

NEW WESTMINSTER DESIGN PANEL

Tuesday, July 23, 2019, 3:00 p.m.
Council Chamber, City Hall

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Geoff Lawlor	- Architectural Institute of BC Representative
Derek Newby	- Alternate Chair, Architectural Institute of BC Representative
Sarah Siegel	- BC Society of Landscape Architects
Mark Thompson	- Architectural Institute of BC Representative
Mary Wong	- BC Society of Landscape Architects

REGRETS:

Joey Stevens	- Chair, Architectural Institute of BC Representative
Fabian Leitner	- Development Industry Representative

GUESTS:

Tony Gill	- IBI Group Architects (Canada) Inc.
Alyssa Semczyszyn	- Prospect & Refuge Landscape Architects

STAFF:

Lynn Roxburgh	- Senior Planner
Carilyn Cook	- Committee Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 2:53 p.m.

1.0 HOUSEKEEPING

There were no items.

2.0 ADDITIONS TO AGENDA

There were no additions.

3.0 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

3.1 Adoption of the Minutes of June 25, 2019

MOVED and SECONDED

THAT the minutes of the June 25, 2019 New Westminster Design Panel meeting be adopted with the amendment of Mary Wong, BC Society of Landscape Architects showing as present at the meeting.

CARRIED.

All members of the Panel present voted in favour of the motion.

Mark Thompson, Architectural Institute of BC Representative, advised that he felt it unnecessary and unfitting to use the word “iconic” in reference to the new Canada Games Pool and Centennial Community Centre as described in the June 25, 2019 staff report presented to the Panel. Mr. Thompson advised that he would share his comment via email with Emilie Adin, Director of Development Services.

4.0 REPORTS AND INFORMATION

There were no items.

5.0 DESIGN REVIEWS

5.1 331 Richmond Street (Richard McBride School): Design Review of Proposed New Elementary School – Lynn Roxburgh, Senior Planner

Ms. Roxburgh summarized the staff report dated July 23, 2019, regarding the Design Review of the proposed new elementary school at 331 Richmond Street (Richard McBride School), noting the following details:

- In 2018, the Ministry of Education announced funding to rebuild the school as a seismic replacement project;
- The new school will hold 430 students from Kindergarten to Grade 5;
- It is anticipated that the new school would open in September 2020 at which time the existing building will be demolished;
- Rezoning and a Development Permit are not required as the site is already zoned for P1 Institutional and is not in a Development Permit Area. Large public institutional building projects are, however, encouraged to voluntarily move through the design review process in order for the design team to receive feedback which can be used to inform the next round of plan updates prior to the building permit process; and,
- Height and other variances will be explored through the process, as zoning specifies a two-storey structure; however, the new school is proposed as one storey on one side of the site and three storeys on the other, which is appropriate for the location.

Ms. Roxburgh reviewed the site location, project description, design objectives, and desired features and intentions for the building, and outlined the questions for the Design Panel to comment on.

In response to a question from a Panel member, Ms. Roxburgh advised that the new school's capacity will be similar to the current school. Panel members were asked to consider future-proofing ideas for the facility to ensure the provision of opportunities for future expansion and growth that will be seen as Sapperton Green and the Brewery District are developed. As well, staff continue to work with the school district on the larger, future school planning discussion.

Tony Gill, Global Director, P3 Buildings, IBI Group of Architects (Canada) Inc., and Alyssa Semczyszyn, Landscape Architect, Prospect & Refuge Landscape Architects Ltd., provided a brief presentation covering the following information regarding the project:

- Connections were made to existing, on-site pedestrian and bike routes as they work well and are familiar to people, with some being enhanced to work better;
- Pickup and drop off zones would be created on both the lower and upper levels using the challenging topography to advantage;
- Various options were considered regarding placement of the new school and keeping the existing school fully operational during construction;
- Eventually, the site of the existing building would become another field;
- The new school would connect to the playing field on both sides of the site as well as the outdoor commons, which would also connect to the indoor commons area and library;
- Classrooms would have views of the mountains, river and bridges, and receive natural light;
- The self-contained childcare, which would have its own entrance and outdoor space, has also been designed to receive plenty of natural light;
- Bicycle storage would be provided at the upper side of the school;
- Sun/shade analysis shows that the proposed outdoor space would receive plenty of natural light during the day; and,
- Materials to be used for the façade include glazing, metal cladding, and cementitious board.

Ms. Semczyszyn provided the following information regarding the landscaping for the project:

- The goal was to create a connection from one side of the site to the other without much construction interference;
- Approximately 275 square metres are proposed outside the gym for outdoor play during recess and after school. The flexible but contained space would also facilitate outdoor learning with room for tables, etc.;
- Small garden spots would be available for the children to do outdoor planting;

- The Seven C's model (character, context, connectivity, change, chance, clarity, and challenge) are proposed for the design of the outdoor play spaces that support the development of young children;
- Outdoor spaces would utilize simple, easy to maintain, hard wearing materials;
- The welcoming front entry has been designed to invite people to sit and wait for their children to be dismissed from class; and,
- The use of indigenous plants has garnered a lot of interest.

In response to questions from the Panel, Mr. Gill provided the following information:

- The wall is in the most appropriate location from a cost perspective and the amount of site work that would be required to build it elsewhere;
- The south side parking lot is proposed to remain;
- The playground on the gravel field would be reinstated after construction;
- The front entry would be accessed from Hospital Street;
- The lower field would be gravel; and,
- The kindergarten program would have its own space so that the smaller children do not feel intimidated by the older kids.

Discussion ensued and the Panel noted the following comments in relation to each of the Staff questions asked in the July 23, 2019 staff report:

Question 1) Staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to the visual prominence of the main entrance. Is a strong sense of entry created?

- The box-like frame is good and provides a strong sense of entry;
- The signage is small and low compared to the scale of everything else;
- The main entry comes across as a minor element but there is potential to make it more dominant;
- The main entry wayfinding appears to be intuitive and makes sense as it plays off of the street corners and what is existing;
- Having two drop offs is pragmatic for how the program is distributed with younger children at the top of the site and everyone else at the bottom; and,
- A procession up to the front door from the parking area would not be opposed; however, it should be more considered than just a fire lane.

Question 2) Staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to the overall design of the building. How well does the materiality and colour palette convey an identity for the school?

- The proposed colours are too subdued for an elementary school, although there are opportunities to add brightness to the building;
- As the playing fields will already provide a lot of grey on the ground, it should not be on the building as well; however, the landscape is rich and would be great if it is maintained as shown;

- Use of cementitious board should be reconsidered as it is not durable nor practical for use at a children's facility as evidenced at the new middle school in Port Moody;
- Although the original building cannot be kept, the current circulation, which has a very strong axiality on Hospital Street, could be maintained. With a bit of movement, the proposed front entry could line up, reinforcing the historical nature of the site and surroundings; and,
- A monochromatic palette can be distinctive; the designer's vision should be seen.

Question 3) Staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to the legibility of the site design. To what extent does the design allow for intuitive wayfinding and support the prominence of the school's main entries?

- The back entrance has some issues, as the west side of the site is underwhelming compared to the east side;
- The bicycle routes are unclear in the circulation diagram;
- Neither of the entrances have sufficient prominence on the elevation and the mechanical space should not be as dominant as it is;
- Pedestrian paths should circulate from the west without having to cross access routes. As proposed, the pathways may be challenging for those with strollers, etc.;
- Pedestrian access to the building appears to be a secondary priority;
- Existing routes, from the east side on the south east corner, do not provide access to anything in particular;
- Given the topography, the organization and general arrangement of the space around the school is well done;
- Access to the kindergarten on the main floor, including the play area and exterior access, must be secure from intruders; and,
- The west entry is strong and designed for access to the daycare and community learning; however, security at this entrance needs to be addressed as the door is at the end of the corridor and, while it provides good access to the school, may be unsecured, unsupervised, and unsafe with respect to intruders.

Question 4) Staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to the design and function of the outdoor commons, including its scale and the design of the retaining wall and stairs.

- The panels and various materials being used to break up the space makes it less overwhelming and the design should continue making it a focal point;
- The basic layout works well and is great use of a difficult space;
- The space feels like two different circulation systems that do not work well together. Consideration could be given to attaining a bit more space to resolve and soften the edges around the commons, lowering the retaining wall, etc. As the second floor is approximately the same level as the hill,

perhaps a clearer, more landscaped option could be contemplated. Simon Fraser University is good example of clear circulation;

- The stairway being combined with bike storage may not be CPTED friendly;
- As the stairwell intrudes into the amphitheatre, perhaps the stairs could be pushed into the retaining wall, reducing the scale of the wall while still providing visual interest. This would also give more “breathing room” to the area and remove the space under the stairs which, on an overcast day, could be dismal;
- The 21 foot retaining wall is problematic and there may be a more meaningful way to integrate it with the landscape (e.g. break it into two parts with two ten foot walls with a gap and landscaping in between);
- The staircase must be gentle with a six-inch riser to a 12 to 14 inch tread so as to not create a hazard for the smaller children; and,
- While the stairway unifies the different areas and outdoor spaces, it could use more consideration.

Question 5) Staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to the design and function of other outdoor spaces.

- Use of the Burning Bush shrub should be reconsidered as it may be toxic;
- The kindergarten play space may need more equipment as it is so far away from the main playground;
- The proposed outdoors spaces have been approached in a thoughtful manner and will be successful with continued development;
- The upper and lower fields will also be used as parks and to have that much open space upon completion of the project is a laudable objective;
- More trees should be planted between the building and lower field, around the edges of the site, and around the games court as they would help soften all the of the paved, hard space while also providing shade and opportunities for students and visitors to reconnect with nature; and,
- If the playing field was rotated to 90 degrees and moved to the southeast corner, moving the relocated playground to the northwest corner where the existing building is, a route could go through the middle, possibly creating enough axiality to provide a reference point to the history of where the school was located, etc., while also substantially improving site circulation.

Question 6) Staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to the design of hard surfaces, including suggested approaches that would ensure each of the spaces function as intended and feel distinct from other spaces

- The diversity of hard surfaces is reasonable and is being addressed appropriately.

The Panel made the following general comments about the proposal:

- It is reasonable and suitable and the layout of the site works well;

- Site topography has been handled cleverly and makes the plan work in general;
- Placement of portables must be considered for the area's growing population;
- Both principal offices having windows, while the staff room has none, should be addressed;
- Bikeways should be separate from vehicle traffic at all times;
- The pedestrian routes need to be more thought out and user friendly; and,
- The Rick Hansen Foundation should be consulted with to ensure accessibility across the entire site. Students, teachers, and visitors should not have to face accessibility issues because of the challenges of the site.

In response to further comments and questions from the Panel, Mr. Gill provided the following information:

- A number of the issues mentioned by the Panel have been challenges to the design of the project, including accessibility, which is still being worked on. The proposed design and location of the school works for many different reasons;
- Regarding the outdoor commons wall, the decision was made to make it a backdrop and not fight the topography. The cost to move the stairs would be great; however, based on the comments received, the wall will continue to be worked on;
- With respect to concerns voiced by the Panel regarding the colour palette, it was noted that the landscaping will have a lot of colour, with the intention being to have focal points of colour instead of splashing the building with colour, which is seen with so many other buildings;
- Once the paving patterns are complete at the front of the school, the fire truck access will look like a part of the outdoor space; and,
- Certain program elements such as the kindergarten, gym, etc., had to be located on the lower floor which determined where the entries are located.

5.0 NEW BUSINESS

There were no items.

6.0 UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There were no items.

7.0 CORRESPONDENCE

There were no items.

8.0 NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, August 27, 2019, in Council Chambers.

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

ON MOTION, the meeting was adjourned at 4:04 p.m.

Certified Correct,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Derek Newby
Chair

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Carilyn Cook
Committee Clerk