Community Planning Department
Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel (BUD)

MINUTES

July 21, 2020, 1:45 pm
Virtual (Online) Meeting

Members of BUD

	present	absent / regrets
Ken Coit (Chair)	✓	
Jana Kelemen (Vice Chair)		regrets
Alexandru Taranu	✓	
Jackie VanderVelde	✓	
Jessica Hawes	✓	
LeAnn Seely	✓	
Matt Reid		regrets
Michael Barker		regrets
Nigel Tai		regrets

Item #1: 284 & 292 Plains Road East

Design Review: First Review

Application: Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments

Presentations:

City Staff: Todd Evershed, Urban Designer, Community Planning

Design Team: Edward Thomas and Patty Graham, SRM Architects; Marianne Mokrycke, OMC Landscape Architecture



Disclosure of conflict-of-interest

None.

City Staff Overview

City staff outlined the project details, planning framework and existing and future context. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. **Site Design**
   Please comment on how the site design and building placement responds to its context, integrates with adjacent properties, and relates to Plains Road. Does the development support a pedestrian-oriented public realm and site circulation?

2. **Building Massing**
   Please comment on the overall configuration of the building and the way it responds to its site and context. Do the proposed balconies, materiality, and setbacks do enough to effectively break up the mass of the building? and

3. **Building Design**
   Please comment on overall building composition in terms of bottom, middle, and top of building. Does the building provide enough articulation to appropriately define these three elements and does it communicate a pedestrian-oriented public realm and site circulation?

Design Team Presentation

The project architect provided an overview of the proposal, including a description of the subject lands, surrounding context and details of the proposed development. The design objectives of the proposal were to achieve a practical building form, to create an inviting and permeable streetscape, and to establish a façade articulation that adds quality and interest to Plains Road East. As well, the design of the building was intended to reflect the future vision for Plains Road East to be redeveloped as a Mixed-Use Corridor while respecting the low-density residential neighbourhood to the south.

The first storey was intended to be oversized with townhouse and amenity uses facing Plains Road to provide an interesting streetscape, support generous stepbacks and balconies above the first storey, allow the driveway to be tucked under the building. The rear of the building is intended to be terraced back to provide a transition to the residential neighbourhood and achieve a 45-degree angular plane. In terms of materiality, a variety of precast concrete finishes and colours were chosen to help articulate the base, middle and top sections of the building and break up the building massing in a practical way. A dark linear pattern was chosen for the top to recede the upper floors and reduce the impact of the building.

The landscape architect walked the Panel through the rationale behind the landscape concept plan and relation to existing and future City streetscaping guidelines/plans. To provide adequate soil volume for large sized trees at the back, raised planters were proposed. The project architect explained that landscape screening materials at the front were chosen to help define public, semi-public and private areas.

Panel Questions:

The Panel asked the following questions of clarification:

- What is the experience for residents to the south when they look north at the property line towards the raised planter?
- Do the 3D renderings accurately show the size of trees along Plains Road?
- Will the townhouse patios facing Plains Road be flush with the sidewalk?
- Has the hydro line been factored into the design and siting of the building and landscaping?
- Is Plains Road at its deemed width? Will there be road widenings for bike lanes or other infrastructure that will affect the setback of the building?
- Does the proposed 3 m side yard setback result in Ontario Building Code compliance issues? Also, the City's Mid-Rise Design Guidelines require a 7.5 m setback – why is the proposed 3 m considered appropriate?
- How far is it to walk from the site to Aldershot GO? While the distance between the site and the station may be short as the crow flies, the actual path to walk to the GO station may be quite long.
- What is the emerging policy context surrounding the site?
- What is the design rationale for the additional height on this site, considering this site is outside of the mobility hub area and is not in a special location (e.g. not at a corner or gateway entrance)?

- Do you have ownership rights to the neighbouring properties on Plains Road that would allow you to negotiate with the neighbours on side setbacks for future buildings?

Panel Advice:

Question #1: *Site Design – Please comment on how the site design and building placement responds to its context, integrates with adjacent properties, and relates to Plains Road. Does the development support a pedestrian-oriented public realm and site circulation?*

- *Site circulation and amenity space*
  The Panel liked that the laneway was integrated into the building form to reduce its impacts for pedestrians and cyclists on the street. However, the Panel felt that the site is generally designed for cars and not pedestrians. Pedestrians are not able to access and move around the site without having to go through the building, and walkways and outdoor areas currently feel like left over spaces that are not integrated with the internal spaces of the building. The Panel suggested bringing cars underground sooner so that more of the ground level can be used for outdoor amenity space. It was also suggested that the parking area in the back could be covered so that a common courtyard area could be provided on the second floor.

- *Response to context and Plains Road*
  In terms of context, the Panel noted that this building would be the first of its kind in its surrounding context and therefore must be evaluated with consideration for the current and emerging context. Plans and views should be provided, showing how the building fits in within the existing context and a future context that is based on the City's emerging policies.

  The Panel stressed that the site design must consider the future context that will be defined through this proposal; specifically, what the impacts would be if it were to be replicated for the length of Plains Road. The Panel noted that the proposed 3 m side yard setback with balconies encroaching into the side yard, if replicated next door, would result in units and balconies that are only 6 m and 3 m apart from each other, respectively.

  The Panel felt strongly that the setback of the building and balconies from the side property line is not good design or livable. The side yards do not provide adequate separation between units and will create uncomfortable units and set a precedence that is very much against the current performance standards of the City and other municipalities. If the building was lower or smaller, the 3 m could perhaps work to help create the beginning of a streetwall.
  The Panel appreciated the height and materials of the base of the building and noted that the street right-of-way is quite wide and could theoretically support a 6-9 storey building, provided the building is well integrated into the street and holds the streetwall. The Panel felt that this was not achieved through the proposal. The Panel commented that a much stronger, real podium around 3-storeys in height and without balconies above it is needed in order for the building to be at a pedestrian scale.

- *Public realm suggestions*
  It was also commented that a double row of large shade trees, along either side of the sidewalk, should be provided to create a canopy for pedestrians to walk under. Additionally, elevating the townhouse patios would create a better public realm with delineation between public and private space, and more useful patios. It was also noted that the existing hydro line may have an impact on the public realm, as well as the design of the podium itself.

Question #2: *Building Massing – Please comment on the overall configuration of the building and the way it responds to its site and context. Do the proposed balconies, materiality, and setbacks do enough to effectively break up the mass of the building?*

- *Overall massing*
  The Panel agreed that the massing and articulation of the balconies at the back of the building is successful in breaking up the bulk of the building. However, overall, the Panel felt that the building is too large for the site, due to the side yards and its height. The Panel commented that the massing of the building would benefit from better definition and subtraction, through a taller building base (3-4 storeys), greater setbacks and stepbacks from the front and sides, and corner balconies. The Panel also reiterated that additional refinement should be made with consideration for how people will live in the spaces and what it would feel like it if the building was replicated next door. Rethinking how the building sits on the site relative to the side yards will be an important consideration, as it currently does not create a positive environment.

  The Panel also noted that the building reads from the front as a slab building with balconies attached, and that the podium appears very small compared to the overall massing of the building. The Panel also felt that the shadow impacts on adjacent properties will be significant.

- *Balconies*
  With respect to balconies, the Panel also noted that the clear material of the balconies adds a transparency that is not beneficial to the massing of the building. Currently, the balconies do not read as volume. Consolidating and making the balconies look more voluminous could help soften the current block appearance of the building. The Panel acknowledged the economics of a cantilevered balcony versus an enclosed or inset balcony, but noted that there are opportunities to mask the front of the building so that more articulation is provided without adding significant cost to the project, such as changing the balcony materials.

- *Materiality*
  Also, in terms of materiality, the Panel agreed that the use of brick for the base is a good choice as it is the standard practise and many of the residential buildings in the area also use brick. However, the dark colour of building top appears to elongate and heighten the mass of the building, making the building appear larger as opposed to receding the massing. A lighter colour and more glazing for the balconies was suggested for the building top. It was also noted that using a wood-looking concrete at the top of the building may not be the best material for breaking up the building's massing.

  The Panel also had general reservations about the use of wood-looking concrete because it is typically not as successful as a wood-based product, particularly on lower levels where it is evident that it is used as a replacement material. The use of authentic or realistic, high-quality materials should be used in the public realm.

- *Additional features to mitigate overlook*
  Lastly, it was suggested that other design features, such as planters, should be incorporated into the terraces and balconies to help mitigate overlook onto adjacent properties. This is particularly important at the side balconies but may not be possible given the setback.

Question #3: *Building Design – Please comment on overall building composition in terms of bottom, middle, and top of building. Does the building provide enough articulation to appropriately define these three elements and does it communicate a pedestrian-oriented public realm and site circulation?*

The Panel noted that the comments provided in response to the previous two questions apply to this question and provided additional comments about landscaping, sustainability, and windows.

- *Landscaping*
  In terms of landscaping, the Panel commented that it may not be possible to save many of the existing evergreen trees because they come very close to the edge of the underground garage. The Panel reiterated that bringing the underground ramp closer or covering the ramp will provide opportunities to increase the outdoor amenity area on this site and create a courtyard in between the wings with features such as a trellis or climbing vines that units can open onto. It was also reiterated that the proposed trees in the front yard may not be able to develop fully because of the hydro lines.

  The Panel also commented that limited coverage is provided on top of the underground parking garage in the snow storage area. Consideration should be given to what this area will be used for at other times of the year, and there should be minimum setbacks to allow for evergreen plantings, at least 1-1.5 m. As the surrounding area will likely remain a leafy residential area with mature trees for the near future, any additional plantings to soften the site would be helpful.

- *Sustainability*
  The Panel also strongly recommended that sustainable features beyond mechanical systems be incorporated into the proposal, such as rainwater features or terrace green roofs, to help alleviate the heat island effect.

- *Windows*
  Lastly, the Panel noted that the size and number of windows on the rear elevation appear disconnected from the rest of the building and should be reconsidered. It was noted that the units mostly address the sides. The Panel felt that the units should address more of the front and back instead of the sides to help alleviate the concerns with the side yards and quality of the units, and take advantage of views over the trees in Aldershot and towards Hamilton.

End...Item #1

Meeting Adjourned