

CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 4 – April 14, 2022

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Thursday April 14, 2022 at 12:30pm.

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	✓ †
Margaret Briegmann: Associate – BA Group	
Dima Cook: Director – EVOQ Architecture	✓
George Dark: Partner Emeritus/Senior Consultant – Urban Strategies	
Ralph Giannone: Principal – Giannone Petricone Associates	✓
Jim Gough: Independent Consultant, Transportation Engineering	✓
Jessica Hutcheon: Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio	✓
Viktors Jaunkalns: Partner – MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects	✓
Olivia Keung: Architect – Moriyama & Teshima Architects	
Paul Kulig: Principal – Perkins & Will	
Joe Lobko: Partner – DTAH	✓
Anna Madeira: Principal – BDP Quadrangle	✓
Jim Melvin: Principal Emeritus/Advisor – PMA; Owner – Realm Works	✓ *
Juhee Oh: Director, Sustainability & Energy – WSP	✓
Heather Rolleston: Principal, Design Director – BDP Quadrangle	✓
Eladia Smoke: Principal Architect – Smoke Architecture	✓
Sibylle von Knobloch: Principal – NAK Design Group	

† Chair of 1st Session

* Conflict First 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 March 10, 2022 by email.

MEETING 4 INDEX

- i. Wabash Community Recreation Centre (1st Review)

WABASH COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTRE

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW First Review

PRESENTATIONS:

CITY STAFF Ashley Wilson, Parks, Forestry & Recreation

DESIGN TEAM Diamond Schmitt Architects



VOTE No vote

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:

Public Realm

Considerations of integration with the public realm; park, reconfigured town square and streetscape.

Building Parti

Considerations of the stacking of the program to minimize the building footprint.

Colour and Materials

Consideration of building materials and colours, given the requirement for high-performance building envelop materials and integration with the red brick heritage structure.

Chair's Summary of Key Points

The Panel would like to thank the City and proponent team for bringing this exciting new community amenity to the Panel for review, sited as it is within the footprint of a beloved and well-used local park, and incorporating a heritage building and existing public plaza. The planning for this centre has been underway for several years and the design presented the result of a substantive amount of design work in response to community input, the site topography, orientation and existing park amenities and infrastructure.

The Panel was generally appreciative of the design but felt that there a greater synthesis of the design with its context and greater consideration of the public realm impact and landscape design is warranted. Specifically:

Heritage: Reduce the impact of the new building on the existing one; leave as much of the existing building intact and legible as possible. Carefully consider the choice of windows to ensure compatibility with the heritage building.

Public Realm: The re-designed public square is now amorphous, non-descript and lacking shade. Panel members suggested that the formal square be reintroduced in a fulsome way.

Site Planning: The proposed “Angler” scheme maximizes park and plaza space but represents a more structurally complex and costly scheme; ensure that the costs (financial, impact on the heritage building) of the Angler scheme do not outweigh any benefit.

Landscape: Panel strongly recommends that the park be included in the project scope. Critically, the ceremonial space must be moved to a location where it has a degree of privacy and a landscape buffer. Panel suggested that the off-leash area be moved to the rail corridor buffer.

Built Form: The relationship of the new building to the heritage building is not resolved; ensure that their interface is well-considered. Panel urged the proponent to review the materiality and colour of the new building, as the current proposal (all facades) has a monolithic, severe, and arguably unfriendly presence, unbecoming a community centre. Panel suggested that the building “open up” more to the landscape and be better integrated with it, and that the proponent team consider a greater range of colour and texture for the exterior cladding, as well as the incorporation of public art.

Traffic: Sorauren Avenue is constricted; ensure that the increased car, pedestrian and cycling traffic to and from the site, drop-off/pick-up and any required parking are accommodated. Consider removing on-site parking altogether, and provision of bike parking on both the east and west sides of the site.

Sustainability: Panel commends the commitment to sustainability demonstrated by the proponent and City team. Ensure that the PV on the fins can be replaced and upgraded, and/or its longevity ensured.

Panel Commentary

The Panel thanked the project team for their presentation and many members commented that it was great to finally see a community centre emerging on this site. Various members felt the presentation and drawing package were both very thorough and the amount of engagement done to date was fantastic and very positive and the Panel commended the commitment to sustainability in the design.

As the project team further develops the proposal the Panel recommended more refinement of the architectural massing and materiality, including with respect to how the new components connect and interact with the heritage elements, along with further development of the landscape design and programming. The Panel looked forward to seeing the project progress.

Site Plan & "Angler" Massing Option

- Various members thought the resolution on site, dealing with the angle of the rail corridor by angling the building massing was generally successful, but had a number of suggestions for the next stages as well as details that required close attention as the project develops.
- A member thought the angler scheme worked because it doesn't crowd the baseball diamond and it seems to maximize open space, which would in turn present an opportunity for the plaza to grow.
- Some members thought the general massing was elegant and sits nicely on the site.
- Some members thought the angler design concept worked really well, and resulted in the building acting as a backdrop for the landscape and outdoor community centre as well as mitigating the rail corridor.
- A member advised further considering the pedestrian and bicycle circulatory system through the site, including adjacent context, including anticipating the future bridge.
 - o This member recommended more investigation into how the bike system and path system in the park would work together and suggested overlaying both on the park.

Indigenous Ceremonial Space

- Looking at the Indigenous ceremonial space, a member advised that if fire and water were being asked for, the intention will be to do ceremony in the space.
 - o Various members pointed out that the ceremonial space did not have ideal adjacencies: it had been located at the meeting point of several paths and very close to the main plaza space.
 - o The Panel advised that the ceremonial space shouldn't and couldn't be in a high traffic area.
 - To use the space for ceremony, it needs to be a private area, with a sense of enclosure;
 - It needs a landscape buffer and the ability to plant trees around the space; and
 - There is a "need to feel embraced by the landscape" during ceremony.
- Many Panel members suggested relocating the ceremonial space to where the dog park had currently been located, and then move the dog park along the rail corridor.
- A member suggested further consideration of proximities for any spaces inside the building that the ceremonial space might want access to.

Dog Park / Rail Corridor Setback Zone

- The Panel advised moving the off leash dog area along the rail corridor.
 - o Some members pointed out this could help solve the 30m setback issue by animating the area along the corridor that can't be built on.
 - o Various members suggested creating a loop walkway or dog run all the way along the corridor.
- One member suggested that alternatively the land adjacent to the corridor could become a crossfit area.
- A member felt that there should be a better design solution than the typical fence used for off leash dog areas. This member further wondered whether there could be a window facing the pool that dogs could look into.
- Some members wondered whether art could be incorporated in the area as well.

Landscape Design

- Some members noted appreciation for the moves made to retain, reconfigure and add to the park programming.
 - o These members noted it was difficult to get this amount of programming in one location.
- Understanding that the landscape design was still preliminary, some members advised further analysis and consideration of the SWM and how design moves could be made to make these types of sustainable considerations visible to the community.
 - o Some examples included the incorporation of infiltration gardens.
- One member suggested including a communal outdoor kitchen space, such as a pizza oven.
- Various members thought there should be some thought to programming the Field House.
- A member noted appreciation for the topographical commitment to some of the landscape spaces as well.

Design of Main Square

- Various members noted that the community had recently raised money for the current public square on the site. These members advised that this was an important public space for the community.
 - o Many members questioned why the existing public square was to be replaced with an "amorphous" circulation space that had no provision for shade.

- Various members commented that the existing square was very unique and wondered why it had been discarded.
 - These members noted that the proposed massing could work with the existing square.
 - The Panel strongly felt that the existing square should be brought back in some way.
- Many members questioned why a portion of the new plaza had been designated as concrete.
 - These members felt that the whole square should be constructed using permeable surfaces and questioned the rationale for using concrete.
 - A member advised looking at low carbon options if the materiality had to be concrete for some reason.
- Some members pointed out that the existing square was not very old and advised the project team to look into whether its materials could be redeployed elsewhere on site.
- Many members advised bringing trees into the area to provide shade options in the summer months to ensure the square will be an enjoyable space year round.

Park Design as Part of Project Scope

- The Panel strongly felt that the project would benefit from having the park design as part of the project scope to allow for complimentary uses and design moves between the landscape and architecture that complement the use of the site.
- Various members pointed out that the suggestion that there was no major landscape project was misleading given that the placement of 60 geothermal tubes would require much of the open space to be "ripped up and redone".
 - These members therefore did not think the landscape component was meeting the aspirations of the community of the project.
- Some members commented that there was not enough urban greenspace in Toronto, and questioned the decision to have so much of the park given over to a baseball diamond.
 - However, other members familiar with the area noted that the baseball diamond was well utilized by the community.

Field House

- Many members felt that the Field House should be included as part of the project, particularly in terms of establishing specific programming for the building.
 - Various members commented that in terms of the sequence into the site, the first view patrons would have is of the Field House which currently has unclear use.

Traffic Control on Sorauren & Wabash

- Many members noted concern about the amount of traffic in the area, including the congestion compounded by the narrowness of Sorauren Ave.
 - These members were concerned that the location of the parking lot and drop off would exacerbate this condition.
 - Some members advised that the left turns into the parking lot from Wabash Ave will need traffic control to be safe as Wabash Ave doesn't have good sightlines due to how it turns around and becomes Macdonell Ave as a continuous street.

Vehicular Parking & Drop-off

- Various members liked the way servicing and parking around the back of the community centre had been minimized.
 - These members hoped that the project was providing as little parking as possible.
 - A member commented that street parking is available on both sides of Wabash Ave.

- Various other members advised that parking should be removed entirely. These members felt that the inclusion of parking on site would cause a lot of issues and further that the space currently given over to parking could be better utilized.

Bike Parking

- A member noted appreciation for the provision of covered bike parking and advised the bike parking should not be an afterthought as there is a large amount of bike traffic in the neighbourhood.
 - o Various members noted that improving the cycling amenities and could help address the issues around the limitations on traffic capacity as well as promote more sustainable modes.
 - o It was noted that it was important to have bike parking located by the front door.

Proposed Architectural Design

- Various members noted appreciation for the simple boxes as an overarching design parti, although the Panel felt that further development and refinement was required. The varied comments about and suggestions for the proposed design included:
 - o The aesthetic quality of the architectural blocks has a lot of design merit and a very clear multi-dimensional façade, but there is a danger that it will be read as being oppressive by the community.
 - The symbolism of vertical bars has a classic formality and classicism to it.
 - Look into animating the architecture by adding colour, such as on the fins.
 - Perhaps the fins could become polycrystalline solar panels rather than the current monolithic expression.
 - o Make sure the community reading of the architecture reflects the design intentions.
 - The architecture is reading a bit institutional.
 - o A member had appreciation the scale-less quality the design brings both from the park setting and as a foil to the heritage building, which is very rich in detail in contrast.
 - o Appreciation for how the angled concept provides a buffer against the rail corridor.
 - o The interior spaces should be revealed more on the exterior of the building.
 - The building has a strong façade, but there is an opportunity to engage the community with the interior.
 - For example, could glazing in the pool area be brought down or otherwise used to reveal some of the programming within the building.
 - A lot can be done to improve the interaction between the interior and exterior amenity spaces.
 - o The architecture of community centres should be joyful.
 - o Suggest the two masses don't need to be architectonically so similar; investigate different colour, articulation or materiality.
 - For example, the building/massing to the left at grade could also be a brick building, and the massing above the heritage building could be "crystalline and luminous".
 - o The angler massing will create a complicated structure for the building, and additionally complicates the relationship between the new architecture and the existing heritage building.
 - This massing solution will take time and money to execute that could come at the expense of other aspects of the project.
 - It also has an impact on what can be done with other aspects of the design and broader site response.

Proposed Materiality

- Many Panel members advised thinking more about how the site and buildings could be animated more, including by adding more colour to the soffit and façade to create more liveliness and texture as well as to tie the community centre into the landscape. Additional comments included:
 - Wonder if the two masses/boxes could be a lighter colour to allow the play of light and shadow to become more apparent to bring the community centre into the dialogue of the neighbourhood in a more abstract way.
 - The introduction of a red tone could be another approach.
 - Strongly support painting the soffit, and further wonder if this idea could be brought into the interior of the building to animate the atrium space.
 - Could also be brought to the east side of the building to better animate the drop off area.
 - Flashes of colour in the interior of the building that can be viewed from the exterior will also help warm the building up and attract people inside.
 - The exterior feels very enigmatic; there should be more hints of what is going on inside the building.
 - The darkness of the renders is causing the building to feel heavy and a bit ominous.
 - However, the presentation illustrates more of a texture of materials that should give the building a "sparkle" that is not reading in the renders.
 - The rendering of the interior feels light washed, open, hopeful, and elevating – this feeling should be on the outside of the building as well.
 - Want to see renders showing the building at night and the impact lighting could have on the exterior.
 - Develop a lighting strategy. The lighting of the building at night could be grand and could highlight key moments, particularly the main entrance.
 - Right now the entrance is reading as dark and recessed – encourage the design team to develop it as a grand space.
 - The Red River College example is a great precedent that should be looked at closely.
 - Do material studies to find a way to lighten up the building while still achieving solar control.

Heritage Building & Rehabilitation / Adaptive Reuse

- A member strongly advised that while they understand why the sub-truss structure could not be preserved, to reduce any further impact it was crucial that the remaining shell was carefully taken care of, such as by not having it exposed to cold.
 - This is very important from both a heritage conservation and a sustainability perspective.
- Various members advised that the choice of windows for the heritage building should be carefully reviewed to ensure it is appropriate for the heritage architecture.
 - This will help keep the remaining heritage elements on site coherent, as unfortunately not many remain.
 - A member commented that having a window that doesn't speak to the character of the heritage building would negatively impact the overall project as well as the heritage component.
- Many members were happy to see the heritage building was being conserved.

Linking Old / New Architecture

- Various Panel members advised that further development was required to successfully link the old and new architecture.

- Looking at the compositional strategy, a member felt that the contemporary elements were colliding with the heritage elements in an "awkward" and unresolved way.
 - One detail specific noted was the collision of the new soffit into the cornice of the old building. The member advised that the way the new architecture connects into the old should be graceful and create a "place of poetry".
- Some members wondered whether the linking piece could become very transparent.
- Some members questioned having the deep fins at the locations where the new architecture hooked into the heritage building.

Boiler Room & Chimney

- Some members commented that they really liked how Building C had been interpreted as a ruin.
 - One member noted specific appreciation for how the component was open to the sky.
 - Another member, while they noted appreciation for the ambitions to keep the boiler room and chimney, conversed advised that this will likely be a challenging form of preservation and wondered whether there was a better way to keep these elements rather than the shown half walls.

Sustainability Strategy

- Many members noted appreciation for the great gestures, targets and measures put into place with regards to sustainability at this stage of the design.
- Some members commented that the embedded PV was an incredibly interesting approach.
- However, various members questioned why the design team wasn't taking advantage of the vast expanse of the roof for sustainable measures, such as PV.
 - One member further noted skepticism around the embedded PV proposed for the vertical fins. This member pointed out that it would be much harder to replace PV embedded in the façade over time as compared to PV on the roofscape.
 - It was also pointed out that there will likely be rapid advancements in PV as well.
- Some members wondered whether art could be embedded in the fins instead. A member suggested the art could somehow embody the program of the project and communicate a story in a way that addresses the passive sustainable role of the fins.
 - Looking at the Brickworks and the idea of a live shade device that can transform over time, another member suggested each fin could become its own art piece and the overarching installation could unfold over time.
- Some members pointed out that a lot of the sustainable measures were hidden away, such as the timber. These members wondered whether there was a way to make visible some of these sustainable components to show the community and broader public this is a very sustainable building and "not just a black box".
 - A member noted that there is an important educational component to doing this as well, especially for kids.
 - Various members suggested looking more into opportunities to build on this potential education piece for the community, including with respect to the mass timber, vertical fins, PV etc.
 - A member suggested included information and signage around how much energy is generated.

- Looking at the operation of the building, a member noted that the natural ventilation system is controlled and cautioned the design team that occupant behavior can change how the building is meant to operate and run.
 - o This member advised ensuring that the passive elements are well controlled so the building will operate as a net zero building as intended.

Rooftop Amenity

- A member felt a habitable roof was essential to the project. They wondered if such an amenity could be expanded, noting that views to the park and to the lake would be an "amazing opportunity".

Public Art

- Various members noted support for the inclusion of public art as part of the project.
 - o A member commented that Red River College had a public art engagement process around using the expression of the building to communicate something about the story of place.
 - o A member noted that there were all kinds of ways the façade could become integrated public art and/or help animate the community centre and area.