

# **CITY OF VAUGHAN**

## **DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

### **Minutes of Meeting**

#### **Meeting 83 – July 30, 2020**

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The Design Review Panel was held online on Thursday, July 30, 2020, over Microsoft Teams Virtual Platform.

#### **PANEL MEMBERS**

##### **Present**

Megan Torza, DTAH (Chair)

Paul Kulig, Perkins + Will (Vice-Chair)

Fung Lee, PMA Landscape Architects Ltd.

Peter Turner, Turner Fleischer Architects Inc.

Ute Maya-Giambattista, SGL Planning & Design Inc.

Guela Solow-Ruda, Petroff Partnership Architects

Henry Burstyn, IBI Group

##### **Absent**

Alfredo Landaeta, Forrec

John Tassiopoulos, WSP Canada Group Ltd

Margaret Briegmann, BA Group

Sheldon Levitt, Quadrangle Architects Ltd.

Michael Rietta, Giannone Petricone Associates Architects

Wayne Swanton, Janet Rosenberg & Studio

##### **STAFF**

Rob Bayley, Urban Design

Amy Roots, VMC Urban Design

Nancy Tuckett, Development Planning

Mary Caputo, Development Planning

Gaston Soucy, VMC Urban Design

Natalie Wong, VMC Development Planning

Carol Birch, Development Planning

David Marcucci, Policy Planning

Shahrzad Davoudi-Strike, Urban Design

Cory Gray, VMC Parks

Shirin Rohani, Urban Design

Chrisa Assimopoulos, Urban Design

Shirley Marsh, Urban Design

Misha Bereznyak, Urban Design

**The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am with Megan Torza in the Chair.**

**1. CONFIRMATION OF THE AGENDA**

APPROVED unanimously by present members.

**2. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

Megan Torza disclosed a conflict of interest with item three on the agenda.

**3. ADOPTION/CORRECTION OF MINUTES**

Meeting Minutes for June 25, 2020, were approved.

**4. DESIGN REVIEW**

**Block C2 (East Block South), Vaughan Metropolitan Centre**

Architect: Gensler

Review: 1<sup>st</sup> Review

**Introduction**

City staff sought Panel's advice on the following:

1. How successful is the site organization, including land use distribution, circulation, access, loading and servicing in providing an active and pedestrian friendly public realm?
2. Does the proposal deliver the principles and functionality outlined by Urban Design and Engineering Staff in considering the proposed road deletion?

- Mid-block connection to the south block future N/S road (type of connection to be determined)
- Providing passenger pick-up/drop-off and on street parking
- Full moves at Apple Mill Road
- Integrating a POPS and strong pedestrian public connection (with public access easements)
- Accommodating servicing and loading
- Ensuring office use is integrated

## Overview

Panel commended the design team for a good presentation, as well as for showing progress drawings and a willingness to work with Staff. The following overview comments were provided:

- **Site Plan and Frontages:**
  - As with most projects that are in dynamic locations, all frontages are important. Panel acknowledged that the proposal is wrestling with the challenges of resolving a mix of uses and related servicing. The main challenge will be the discreet location of the back of house elements. If possible, Panel urged the design team to push some of the servicing components below grade.
  - Panel felt the portals were intriguing and appealing but cautioned that they be oriented and designed in distinct ways so that they react to the external and internal context. Consider terminal views, pedestrian flows, etc.
  - Panel felt the materiality was good, and noted that the colonnade is a nice gesture, if used sparingly.
- **Transportation and Connectivity:**
  - The east west local street plays an important role as a drop-off and pedestrian zone, but will be a likely location for services, so aligning the built form and service access will be key.
  - The shape of the hotel could become a contributor to the east west street if lobby access is located along that frontage.
  - Loading below grade would benefit the public realm frontages.
  - Allow for lobby connections through the buildings to connect to both interior and exterior spaces.
  - Provide more approach views for pedestrians coming from destinations in context, such as from the SmartVMC bus terminal and Edgeley Park.

## Comments

### Package

- Panel appreciated the package and presentation. The process outlining the design evolution was very helpful.

## Site Plan and Organization

- The site composition, organization, location of buildings and uses are taking good advantage of the most utilitarian components of the design. This strategy works, and can be used as the base to explore how the public realm can start defining the pedestrian connectivity and start developing the different transitions and characters of the open spaces; from a more active and public south-west corner to a more quiet and private space at the north side.
- The mix of uses are great and provide a unique opportunity, well translated to the built form and layout.
- The central plaza, along with the north and south blocks being related, is a strong design concept.
- Some of the traditional street edges are being sacrificed in favour of the courtyard.
- Tightening up of the courtyard might be a good idea to control the large open space.
- Solving servicing, drop-offs, loading, pedestrian interfaces etc. will be critical and functional issues must be resolved prior to finalizing the ground floor and public realm. The new plan being developed with Staff is starting to address some of the early challenges.
- Explore whether it is possible to have a large underground solution to all loading, to create a better ground floor public realm and rationalize the servicing.
- Explore whether the residential lobby should face Jane street. Consider a through access on the residential lobby to Jane Street.
- Focal points in the plan are good. Generally, the portals are creating interesting angles and relationships. Panel felt the portal from Millway was a strong gesture to frame a landmark building as an invitation into the civic courtyard. However, Panel felt there were challenges at portal to the south with respect to the entrances to the buildings If loading and services are located there. Consideration of the view and connection from the road to the south requires attention.
- Undertake a clear pedestrian analysis to help inform where the passages should be located. Focus on desire lines to determine where the frontages and back of house are located.
- Resolving the main entrance, drop-off and servicing to the hotel is critical. The tabletop crossing is being blocked by the hotel loading. Consider relocating and explore a layby along Millway Avenue to create a grand hotel entrance.
- The permeable south-west corner at Apple Mill and Millway creates a good focal point at a very important location. But is it at the right distance to the edge to allow for the street activation to happen?
- The heroic view at the south west-corner of Apple Mill and Millway might not be representing the actual experience that pedestrians will have as they move across Millway from the transit hub. Doing clear and more precise pedestrian maps would help determine what the experience could be like and provide information to help refine the design and better respond to its users and context.

## Landscape

- The landscape framework and connections are appreciated.
- The portal through Millway is quite large but it is understood as a big transit connector.
- More activation is preferred along Jane Street, especially at the corner at Apple Mill and Jane.
- The large opening towards Jane Street is not necessary as it takes away from the streetscape activation and character. The character along Jane Street across from the Edgeley Park, as well as the character along Apple Mill will be critical to mediate with the park to the east.
- Elimination of the south-east portal will allow for a good development of the connection from the east-west road (east end) to the south-west corner.

## **7850 Dufferin Street – Marydel Homes**

Architects: Kohn Partnership Architects  
Review: 2<sup>nd</sup> Review

## **Introduction**

City staff sought Panel's advice on the following:

1. How successful is the revised design in addressing the first-round comments related to:
  - creating a balance between roads/driveways, open space and built form.
  - Creating a clear hierarchy of street network and blocks, with an understanding of the location of building frontages/entrances vs servicing/loading.
  - Walkability and pedestrian comfort and permeability
2. Please comment on the proposed architectural expression of the mid-rise buildings.

## **Overview**

- While Panel acknowledged the improvements over the previous presentation, they noted that further consideration is required for effective placemaking; consider how streets contribute to a sense of place, and how places like mews and the courtyard create character. Panel encouraged the applicant to think on the pedestrian level.
- The mews can be a special place, but currently, fire access requirements is what drives the design. The applicant should provide more landscaping and consider

an alternative fire route access, the townhouse typology and the location of the playground to make the open space a destination for the residents.

- The east-west street is the potential gateway to the site and should have its own presence contributing to the placemaking approach with street trees, and proper relationship to building frontages not a purely utilitarian driveway. As the point of arrival, the first impression should have identity and gravitas. There is room on site to reorganize and adjust the buildings to achieve this.
- there is opportunity to connect the mid-rise buildings and share the lay-by and drop-off zones to avoid a turn-around in the courtyard. The project is not large enough to require two drop-offs.
- The architectural expression feels commercial; it needs a more pedestrian-friendly base to be perceived as people's homes. views from the ground level can help achieve this.
- The identity of the street along the western edge and hydro corridor is still unclear. Consider how this roadway, which flanks an extensive open space, can benefit from it. Consider the material language as well as the configuration of parking and planting.
- Consider different massing options other than the townhouses or identify other ways to loosen the plan. The buildings are too close together at the north end; balance the built form to create better public spaces and provide individual addresses for the townhouse units.
- The applicant should appreciate that there will be a large development on the site to the south, and the placement of buildings should be respectful of facing distances and separation requirements.

## **Comments**

### Improvement over the Previous Presentation

- Panel appreciated the improvement in the site plan design over the first presentation and commended the functional amenity spaces and the consistent approach.

### Coordination with Neighbouring Sites

- A land swap with the neighbour to the south is desirable to create better conditions on both properties.
- The applicant should work with the neighbour to the south to coordinate the site organization and ensure the two sites are well-connected.

### Overall Site Plan

- The site plan lacks a clear idea of internal site connections. The site planning should be more than the sum of technical requirements of setbacks and vehicular access. Dufferin Street and the Hydro corridor should play major roles in determining the site organization and Green spaces throughout the site should create a whole.
- Since there are no pre-existing conditions within the site that must be accommodated, the blocks can be laid out in any way. A radical rethinking of the proposal may be warranted.

- The design is a tight scheme that could be improved by loosening up in certain areas especially around the townhouses. Maybe the townhouse blocks should be reconsidered for an all mid-rise proposal to allow rationalizing of the access points, streets and open spaces.
- Determine whether the road along the hydro corridor a positive space and a central spine, or is it a service road and the central spine is in the mews
- Overall, improving the usability of the outdoor amenity spaces and the arrival experience are major aspects that need to be addressed in the site plan.

#### Arrival from Dufferin Street

- The central driveway off Dufferin Street is the main arrival experience into the site, and as such, requires significant improvement. The sidewalk is narrow; it requires a stronger streetscape language to be designed more like a boulevard with rows of trees and possibly with lay-by parking.

#### Street Network

- The applicant should look at the design as building a community. The Streets are an expression of the community; they don't have only a functional role and should not be considered only for vehicular use.
- More street hierarchy is required; currently, all roads are designed as driveways. The driveway from Dufferin Street and the north-south driveway should be looked at as streets.
- There should be more consideration for pedestrian movement along the north-south axis.

#### Parking

- Parallel parking should be considered along the north-south street, with bump out connections at crossings to the hydro corridor; this could allow eliminating some of the visitor parking throughout the site.
- The majority of the parking should be accommodated underground, with the balance as parallel parking.

#### Mews

- The mews present a great opportunity but currently is still a residual space. It is important to understand the cross-section of the mews in terms of room for active uses and landscaping for the townhouses.
- The south end of the mews is very problematic; it ends at the side of a building where it intersects with the main entrance to the site.
- The idea of the mews should be carried to the south portion of the site. In this way, all buildings would have front doors on the mews, and the mews will connect the two amenity spaces. The west road could then become just a hard-working back lane that takes on all the servicing functions.
- The applicant should examine if it is possible to locate the firetruck turn-around between buildings C and D and meet the required fire access distance. By eliminating the need for fire access into the mews, there will be opportunities for trees and landscaping in the mews.

### Mid-Rise Buildings Organization

- Building B does not provide sufficient separation from the south property line to allow development on the adjacent property.
- The two mid-rise buildings may be combined into one U-shaped building connected through a central link or a lobby facing the courtyard.
- The leg on building A is unnecessary, and the building may work better as a simple slab building.

### Outdoor Amenity Area

- While the central open amenity area in Phase 2 was improved over the previous presentation, there is still room for improvement, specifically in the way it is flanked by the turn-around. The vehicular movement could be tightened to support a more useable amenity space.
- The location of the playground is not convincing; it should be more centralized and located in the mews area, for example, in a widened space between buildings C and D.

### Architecture

- The architectural expression of the mid-rise buildings feels more institutional or commercial than residential. Explore a more residential expression and tie the aesthetics of both components of the site into one cohesive expression.
- There should be a stronger identity to the architecture, as it feels cold and anonymous; perhaps materiality and the design approach of the townhouses can be translated to the mid-rise buildings to make them more connected and appealing.
- The architectural expression of the mid-rise building could be improved by relating a base to the scale of the townhouses rather than only using a stand-alone design logic.
- The mid-rise buildings don't have a base that would relate to the pedestrian scale. A taller ground floor would assist in achieving a better relationship to the ground level.

## **Vaughan Mills Centre Public Realm and Streetscape Plan – City of Vaughan**

Architects: DTAH

Review: 1<sup>st</sup> Review

### **Introduction**

City staff sought Panel's advice on the following:

1. Did we miss anything in our Existing Conditions Analysis?
2. What do you think about the initial thoughts?
3. Are there additional quick wins or long-term strategies to consider for the Vaughan Mills Mall?

## Overview

- Panel appreciated the comprehensiveness of the presentation and flexibility of the proposed ideas as a way to explore them without committing to them.
- The form and structure the place is already identified in the Secondary Plan and now needs to be refined. There are opportunities to develop the plan in a way that builds on the framework of the Secondary Plan.
- Panel raised questions about the lack of collaboration of the mall owner; Staff should ensure that this collaboration happens during the study.
- There are a few opportunities for “quick wins”, actions that can be implemented in a short timeframe that have high visual impact, to incentivize the city and the stakeholders to further push for the implementation of the plan.
- To create a flexible framework, it is important to ensure that there is a clear hierarchy so that the framework can withstand individual changes. The framework should identify what is the heart of the place: the open spaces and elements that are not negotiable. The secondary spaces can complement those and would be more flexible.
- In the west side, the ambition of Black Creek and the green-blue infrastructure has the potential to create a unique and memorable place.
- It is worthwhile to document the challenges and lessons learnt from other similar projects such as mall redevelopments in the GTA to understand how they can be applied in this plan. This will help prioritize where efforts should be spent by picking the major elements that are critical to the plan’s success and focusing on them.

## Comments

### Overall Framework

- It is important to set the overall framework to allow flexibility in the implementation of the details.
- In the longer term, it is important to look at dissecting the mall footprint, not only to connect but also as the heart of the community for the eastern part of the plan.
- Consider what will be the heart, the centre of the eastern part, and how it will be a meaningful central open space.
- Panel was compelled by the notion of the emerald necklace and the emphasis on complete streets.
- The plan will present specific challenges, including public vs. private streets and what they mean for above- and below-grade design, access and servicing, implementing mid-block connections, and how servicing and loading should not prevent achieving great streetscapes.
- The relationship of community facilities and open spaces is critical, and the potential facilities and services that were identified in the Secondary Plan should be aligned with open spaces throughout the plan.

### The Ring Road

- The implementation of the plan where the interior of the ring road remains as is while the exterior is being redeveloped will create challenging conditions, with surface parking on one side and active uses on the other.
- Assuming the ring road will stay at its current alignment, greening it would go a long way to make a better place. It could become a secondary walking circuit in the same way seniors use the mall right now.
- While shifting the alignment of the ring road to provide opportunities for development on both sides would be beneficial, it would be challenging; but even in its current location, the ring road can be greened and become a unique typology as a memory of the mall, similar to how Roman circuses became plazas or boulevards replaced the obsolete walls of walled cities.

### Interface with Highway 400

- The interface with Highway 400 may be the weakest part of the plan. Perhaps the current plan is too constrained by the existing road network. Active streets with an urban feel, cannot be achieved successfully only with landscaping and will require the use of built form. Maybe in the long term, the western part of the road (on the east part of the site) should be brought closer to the mall to have built form against the highway to achieve a double-loaded pedestrian-oriented street.
- Panel loved the concept of the emerald necklace and the connection that it provided along the highway.
- Making a positive space along the highway will be hard to implement; identifying its distinction from other open spaces will help refine the overall hierarchy. It does not need to be an open space that will be occupied and promote gathering.
- Intervention along the highway is a low-hanging fruit, as the green interface with the highway will change the feel of how you experience the space.

### Quick Wins

- One of the opportunities for quick wins is using seasonal features to allow the attraction of the mall to reach beyond the interior so that people can come and realize what the new opportunities in the area are. These could include improvements such as a splash pad, picnic tables, food trucks.
- It is important to keep making gradual improvements, such as the greening of the highway, so that people see that improvements are happening.
- Green streets and complete streets can be short term wins. Streets that approach the mall site can be made conducive to biking and walking. These are more important in the short term than the green spaces, which will be created in conjunction with new development.

### Public Engagement and Keeping an Updated Plan

- A missing part in the plan is the ongoing review. The package is well-based and covers all the major elements, but where will updates be kept? There have to be mechanisms for feedback and continuous adjustments.
- While currently the mall owner is not involved, there should be a dialogue with the people who use the mall.

- A continuous model of the schemes could help communicate with the public. Don't limit the engagement to stakeholders' meeting; instead, create working groups. This will help drive enthusiasm and create leadership to show that progress is happening.

### The West Side

- On the west side, there is an opportunity for creating a clear vision of an office area along the green and blue infrastructure. the ability to create a place from scratch is an amazing opportunity.
- In employment-centred areas, the users want shared amenity for everyone, not partitioned campus-style developments. These places also help supplement the needs of the broader community.
- Black Creek can help define the west side, this is an opportunity that the east side doesn't have.

### Learning from Precedents

- Mall conversions are now common in the GTA; at this stage of the project, it would be worthwhile looking at the challenges of implementation experienced by other places. Here, there is a special challenge in that the actual mall itself is not yet part of the plan.
- Learn and implement early lessons regarding cross-sections, standards, consolidating service access points to retain active frontages.
- The VMC is an example of a place where a very high-level of landscaping and materiality is not able to compensate for the overly wide street cross-sections. This was the result of a plan that was created in a different urban design context. It's important that the City reviews and provides flexibility with its municipal standards to ensure that Vaughan Mills will not fail to achieve its goals of creating a great public realm.