

# CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

## MINUTES: MEETING 5 – April 8, 2021

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Thursday April 8, 2021 at 1:45pm.

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### Members of the Design Review Panel

*Members  
Present*

<b>Gordon Stratford (Co-Chair):</b> Principal – G C Stratford – Architect	✓†
<b>Michael Leckman (Co-Chair):</b> Principal – Diamond Schmitt Architects	✓
<b>Meg Graham (Co-Chair):</b> Principal – superkül	
<b>Carl Blanchaer:</b> Principal – WZMH Architects	✓
<b>Dima Cook:</b> Director – EVOQ Architecture	✓
<b>George Dark:</b> Design Partner – Urban Strategies	✓
<b>Ralph Giannone:</b> Principal – Giannone Petricone Associates	
<b>Jim Gough:</b> Department Manager, Transportation Planning – WSP	✓
<b>Jessica Hutcheon:</b> Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio	✓
<b>Viktors Jaunkalns:</b> Partner – MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects	✓
<b>Joe Lobko:</b> Partner – DTAH	✓
<b>Jim Melvin:</b> Principal Emeritus/Advisor – PMA; Owner – Realm Works	✓
<b>Juhee Oh:</b> Director, Sustainability & Energy – WSP	
<b>Heather Rolleston:</b> Principal, Design Director – Quadrangle Architects	✓
<b>David Sisam:</b> Principal – Montgomery Sisam Architects	✓
<b>Sibylle von Knobloch:</b> Principal – NAK Design Group	✓

*†Chair of Meeting*

### Design Review Panel Coordinator

Meredith Vaga: Urban Design, City Planning Division

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### CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting which was held on March 11, 2021 by email.

### MEETING 5 INDEX

- i. 1319 Bloor Street West – Value Village Site (1<sup>st</sup> Review)

# 1319 BLOOR STREET WEST – VALUE VILLAGE SITE

## DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

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DESIGN REVIEW First Review

APPLICATION Rezoning

*PRESENTATIONS:*

CITY STAFF Victoria Fusz, Community Planning; Setareh Fadaee, Urban Design

DESIGN TEAM Hariri Pontarini Architects



VOTE Support – 11  
Non-support – 1

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## 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. Transit Integration**

Please comment on ways in which the transit station components could be successfully integrated within the proposed development.

**2. Site Organization & Porosity**

What changes could be made to the proposed site organization and ground floor to improve porosity through the site?

**3. Public Realm Improvement**

What strategies could be used to enhance the public realm on Bloor St W, St. Helens Ave, and the proposed extension of the West Toronto Rail Path along the site's western limit, taking into consideration the grade related challenges along Bloor St W?

**4. Built Form**

Is the proposed massing appropriate? Does the proposal represent good urban design? Does the height, mass, scale, and density of the proposal fit within its existing/planned context?

## Chair's Summary of Key Points

The Panel would like to thank the proponent team for a very complete submission package and an assured, quietly elegant design on a site that possesses some challenging conditions.

This project is important to our city as a potential exemplar for sensitively executed transit-oriented development on a complex site, and as a permeable civic hub/portal for a vibrant neighbourhood. To realise this potential further work is needed in the areas outline below:

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

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- The proposed design's response to context shows promise, with a focus on creating a well-mannered development that is sensitive to its surroundings. Further attention to the following areas is needed:
  - Bloor Street and Underpass:
    - Improve response to and enhancement of this context.
  - Planned Multi-Use Trail/Path:
    - Ensure design enables this future context.
  - Proposed Park + Station:
    - Create a stronger civic context that is open to and interconnected with the broader community.
  - South Edge of Site:
    - Engage with existing context south of site.
  - Portals to Neighbourhood:
    - Given the site's role in the broader neighbourhood as a key intermodal junction focus on creating a strong, permeable civic portal context to the north (at Bloor and along multi-use path), the east (via proposed park) and the west (across rail corridor).
  - See Site Plan Design.

### Site Plan Design

- The proposed site plan has started to address the diverse conditions surrounding the site, but further work is needed in the following areas to achieve a complete design that fully unlocks the possibilities of a "site-in-the-round":
  - General:
    - See Response to Context.
    - Ensure that the definition of and transition between the public civic and private realms is well defined.
  - North:
    - Create a wider sidewalk along the Bloor Street frontage and rail line underpass.
    - Provide intuitive and generous pedestrian connectivity between Bloor and the station platform.
  - West:
    - Enhance the station platform area to ensure a high-quality civic realm, with sufficient outdoor space for both station related and public related activities to occur simultaneously.
    - Avoid dead end condition at north edge of platform.
    - Develop alternative crash wall design to provide more permeable pedestrian circulation between station platform area and south park.
    - Increase east-west pedestrian porosity through site.
  - South:
    - The proposed park serves a greater catchment area than just the project site, and thus needs to be larger. Also, the park feels more like a private extension of the development rather than the public space that it needs to be.
    - Shift underground parking access, loading/servicing, surface parking and driveway out of open area along south side of site.
    - Extend park space from St. Helens Avenue west to crash wall, and south to south property line.

- Ensure that the park is distinctly publicly accessible in character and programming and is openly connected to the civic space along the west side of the site.
- East:
  - Relocate parking entry/egress and loading/servicing to access directly from St Helens Avenue.
  - Reduce townhouses along this frontage and replace with amenity function.

### **Pedestrian Realm**

- See Site Plan Design.
  - Ensure that the Bloor underpass provides a safe and animated pedestrian realm.

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

- The proposed "fabric building" strategy is appropriate, with further work needed in the following areas:
  - North Tower:
    - Shift tower west and south for a more sensitive response to the neighbourhood.
    - Further to the above consider rotating tower to a north-south orientation
  - Bloor Street:
    - Set back built form in response to creating a pedestrian access between Bloor and the station platform.
  - St. Helens Avenue:
    - Trim back built form height and shape along St. Helens for a more sensitive transition to surrounding neighbourhood.
  - Towers Character:
    - Consider changing south tower expression to be similar to that of the north tower.

### **Landscape Strategy**

- See Site Plan Design

### **Sustainable Design**

- Ensure that a deep sustainability strategy is fully implemented.

### **Comments to the City**

- Due to being situated at a dynamic intermodal node (GO, SmartTrack, multi-use trail), this project will have a significant ripple effect impact on the surrounding neighbourhood. As a result, getting this project right in terms of civic connectivity and flow is essential.
- The Panel encourages the City to work with all stakeholders to help achieve the following:
  - Working within the construction timeline of the development ensure the continuity of the multi-use trail across Bloor and connection with public realm initiative along the rail corridor.
  - Coordinate with Metrolinx and the developer to create a crash wall solution that meets rail safety requirements while providing a much more open pedestrian connectivity between the civic spaces along the west and south sides of the site.
  - Create a pedestrian connection across the rail corridor that links the neighbourhood to the west with the station and the south end of the site.

## Panel Commentary

The Panel thanked the design team for their "great presentation" and "very detailed, well-illustrated package". Many members noted their support for intensification at a transit node in Toronto and various members commented that there were many good aspects to the proposal.

Moving forward, the Panel thought more work and development was needed in terms of the open space, connections and built form massing. Several members felt that the project could become a substantial improvement for the area and the Panel looked forward to seeing the project progress.

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

### Existing Context

Many members pointed out that this area will be an attractive place to live, particularly given the Barrie Line, UPX and TTC connections in the quadrant. Some members noted that the project had many important existing adjacencies and a great potential to positively improve the existing and changing community.

### Transit Context

Various members commented that the GO line connecting this site will also be connecting into Downsview, which will also be substantially transformed over the next decade or so. These members felt that this area will become a transit crossroads, hub, and landmark.

Some members remarked that it was interesting to see the evolution of the broader transit system including how new connections were being made between newly intensifying parts of Toronto.

### Site Complexity

Some members noted that the project was located on a very complicated site. These members appreciated this complexity and the efforts made by the design team to address it.

Other members commented that they were familiar with the area and felt the project presented an interesting proposal of parts. Another member advised that the design should focus more the edge conditions.

## Site Plan Design

### Site Porosity & Courtyard Design

The Panel had differing perspectives on the courtyard design. Many members felt the courtyard was too enclosed and needed more porosity, while other members appreciated the intimacy of the courtyard as designed.

The Panelists recommending more porosity were concerned that the courtyard was too enclosed and, together with the platform, were presenting a dead end when travelling north. They wondered whether there was a way for the site to incorporate a public realm scale connection from the courtyard, or from the south, through the project and down to Bloor Street. Some members suggested cutting a pedestrian friendly diagonal, arc, or crosscut through the site at grade.

Various members recommended shifting the massing on site to achieve more porosity in the courtyard area and to reduce the impact of the proposal on St. Helens Avenue. Some members suggested cutting back the leg of the podium "U" on St. Helens to substantially open the view and access to the park and create a much more open space. Other members suggested flipping the orientation of the massing on St. Helens to make a more open aperture into the courtyard.

The Panelists more supportive of the courtyard design as shown, noted that it was reminiscent of a common typology in Chicago of low and midrise apartments around deep courtyards. These members thought that a contained courtyard could become a special space. One member

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additionally noted that the containment meant that the space would be shielded from the heavy train noise. Another member commented that the courtyard was acting as a positive figure in the scheme.

Other remarks around the courtyard design, included advice to really analyze the circulation, flow and access points for the development as well as carefully define what will happen in the space. One member thought the transition zones and semi-public areas were well developed and appropriate responses. Many members suggested connecting and extending the courtyard south to the walkway along the historic building.

#### Courtyard as Perceptually Private Space

Various members felt that the courtyard was reading as a privatized space that would act as a forecourt for the residents. A member noted that the spirit of a public park should not feel like an outsider is invading a condominium or apartment building's private territory.

Another member commented that if someone was in the courtyard at night the residents would feel uneasy and likely call the police. A different member wondered whether the courtyard could have more porosity from Bloor during the day so that it doesn't dead end or feel as private.

One member pointed out that for a site that will have many transit connections there will be a lot of pedestrian travel around the townhouses proposed at grade. This member questioned whether townhouses were the best use at grade or whether having more building amenities and other service at grade in areas that will be subject to a lot of pedestrian flow would make more sense in terms of privacy and transitions.

#### Response to Bloor Street

Various members pointed out that this stretch of Bloor Street is currently "very miserable" and the Panel thought the replacement of the retaining wall on Bloor Street with retail and a pedestrian friendly environment would be a big improvement.

Moving forward, the Panelists advised increasing the porosity from Bloor Street as well as to the retail on the upper podium. Many members recommended setting the building further back to increase the sidewalk width on Bloor. Various members additionally advised including more street trees as well as planters. A member felt more needed to be done to announce the entrance to the GO station as well.

Some members suggested taking advantage of the expected bridge reconstruction to improve the public realm along this stretch of Bloor. One member pointed out that the replacement bridge will become chunkier and take up more of the length along Bloor Street. This member advised ensuring there was enhanced lighting under the bridge as well as the inclusion of some public art.

#### Sidewalk Width along Bloor Street

The Panel felt that the sidewalk width along Bloor Street needed to be widened and recommended setting the building back from Bloor.

Some members pointed out that more consideration of pedestrian flow and transitions was required. These members were concerned that the proposed 2.7m width would not be enough to deal with the mass of people going by and accessing the GO station entrance. Many members commented that the building will become a transit hub and a centre for pedestrians.

Various members also felt that the podium should not be against the property line and recommended moving the whole building south to create more sky view to allow trees to be added along Bloor Street.

#### Transit Platform Area & Connections

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The Panel was felt more porosity across the site was needed as well as increased connections to the transit platform. Several Panel members thought there was an opportunity to establish more connections to the transit platform from Bloor Street.

Many Panel members were concerned about having a dead end and advised including stairway access so that people aren't abandoned on an upper level with no escape. Several members additionally recommended providing a more generous open space at the entrance as well as generally doing more to announce the entrance to the station.

Various members suggested there should be an open connection between the residential building and the transit station. Some members noted that on level 3 the podium tapers back and wondered if that could be continued to create a "gorge-like" open space connection to the podium.

#### UPX Station

One member suggested looking at the existing UPX station to the west of the site to understand what worked/didn't work and improve on the design of the transit station for this site. This member noted that one of the things that doesn't work with the UPX station was the location of the pedestrian access off Bloor Street due to the lack of visibility and access to the entrance.

However, this member also noted that the UPX station had successfully integrated other access points to the station, such as the informal drop off on the east side off Perth Avenue which allows people to "flow and filter into the station".

#### Train Station Plaza & Public Courtyard

A member pointed out that the train station plaza is historically a primary public space for cities. This member felt it was really important to push this aspect of the project. Looking at pg. 50 of the drawing package that showed a perspective view looking south, this member commented that the brick building to the left and the utilitarian "subway building" to the right were reading as two different schemes.

Instead, this member suggested enhancing the public nature of the train station by creating a "public realm horseshoe" around the project. The member noted this could become a "fantastic public courtyard" that was part of the train platform. It was also noted that this would create different opportunities for shelter within the public space as well as the inclusion of many different public amenities.

#### Proposed Park ("Great Lawn")

The Panel strongly felt that the site organization should be reconfigured to give more of the space currently reserved for servicing and loading to make more park space. Some members estimated that this would allow the provision of park space to "double, almost triple in size". One member pointed out that this increased size would still be below the required park space for the proposed development.

Various members noted that the park will need to be programmed with amenity spaces serving the community, such as playground equipment and off leash dog areas. The Panel felt that the park as shown was too ornamental and small for the neighbourhood. Many members questioned why there was so much hard surfaces proposed in the park when there were walkways on either side.

Various members noted that the park seemed to be visually terminated by a crash wall and functionally terminated by a load drop off area and loading dock. The Panel suggested moving the park to the south adjacent to the historic building and developing the space as both a park as well as a way to connect to the multi-use trail and GO platform.

#### Rail Path Connection

Many members felt the public space along the west side of the building should be expanded as part of the potential West Toronto Rail Path. The Panel pointed out that there was an opportunity on the site to extend the park southwards and create another access point to the multi-use trail.

A few members thought it was important to show what the real version of the extension of that rail path should be, including through diagrams and a series of studies.

Some members thought the proposal should include having the multi-use Davenport Diamond trail built all the way to Wade Avenue, with one member commenting that the connection is integral to the design development. Other members thought the project team should look into whether it would be possible to connect the multi-use trail down to Bloor.

#### Open Space at Track Level

Looking at the public realm space at track level, specifically the 7m open space between the crash wall and the multi-use trail, some members thought there was really interesting potential for the spaces there, such as a productive landscape or more active non-sensitive uses.

#### Opportunity for Pedestrian Bridge

Some members noted that there was an opportunity to include a pedestrian bridge over the rail corridor somewhere at the south end of this development. One member noted that there currently isn't any east-west activity in the area from Bloor or down to Dundas.

A member suggested that in the long term planning of the area a bridge could connect over across the Kitchener rail corridor, over to the Loblaw's redevelopment site to create an east-west pedestrian path midblock between Bloor and Dundas.

#### Servicing & Loading

Several members thought that in terms of site organization too much space had been given over to the road at the south end as well as the turnaround/entrance to the underground. Some members pointed out that this was a transit oriented development and questioned why so much space was given over to cars.

The Panel advised redeveloping this portion of the proposal to locate the driveway/underground access, drop off area, and servicing area immediately off of St Helens. The Panelists noted that much of this vehicular space should become more parkland and/or open space.

Many members additionally felt that the inner part of the site could then be given over to pedestrian traffic and the east-west walkway along the historic building could become an east-west connection.

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

#### Built Form Height & Massing

Many Panel members felt that in broad terms having two towers on the site worked, with some members noting that due to the transit and connectivity potential it would likely become a landmark site. However, various members thought the density was slightly too large for the site and should be shrunk.

One member commented that the proposal felt slightly over scale and recommended bringing it down to 90% of its current scale. Another member pointed out that the proposed FSI for the project was 5.9 and contrasted it with Market Square in the St Lawrence Market neighbourhood which has an FSI of 5, and no towers.

This member questioned whether two towers on the site was appropriate, and was more convinced about the tower located on the rail line rather than the one at the corner of Bloor and St. Helens.



The member additionally pointed out that Market Square was a very elegant way of building as it created streetwalls, good density and courtyards. They questioned why towers and podiums seemed to have become the default design solution.

#### Tower Locations

Some Panel members noted that it would have been helpful to have seen orientation studies regarding the placement of the two towers.

Several members felt the location of the northeast tower at the corner of Bloor and St. Helens should be further adjusted. The Panel additionally thought that the transition from the northeast tower down to the residential neighbourhood on St Helens needed improvement.

Various members pointed out that the tower separation distance was over 25m, as illustrated on pg. 39 of the drawing package, which suggested that there was room for the northeast tower placement to be reconsidered and refined.

A few members thought the current location and massing of the northeast tower had a "looming effect" on the existing neighbourhoods, particularly when viewed from south to north. Various members suggested moving the northeast tower further west and south to better respond to the neighbourhood. Some members additionally noted that if the northern tower was moved, the green space could be enlarged.

Another member suggested instead rotating the northern tower 90 degrees such that it was in line with the slab building to improve the shadow on the park to the north. A couple of members questioned whether it was really a two tower site or if the northern tower should be eliminated and the density redistributed.

#### Tower Articulation

Various members thought the building was "stately and elegant". Some members noted that while they appreciated the architectural expression of the towers and the way they were vertically broken to re-proportion and perceptually appear more slender, they felt the towers could look more similar to each other.

A member thought the northern tower was calmer due to the inset balconies compared to the outboard balconies on the western tower. This member suggested the western tower balconies should be more similar to the northern tower, and additionally noted that it would also be a more sustainable response.

#### Fabric Building

Many members commented that in general they really appreciated the simplicity of the architecture and the "muted design" at the podium. In general, these members thought that having a "quiet" fabric building on this site was an asset and would be a good fit for the neighbourhood, including the character of Bloor St.

Some members additionally noted that the simplicity of the design would help create more of a sense of place and continuity along this section of Bloor.

#### Podium Height & Massing

The Panel thought the podium height and massing needed further consideration. Various members thought the upper podium along Bloor St was too tall and could use a trim. Some members thought that in general there was an overall need for a greater degree of sky view and porosity.

Looking at the relationship between porosity through the site and the proposed massing, various members questioned the decision to restrict the podium height along the tracks. These members

instead suggested shifting the massing by angling up the podium height to the west to create more porosity into the courtyard area and to reduce some of the impact on St. Helens.

However, other members were concerned that raising the height would further impact the ability of getting reasonable light into the courtyards at different parts of the day. Looking at the terraces as shown on pg. 43, a member thought the depth of the terraces and balconies needed reconsideration because they currently also had the effect of closing in the courtyard.

Some members advised further study of where the different architectural expressions on the podium meet (the vertical expression and then the punched openings on the west side).

The Panel was concerned that there was no transition from the southerly tower to the 2-3 storey buildings to the south and advised having a greater transition down to the existing neighbourhood.

#### Scale on St. Helens Avenue

The Panel strongly felt that the scale of the proposal along St. Helens Avenue was too large and needed improvement, particularly the transition from the tower down to the residential neighbourhood.

Many members thought that shifting the tower west and south would be a step towards developing an overall massing scheme that would better respond to the neighbourhood. Various Panelists felt that the podium along St. Helens was too high. Other members felt that the closed north end of the courtyard was further impacting the transition and wondered if that portion of the podium could also be reduced to get a better feeling of openness throughout the site.

One member, looking at the perspective view along St. Helens from the south, commented that the height of the podium felt top heavy and advised further study. Another member wondered if the angle of the massing on St. Helens could be flipped to create an open aperture to the courtyard to have more visual acuity.

### **Landscape Strategy**

#### Walkway along the North Side of the Historic Building

Various members noted that the existing walkway on the north side of the historic building was a wonderful space with many "little entrances" going into the ground floor of the building, as well as many trees.

Moving forward, the Panel advised consideration of a more substantial and "beautifully landscaped" east-west pedestrian connection, potentially along the north face of the historic factory building. Various members noted that this would much a strong public realm link from the platform, as well as the future north-south bike and pedestrian path, the street, and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Some members thought that if the future of the rail edge was better defined it could help understand how this walkway could be used as a connection point. In general, the Panel thought that likely the connection to the site should be along the south property line and integrated with the park rather than beside the driveway.

#### Landscape along St. Helens Avenue

One member noted that the landscaping along St. Helens Avenue seemed quite lush.