CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL
MINUTES: MEETING 10 – October 10, 2019

The Design Review Panel met on Thursday October 10, 2019, in Committee Room 2, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, Toronto, at 2:20pm.

Members of the Design Review Panel

Gordon Stratford (Chair): Principal – G C Stratford – Architect
Michael Leckman (Vice Chair): Principal – Diamond Schmitt Architects
Carl Blanchaer: Principal – WZMH Architects
Dima Cook: Director – EVOQ Architecture
George Dark: Design Partner – Urban Strategies
Ralph Giannone: Principal – Giannone Petricone Associates
Jim Gough: Department Manager, Transportation Planning – WSP
Meg Graham: Principal – superkül
Jessica Hutcheon: Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio
Viktors Jaunkalns: Partner – Maclennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects
Joe Lobko: Partner – DTAH
Jim Melvin: Principal – PMA Landscape Architects Ltd.
Adam Nicklin: Principal – PUBLIC WORK
Juhee Oh: Director, Sustainability & Energy – WSP
Heather Rolleston: Principal, Design Director – Quadrangle Architects
David Sisam: Principal – Montgomery Sisam Architects
Sibylle von Knobloch: Principal – NAK Design Group

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 September 19, 2019 by email.

MEETING 10 INDEX
i. 777 Victoria Park Avenue – Housing Now Initiative (1st Review)
ii. 50 Wilson Heights Boulevard – Housing Now Initiative (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:

As we advance from City-initiated zoning by-law amendments to site plan applications for each site, what advice does the Panel have to ensure high quality of development and the integration of affordable housing and market housing? How can the City set expectations and provide clear direction for the developer partners while enabling flexibility and design excellence?

1. Site Plan Design
   What design features or refinements to the site plan could be used to ensure the proposed development sits comfortable on the constrained site?

2. Pedestrian Realm
   Are there further refinements to pursue to ensure the proposal better integrates with the surrounding community and provides highest quality of design?

3. Built Form Massing, Height & Articulation
   What are the opportunities to ensure the built form appropriately responds to the context and effectively integrates affordable housing and marketing housing?

Chair's Summary of Key Points
The Panel appreciates the efforts of the proponent team towards this submission, especially given the fast track schedule the team is working within. The Housing Now Initiative is vital in tackling the challenge of providing more affordable housing in the City of Toronto. The development proposed in this submission presents the opportunity to be an exemplar for how the Initiative can unlock the potential of City-owned land adjacent to a public transit hub and major green space, and provide a vibrant new community to live in.

The proposed design shows a strong start, but in order to fully realize its potential the following aspects of this project need further work:

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)
- Provide more information in the submission regarding surrounding exist and future context; including strategy of how future context will be anticipated (and driven) by the proposed design.
- Outline strategy for proposed relation to surrounding existing open space context.

**Site Plan Design**
- Minimize vehicular circulation footprint and maximize quantity, quality and variety of outdoor amenity; including ensuring forecourt is primarily a pedestrian and green focused area.
- Provide a larger scale site plan in future submissions.
- If street level green space along the west side of Building B is intended to be outdoor space for a daycare mitigate noise and sight of busy Victoria Park Avenue to ensure a high quality outdoor space appropriate for daycare activities.

**Pedestrian Realm**
- Ensure pedestrian visibility and safety at TTC driveways and development's service/parking driveway.

**Built Form (Massing, Height, Articulation, Heritage Conservation)**
- Encourage different building typologies to help achieve design excellence within the business case.
- Consider increasing density (through adding height to the tallest portions of Buildings A and B) to add residential units and make development more affordable to build.
- Emphasize design durability.

**Landscape Strategy**
- Ensure a variety of landscaped areas at and above grade that nurture this new community (e.g.: community gardens, etc.).

**Sustainable Design**
- Push for a much higher level of sustainability, especially given the City's long term investment in the Initiative.

**Comments to the City**
- The Initiative is a unique opportunity for the City to lead by example; compelling prospective development partners to offer both a viable business case and “thinking outside the box” innovative design.

**Panel Commentary**
The Panel thanked the design team for their presentation and submission in the context of the Housing Now Initiative, which many members called "essential" and a "watershed initiative". The Panel thought the proposal was off to a good start, but advised further development was needed.

Many members noted that the project needed to achieve both design excellence as well as a strong business case for partners to buy into. The Panel felt the first project of this initiative needed to lead by example and looked forward to seeing it again.

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

**Existing & Future Context**
Many members noted the project was sited in a "pretty remarkable" location, as it is right on the subway and in the middle of a vast green space. Moving forward, the Panel wanted to see more information on the existing and future context of the area, including the development of a strategy for how the future context will be anticipated in the design.

Open Space Context
The Panel wanted to see further information regarding the contextual relationship of open space in the area. Some members noted that there was open space on the property to the south, and wondered how that would relate to the open space proposed to the immediate north.

Site Plan Design

Minimize Vehicular Circulation
The Panel felt the driveway entrance was being pinched and suggested either widening or otherwise changing the condition of the space. A few members wondered whether the space could be redeveloped to be more landscape oriented with a provision for trucks etc.

Some members pointed out that the need for drop off and pick up areas might result in the misuse of the forecourt.

Ground Floor Amenity Spaces
Many members noted the project was located on heavily traveled streets and supported the choice to locate the amenity spaces on the ground floor. Other members commented that Victoria Park had been well programmed with a variety of uses.

Site Plan Development
The Panel wanted to see a larger site plan, and several members commented that it was difficult to read at the current scale. Some members suggested doing more context analysis for the site. Many members felt the general site plan layout worked well, and the Panelists advised "baking in" as much as possible into the resolved site plan.

Grading of the Site
Several Panel members acknowledged the grade challenges on the site, and many members felt they were being handled appropriately. The Panel noted that grading was important and advised securing the entrance on Denton Ave.

Placement of Buildings on Site
Several members thought the buildings had been appropriately located on the site. Many members noted that the public space condition in the rear of the site was a "remarkable thing" that doesn't occur very often. Some members suggested landscaping, public art and programming could further elevate the back half of the site.

Moving forward the Panel advised ensuring the proximity to the bus route behind the buildings remained clear such that the future development rights to the east didn't pinch the building. Many members advised embedded this into the documents.

Pedestrian Realm

Pedestrian Safety & Connectivity
The Panel pointed out that pedestrian safety was an important aspect that needed to be addressed. Many members noted that the adjacent plaza had a wide aperture crossing the bus route. These members felt there was a potential pedestrian risk crossing along the northern frontage adjacent to the bus route and suggested pulling the aperture back to clarify the location of the crossing.

Improve Pedestrian Realm on Denton Ave
Many members felt the curb cut access points needed to be improved on Denton Avenue, and further suggested incorporating a minimum pedestrian refuge area on the avenue.

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

**Encourage Different Building Typologies**
Many Panel members noted that the project was proposing "complicated podia" and wondered whether the designs needed to be a tower/podium assembly. Several members suggested investigating new, inventive or hybrid building typologies for the site.

Some members advised simplifying the complex façade and podium patterns.

**Materiality**
Some members noted that the materiality section was "a little light on context" and unclear. The Panel wanted to see more information on the relationship between the proposed massing and material selection.

**Stepbacks on Victoria Park Avenue**
Many members expressed their support for the stepbacks and Victoria Park Avenue, particularly with regards to how they related and balanced the opposite setbacks and vegetation.

**More Flexibility with Cost & Density**
Many members felt there was an opportunity to increase the density on the site by adding 1-2 additional storeys to both Buildings A and B. These members noted this would allow for more residential units as well as make the development more cost effective to build.

**Landscape Strategy**

**Outdoor Daycare Greenspace**
Several members expressed concern around the daycare play space on Victoria Park Ave. These members advised ensuring there was appropriate buffering/separation and an explicit demarcation of space for this zone to be successful.

Looking at the space and grading from the perspective of the street, many members wondered how the space would feel when the daycare is not as animated, and advised ensuring the space felt safe during all parts of the day.

**Develop Variety of Green Space**
Several Panel members advised developing a variety of green spaces for the residents, including above grade such as community rooftop gardens and terrace spaces. Some members suggested further developing the landscape character to help understand how people might use the buildings.

Other members felt both direct and slower paths should be developed in the landscape design to accommodate both commuters and people who want to "meander" through the landscape.

**Existing Trees**
Some members advised that the numerous existing trees on site were important to save, and/or transplant.

**Sustainable Design**

**Sustainability Strategy**
Several Panel members strongly felt CreateTO should at minimum undertake a study to understand what it would take to achieve Toronto Green Standard Tier 3 or 4 for this, and similar, projects. The Panel felt the City should be at the forefront of energy consumption and building typologies.
Some members suggested taking advantage of design repetition to get further benefit from land and construction costs. A few members suggested implementing bonuses for development team who go beyond the minimum TGS requirements.

**Resiliency**

The Panel advised that resiliency needed to be considered for the next 100 years in terms of durability, energy and sustainability requirements. Moving forward, the Panelists felt the project needed to think about the durability of materials, including the building cladding.

Many members pointed out that the management structure for affordable housing is typically long term which would make energy considerations, including such things as backup power requirements, more feasible to implement.
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:

As we advance from City-initiated zoning by-law amendments to site plan applications for each site, what advice does the Panel have to ensure high quality of development and the integration of affordable housing and market housing? How can the City set expectations and provide clear direction for the developer partners while enabling flexibility and design excellence?

1. **Site Plan Design**
The current organization of the site refines the earlier "Structure Diagram" from the Site Specific Official Plan policy adopted by City Council in 2015. What further refinements can be done to ensure this new development integrates into the larger community and provides the highest quality of life for future residents, workers and visitors?

2. **Built Form Massing, Height & Articulation**
What are the opportunities to ensure the built form appropriately responds to the context, contributes to a well-designed community and effectively integrates affordable housing and market housing?

Chair's Summary of Key Points
The Panel appreciates the efforts of the proponent team towards this submission, especially given the fast track schedule the team is working within.

The Housing Now Initiative is vital in tackling the pressing need for more affordable housing in the City of Toronto. The development proposed has the opportunity to be an exemplar for how to take advantage of the opportunities and challenges of proximity to a public transit hub and yards, airport and major transportation arteries to create a vibrant new neighbourhood to live in. In order to achieve this the following aspects of this project need further work:

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

- Focus response on the following surrounding context:
  - Existing built form context along northeast side of Wilson Heights Boulevard (see Built Form).
  - TTC Wilson Station and its bus access requirements (See Site Plan Design).
Major arteries (Allen Road, 401) (see Site Plan Design and Built Form).
- Airport (see below + Site Plan Design).
- Anticipate potential impact on development if/when Downsview Airport no longer exists in its current state.

**Site Plan Design**

- Explore shifting bus route accessing Wilson Station to west edge of site to:
  - Consolidate proposed pieces of green space into a single, more useful park as a key amenity for the new neighbourhood and broader community.
  - Reduce vehicular traffic in new neighbourhood.
- Ensure service areas are consolidated and centralized away from quieter areas of the new neighbourhood.
- Increase green areas and reduce vehicular; especially in courtyards and driveways.
- Provide bike parking.
- Anticipate and enable continuation of Allen pathway along edge of Allen Road and 401 to Champlain Parkette.
- Develop site plan to protect the new neighbourhood from noise/visual/pollution presence of Downsview Airport, Wilson Yard Complex, Allen Road and 401.

**Pedestrian Realm**

- Ensure a safe pedestrian realm throughout the new neighbourhood.

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

- Encourage different building typologies to address:
  - Providing a different strategy for Block 3 that more sensitively responds to existing context.
  - Creating typologies that minimize residential units facing west along Allen Road.
  - Achieving design excellence within the business case.
- Emphasize design durability.

**Landscape Strategy**

- Ensure a variety of landscaped areas at and above grade that nurture this new neighbourhood (e.g.: community gardens, etc.).
- Programme consolidated park area to support new neighbourhood and surrounding community.
- Ensure high quality/quantity landscape plays a major role in mitigating surrounding context along the west and south edges of the site.
- Integrate storm water management in throughout landscaped areas of site.

**Sustainable Design**

- Push for a much higher level of sustainability, especially given the City's long term investment in the Initiative, and the critical mass of buildings and programme envisioned in the new neighbourhood.

**Comments to the City**

- The Initiative is a unique opportunity for the City to lead by example; compelling prospective development partners to offer both a viable business case and "thinking outside the box" innovative design.
Panel Commentary
The Panel thanked the design team for their presentation, commenting that it was an interesting site that needed to design for both existing and future conditions. While the members felt the proposal was off to a good start, they noted there were several siting, landscape and built form considerations that needed further consideration.

The Panel thought the Housing Now Initiative was "vital" and "so important" and commented that they looked forward to seeing the project again.

Site Plan Design

Wilson Station Bus Access
The Panel was concerned by the decision to bring the TTC buses on site to solve a compromised development condition. Several members pointed out that to access the park via the path, people would need to cross a frequently used bus entrance.

These members questioned what interventions would be required for a child living on one side of the street to comfortably cross the street to the park. Some considerations raised around the design of the intersection included ROW dimensions and channelization of pedestrian traffic.

The Panel suggested having the bus lane go underneath Building 1 to move it away from the open space altogether.

Servicing & Loading
Many members questioned locating the servicing within the internal courtyard given the potential noise for the courtyard-facing units. The Panel recommended further consideration into managing this aspect, such as whether the loading could be shared or relocated underground.

Cycling Infrastructure
The Panel advised adding additional surface bike parking. Many members pointed out that given the proximity to transit, creating more robust cycling infrastructure would be "really useful".

Consolidate Green Space
While the Panel acknowledged the design team was trying to propose a series of good urban conditions, they felt the moves were not consistent and had resulted in several smaller scale urban pieces. The members suggested further developing the site plan blocks and consolidated the green spaces into a larger public park for the neighbourhood.

Many members advised that the central park needed to have direct pedestrian access. The Panel suggested developing a planned configuration that is built up against Allen Road on the edges to both better define a primary green space as well as begin to buffer the existing arteries.

Allen Pathway & Increased Connectivity
The Panel advised that the Allen pathway and stair heading into the sidewalk needed further development. Many members advised looking at the pathway and area connectivity in terms of how people will access the site.

Many members advised extending the Allen pathway to the Champlain Parkette, commenting that a connected pathway would help anchor the park as a destination for the area. The Panel strongly felt the existing and future pathways throughout the project needed to be addressed to ensure they afforded a "friendly" and safe experience for those utilizing them.

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

Encourage Different Building Typologies
The panel encouraged the design team to pursue different building typologies. Although they had no issue with the simplicity of the building form, many members felt the proposal was "somewhat out of scale" and suggested bringing down the height.

Some members suggested reconsidering the podiums. These members suggested reshaping the building forms to allow for some more density. Various members felt that L shape slab buildings could frame the central open space.

Other members suggested moving away from the slab massing of block 3 in favour of a more original built form that more appropriately responds to the context.

**Landscape Strategy**

**Develop Overarching Landscape Idea**
The Panel felt the project needed a "big landscape idea" and explicit placemaking. Many members noted that although there was a lot of green shown on the drawings, it was largely not accessible. Some members felt the termination of the path could help define the landscape.

Other members suggested having a big open space that connected with the building facades facing the park. A few members suggested the landscape could inform the intensity adjacent to Allen Rd.

**Sustainable Design**

**Sustainability Strategy**
Several members advised that for a project of such a large scale the design team needed to undertake energy plans to understand what the energy consumptions would be, for different energy types including the possibility for low carbon and renewable energy sources.

These members noted that the energy calculations should be done early to inform massing, shadow, materiality etc.

**Mitigate Noise & Pollution**
Many Panel members noted that the proximity of the site to a major thoroughfare, highway and airport was problematic due to noise and pollution. The Panel advised using the architecture, landscape and site plan design to mitigate the noise and pollution as much as possible.

**Stormwater Management**
The Panel advised that stormwater management should be considered upfront from the perspective of an overarching campus landscape, and should not be using the leftover spaces.