrastructure opportunities.

Chair's Summary of Key Points
The Panel would like to thank the proponent team for their submission. With the increase in density and resulting built form, creating a superior, high-quality living environment becomes even more essential. With this in mind further development is needed in the following areas:

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)
- See Site Plan Design.
- Response to proposed new public parks needs adjustment to ensure a high-quality public amenity.
- Elevate design to match quality and vitality of context shown in precedents presented.

Site Plan Design
- For a large-scale, complex project of this kind a highly schematic 1:1500 drawing does not provide sufficient information for review. Please provide a more detailed site plan.
- Adjust towers to reduce shadowing of proposed new public parks.
- Maximize contiguous new public park space; shifting public road to achieve this.
• Given southerly exposure increase emphasis on green amenity along south side of site.
• Shift loading/servicing to edges of site wherever possible, to improve quality of pedestrian realm.
• Provide a more detailed response to the relationship between the at-grade apartments and their immediate context; including details to illustrate the varying responses to the changing conditions.

Pedestrian Realm
• See Site Plan Design.

Built Form (Massing, Height, Articulation, Heritage Conservation)
• Stagger towers and adjust tower heights to reduce shadow cast on proposed new public parks while creating more visual variety.
• Develop strategy of varied design character for towers and street buildings to eliminate current visual sameness.
• Provide more 3-bedroom units than currently proposed.

Landscape Strategy
• Develop landscape concept to equal precedents shown in presentation.

Sustainable Design
• Given size of proposed development provide a comprehensive whole-site sustainability strategy.

Comments to the City
• Encourage all proponent teams to include the broader surrounding existing and future context in their submissions.
• Consider reviewing the tall building guidelines, relative to the increasing size and scale of development being experienced in the city.

Panel Commentary
The Panel thanked the design team for their presentation. While some members felt there were thoughtful aspects to the proposal, the Panel strongly advised the design team to further develop the design response. The Panel looked forward to seeing the evolution of the project.

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)

Elevate Design to Better Respond to Context
Several members felt the design team should take more inspiration from the precedents shown in the drawing package. The Panel thought the site was a great opportunity to transform a vehicular road in the city, and many members felt the project should contribute towards humanizing the experience of the area.

The members were concerned that the initial design response was to stamp the same tower type across the site and advised looking further both the proposed density and surrounding context.

Need a Context Plan
The Panel wanted to see diagrams showing the surrounding context as well as the existing, proposed and approved development in the area. The Panel noted that a context plan was crucial. Many members felt that in some ways the proposal had too much detail, while in other ways the project was underdeveloped. The Panel noted that it was not possible to develop the design at such a schematic scale.
Character of Place
While they acknowledged all the work and history that has gone into the project to date, the Panel felt that the proposal needed an idea of how to make the development more of a complete community.

Several members noted that towers surrounding a park could be a strong idea that could both infuse the place with a clear identity as well as provide an amenity that the future residents would be able to enjoy.

Site Plan Design

Develop Project at More Detailed Scale
The Panel noted that there was a very low level of detail in the project at all scales. Many members pointed out that at a 1:1500 scale it was very difficult to see the commitment to public space. These members wanted to see stronger evidence of the commitment to the public realm at a variety of scales to understand whether the ask vs improvement to the city was adequately represented.

Adjust Towers to Reduce Shadow Impact
The Panel noted that the towers had a large shadow impact on the new park. The members variously suggesting adjusting the tower heights to allow for more sunlight on the park.

Some members recommended keeping the taller towers to the east and reducing the height of the other towers. Other members additionally suggested removing Tower 3B, noting that together this would also relieve some of the visual density.

Location of Road Network
The Panel thought the decision to convert the internal road to a public road was promising. Many members noted that the public road should include bike lanes. The Panel did not think it made sense to bisect the neighbourhood park with a 27 m road ROW. The Panel suggested looking at the road placement again in order to maintain a larger contiguous park, and reconsider the road width to be more compact and easier to cross.

Servicing & Loading
Some members felt that the eastern side of the site was doing a good job of orienting the vehicular and loading to the site. A few members suggested pushing the loading to the edge of the site rather than in the center.

Amount of Retail
Some members questioned whether that much retail was needed at the base of the building, or whether it would be viable.

Maximize Continuous Green Space
The Panel advised maximizing continuous green space. Several members noted that an over dedication of green space could help with the "big ask" of the proposal. Some Members suggested reducing some of the retail to make an "amazing" green pocket.

Built Form (Massing, Height, Articulation and Heritage Conservation)

Built Form Massing & Articulation
The Panel felt there was a sameness between the buildings and across the architecture and materiality. Several members thought it felt like the buildings were just aggregations of the guidelines. The Panel encouraged more variety and heart as the proposal develops.

Amount of Towers & Tower Height
Several members, commenting on the "sameness" and "relentlessness" of the towers, suggested there could also be further differentiation between the heights of the towers. The Panel pointed out there was no hierarchy or distinctions in the proposal. Many members also felt the amount of towers felt too crowded and suggested reducing the towers by one.

**Tower Placement**
The Panel advised offsetting the towers and corresponding setbacks to have relief and provide different suite options. Many members noted that the current design felt like the towers had been stamped in a row, and suggested that staggering the towers would alleviate shadow issues and help establish a visual hierarchy.

**Increase Variety of Unit Sizes**
Several Panel members were concerned that less than 1% of the units proposed had 3 bedrooms, calling it "unbalanced". Some members felt that the large shallow plates would work well with larger units. The Panel encouraged a better mix of unit types to better serve a variety of demographics including families.

**Ensure All Units Have Daylight**
Some members noted that the units in the base would have issues getting daylight and the Panel advised planning to allow access to daylight in all of the units throughout the proposal.

**Landscape Strategy**

**Park as Heart of Development**
Several Panel members commented that the park was at the heart of the development. While they acknowledged the intersection was fixed, the Panel was concerned by how small the proposed park was. The members noted there would be "real value" in trying a different arrangement to allow for one larger park.

The Panel variously suggested pushing the park to either the east or the west. Some members pointed out that the road didn't have to be the view corridor, and that the best thing is to deliver a great park amenity to the families who could be living here.

**Green Corridor**
The Panel thought the green corridor at the rear of the site had huge potential. They suggested connecting to the north as well as looking at possible expansions to the corridor. Some members were reminded of the railways lands and Concord Apex development.

Many members were excited about the idea of developing a safe, park full of amenities where you wouldn't need to cross a street. Some members advised thinking about girls who are often underrepresented in parks.

**Windscreens**
Some members questioned the windscreens shown. They wondered whether a natural solution would be more appropriate, for instance groves of pine trees.

**Sustainable Design**
Several members pointed out that not much had been done regarding the Toronto Green Standards, including on energy, multi-modal transit and wind effects. The Panel felt that especially with a proposal for a development of this scale, there needed to be some kind of ambition with respect to sustainable design and strategies.