

CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 2 – January 28, 2021

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Thursday January 28, 2021 at 12:35pm.

Members of the Design Review Panel	Members Present
Gordon Stratford (Co-Chair): Principal – G C Stratford – Architect	✓++
Michael Leckman (Co-Chair): Principal – Diamond Schmitt Architects	✓#
Meg Graham (Co-Chair): Principal – superkül	✓†
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	
Jessica Hutcheon: Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio	✓**
Viktors Jaunkalns: Partner – MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects	✓
Joe Lobko: Partner – DTAH	
Jim Melvin: Principal Emeritus/Advisor – PMA; Owner – Realm Works	✓
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	✓*

†Chair of First Session

††Chair of Second Session

**Conflict First Item*

***Conflict Second Item*

#Absent Second Item

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 January 14, 2021 by email.

MEETING 2 INDEX

- i. 253 Markham Road (2nd Review)
- ii. 700 University Avenue (1st Review)

253 MARKHAM ROAD

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW Second Review

APPLICATION OPA & Rezoning

PRESENTATIONS:

CITY STAFF Jeffery Sinclair, Community Planning; Shan Li, Urban Design

DESIGN TEAM RAW Design



VOTE Support – unanimous

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. Has the revised design successfully resolved comments raised by the panel in the first review related to the mix of building types, building heights and lack of contiguous outdoor at grade amenity space?
2. Are there ways to improve the proposed driveway accesses and service areas to limit their impact on the public realm along Markham Road?
3. Are there any suggestions on how the central outdoor amenity space and the buildings around it should be designed at the Site Plan stage?

Chair's Summary of Key Points

The Panel would like to thank the proponent team and the City for bringing this OPA and rezoning application back to the Panel for discussion.

The Project is on a site with several site constraints, including a rail corridor, two watermain easements, and an overpass that creates a significant grade differential on the west edge of the site. Given these conditions, on-site placemaking within the development (rather than through block connectivity) is particularly critical to its success. Thoughtful attention to at-grade amenity, uses and open space within the development are key, as are – in particular – a thoughtful southern and western edge befitting their individual particularities. The Panel expressed unanimous support for the transformative progress made since the last presentation of this project to the Panel, but felt that further exploration/development is required in the following areas:

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)

- The new open space will be a great community space: create wider/greater connectivity between it and the park to the east, and emphasize their contiguity through paving or surface treatment;

- Panel agreed that the new scheme greatly improved the building scale throughout the development; the scale at each edge was contextually appropriate;

Site Plan Design

- Ensure that the open space is well-connected throughout;
- Panel recommends reviewing the loading/ramp at Building C, and whether its impact on the open area could be lessened; also consolidating all service functions to one area, between Buildings A and B

Pedestrian Realm

- The Panel suggested making a pedestrian connection from the court between Buildings A/B to Markham Road and the rain garden;

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

- The Panel felt that the removal of the podia on the Markham edge was a particularly adept and successful design change;
- The proponent was urged to review whether Buildings C and D need podia;
- Tower separation distances were commended.

Landscape Strategy

- Consider breaking the tall plantings along Markham to allow views through;
- The proponent is encouraged to review the amount of outdoor activity/infrastructure near the townhouses and whether it could be shifted elsewhere;
- The Panel suggested adding urban agriculture programming to the project;
- The proponent is encouraged to investigate moving the off-leash area to the north side of the private road, against the rail line.

Sustainable Design

- Define project targets and strengthen project aspirations.

Comments to the City

- N/A

Panel Commentary

The Panel thanked the design team for their "clear and complete" presentation. Many members additionally thanked the team for the work that had been put into the design since the first review at the Design Review Panel. The Panel unanimously felt that the proposal had been "transformed" and "radically improved" since they last saw it.

Several members felt the progress made to the project speaks to the value of design review and the collaborative process, especially when paired with a strong, receptive design team.

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)

Complete Community

Many Panel members felt the revised proposal would support a complete community once complete. The Panelists noted there numerous great improvements to the current scheme.

Site Plan Design

Site Plan Evolution

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

The Panel noted appreciation for all the changes that had been made to the site plan, with many members commenting that the resulting site plan was "much improved".

Some members commented that at the previous review, the major issues in the site plan revolved around the consolidation of green space as well as the different typologies, much of which had been addressed in the current iteration.

Moving forward, several members advised providing more porosity in the site plan to "go that final mile". Various members pointed out that at the first review, there was penetration through the fingers of the townhouses to access the green area to the north of the site. These members felt that it was important to still find a way to have some penetration and a pedestrian connection into this green area.

One member suggested allowing for "decongestion" as one moves through the site.

Various members noted that it was very helpful being able to compare the previous plan with the current design.

Open Space & Public Realm

Many members indicated strong support for how the open space had been developed. Some members felt these spaces could provide great placemaking opportunities around all the buildings. Various members appreciated how the public realm uses proposed in the previous scheme were generally still present, but now with more room to maneuver.

Several members thought the narrowed crossing to the park was "much safer". Many members were pleased to see the fantastic green amenity space proposed in the center of the site. Some members advised ensured the design of this central space was developed with the programming for the future park to avoid doubling up the programs in the two spaces.

Some members noted appreciation for the move to normalize the park and the streets as compared to the previous scheme. Many members wanted to see greater connectivity between the different green spaces and public realm spaces. One member advised developing more linkages from the internal public realm spaces to the open spaces along the edge of the site.

Vehicular Circulation & Loading

Several Panel members recommended consolidating the various loading spaces. Many members specifically suggested moving the loading ramp on Building C servicing buildings C and D west and integrated into the building to increase the courtyard space.

Other members wondered whether one of the servicing areas could be hidden behind the naturalized area. A few members suggested creating more landscaping around the drive aisle to screen the servicing area on Markham Rd.

However, the Panel advised ensuring the servicing area for buildings C and D is not completely blocked off so that people could take the back route as a shortcut to the public spaces. On this point, the Panelists additionally advised ensuring the servicing areas and route was attractive and safe.

Some members suggested having different paving patterns at the pedestrian crossings to ensure the pedestrian routes are safe and attractive.

Pedestrian Connection to Markham Road

Various members advised incorporating a pedestrian connection linking the site to Markham Rd. Many members noted that more porosity and connectivity through the site would help the design "go that final mile".

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

Massing & Articulation

Several Panel members noted appreciation for the variety building typologies proposed for the site, including the mid-rise and upper mid-rise typologies. Many members specifically indicated support for the "slab-type" building with a 750 sm footprint. These members thought it, together with the low rise townhouses, appropriately referenced the existing housing stock of the neighbourhood.

Some members thought the scale of the massing at the edges of the site was appropriate to its surroundings. Other members thought the elimination of the large podium on Markham Rd worked well. Many members suggested introducing more porosity into the south-west corner of the site.

Various members advised further defining the transition in scale from public to semi-public to the private townhouses. Looking at Buildings C and D, some members questioned whether the podium was expression necessary. Other members were glad to see a good tower separation distance.

One member suggested incorporating a subtle "visually variety" to the buildings, such as through the introduction of subtle colour changes, for example. Another member noted that their personal preference was for the "crisp" and "abstract" lines of the tower. This member questioned how the tower related to the different architectural language of the rusticated bases, feeling there was a linguistic different between the two.

A few members felt that the way the balconies had be staggered on the towers was less successful than the corner treatment of the towers, which they found more impactful.

Some members felt that while there were many good things about the architecture on the north-west façade of the building, it would be improved with more pedestrian animation.

Townhouses

Many members thought the townhouses were appropriately located, and various members commented that in general they had been greatly improved.

Location of Lobbies

Some members noted appreciation for the orientation of the lobbies. These members pointed out that the lobby location situates the corridors towards each other in a way that would be civic and social.

One member commented that locating the arrival space and views back to the park was an improvement from the previous proposal.

Hub Exit Stair

A few members liked what the design team was proposed through the hub exit stair. These members suggested expanding this space, commenting that it could become a "porch" for the building where residents could pick up mail, talk to neighbours etc.

Landscape Strategy

Develop Fine Grain Landscape Design

The Panel recommended further development to the landscape and amenity spaces. Many members wanted to see the "richness" of the overarching landscape design carried through into a finer grain. The Panel generally thought the proposed naturalized area worked well.

Many members suggested having more connectivity between the various amenity spaces, such as through the use of paving pattern. Various members felt the active uses could be spread out more

across the site. Several members noted a potential programming conflict with the future park site and advised coordinating the design and programming of the two sites.

Some members wondered whether urban agriculture could be introduced on the site.

Rain Garden

Various members felt it would be nice to have the trail connect at the service court between Buildings A and B in an informal way to the rain garden in the corner to allow people to enjoy the activity at an intimate small scale.

Dog Run

Some members noted that the railway lands on the north side of the site would be an ideal place for an off leash dog area. One member pointed out that dog barking is a major complaint in multi-unit dwelling and strongly recommended moving the dog area away from the central court.

Open Spaces Adjacent to Townhouses

Various members noted concerns about the amount of active uses proposed for the open spaces adjacent to the townhouses on Dunlem Rd. These members advised that there should be a separation of uses between what happens in the rear yards of townhouses and public open space.

One member suggested that the rear yards could be a little more personalized and private. Another member recommended providing richer landscaping buffering the townhouses from the facing outdoor amenity space.

700 UNIVERSITY AVENUE

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW First Review

APPLICATION Rezoning

PRESENTATIONS:

CITY STAFF Mladen Kucic, Community Planning; Nasim Adab, Urban Design

DESIGN TEAM KPMB Architects, Janet Rosenberg & Studio



VOTE Support – unanimous

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:

- The height, scale and massing of the proposed tower, including the relationship between the existing office building and the office building addition.
- The relationship of the proposed tower with the surrounding context, including the transition to lower scale neighbourhoods and separation distances from the adjacent properties.
- The impact of the proposed tower on the surrounding public realm.
- The public realm enhancement, including interior and exterior spaces.

Chair's Summary of Key Points

The Panel would like to thank the proponent team for a well-crafted presentation, and an accomplished design on a challenging site.

There are many mixed-use transit-oriented developments throughout Toronto, but this project is important in that it has the potential to contribute new energy and animation to two of the City's major thoroughfares and a significant civic precinct.

To fully achieve this promise further work is needed in the following areas:

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)

- The project's response to the existing built-form context on site as well as to surrounding current context shows great potential. As well, the proposed design's shift towards creating a future context that is more connected, open, and engaging is very positive. To further this strong start work is needed in the following areas:
 - West Context:

- Ensure that the design of the proposed new tower is sensitive to the Orde Street Junior Public School context.
- South Context:
 - Ensure that the design of the proposed new tower mitigates the tight existing context of a narrow Orde Street and close proximity of Princess Margaret Hospital's north façade.
- University/College Intersection and Queen's Park Context:
 - Enhance project's presence at intersection to fully respond to open space context of Queen's Park.
 - See Site Plan Design.

Site Plan Design

- The site plan presented proposes a much more engaging and effective concept than the existing site condition. Further work is needed in the following areas:
 - TTC Station Pavilion – remove this element, shift its function into the new main pavilion and increase outdoor public plaza/landscape space.
 - Moving the station into the main pavilion will further enhance that space's communal dynamic.
 - Microclimate – ensure that microclimate conditions at grade support pedestrian comfort year-round.

Pedestrian Realm

- See Site Plan Design.

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

- See Response to Context.
- The proposed new built form character shows strong potential, providing elegant counterbalance to the sedate presence of the existing building. Further work is needed in the following areas:
 - Tower – the tower is well situated given site constraints; with work needed in the following areas:
 - Shift daycare outdoor space on south side of tower away from close proximity to Princess Margaret Hospital façade.
 - Ensure residential units directly facing Princess Margaret Hospital have adequate access to natural light and view (including visual privacy related to hospital overview).
 - Entry Pavilion – shaping of this element is too related to the existing building:
 - Explore an alternative that is in sync with the ovoid-shaping of some of the new built form (e.g.: tower).

Landscape Strategy

- The proposed landscaped plaza is a welcomed contribution to the public realm and enlarging it will make it even more significant.
 - See Site Plan Design.

Sustainable Design

- The proposed sustainability strategy is robust and has the potential to serve as an exemplar for similar developments.
 - Ensure that this strategy is fully implemented.

Comments to the City

- N/A

Panel Commentary

The Panel thanked the design team for their presentation. Many members felt that it was a challenging project and a complex building, with some members commenting that it was a "miracle" that something could even be proposed on the site.

Several members noted that the project was sited in a significant location for the City. While the Panel generally felt the overall scheme was moving in the right direction, they advised further development of the public realm as well as the setbacks and design on the Orde St elevation.

Many members additionally thought further refinement of the massing was required, particularly at the tower top, to better manage the shadow impacts on University Avenue and Queen's Park.

The Panel looked forward to seeing the project again.

Response to Context (including local character and heritage)

Ontario Power Building

Some members noted that the existing Ontario Power Building was an architecturally significant building located in a prominent corner of the city.

Reflecting on the building's significance, some members noted some of their memories of the building. One member mentioned that they had studied this building during a university engineering course and everyone enrolled thought the building was "fantastic".

Composition of the Project

Many members found the composition of this project really interesting. Various members noted that the inflection of the proposed tower towards Queen's Park was mirroring (but not duplicating) the geometry of the lower building. Other members felt that the proposed tower was generating an unanticipated echo or ripple of the existing hydro block.

Several members noted how remarkable it was that this project could be laminated onto the existing building. One member suggested the ultimate proposal had the potential to become an interesting, site specific, hybrid building typology.

Some members commented that the asymmetry of the project was appropriate for its location. These members noted that University Avenue is a formal street with many institutional buildings, while one street over McCaul Street feels like the end of the downtown core.

Pedestrian Views on University Ave & College St

Many members commented that they would have appreciated having more massing views from the pedestrian level on University Ave and College St to better understand how the proposal would fit into the existing context.

Proposed Residential Uses

The Panel noted that the residential uses were not consistent with the Downtown Plan, but some members understood the argument the proponent team was making for the inclusion of the residential building uses to serve the adjacent hospitals.

Some members suggested there would additionally be demand for affordable residential units by the University of Toronto. A few members felt that the proposed mixed uses would appropriately intensify use at a major public transit hub.

Site Plan Design

Public Realm at University Avenue & College Street

Many members felt the proposed changes to the public realm at University Avenue and College Street would be a "huge improvement" and revitalize the area. Various members commented that the current public realm design, while attractive when initially constructed, was becoming increasingly difficult to navigate.

One member felt that the design of a "pit" or "moat" around a building is only successful under specific circumstances, such as at Roy Thompson Hall or in Chase Plaza in New York City, but otherwise had the tendency to create tough urban spaces.

Moving forward, many members advised putting as much into the revitalization of the public realm along the other building frontages as had been put into the proposal of the University and College corner.

Short Term Parking

Various members questioned where short term delivery parking would be located for the building. Some members indicated support for the general location of the daycare with respect to the presumable availability for short term parking for drop off/pick up.

Setbacks & Location on Site

The Panel thought that while the proposed tower seemed to have been sited well from University Avenue and College Street, there was a problem with the lack of setback on Orde Street.

Many members noted the building would negatively impact the availability of light and air, particularly at the lower levels. The Panel advised setting the building back further at the lower levels if possible to mitigate these negative impacts.

Some members commented that the back of the proposed building did not appropriately acknowledge or respond to the context of the area in which it was located and the Panel advised further consideration of these frontages.

Orde Street Elevation

The Panel strongly felt that the Orde Street elevation needed further development.

Many members noted that even though the proposal and the existing Ontario Power Building were "rubbing their backs together", the proposed building was oriented entirely to the east towards University Avenue instead of turning over and also responding to the western context, which included Orde Street Public School.

In addition to establishing a larger setback on Orde, several members pointed out that the blank wall was "brutal" and exacerbating the "tight and service-like" feeling on the street. Some members noted that the elementary school felt like it was situated in a canyon. The Panelists strongly advised relocating the back of house uses and animating this façade with increased fenestration to penetrate the blank wall of the large floorplate.

Many members additionally suggested improving the residential entrance on Orde Street, such as by finding a way to cut some of the raised patio area to widen the sidewalk and create a more generous throat to the entrance into Orde Street.

The Panel pointed out that the existing space on Orde Street was "mean" and advised putting as much effort into revitalizing the public realm on this portion of the site as had been put into revitalizing the corner of College and University.

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

Tower Architecture & Relationship to Princess Margaret Hospital

Several Panel members commented that the initial tower architecture was "gorgeous" and a fantastic massing. Although the members noted that the architectural was still preliminary, they felt it was beginning to echo the architectural language that dominates University Avenue.

However, the Panel noted that the architectural response needed further development in terms of how it was relating to Princess Margaret Hospital. The members felt that more thought needed to go into the setback and uses of the adjacent hospital.

Many members wanted to see an analysis of the uses in Princess Margaret on the corresponding façade to understand what would be facing the proposed massing, given that the setback would be very tight. The Panel questioned whether patient rooms would be facing the project.

The Panelists felt that the proposal needed to be set farther back from Princess Margaret to provide more breathing room. Some members additionally pointed out that Princess Margaret could increase its height in the future, which would compound the need to provide sufficient setbacks.

Tower Height & Shadow Impacts

Some members noted concerns about the shadow being cast by the tower due to its height. These members pointed out that at 10:18am the tower shadow would go right across the ceremonial axial entrance to University Avenue.

It was also noted that at 2:18pm there would be a lot of shadow on the lawn area at the north-east corner of College and University.

The Panel felt that these shadow impacts to the public realm should be improved, and some members suggested taking a few storeys off the tower or further sculpting the tower massing to alleviate the negative impacts.

Tower Façade

Looking at the highly reflective surface of the tower façade, a few members commented that the building could be "fascinating" with one member comparing it to a "live billboard" that reflected the life going on around it.

However, one member pointed out that on sunny days the shadows from other buildings would be reflected in the façade as well.

Additional Office Floors

One member felt that the additional office floors being added to the project were just as important as the proposed tower and pavilion. This member commented that the mediating element of the existing building was important to the project given its strong curving mass.

Unit Types / Sizes

Various members noted concern about the proposed residential unit types. These members felt that the proposed sizes would be more appropriate for hoteling or studio spaces, but thought if they were used by the hospital for short term use as described in the presentation, the size could be okay.

However, the Panelists felt that if the residential units were to become rentals the sizes as shown were too small for long term use.

Elevated Bridge Connection

A member strongly felt that the bridge connection to Princess Margaret Hospital was not conducive to good city building. This member commented that on principle elevated bridges were not appropriate. They noted that the place to go between buildings should be on the ground plane.

Rooftop Amenity Spaces

Some members noted appreciation for the idea of having a "city room" on top of the tower via the proposed rooftop amenity, but suggested pushing out the residential amenity so the vertical community could also enjoy the rooftop.

These members pointed out that currently the residential amenity spaces were tucked behind the curving gesture of the building. A few members suggested that the architecture could become more plastic to allow more space for the residential amenities, including a view towards Queen's Park.

Daycare Location

Many members noted that the daycare and outdoor area had been located directly over the loading area. A few members advised that these spaces needed to be carefully designed to ensure the occupants' comfort, including from the wind coming down the tower, as well as from the sound and air quality from the loading.

Architecture at Grade / Retail

Several members thought the architecture of the base building should be further refined. While many members felt the office lobby and clarity of the main entrance/movement into the main building was "strong", they thought the overall architecture at grade seemed less developed than the tower architecture.

Various members thought it would be great if more of the language of the tower and building entrance made its way into the retail pavilion and College Street façade.

Looking at the interior spaces, while many members noted appreciation for the cascading tiered seating, some members suggested incorporating more retail, such as a juice bar or café, at grade to further engage the public.

TTC Pavilion

The Panel had differing opinions on how to approach the TTC entrance. Many members supported the pavilion approach, noting that it would offer a clear statement of how to access the TTC, compared to trying to navigate through a building.

Some members compositionally liked the pavilion. One member suggested developing a "wonderful skylit space" would further enhance the experience of the entrance. A few members advocated that Toronto needed to celebrate public transit more in general, and thought the inclusion of the pavilion would go towards that goal.

However, other members felt the TTC entrance should be moved into some of the retail spaces at grade to open up the corner. These members noted that in terms of signage and accessibility, there are already two other standalone station entrances on the north-east and south-east corners of the intersection.

Instead, if the pavilion was eliminated, these members argued that there would be more public realm available allowing for the more landscaping and an overall revitalization of the significant corner.

Microclimate

Various members were concerned about the grade related microclimate. These members pointed out that the area is currently always "incredibly windy" and were concerned that the proposed curved massing may exacerbate this condition.

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Landscape Strategy

Overarching Landscape Design

Looking at the overarching landscape design, various members thought it was responding well to the building. Other members advised that the plaza should be designed as a significant public realm space.

University Ave & College St

The various members who felt that the TTC entrance should be moved into the building concourse noted that the removal of the pavilion would liven up the open space in front of the building.

One member cautioned the design team to provide more protection for the people waiting for the College streetcar. This member commented that a glass pavilion would not provide sufficient shelter from the elements.

Some members noted specific appreciation for the proposed bosque of six trees and recommended incorporating more trees going west along College St to give the public realm a green forested look on the corner.

Sustainable Design

Passive House & Carbon Neutral

Many members commented that it was "wonderful" to hear the design team's commitment to sustainability and the Passive House/carbon neutral aspirations.

The Panel wanted to see more information regarding the specifics of the sustainability strategy and some members noted that they hoped the carbon neutral goals remains a part of the project through to completion.