

CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 4 – June 18, 2025

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday, June 18, 2025, at 12:30 pm.

Members of the Design Review Panel

Gordon Stratford (Co-Chair): Principal – G C Stratford | Architect
Michael Leckman (Co-Chair): Principal – Diamond Schmitt Architects
Meg Graham (Co-Chair): Principal – superkül
Dima Cook: Director – EVOQ Architecture
Ralph Giannone: Principal – Giannone Petricone Associates
Jim Gough: Independent Consultant, Transportation Engineering
Jessica Hutcheon: Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio
Olivia Keung: Associate – Moriyama Teshima | Architects
Paul Kulig: Principal – Perkins & Will
Joe Lobko: Partner – Joe Lobko Architect Inc.
Anna Madeira: Principal – BDP Quadrangle
Jim Melvin: Principal Emeritus/Advisor – PMA; Owner – Realm Works
Juhee Oh: Director, Climate Strategy – Choice Properties
Heather Rolleston: Principal, Design Director – BDP Quadrangle
Eladia Smoke: Principal Architect – Smoke Architecture
Sibylle von Knobloch: Principal – NAK Design Group

Design Review Panel Coordinator

Maria Mokhtariesbouei: Urban Design, City Planning Division

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting, which was held on May 14, 2025, by email.

MEETING 4 INDEX

1. 23 Toronto Street (1st Review)



23 TORONTO STREET

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	ZBA and SPA
DEVELOPER	Goband (Toronto) Development Ltd.

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Christy Chow, Community Planning Juliana Azem, Urban Design Georgia Kuich, Heritage Planning
DESIGN TEAM	Jonathan Tinney, SvN Architects + Planners
VOTE	Support: unanimous

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Joe Lobko
PANELISTS	Dima Cook, Ralph Giannone, Jim Gough, Olivia Keung, Paul Kulig, James Melvin, Sibylle von Knobloch
CONFLICTS	Anna, Heather

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. How does the building design fit within the local context (MUA-1) and the city skyline?
2. How does the proposal present a subordinate addition to the heritage resources and is it sensitive to the HCD in general?

3. How does the proposed design expand and enhance the public realm, particularly Courthouse Square Park?

Summary of Project's Key Points

The following panel member discussion points were highlighted in the verbal meeting summary by the Chair:

The Panel appreciates the opportunity to review this significant proposal at an early stage of design and planning. Several key themes emerged from the panel discussion that followed the presentation.

Public Realm and Heritage

The panel emphasized the significance of this site, noting its historical importance in the city. The public realm, particularly Courthouse Square, should be revitalized to serve this growing community. The team was encouraged to further enhance this public space, building on the groundwork laid by the BIA. The panel recognized the sensitivity of the project to heritage elements and appreciated the project team's attention to preserving existing building character. However, it was felt that more effort was required with the design of new elements to better complement the heritage features, ensuring a harmonious relationship between the old and new.

Significant concerns were also raised about the potential additional shadow impact of the proposed development on St. James Park.

Block Planning and Integration

A recurring theme was the need for comprehensive block planning. With multiple tower projects adjacent, the panel highlighted the importance of coordinating with neighboring developments and engaging in a block planning process to create a cohesive, vibrant, and functional urban fabric. City staff's experience in facilitating such processes was recognized as essential to ensuring smooth integration with the broader context.

Architectural Design and Tower Form

While the panel acknowledged the proposal's ambition, there were concerns about the

tower's design and expression, particularly the tower's relationship to the heritage elements below and how the tower meets the sky. While the stated emphasis on simplicity was supported, the aesthetics of the tower were seen as underwhelming at this stage, and the panel urged the team to refine the design to match the project's overall vision and ambition.

Community Amenities and Tower Resilience

A number of panel members emphasized the critical importance of integrating community amenities into the podium levels of the development commensurate to the substantial density proposed on this site and the block as a whole. This evolution in thinking about the project would provide valuable community resources critical to future livability. Tower resilience should also be a focus of further design development. The team is encouraged to carefully consider the challenges of super-tall buildings, particularly regarding livability, durability, and resilience during extended power outages and extreme weather events. How can the organization, programming, and design of tall buildings better encourage the development of supportive vertical communities?

Unit Mix and Market Demand

A notable concern raised was the need to reconsider the mix of units, particularly the number of small units being proposed. The panel noted that the market for small units in Toronto is saturated, and a more diverse mix of unit sizes is necessary to ensure the project's success.

Final Remarks

The Chair concluded by commending the team for their work in progress and for engaging the panel early in the process. The panel's feedback was aimed at helping to shape the project to ensure it will contribute positively to the city's urban fabric. The Chair expressed optimism for the next iteration of the project and wished the team the best in moving forward.

The meeting concluded with a vote on the project, where panel members had the opportunity to express their overall support or concerns, with the option to propose conditions.

Panel Commentary

Project overview and General Observations

Panelists acknowledged the ambition and complexity of the proposal for 23 Toronto Street, a project that seeks to introduce an 88-storey mixed-use tower while retaining and integrating several significant heritage structures. The site is within the downtown mixed-use area and the St. Lawrence Heritage Conservation District (HCD), which presents both opportunity and responsibility. Members expressed appreciation for the whole-building retention strategy, particularly for the courthouse and Consumers Gas buildings, while noting the need for vigilance to ensure this commitment is maintained through detailed design and construction. There was broad support for the early engagement with the DRP and the heritage-driven approach, although concerns were raised about the livability and feasibility of supertall residential towers.

Context and Site Integration

Panel members emphasized the importance of the site's relationship to the surrounding context—especially its adjacency to Courthouse Square and the other development proposals within the same block. The panel encouraged the City to initiate a coordinated block planning process, given that this site is just one of potentially four tall buildings in the area. The mid-block connection through the site was identified as a strong and welcome urban gesture, with potential to create a meaningful public connection to the park and help reanimate Courthouse Square. Panelists appreciated the intention to improve the public realm and recognized the value in restoring connections that support pedestrian movement, particularly along Toronto Street and Court Street.

Built Form and Massing

The proposed tower's relationship to the heritage buildings below was the focus of much discussion. While panelists commended the setbacks and the strategy of placing the tower on a consolidated corner podium, there were concerns that the tower expression was visually complex and potentially overwhelmed the retained heritage structures. Several members noted that the step-backs and layered façade may result in a lack of architectural clarity and subordination. Suggestions were made to simplify the design—particularly at the amenity reveal levels—to allow the heritage buildings to maintain their prominence. The proposed height was also questioned, particularly given the residential nature of the building and the absence of a strong architectural resolution at the tower top. Panelists encouraged the team to explore strategies that improve livability, reduce floorplate crowding, and enhance the skyline profile.

Connectivity and Future Development Considerations

The panel emphasized the importance of understanding the site as part of a broader block undergoing transformation. The presence of other high-rise applications nearby led to a discussion about how these projects collectively impact the public realm, pedestrian access, and sun/shadow conditions. Panelists encouraged the City to lead a block-wide coordination effort, potentially through block planning or precinct planning, to ensure cohesive development outcomes. Members also encouraged the team to anticipate how increased density will affect infrastructure, mobility, and green space demand.

Public Realm and Open Spaces

There was consistent support for the idea of transforming Courthouse Square into a more vibrant and usable public space. Several panelists highlighted the shadow impacts of the proposed tower—particularly during key summer afternoon hours—and stressed the cumulative nature of such impacts when combined with adjacent proposals. Members expressed strong support for the zero-parking strategy and internalized servicing approach, recognizing these decisions as positive urban design choices. The need for enhanced animation of the park-facing frontage, public seating, greenery, and dog relief areas were also raised as priorities to ensure the open space meets the needs of future residents and visitors.

Sustainability and Environmental Considerations

Panelists appreciated the proposal's initial efforts toward sustainability—such as adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, no on-site parking, and high-performance cladding. However, several members highlighted the lack of detailed strategies addressing the embodied carbon, tower resilience, and energy efficiency specific to supertall buildings. There was a call for more advanced thinking around how a high-rise residential population can be supported during power outages or climate extremes. The panel also discussed the challenges of building tall in Toronto's current economic and market context and recommended that a more thorough sustainability narrative be developed.

Path Forward for Design Improvements

The panel voted unanimously to support the proposal with a condition. The key condition was the need for a more robust development of amenity spaces and tower livability strategies, including the reconsideration of indoor/outdoor amenity connections and more public-facing uses in the podium. Additional guidance was provided on simplifying the tower expression, continuing to prioritize whole-building heritage retention, and

working closely with City staff and neighbors to develop a coordinated block plan. Panelists also strongly endorsed enhancing the mid-block connection and upgrading the adjacent public realm, while recognizing that broader improvements to Courthouse Square would require City leadership and investment.

The panel acknowledged the promising direction of the proposal and encouraged the team to continue refining the design with attention to heritage conservation, community infrastructure, and public realm excellence.