CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 6 – September 10, 2025

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday, September 10, 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 July 16, 2025, by email.

MEETING 5 INDEX

1. 444 Yonge Street (College Park) (1st Review)

444 Yonge street (College Park)

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	ZBA
DEVELOPER	GWL Realty Advisors Ltd.

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Paul Johnson, Community Planning Joanna Chludzinska, Urban Design
DESIGN TEAM	Michael Attard, Hariri Pontarini Architects
VOTE	Support

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Michael Leckman
PANELISTS	Dima Cook, Jim Gough, Jessica Hutcheon, Paul Kulig, Anna Madeira, James Melvin, Heather Rolleston
CONFLICTS	None

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. Proposed parkland dedication configuration and integration of the public and private spaces.

2. Potential Park edge animation through lower and upper ground floor retail and programming

3. The completed Heritage Building and its relationship to the towers above.

4. Interface between the heritage building and the new base building facing the park.

5. Skyline presence of the towers when viewed from a distance including those relevant views found on Map 7B of the Official Plan

Summary of Project's Key Points

The Panel expressed strong support for the ambition, civic significance, and overall vision of this proposal. The Chair commended the project as a remarkable expression of confidence in the civic life of Toronto, recognizing its optimism, cultural depth, and thoughtful response to the city's evolving urban identity. The team's history of delivering complex and high-quality projects was acknowledged as a foundation for trust in the design's potential.

Civic Vision and Public Realm

Panel members emphasized that the proposal represents an important civic gesture, engaging meaningfully with Toronto's history and the role of public life within the city core. The design was praised for its generosity toward the public realm, particularly its integration with College Park. However, the Panel encouraged further clarity in how the interior civic space relates to the exterior one, questioning whether the glass edge between the two is simply transparent or can be meaningfully occupied to enrich the public experience. Examples such as the Four Seasons Centre were cited as successful precedents in activating transitional edges.

Urban Design and Access

The project's boldness as a fully transit-oriented, no-parking development was recognized as an important precedent for Toronto. The Panel encouraged the team to continue refining strategies for pick-up and drop-off functions, especially considering the range of uses within the project—including the daycare and hotel components. Ensuring clarity of arrival sequences, legibility between the front and back doors, and overall flow of movement was considered key to the project's long-term success as a civic destination.

Architectural Expression and Materiality

The Panel expressed enthusiasm for the architectural ambition of the proposal and acknowledged the design team's demonstrated skill in material exploration and detail through previous landmark projects. The Chair encouraged continued focus on the material presence of the building, ensuring that it contributes to the city's architectural

richness and builds upon the legacy of College Park as a civic and material landmark.

Sustainability and Future Resilience

The Chair reiterated the importance of sustainability, urging that the project's environmental ambitions be expressed not only through performance but also through architectural form and design character. Given the project's scale and symbolic significance, the Panel felt it should exemplify the next generation of sustainable civic buildings in Toronto.

Inclusivity and Family-Oriented Design

Panel members also raised the opportunity to strengthen the project's inclusivity by better addressing family-oriented needs within the mix of uses and spaces. Encouraging more diverse forms of occupancy was seen as a way to enhance social richness and reflect the city's evolving demographics.

Final Remarks

The Chair concluded by commending the project team for an inspiring and visionary proposal that demonstrates optimism, design excellence, and civic purpose. The Panel looks forward to reviewing the next iteration, with refinements that will further clarify key relationships within the public realm, improve accessibility and sustainability integration, and enhance the project's expression of civic life in Toronto.

Panel Commentary

Project Overview and General Observations

Panel members commended the ambition and complexity of the proposal, noting its potential to become a transformative civic project within the downtown core. The design was recognized as an ambitious vertical "city within a city," balancing residential, commercial, and civic functions with significant connections to transit.

There was broad appreciation for the richness of the public realm strategy, including the proposed Winter Garden and extensive indoor–outdoor spaces. Members highlighted the project's promise in delivering a new kind of urban typology for Toronto, while also cautioning that the scale and density require careful attention to livability, heritage integration, and long-term operations.

Context, Heritage, and Materiality

Panelists strongly acknowledged the project's rare opportunity to complete an unfinished historic site, emphasizing the responsibility to respect and reinterpret the original

architectural intent. Concerns were raised regarding the resolution of materials and detailing, with several members noting that without careful articulation, the new podium risks appearing flat and two-dimensional rather than authentically tied to the heritage fabric.

Discussion focused on how the new podium façades turn corners, articulate window rhythms, and transition between the city-facing and park-facing elevations. Some members encouraged the design to extend heritage-inspired masonry rhythms into the park edge to create continuity, rather than a sharp dichotomy between front and rear facades.

Built Form and Massing

The panel offered extensive commentary on the three proposed towers. While the overall placement was supported, concerns were raised about the current tower expression being overly complex and visually “busy.” Members compared the proposal to historical precedents such as Rockefeller Center, highlighting the need for stronger symmetry, simplified vertical articulation, and clear tower-podium relationships.

Particular attention was given to the central tower, whose increased height was seen as an opportunity for more pronounced stepping at the crown to meet the skyline more gracefully. Several members encouraged refinement of vertical lines, proportions, and crown details to strengthen the architectural clarity.

Public Realm, Connectivity, and Open Space

Panelists expressed strong support for the ambition to create an extensive indoor–outdoor public realm network, noting its potential to serve as a year-round civic amenity. The Winter Garden was praised as a powerful design element, with members envisioning it as a key urban space comparable to the city’s most successful civic interiors.

At the same time, the panel cautioned that balancing the “secondary public realm” inside the project with the existing external public spaces will be critical. Suggestions included developing a continuous circulation diagram linking the subway, atrium, Winter Garden, food court, and park into a coherent sequence. Members noted opportunities to strengthen entrances, pickup/drop-off strategies, and pedestrian clarity to ensure legibility and inclusivity.

Concerns were raised about the adequacy of the existing subway facilities and the need for early engagement with the TTC regarding a second entrance. The panel also encouraged the design team to consider more active and family-oriented amenities at grade—such as play areas or interactive fountains—so that the public realm supports all age groups, not just seniors or transient users.

Livability and Community Considerations

Several members raised questions about the building's ability to support family living. While larger unit types were included, panelists noted the absence of community amenities such as recreation centres or libraries, making it more likely to serve as a "naturally occurring retirement community" than a family-focused development.

Concerns were also raised about supertall livability, including elevator wait times, the design of corridors, and the need for wider, more social circulation spaces. Members encouraged creative strategies for community-building in vertical environments, including sky lobbies and intermediate amenity spaces where residents can interact.

Sustainability and Environmental Considerations

The panel underscored the importance of sustainability, noting that a project of this scale should demonstrate leadership in green building standards. Members requested a more robust sustainability strategy addressing embodied carbon, energy efficiency, and resilience in tall buildings. Suggestions were also made to integrate more greenery into the Winter Garden and conservatory, potentially leaning toward an arboretum-like approach.

Concerns were raised about glare and overheating from southwest-facing glass, with members advising consideration of shading strategies or material treatments to mitigate thermal impacts.

Documentation and Process

Several panelists noted that the submission package, while thorough, was difficult to review due to its length and formatting. Members recommended providing more accessible, consolidated documents in future submissions to allow for deeper and more constructive feedback.

Panel Summary and Path Forward

The panel recognized the proposal as a landmark project with significant civic potential, praising its ambition, heritage sensitivity, and innovative public realm strategy. At the same time, members identified critical areas requiring refinement:

Heritage and Materiality: Resolve materials, detailing, and corner conditions to authentically respect the historic fabric.

Tower Expression: Simplify massing, strengthen vertical articulation, and refine skyline terminations for clarity.

Public Realm: Ensure coherent circulation between interior and exterior public spaces, refine entrances and drop-off strategies, and strengthen family-oriented programming.

Livability: Address supertall design challenges including elevators, corridors, and intermediate community spaces.

Sustainability: Develop a robust environmental strategy, including shading, resilience, and integration of urban greenery.

Panel Vote

The panel voted Support with Conditions, emphasizing that:

The relationship between podium and towers, and the articulation of tower expression, must be simplified and clarified.

Heritage materiality and detailing should be resolved to ensure authenticity and avoid flattening of historic references.

The public realm strategy should better integrate interior and exterior spaces while accommodating families and diverse users.

A comprehensive sustainability narrative should be developed to position the project as a leader in environmental performance.

The panel expressed enthusiasm for the project's vision and strongly encouraged the design team to return with refinements addressing the comments raised.