

Urban Design Review Panel Comments

Urban Design Review Panel Comments

Date	January 24, 2024	
Time	2:00	
Panel Members	Present Jeff Lyness (chair) Boris Karn Noorullah Hussain Zada Maria Landry Beverly Sandalack Brendan Stevenson	Distribution Kathy Oberg (chair) Rasool Ghodoosi Dehnavi Rick Gendron Katherine Robinson Ryan Martinson Raphael Neurohr
Advisor	David Down, Chief Urban Designer	
Application number	PE2024-00022	
Municipal address	222 8 Av SE	
Community	Downtown Commercial Core	
Project description	New: development Arts Commons Transformation	
Review	First	
File Manager	Colleen Renee-Grivell	
Urban Design	Sonny Tomic	
Applicant	Hindle Architects	

*Based on the applicant's response to the Panel's comments, the Chief Urban Designer will determine if further review will include the Panel or be completed internally only by Urban Design.

Summary

The Panel understands the critical nature of this site within Calgary's Primary Activity Centre and the ambition for the ACT Expansion project to become a transformative, open and inclusive arts hub and the next great civic space for Calgarians. Given the important nature of this project, the Panel appreciates the opportunity to review the design in a pre-application stage. As outlined during the presentation, the Panel understands that the building design is responding to Olympic Plaza in its current form and has been designed in isolation from the new design that is being completed as part of the Olympic Plaza Transformation project.

The Panel appreciates the design progress and graphical representation provided in the package, however key challenges with the proposal remain and the Panel strongly recommends that further review be undertaken. The Panel's concerns in general are summarized below:

1. Given that the project is not responding to the future Olympic Plaza Transformation project at this time, a comprehensive site planning process has not been undertaken (as presented).
 - a. This is required as the aspirational outcomes noted by the applicant can not be achieved without the integration of both scopes in a considered manner. Anything less does a dis-service to the projects themselves and ultimately the citizens of the City of Calgary.
2. The public realm interface with Olympic Plaza (in its current or future state) is of critical importance. The current design does not provide an active interface and a single non-prominent vestibule entry is insufficient.
3. The building elevation along 7th Avenue SE is a solid, impermeable wall with no bounding edge improvements. The Panel understands that loading occurs behind the wall and that porosity may not be possible; however, a considered treatment of this edge as a primary face of the project is critical and was not addressed in the presented materials.
4. Further consideration should be given to the west edge, the Teatro interface and the viability of the "pocket park" as designed given multiple back-of-house operations conflicts (loading, W&R staging, etc).
5. Given the scale and location of the building, the roof should be treated as an equally important façade, even if it is not planned to be an occupied roof.

Please refer to the Urban Design Elements section for more detailed commentary.

Applicant Response

(2024-10-15)

1. *The site planning process was integral to the concept design phase and was comprehensive. The process took just under two years and involved close consultation with CMLC, The City, the local Indigenous community, and a variety of theatre and engineering consultants..*
2. *The design team acknowledges the critical importance of the public realm interface with Olympic Plaza, and has since developed a major aperture to the studio theatre that can act as a two-way interface to the plaza. The east entrance has also been made more prominent (and vestibuled).*
3. *The design team has since developed this edge by reducing the amount of precast concrete via lowering of the canopy, and extension of the studio theatre glazing. More significantly the design team has engaged a consultant to lead a public art procurement process. The entire north wall is available for public art.*
4. *This area will be designed by the Olympic Plaza Transformation (OPT) project and brought to UDRP seperately.*
5. *Noted. The design team considers the roof a 'fifth elevation,' and are aware of its visibility form surrounding high rises. Venting and protrusions have been consolidated and similarly coloured. Outdoor mechanical equipment is consolidated north of the fly tower and is concealed by a cladding enclosure.*

Urban Design Element	
Place Recognize and enhance the unique and emerging identity of a place by responding to surrounding context, local policy, and community objectives through the contribution of innovative architecture and public realm.	
Site	Does the site planning show innovation in addressing site constraints and challenges?
	Does the design respect existing topography, landscape, and archaeology?
	Does the site design accommodate people of all abilities?
Architecture	Is the project visually interesting and unique?
	Does the architecture respond to landmark and gateway opportunities presented by the site?
	Does the design reflect any distinctive social, cultural or historical aspects of the site and community?
Public Realm	Does the project contribute to the creation of a high quality, connected public realm?
UDRP Commentary	<p>The design offers a simple and unique building form with a refined material palette that offers visual interest through a density of vertical slats that carry up the building. The Panel understands that the basis of design was inspired by Indigenous lodge typologies which provided shelter and acted as a place for storytelling; however, the current design is lacking the connection to site and local culture of the city. Sense of place is intrinsically linked to site climate, sun and urban context, all of which require further consideration. There is an opportunity to more clearly link the design inspiration to the diversity and vibrancy of Alberta's and Calgary's natural landscapes as alluded to in the Applicant package.</p> <p>The Panel understands that the current design is responding to Olympic Plaza in its current state; however, it is fundamental that a comprehensive site planning process be undertaken in concert with the future Olympic Plaza Transformation. The success of this project will ultimately depend on the public realm interface and edge conditions, therefore a holistic approach is critical. The Panel hopes that future stages of the ACT project may be able to incorporate, coordinate and build upon the ongoing design progress of the Olympic Plaza Transformation project.</p>
Applicant Response	<p><i>The site planning process for this project was both lengthy and thorough, allowing the design team to carefully consider how the building form and location would enhance the public realm, as well as meet programmatic and environmental needs. A key aspect of the siting strategy was to create a strong connection between the theatre spaces, 8th Avenue, and the plaza, establishing a symbolic gathering place while addressing the operational and infrastructural requirements of the performing arts theatres.</i></p> <p><i>Given that the OPT project was still in the planning stages, it was essential for the site design to be adaptable to the current plaza conditions while also accommodating future developments. With the OPT project now greenlit, the design team is collaborating closely with the OPT team to develop a cohesive campus strategy.</i></p> <p><i>At the building's at-grade edges, we have achieved a seamless connection to the plaza through floor-to-ceiling glazing, featuring two prominent entrances and a unique large aperture that facilitates a two-way connection to the studio theatre. In the north and west sides, where operational requirements limit transparent inside-outside activation, the landscape design by the OPT team, complemented by a large public artwork project, will create vibrant, visually engaging edges.</i></p>
Scale Ensure appropriate transitions between building masses and adjacent places and spaces; define street and open space edges and bring human scale through articulation, materials, details and landscaping.	
Site	Does the arrangement of buildings and spaces on the site address street edges well?
	Is the scale and placement of buildings and structures appropriate for the street and public space size and type?
	Are large service and surface parking areas modulated and screened by structures and landscaping?
Architecture	Are design strategies employed to reduce the impact of building height and bulk?
	Are street walls well defined and of appropriate height to street width and type?
	Are human scaled elements and details included to enhance street character?
Public Realm	Are public spaces well edged and framed by structures and/or landscaping?
	Does the design include detail which will enhance street character and encourage use of the public realm?

UDRP Commentary	<p>The Panel appreciates the proposed massing strategy and building scale, including that it intentionally slopes away from the street, creating a less imposing building interface for pedestrians while also resulting in unique and voluminous interior spaces. However, the treatment of the surrounding building edges is lacking in its capacity to enhance the street character and public realm.</p> <p>Within its context, the building as presented is not a tall structure — as such, the Applicant could explore removing the facade detailing that visually indicates storeys or floors in favour of a more uniform façade treatment that would allow the building to more closely resemble the Indigenous building typologies it references.</p> <p>The building's elevation along 7th Avenue SE shows a solid, impermeable wall that screens the building's significant loading dock and back-of-house area. The sheer length and uniform treatment of this façade emphasizes this effect. The Panel is concerned this design approach will exacerbate an already unsafe and uninviting condition along 7th Avenue and urges the Applicant to reconsider alternative design strategies or treatments for this key edge given that it will be experienced by both passing and arriving pedestrians and CTrain users. There is a significant opportunity to turn this functional edge into a "billboard" for ACT or a public art display.</p>
Applicant Response	<p><i>The design team has made significant strides in refining the building edges to enhance the adjacent public realm. By closely coordinating with the OPT team, we aim to create a seamless integration that invites community interaction. Our ongoing iterations of the facade design reflect a commitment to aesthetic and conceptual values, particularly through the use of horizontal detailing. This design choice not only resonates with the natural striations found in indigenous construction but also evokes the landscape formations of the prairie coolee.</i></p> <p><i>In our recent design developments, the team has prioritized creating a more inviting and activated building interface. We've extended the glazing around the Studio Theatre's NE corner, fostering transparency and establishing a welcoming entrance to the plaza. Additionally, we've introduced a large opening for the Level 02 green room, enhancing visibility and connectivity. These adjustments, along with the pull-in of the second-tier massing, significantly reduce the building's visual weight on the north LRT corridor.</i></p> <p><i>Our approach to the building's design has focused creating an engaging, activated edge to the public realm and visual harmony. The design team has collaborated with a public art consultant to explore options for the at-grade north wall, ensuring it becomes a vibrant part of the public realm. Furthermore, we've made thoughtful changes, such as lowering the canopy at the NW corner, to achieve a consistent human scale along the corridor. These modifications not only enhance the building's presence but also enhance the surrounding environment.</i></p>
<p>Amenity Ensure that public sidewalks and gathering spaces are generously proportioned, comfortable, safe, fully accessible, and framed by permeable facades which allow for activation throughout the year.</p>	
Site	<p>Are equitable, inviting access and varied movement options provided for all ages and abilities?</p> <p>Does the design work with sun orientation and seasonal climate variation?</p> <p>Does the site plan safely accommodate all travel modes?</p> <p>Are service and utility requirements located appropriately to lessen visual impact?</p>
Architecture	<p>Does the building(s) meet or exceed expectations for universal access design?</p> <p>Does the architecture create a pleasant street edge which feels safe to users?</p>
Public Realm	<p>Does the public realm design prioritize pedestrians and cyclists over vehicle access?</p> <p>Is the public realm visually interesting, comfortable, and safe during all seasons?</p> <p>Are the public spaces designed for people of all abilities and ages?</p> <p>Do the public spaces meet or exceed expectations for universal access design?</p>
UDRP Commentary	<p>The public realm of this project is intimately tied to the future Olympic Plaza Transformation design which has not been presented as part of this package. The Panel understands that the Olympic Plaza Transformation is part of a separate project and will be presented at a later date. Therefore, the Panel will reserve its comments to amenity spaces that have been shown as part of this package. That said, the Applicant and the City are strongly encouraged to pursue an integrated approach to both the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza. The question</p>

	<p>remains: if the projects were to have advanced in concert, would the building form and program placement be different?</p> <p>A pocket park has been shown on the west face of the building, adjacent to the loading area. This park space feels more like leftover space that connects the waste and recycling area to the loading behind an elevator core. Further design consideration is required in order to make this a successful amenity. Alternatively, the Applicant may consider re-allocating the space to building program to the benefit of other key edges or functional requirements if a pocket park proves unfeasible.</p>
Applicant Response	<p><i>Following the launch of the OPT project, the design teams collaborated closely to ensure an integrated approach. While adding additional programming to the pocket park was deemed unfeasible due to budget constraints, both the OPT and ACT design teams believe that this area will provide essential activation and landscape relief to an otherwise austere downtown corridor.</i></p>
<p>Legibility Create logical, permeable networks of streets and pathways that connect within and between neighbourhoods and public places; design well-defined community and building entrances with distinctive, memorable attributes.</p>	
Site	<p>Does the project provide a permeable, fine-grained and functional urban structure of blocks and streets?</p> <p>Does the project provide legible, accessible, continuous walking and cycling connections within the site that connect to adjacent systems and destinations?</p> <p>Does the proposed network consider future expansion into surrounding areas?</p> <p>Are large parking areas designed with clear, safe, direct pedestrian connections?</p>
Architecture	<p>Are buildings designed with clearly marked and differentiated entries to facilitate wayfinding?</p>
Public Realm	<p>Are the public routes and spaces configured to facilitate easy and safe navigation with clear paths and appropriately placed wayfinding elements?</p>
UDRP Commentary	<p>The building entries are not legible enough to bring people into the building nor celebrate it for what it is. It is of particular concern that there is only one entry on the building face that fronts Olympic Plaza. As a result, the primary building face fronting Olympic Plaza feels impermeable and results in a lack of clarity for people wanting to enter the building.</p> <p>The Panel understands loading and back-of-house considerations as key program and design drivers. It is unfortunate that this building needs to be designed to accommodate the loading movements of the largest possible vehicle classes for performance spaces that are understood to be more modest in size and capacity. The Panel appreciates the level of consideration and analysis required to accommodate the necessary large vehicle movements on a major one-way corridor. It will be imperative to ensure that loading activities requiring lane closures on 1st Street SE occur outside of the AM and PM peak periods of traffic.</p> <p>Although the Panel understands that loading will need to occur on the west edge of the building, there are several items that require further consideration along this face. With visitors via the CTrain and taxi/Uber likely arriving from the west side, additional activation along this frontage would provide a more welcoming and inviting feel. The project's interface with The Dominion Building / Teatro appears to isolate this building rather than embrace it as part of the larger design.</p>
Applicant Response	<p><i>The entries have been further developed to be more pronounced, featuring fully glazed vestibules that extend beyond the standard glazing line. Additionally, under-canopy lighting will highlight the entrance locations, complementing the future plaza design that will integrate with these entrances. A large opening into the studio theatre will facilitate a performance connection with the plaza.</i></p> <p><i>The loading bay is essential for the building's operations. A loading protocol, created in collaboration with Bunt and Associates and approved by The City's Mobility Engineering department, was included in the original permit package.</i></p> <p><i>The design team is also working with the OPT team to create a vibrant, inviting edge on the west side of the building. Locating the building immediately adjacent to the Dominion Building was not feasible, as it would require extensive renovations to its critical mechanical and operational infrastructure.</i></p>

Vibrancy Ensure that new developments are configured and designed to animate streets and public spaces with varied sizes and types of grade-oriented uses.	
Site	Will the building placement and orientation together with the arrangement and variety of uses activate the adjacent streets and public spaces? Will the project contribute to creating greater economic, employment and/or residential diversity in the neighbourhood?
Architecture	Does the building articulation, materials and details contribute to the vibrancy of the streets and public spaces? Is there a variety of residential and/or commercial unit types and sizes?
Public Realm	Do outdoor spaces provide varied experiences and accommodate people with diverse abilities?
UDRP Commentary	Through discussions on the programming, the Panel feels that there is a need for more active uses within the building that could be used by a larger and more diverse demographic. There does not appear to be sufficient public programming contemplated to allow the ACT project to becoming a successful civic space and central hub. The design offers a visually interesting building treatment and simplicity of materials with the varying density of vertical battens, although with blank walls and a poor interface with the public realm. However, the Panel would like to see the roof treated as an equally important façade. Given the lower scale of the project, the roof will be highly visible by the surrounding higher buildings. The theme relating to emphasis on the environment should be considered all the way through, and an alternate treatment on the roof (such as green roof or plantings such as sedums) should be considered.
Applicant Response	<i>The new building will offer a diverse range of inclusive public programming throughout the day, extending beyond the theatre's scheduled activities. The development of the studio theatre opening, along with ongoing collaboration with the OPT team, will enable the building to actively participate in civic events on the plaza.</i> <i>The roof is being considered as an important "fifth" elevation, given its visibility from surrounding high-rise buildings. Our goal is to ensure it is visually clean and presents an elegant, cohesive appearance from above. While the design team explored the possibility of a green roof, this option has been set aside due to cost and technical challenges associated with theatre construction.</i>
Resilience Ensure that projects provide opportunities, through their site layout, spatial configuration, materials, and sustainable design features for responsible operation and continuous adaptation to change over time.	
Site	Is the project designed to respond to change (economic, social, demographic or other) over time? Does the plan meet/exceed climate resilience/sustainable design expectations? Are active travel modes prioritized, and active lifestyle choices encouraged?
Architecture	Does the building show indication of sustainable design practices and materials? Is a range of uses accommodated; does the design anticipate future change? Is the building designed to endure over time with reasonable maintenance?
Public Realm	Are public spaces adaptable for multiple uses over short and medium term? Does the public realm design respond to climate resilience / sustainability expectations?
UDRP Commentary	The project is targeting LEED Silver and the Applicant is currently considering the possibility of putting PV panels on the roof. Given the public and civic nature of the building, the Panel would like to see the Applicant target more robust energy initiatives. To ignore the building performance and sustainability does not align with project concepts and values, especially given the necessary impact to the existing mature urban tree canopy required to realize the project. For example, the Applicant could consider targeting a certain percentage beyond NECB minimum requirements, or providing data regarding carbon savings with mass timber construction. The Panel would like to see more information on this topic at future stages of the project.

Applicant Response	<p><i>The design team has focused on maximizing the building's energy performance and sustainability within the established economic and programmatic realities.</i></p> <p><i>To achieve a lower Thermal Energy Demand Intensity (TEDI), the building will incorporate a high-performance envelope. It will also source heating energy from the District Energy System (DES) operated by Atlantica, which has indicated an average delivered heating efficiency of 145%, including associated pumping energy. Additionally, the building features a hybrid structure, utilizing mass timber for the lobby's primary framework, while the exterior cladding will consist of aluminum with high recycled content.</i></p>