

CITY OF VAUGHAN

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Meeting 103 – February 23, 2023

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Thursday, February 23, 2023. The meeting was recorded and will be posted on the City of Vaughan website.

PANEL MEMBERS

Present

Megan Torza, DTAH (Chair)

Peter Turner, Turner Fleischer Architects Inc. (Did not attend the 2nd item)

Margaret Briegmann, BA Group

John Tassiopoulos, WSP / MMM Group Limited

Alfredo Landaeta, Forrec

Guela Solow-Ruda, Petroff Partnership Architects

Michael Rietta, Giannone Petricone Associates Architects

Wayne Swanton, Janet Rosenberg & Studio

Paul Kulig, Perkins + Will (Vice Chair) (Did not comment on the 1st item)

Sharon Sterling, WSP

Ute Maya-Giambattista, Fotenn Planning + Design (Did not attend the 1st item)

Fung Lee, PMA Landscape Architects Ltd. (Did not attend the 1st item)

Absent

Henry Burstyn, IBI Group

Harim Labuschagne, BDP. Quadrangle

STAFF

Shahrzad Davoudi-Strike, Manager, Urban Design & Cultural Heritage, Development Planning

Shirley Marsh, Project Manager & Urban Design, Development Planning

Michael Tranquada, Senior Urban Designer, Development Planning

Chris Assimopoulos, Urban Design, Development Planning

Alex Yang, Urban Design, Development Planning

Ben Nagarajah, Urban Design, Development Planning

Shirin Rohani, Urban Design, Development Planning

Mary Caputo, Senior Manager, Development Planning

Daniela Degasperis, Planner, Development Planning

Margaret Holyday, Senior Planner, Development Planning

Tania Dowhaniuk, Parks Planner, Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development

Cory Gray, Manager, Parks & Strategic Initiatives, VMC

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 am with Megan Torza in the Chair.

1. CONFIRMATION OF THE AGENDA

APPROVED unanimously by present members.

2. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Fung Lee, conflict with the 1st item on the agenda

Peter Turner, conflict with the 2nd item on the agenda

Harim Labushchagne, conflict with the 2nd item on the agenda

3. ADOPTION/CORRECTION OF MINUTES

Meeting minutes for February 23, 2022, were approved.

4. DESIGN REVIEW

3300 Rutherford Road

Architect: BDP Quadrangle

Urban Design: Urban Strategies

Introduction

City Staff sought Panel's advice on the following:

- How successful does the proposed massing appropriately fit into the existing context and respond to the Vaughan Mills Centre Secondary Plan?
- How successful is the proposed road network, open space system, mews, POPS, and built forms?
- Are the ground floor uses and public realm strategy successful in establishing a pedestrian-oriented environment and interfacing with the larger context and vision for this area?

Overview

- **Overall Presentation** – Panel thanked the applicant for a comprehensive presentation and complimented the place making opportunities for this development. Also it was noted that, there were some details on the plan that could be further explored to reach their full potential, as noted below.
- **Open Space** – Panel generally appreciated the volume and the variety of open space that was provided in this application, especially the integration with the northern neighbours. But noted that the frontages of Rutherford Road and Sweetriver Blvd need more attention and consideration.

The open space system should be further developed to improve the connectivity to the arterial road, particularly in creating the hierarchy and the character of the street. Panel suggested getting into the perspective of the street-level study of each individual type of street, as well as the cross-sections to improve the place-making and street quality.

Further to the above, Panel recommended further study on the residential frontages. Considering that townhouse frontages demand a different kind of streetscape than the retail, a woonerf street character would be more appropriate for the residential frontages as opposed to the vehicular character.

- **Road Network** – Panel encouraged the applicant to further study the street hierarchy by reconfiguring private and public roads, which would also help improve the volume of pedestrian priority spaces on the overall site.

Panel suggested reconsidering the east-west road as it currently terminates at a roundabout with a pedestrian linkage above. Explore the opportunities to create a pedestrian-scaled terminus at grade without having a linkage above.

- **Built-form and Transition** – Panel are generally comfortable with the overall built form and the transition strategy. However, there were concerns about the massing for Block 1 being too large and lacking façade variety along Rutherford Rd. Panel expressed their concerns that the massive scale of the building might setup an inappropriate precedent in character for other developments along Rutherford Rd, and greater attention should be placed on the pedestrian scale.
- **Architecture** – Panel questioned the retail frontages along Rutherford Rd., as the plan is vehicle-oriented. There is a lack of pedestrian traffic to support the proposed retail frontages along Rutherford Road, and most people would drive into the underground parking and use the elevators to access the retail.

Panel suggested looping the retail experience to create a pedestrian flow and considering the flexibility of those retail spaces to become other potential uses if the market does not support it.

Panel addressed the private and public tension on daycare use as it fronted onto the public park. To avoid a conflict of interest between visual privacy and open space connectivity, Panel suggested relocating the daycare to prevent having a large privacy fence fronting the park.

Comments

Open Space Network and Frontages

- Panel acknowledged that the proposed open space network is interesting as it successfully connects to the northern neighbourhood with a prioritized pedestrian movement from Sweetriver Blvd to Komura Rd and further to the residential neighbourhood to the north.
- Panel suggested exploring the frontages along Rutherford Rd and Canada's Wonderland Dr, expanding the open space network further south to benefit the retail along Rutherford Rd and maximize their full potential. Considering there are other facilities, such as transit, and bike amenities that would support pedestrians, there are opportunities to create a pedestrian-oriented interface along Rutherford Rd. In addition, the interface along Canada's Wonderland Dr could also be designed to be more pedestrian friendly.
- Panel commented on the sameness of the street frontages, particularly the townhouse interface. Whether they are fronting on private drives, public streets or open spaces, the plan proposed a similar cross-section with the same setback. The street should be provided with a hierarchy, and the interface need further exploration of the materiality as well as functionality.
- Further to the above, Panel encouraged the applicant to further explore the different road cross-sections by figuring out all the road elements that contribute to the active transportation network, such as bike lanes, and the pedestrian realm. This will also help to improve the pedestrian connection from Rutherford Rd to the northern neighbourhood.
- Panel appreciated the big public park proposed in the centre of the site, which greatly contributes to the overall open space network. However, the loading accesses directly fronting the main public park is inappropriate and should be further reviewed and if possible, relocated.
- Panel questioned the triangle POPS located on Komura Rd with townhouse units fronting on it. Considering the direct adjacency of the main public park on the east, the functionality of this small POPS does not contribute to the plan. Instead, Panel suggested changing it to a more integrated outdoor public space for those townhouse units.

Road Network

- Regarding the overall road network, Panel encouraged the applicant to further explore the street hierarchy by analysing whether a road should be public or private based on the connection and frontages. For example, the main east-west road should be public since it has multiple access points for loading, underground entrances, and the roadway to the north. Reconfigure roads that accommodate only private uses as private.
- Panel raised concerns that the main east-west public road terminates with the view of highway 400, and also questioned the roundabout as the termination point, which does not benefit the development. If Canada's Wonderland Dr connection is not possible, Panel suggested reworking the road network to mitigate the highway impact by designing the termination point to a much stronger view terminus with a mixed form of drop-off and pedestrian-friendly open space.
- Notwithstanding above, Panel encouraged the applicant to coordinate with the City to acquire access from Canada's Wonderland Dr., which would provide access to deal with loading and servicing and help with the road network configuration.
- Panel raised concerns that the diagonal street has a public nature as it connects to the existing northern neighbourhood and has building lobbies fronting it, but this nature contradicts with the residential private amenity spaces and front doors. As an option, Panel suggested a courtyard-type of buildings, using pedestrian-based mews instead of vehicular connection, and reducing the road surface to potentially make the west corner more successful.
- Alternatively, Panel suggested to change the diagonal private road to public, since it is connected to Komura Rd, a high-order public road with a sidewalk. It also gives an opportunity to reconfigure the roads along the public park. Panel suggested flipping the road to the east side of the park to connect to Love Run Rd, and having a pedestrian-oriented street on the west side.
- As another alternative, Panel suggested a different road alignment for the diagonal road by "kinking" it up quickly at the terminus like a hockey stick which allows it to be straight as it connects to the north road to avoid the angle.

Architecture Massing and At-grade Use

- Panel were concerned with the size of the massing for Building 1, which requires a larger loading area with two access openings. More importantly, having one of the loading accesses fronting the public park was questioned and not well received. Therefore, Panel suggested breaking up the massing to create a finer-grain block, potentially allowing a different loading layout without interfering with the public park. It was further noted that the size needs to take into consideration the large anchor tenant and that further review of the loading configuration was necessary.
- Further to the above, Panel suggested creating a mid-block pedestrian connection that goes through Block 1 to break up the “big” massing and connect to the public park. It helps create a varied building façade along Rutherford Rd, improves the permeability and enhances the connectivity between Rutherford Rd and the central park.
- Panel questioned the daycare location in front of the public park which has high public exposure. As the daycare uses require privacy, it would need a large screen wall for privacy and to prevent vulnerable children from being directly exposed to the public. Panel recommended relocating the daycare to the lower-density residential place on Komura Rd.
- Panel were concerned about the viability of the retail uses along the Rutherford Rd frontage, especially at the corner of Canada’s Wonderland Dr. The retail was situated at a dead-end location on the pedestrian route, and to improve the viability, Panel suggested creating a loop for the pedestrian circulation and making the retail a part of the loop.
- Alternatively, Panel suggested relocating the retail to the east side that fronts Sweetriver Blvd. Furthermore, Pushing the lobby entrances further west will help create more room for retail frontages.
- Panel suggested introducing more flex space for ground-related uses such as live/work, 2-storey structure with columns rather than a shear wall, and leave it to future generations to decide what should happen in terms of the uses.
- Panel commented on the location of Building 1 and Building 4 lobbies that face the north-south street, which may conflict with the loading entrances. And suggested flipping them with the loading entrances to avoid people going through the loading to access the lobbies.

Abeja Phase 2 - 401 Caldari Road High-Rise Mixed-Use Development, 1st Review

Architect: Turner Fleischer Architects

Landscape Architect: Studio TLA

Introduction

City staff sought Panel's advice on the following:

1. How successful is the proposed ground floor layout, the open space system, and the built form in response to the site constraints and the compatibility of uses?
2. Please comment on the proposed massing and transition to the neighbouring low-rise context.
3. Is the ground floor layout, the internal pedestrian circulation network, and the interface with the public realm successful in responding to the adjacent context, both in the interim and ultimate conditions, as per the proposed phasing plan?

Overview

- **Master Plan** – Panel criticized the absence of an overall comprehensive Master Plan that properly addresses the significance of the site; its proximity to the natural resources as well as the challenging incompatible uses to the east and south of the development. It was noted that the proposed master plan required significant improvements with respect to the following issues:
 - **Street Network, Circulations and Connections:** Panel found the proposed street network disconnected and lacking hierarchy. The proposal does not address the public frontages properly or take advantage of the resources on the site. Panel noted that the volume of the streets penetrating the site is very limited, and public connections terminate on the back of the house uses and services. The applicant was advised to consider vehicular and pedestrian access points to the public realm by highlighting the existing and future desired paths and destinations.
 - **Incompatibility of Uses:** Panel expressed concern about the immediacy of the noise sources and encouraged the applicant to refer to existing precedents and consider better siting and built-form configuration to address the adjacent incompatible uses at the master plan level to provide high-quality communities and open spaces.
 - **Open Space Network:** Panel members criticized the connectivity of the proposed open spaces and their physical and visual access to the public right of way. It was noted that visual presence and connections to the public realm are necessary for an open space to be perceived as publicly accessible.
 - **Micro Climatic Impact:** Panel advised the applicant to be mindful of the microclimate impacts imposed on the site by the proposed massing. It was emphasized by Panel members that other means of mitigation, such as diversity in form and massing, building footprints and orientations, should be

considered at the master plan level to not only mitigate the undesirable microclimate impacts but create attractive communities.

- **Phasing:** It was noted that the first phase of the development appears to face significant challenges. Panel advised other phasing strategies that allow for the required studies to develop and issues to be coordinated further in conjunction with the first phase of the development.
- **Site plan** – Panel pointed to the following issues at the site plan level:
 - **Ground Floor:** There were concerns regarding the lack of activation and pedestrian access along Caldari Road and the open space network. Panel advised reconfiguration and consolidation of the multiple loading and parking accesses to free up the ground floor level for active uses.
 - **Streetscape Design:** There were recommendations to not only meet the minimum standards for the Public Street but to exceed those requirements to provide a streetscape that matches the proposed density and the urban character of the development by considering adequate active transportation facilities and room for street tree planting.

General Comments

- Panel acknowledged that the site is very challenging, as the development has to mitigate the impacts of the adjacent incompatible uses.
- Panel stated that significant revisions and fundamental studies at the master plan level are required to ensure design excellence and habitability of the proposed community. It was expressed that the proposed master plan lacks any organizing elements and does not account for the periphery conditions
- Panel questioned the nature of the proposed park and open space network and expressed that the ties and connections of the development to the overall context and the public right of ways were weak and limited. It was noted that the open space network was perceived as private and a back condition due to the building allocations. The proposed phasing strategy further exacerbates this condition for the first phase of the development.
- Panel felt the phasing of the development is not responding to the constraints on the site, and there is ambiguity with respect to the interface of different phases.
- There was a consensus among Panel members regarding the lack of connection to the adjacent context. More specifically related to the open space network and how it is framed by the built form. As well as the desirability of the proposed spaces with their challenging microclimate.
- Panel asked for a consistent pedestrian public realm and a purposeful pedestrian circulation network cognizant of destinations and desired paths.
- Members noted the lack of hierarchy and diversity in the design and strongly recommended revising the building footprints, orientations, heights, and massing to achieve visual connections, view corridors and skyline opportunities while addressing the site constraints and adjacencies.

- Panel encouraged the applicant to revisit the development as a community with gathering places and the amenities needed for such density and to embrace the challenges of the site through creative design ideas at the master plan level.
- Panel Pointed that without understanding the existing and envisioned context, the members can't review this phase of the proposal thoroughly.

Site Plan Organization

- Panel encouraged improving the overall connectivity as the current first phase design lacks meaningful connections with the surrounding context. The connectivity could be improved the following ways:
 - i) Relocate and consolidate loading and parking access and orient them away from the public right of way.
 - ii) Improve the pedestrian experience at the ground level by reorienting the buildings and their placement on the site to create more connection between the public right of way and the proposed open space network.
 - iii) A more sensible building allocation that responds to the edge conditions and proximities.

Public Interface and Ground Floor Uses

- Panel noted that the ground floor plan does not have any active frontages, as the entire periphery of the building at the ground level is consumed by services and utilities.
- Access to both lobby and bike rooms is compromised, and the public interface lacks animation along the public right of way and the internal green space.
- Panel questioned the proposed streetscape design and amenities and encouraged the applicant to exceed the minimum municipal standards and propose amenities that match the ambitious proposed development.

END OF MINUTES