

# **CITY OF VAUGHAN**

## **DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

### **Meeting 114 – February 29, 2024**

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The Design Review Panel met virtually on Thursday, February 29, 2024. The meeting was recorded and will be posted on the City of Vaughan website.

#### **PANEL MEMBERS**

##### **Present**

Alfredo Landaeta, Forrec (Chair)

Megan Torza, DTAH

Ute Maya-Giambattista, O2 Planning & Design Inc.

Peter Turner, Turner Fleischer Architects Inc

Harim Labuschagne, BDP Quadrangle

Paul Kulig, Perkins + Will (Vice Chair)

Wayne Swanton, Janet Rosenberg & Studio

##### **Absent**

Michael Rietta, Giannone Petricone Associates Architects

Guela Solow Ruda, Petroff Partnership Architects

Fung Lee, PMA Landscape Architects Ltd.

Henry Burstyn, IBI Group

John Tassiopoulos, WSP / MMM Group Limited

Margaret Briegmann, BA Group

Sharon Sterling, WSP / MMM Group Limited

##### **STAFF**

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

Michael Tranquada, Senior Urban Designer, Development Planning

Shirley Marsh, Project Manager, Urban Design Development Planning

Chrisa Assimopoulos, Urban Design, Development Planning

Alex Yang, Urban Design, Development Planning

Andrea Shotlander, Project Manager, VMC Program

Julia Crane, Landscape Architect, VMC Program

Nicholas Trajkovski, Planner, VMC Program

Lucy D'Acunto, Administrative Coordinator, Development Planning

Letizia D'Addario, Senior Planner, Development Planning

Mary Caputo, Senior Manager, Development Planning

**The meeting was called to order at 9:34 am with Alfredo Landaeta in the Chair.**

**1. CONFIRMATION OF THE AGENDA**

APPROVED unanimously by present members.

**2. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

Sharon Sterling, conflict with the 1<sup>st</sup> item on the agenda

John Tassiopoulos, conflict with the 1<sup>st</sup> item on the agenda

Margaret Briegmann, conflict with the 1<sup>st</sup> item on the agenda

**3. ADOPTION/CORRECTION OF MINUTES**

Meeting minutes for February 29, 2024, were approved.

**4. DESIGN REVIEW**

**Zancor Homes (Steeles) LP**

**2600/2700 Steeles Ave**

**High-Rise Mixed-Use Development, 2<sup>nd</sup> Review**

Architect: Rafael + Bigauskas Architects.

Planner: Bousfields Inc.

Landscape: Strybos Barron King Landscape Architecture

**Introduction**

City Staff sought Panel's advice on the following:

- How successful is the ground floor organization and overall internal programming?
- Are the proposed interfaces successfully addressing the interim relationship with the adjacent functioning uses and the ultimate context?
- Please comment on the sustainable best practices that can be incorporated into the building design at this stage to improve the quality of the design.

## Overview

- **Presentation:** Panel thanked the applicant for a comprehensive presentation, appreciated the thorough package, and acknowledged the improvement in comparison with the last submission in terms of general building location and the distribution of spaces.
- **Transit-Oriented Development:** Panel questioned the overall design for prioritizing cars despite the site's proximity to the TTC station. The design contradicts the principles of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). Therefore, Panel suggested using a stronger TOD approach with more focus on pedestrians and cyclists.
- Further to the above, to better align with the TOD aspirations, Panel suggested relocating the bike storage room to be more evident for people coming from the transit station and closer to the lobby.
- **Complete Community:** Panel emphasized that this development is going to be a precursor for future development. However, the high density and isolated parcel design will put a heavy burden on the surroundings. Therefore, creating a complete community by considering community facilities such as schools and other amenities is important for creating a strong sense of place.
- **Retail Strategy:** Panel identified inconsistencies in the retail strategy, particularly along the greenway corridor. To address this, panel recommended a thorough study to analyze the greenway's character, identify retail types, explore how the public spaces can be activated, and ensure a cohesive pedestrian experience across both sides of the street, considering both visual appeal and seamless flow for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Panel reminded that the active frontage can be achieved not only with retail but also with community facilities, and therefore encouraged investigating additional uses for the ground floor that will provide community engagement and activation.
- **Sustainability:** Panel expressed concern that the project's current sustainability strategies only meet the basic requirements but fall short of ambitious aspirations. To address this, a more proactive approach is recommended to enhance the overall building's sustainable performance.
- Panel questioned the stormwater management system for the greenway as it sits above the concrete slab of the underground parking. Further research and exploration are encouraged to enhance the water percolation while maintaining the parking levels.
- Further to the above, panel highlighted the greenway potential that is more than a piece of sustainable infrastructure, it is also an engaging public space, a way-finding device, and an educational resource. Furthermore, these principles could

be extended to other streets, creating a well-connected, comprehensive green network throughout the community.

- **Architectural Elevation:** Panel disagreed on the ground floor façade's excessive blank walls and the lack of signage opportunities. Therefore, Panel recommended incorporating other materials to activate the façade for improved aesthetics and functionality.

## Comments

### General Massing and Scale

- Panel expressed concerns regarding massing and scale, because the proposal will be bringing a large density similar to the population of the town of Stratford into this development block, which will place a heavy burden on the existing community resources due to the lack of schools or other amenities. For instance, the nearest school is approximately an hour's walk away from this site which risks creating an isolated enclave to the overall urban fabric.
- Further to the above, Panel highly recommended revisiting the City's Secondary Plan and conducting a comprehensive study on the larger context to ensure all the development blocks are coordinated and can effectively serve a population of this scale.
- Based on the tower placement, half of the residents' principal view is of another tower. Even though the tower distance meets the minimum requirements, it compromises the intended quality of life and benefits for the residents. Panel suggested revising the southern tower arrangement to improve the residents' views. Potential solutions include exploring a different tower form, adjusting the orientation, or implementing a "scissor stair" design to reduce its visual mass.
- Panel suggested enhancing the tower form to better align with their uses. For instance, consider incorporating recessed outdoor spaces instead of bulky balcony designs to create a more visually interesting tower and podium design.

### Complete Community

- Panel emphasized the importance of conducting a comprehensive study on the services to ensure a complete community can be delivered. Considering this development is the first submitted application, Panel reminded the proponent of their responsibility to explore creating a new community rather than just a condo block.
- Further to the above, Panel highlighted the greenway as one of the study areas and suggested creating a pedestrian spine that integrates services, community spaces, and amenity areas. This would fulfill the vision of a complete community, aligning with the central spine concept outlined in the Secondary Plan. Additionally, establishing design standards would ensure a cohesive aesthetic and guide development for the neighbouring blocks.

### Site Organization and Ground Floor Uses

- Panel criticized the suburban site layout that deviates from the urban principle, particularly the cul-de-sac and the drop-off location. To better align with the transit-oriented vision, Panel suggested improving the overall site layout with the following strategies:
  - i) Locate this parking access to the back side of the building, possibly from the east laneway, which allows the lobbies to front the street and be better accessible for pedestrians.
  - ii) Eliminate the loop and drop-off layout and restrict it to one parking access. Create one consolidated loading and servicing space for two buildings and access from the laneway.
  - iii) Free up the space between the two towers to create a vibrant pedestrian realm.
  - iv) Use on-street layby for the drop-off to better align with urban principles.
- Panel questioned the retail spaces for being too shallow which deviates from the function of retail needs. Therefore, Panel suggested improving the retail space organization to ensure its viability.
- The site layout prioritizes car use over pedestrians, failing to take advantage of the public transit station and contradicting the vision for active transportation and transit-oriented development. Panel criticized the placement of the bike storage room at the back of the building and far away from the public transit and suggested relocating it close to the residential lobby for visibility and convenient access.

### Architectural Elevations

- Panel addressed concerns about the building's excessive use of curtain walls and metal frames, which can be problematic for thermal bridging and energy efficiency. While the architectural design meets the minimum code requirements, there are big opportunities to achieve a more contemporary and sustainable approach.
- Further to the above, the blank curtain walls along the retail façade lack space for signage. Panel recommended incorporating a variety of materials, such as canopies, brick, stones, or other solid elements that can break up the large curtain wall, provide signage opportunities, visually enhance the retail facade and create a human-scaled experience for pedestrians.

### Wind Mitigation

- Panel identified shortcomings in the wind mitigation strategies for this development block. More specifically, the Wind Study highlighted the highest level of wind around the residential lobbies and the ground-floor bike storage, reaching uncomfortable thresholds. However, the proposed wind mitigation

strategies appear insufficient, particularly for the bike storage room which lacks measures other than a recessed entry.

- To better support the transit-oriented development principles, especially considering the large amount of density being proposed, fostering a community less reliant on vehicles is crucial. This requires prioritizing public transit and cycling infrastructure. From a wind mitigation perspective, efforts need to be made to ensure all pedestrian and cyclist entrances are designed for comfort and safety.

#### Landscape and Sustainability

- Panel commented on the overall landscape design for being rudimentary and recognized the greenway's immense potential for place-making and fostering educational experiences in ecological stormwater management best practices. Therefore, Panel strongly encouraged the applicant, as well as all the other landowners who are fronting this green corridor, to improve the design and achieve an amazing linear mixed-use atmosphere instead of a normal green area with just lawn, sidewalks, and roadway.
- Panel identified critical shortcomings in the current design of the greenway. Because the underground parking extended to the property line, which prevents stormwater infiltration through the concrete slab, and the landscaping resembles a hardscape urban street rather than a green corridor, failing to capitalize on its potential.
- To address the above-mentioned issues, Panel recommended a holistic reconsideration of the greenway design with a grander vision. This could include incorporating structural soil beneath the sidewalk to facilitate stormwater management, creating a mutually beneficial solution for both private and public property. Redesigning the greenway with a more ecological vision to ensure a productive and environmentally beneficial space.

**END OF MINUTES**