

Urban Design Review Panel Comments

2024 November 26

Urban Design Review Panel Comments – Applicant Response

Cantiro and GEC Architecture appreciate the time that the UDRP panel has given to reviewing this project with the intent on achieving a mixed-use project that supports high quality urban design and positively contributes to the urban fabric of Calgary. The responses that we received from the panel have been taken seriously and have guided our continued refinements in the design process. Within the following, we hope to summarize the design evolution we have made, provide response comments to each key refinement theme and a response to each urban element. Through this process, we will provide additional detail supporting the intention and design rationale for the project and why we feel that the design, in its present state, is a strong representation of a high-quality mixed-use development that will positively contribute to a revived public realm along 4th Ave and 6th street, and the skyline of downtown Calgary.

Design Evolution

Program: Since our submission and presentation to the UDRP panel we have undertaken several design refinements as more detail from our client and our consultant team has been developed. The program of the project has still been as communicated (purpose built rental tower, with main floor retail space facing 4th ave and 6th street and provisions to connect to the plus 15 system.

Though the design of our client was to bring a single tenant grocery store to this project, discussions with the market have not provided the level of confidence needed to keep this type of flexibility within the design. As a result, our client has pivoted their position and will be targeting the commercial space for smaller retail tenants. Within our revised submission, the use of the commercial space will be listed Retail and Consumer Service with the intention of reclassifying demised retail bays to align with the specific uses of the leased tenants. It is our clients' intention to create a combination of tenants that will provide a complimentary mix of tenants that will activate the public realm, animate the street through patios, and provide activity along 4th Ave and 6th street. We heard through the UDRP process and within the comments provided that the west facing elevation had concerns about supporting animation with a larger format grocery tenant. The change in position to smaller retail tenants will support increased animation along that property line and create a positive interface with the McDougal Centre across 6th Street.

Further, the change to smaller demised retail space no longer required our project to keep the interior volume within the main floor commercial space. The revised design now has the main residential amenity program above the retail space, within the same mass of the podium presented. We feel that this will further the level of activation to the public realm by replacing volume with active program. The residential fitness program will have clear glazing along 4th Ave and will provide activation at all hours of the day.

The main floor amenity programs have had some revisions as well. The golf simulator has been repositioned to the second-floor amenity level. We understand that the UDRP panel was supportive of this program at grade to support added vibrancy to the streetscape, however, upon further investigation, having large expanses of glazing were presenting a problem to the long-term success of the

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program (potential for glass breakage due to golf balls, daylight affecting the visibility of the screen). In its place will be stair access to the future plus 15. It is our intent to glaze this space to keep a level of visibility and safety for users of the plus 15. As a temporary measure while there is no plus 15 bridge across 4th Ave, the space will be used for added residential amenity.

Podium: Within the UDRP response there was a request for the podium to be simplified and rationalized. We heard that the canopy was too heavy, the material and colour were not inviting to the pedestrian environment and the design lacked design elements to promote permeability and to foster an inviting urban edge.

Our design's evolution has considered this feedback and resulted in a podium that we feel addresses the key themes for refinement provided by the UDRP panel. First, the corner cut at the northwest corner of the site. We have changed the 45° corner to an angle that better reflects the angles that are seen within the rest of the podium at the northeast corner, and the tower. We feel this has made a much more contemporary and cohesive gesture to the podium design. In addition, we have pushed the mass of the second-floor amenity out at the corner, towards the west, cantilevered over the pedestrian sidewalk below. The design intent of this is to provide added articulation to the podium, continue the weather protection of the pedestrian areas, and provide animation to the corner of 4th Ave and 6th Street. On the west side, we have lowered the podium mass along 6th street where the outdoor resident amenity space is. This will give residents a view of the McDougal Centre grounds and access to sunlight.

The canopy has been looked at with a greater level of detail to minimize its assembly as much as possible. We are still proposing a solid canopy that will allow the highest level of weather protection without a risk of falling ice. The Canopy will have a black composite aluminum fascia that will support retail signage and will have a soffit that will be clad in a wood-look aluminum plank. The colour will be a natural maple which will add a light warmth to the pedestrian experience.

In addition to the soffit material, we have introduced brick masonry to our podium pallet. The masonry will be pilaster cladding to separate the retail frontage and will continue to combine with the clear glazing at the residential entry. We propose the brick be installed in a stack bond with the bricks slightly rotated to create a saw tooth like pattern. A similar detail has been used with the composite aluminum panels on the podium where one leg of the panel is shorter than the other. With complimentary material instillation details, the brick and composite panels will add some human scaled texture and dimension to the building.

Also, we have included a publicly viewable mural to be incorporated on the building's east facade. It is our understanding that a complimentary approach has been taken on the neighbouring development to the east. The combination of these facing murals will add some needed colour and vibrancy to the shared laneway.

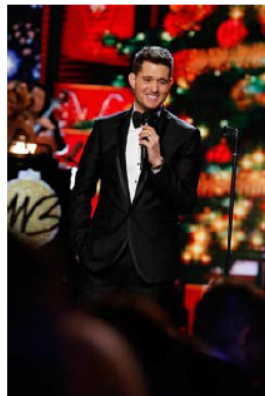
The ground plane has also been revised to better support a positive urban experience. The block profile of 6th street SW is sloping down from north to south. As a result, this has created a grade differential of approximately 600mm from the floor elevation of the retail space and the sidewalk. To address this, we have moved



the podium back further from the street to allow for a large patio area to be provided slightly raised from the sidewalk. Barrier free accessibility will continue to be provided to all the retail bays and the transition space between the raised patio space and the public realm will include concrete stairs and planting areas. We feel this solution offers some added opportunities for texture, vegetation, and provides the best solution to support long term leasing flexibility of the retail space. The increased podium setback also positions the building face 1m east of the plus 15 structural support. We feel this separation provides some visual porosity to an undesired pedestrian experience that is created by the plus 15 in this location. Opening it up also allows for a visual connection to be made from the plaza space of the 640 fifth building to the south.

Colour: We understand that there were concerns from the UDRP panel about the colour choices presented for the tower and podium materials. A polarizing subject, there is no doubt. The design expression for the Plaza 54 tower is to create a mixed-use residential tower that has an identity. Our client has asked GEC to design a building that will stand out from the other residential towers that have been recently constructed within the Beltline, the East Village and the existing fabric in Eau Claire. Each of the buildings we reviewed have a different colour combination and architectural expression that helps them stand out amongst their competitors. The colour choices we've made, along with the architectural expression have been intentional to achieve this vision. The two primary materials for the tower are clear glass and black glass spandrel panel. Plaza 54 will stand within the cityscape as a bold and contrasting tower, standing out from the neighbouring towers. It will add to the variety, texture and interest of the skyline.

Black presents a modern and contemporary style that has a lasting quality. It matches the vision that our client has for the project and will suit the marketing that they will pursue for the project. We have completed many high-rise towers using black as a primary colour for the spandrel panels. We know very well what the outcome will be and have confidence in this direction. We have been very deliberate in making sure that the black is achieved through a back painted spandrel glass panel over a prefinished metal panel. Our experience has found that this approach helps to resist fading and keeps the tower looking clean and modern throughout the seasons and over time. A metaphor that we have often used when discussing black as a colour for buildings is a tuxedo. Over time, there are many details that have evolved and refined to match the styling of the day, but the colour has remained (see images below).



Through our design process for the Plaza 54 project, we spent lots of time and effort looking for a complimentary colour that we could use to work with the black in a way that would suit the design direction, be contemporary, and be unique. The more we looked and tried different options, the more that red came up as a suitable decision.

Red draws attention creates a focal point and adds a dynamic edge to the tower. We've used the colour as an accent on the north and south elevations, in a fading linear pattern, to accentuate the verticality of the tower. Since we presented the design to the UDRP, we've adjusted the colour from a darker, deeper red, to a brighter more vibrant red. We have also revised the material choice from prefinished metal panel to a back painted glass spandrel.



We understand that there was some concern from the UDRP that the decision was simply made as a result to the coincidence that several corporations in Calgary use red for their corporate branding, but we can assure you that the design intent was not simply that. Red is a colour that has been used in the Calgary skyline to highlight important landmarks such as the Calgary tower, the Peach Bridge and the Saddle dome. Red has is used throughout fashion, graphic design, and vehicles, to stand out amongst the crowd. We feel very strongly that the colours chosen for plaza 54 will create a striking unique tower within the skyline. It will be a building that will add some much-needed presence to that section of the skyline.

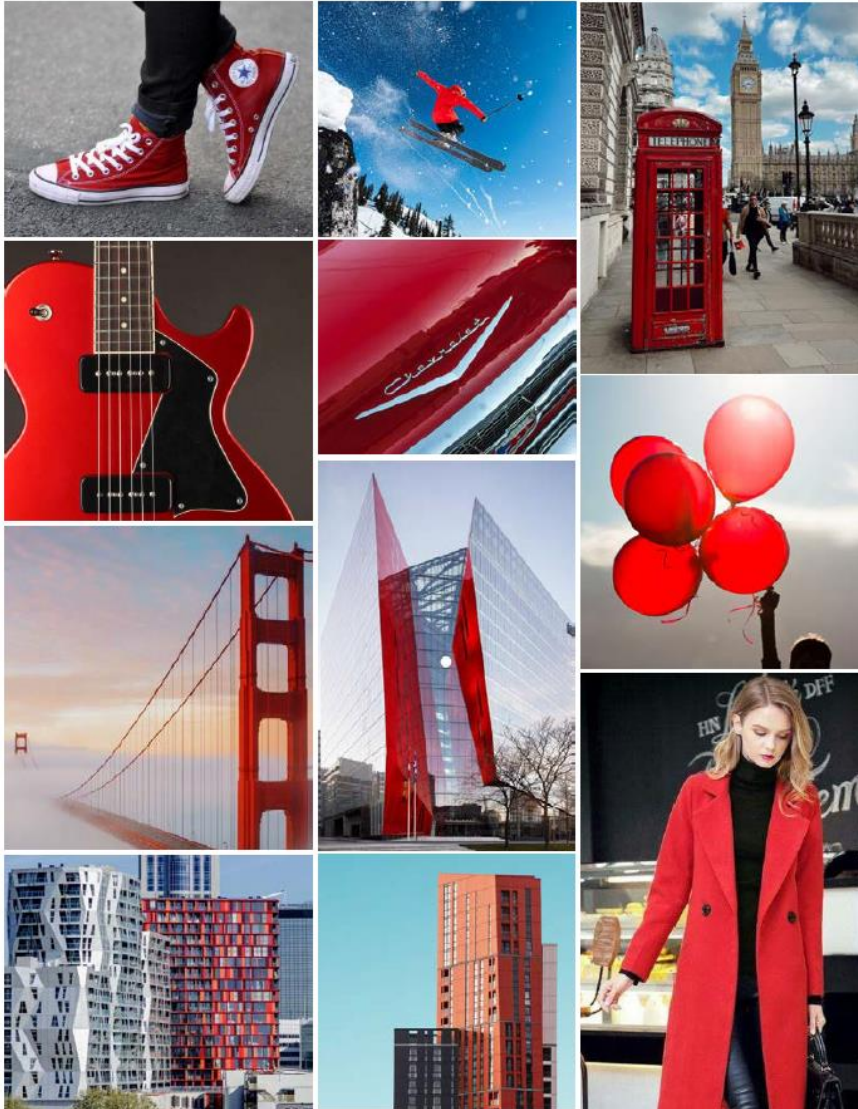
As mentioned above, we have evolved the design to provide a change in colour and texture at the pedestrian level. We have incorporated a smaller more human scaled module of the brick masonry and the soffit planks. We've re-enforced the design language of the tower in the shape and installation details of the podium materials. And have focused the evolution of the interior program to prioritize animation, porosity, accessibility and the best chance to attract high quality retail tenants.

During the winter months, the development will provide weather protection from the elements, will provide a warm soffit material that will affect the feeling of the pedestrian, and the masonry will add texture and shadow that will provide visual interest. Clear glazing at the podium will allow for inside/outside animation during



low light winter months and will complement the material choices of the podium.
Planting areas have been incorporated into the public realm along 6th Street to add the warm colour and texture during the winter months.

We hope that the above has illustrated how the design of Plaza 54 has evolved and been influenced by the comments received from the UDRP panel. Below, we will provide specific responses to each urban element and the comments provided.



Place

UDRP Commentary: *In terms of size, density and use, this development is aspirational. It contributes to the neighbourhood by providing street level uses that complete the urban edges along this part of McDougall Centre Park. The Panel is concerned the inclusion of the grocer may not adequately support pedestrian level enhancement to the 6 Street park edge due to the limited access points and windows typically associated with that use.*

Incorporate landscape elements and associated street furniture (benches/planters) to enhance and animate the commercial and residential entry points and increase permeability of the retail facades to the greatest degree possible.

Applicant Response: The program of the main floor commercial space has been revised to be targeted to smaller format retailers who will provide increased transparency, access points, and overall animation to the retail frontage. The 6th street setback has been increased to provide added planting areas, and to support retail patio space/seating opportunities. An integrated planter/bench is provided at the residential entry space. Benches are also specified along both 4th Ave SW and 6th St. SW to support street level animation.



Scale

UDRP Commentary: *The residential entry/canopy location needs to be refined to relate to the human scale. The larger move noted in the design is more commercial in nature and as noted in the summary section, competes with other design elements.*

Consider improving the NW corner of this development to enhance the public realm while providing a design response that relates to the podium design.

Consider art work or other interventions for the walls facing the lane.



Applicant Response: A new residential entry canopy has been introduced at a lower level to be more human scaled and provide better weather protection. The NW corner has been revised as well. The second-floor residential amenity program cantilevers out to the west, interrupting the retail canopy, and providing a dynamic gesture to the corner. The clear glazing will provide amenity programming on the corner and will animate the intersection at night. Publicly viewable art will be provided along the east elevation. Cladding selections and lighting will be provided to support the mural.



Amenity

UDRP Commentary: *The public realm appears to be well considered on the building perimeter – retail and amenities such as the climbing walls provide at grade pedestrian animation; however there needs to be further refinement and consideration in regards to the west elevation and tenant space. The floorplan of the golf simulator space could be modified to place the active spaces against the façade and storage areas inboard.*

Applicant Response: As mentioned within the response to “Place” the commercial retail program has changed from a grocery store to smaller format retail. The west elevation will have clear glazing and multiple entry points to support street level animation. Added patio space has been provided, and a continuous weather protection canopy will increase the quality of the pedestrian experience of the commercial frontage. The golf simulator has been repositioning to the second floor, and the climbing room stays on the main floor with glazing to the street.





Legibility

UDRP Commentary: *The permeability of the west façade may not be realized as a result of the building program. Improve the north facing residential entrance so that it is distinguishable from the large extents of retail glazing.*

Overall approach to use black as the primary driver at grade is one that needs further consideration to ensure the pedestrian scaled interface does not inadvertently create an uninviting place. The entrances noted are blurred due to the complexity of the podium elements on the façade. The Panel recommends establishing a series of hierarchical elements / moves on the podium to establish a more legible and inviting urban realm.

Applicant Response: The building program has been changed to smaller format retail space to support greater permeability of the west facade. The residential entry to the north has an increased setback from the street, an individual canopy, planting, seating, and at grade bike parking to distinguish it from the retail frontage. Materials of the podium have changed from what was presented originally to the URDP panel. Brick masonry and clear glazing are now the materials used at the base of the podium, where human interaction is. Black metal panels no longer extend to grade. The soffit material is a wood-look metal plank that will be a maple colour to add some warmth to the pedestrian experience. We feel this change in material pallet sets up a hierarchy with differing scales of texture. The masonry and plank soffit are more human scale in dimension, the metal panel that is on the upper portions of the podium has an increase in scale and is more addressed to the street scape. The tower colour, balcony texture and top has been scaled for the cityscape.





Vibrancy

UDRP Commentary: *The expectation is that the west façade provides more animation as it relates to the park and the south facing neighbour building.*

The Panel would appreciate more details on the bridge element as this as shown establishes a harsh edge. If considered for future development, strong consideration of the impact of this integration should be explored.

Applicant Response: As mentioned above, the design has evolved to address the concerns of vibrancy of the west elevation. The building face has been pulled back from the street to separate the building face from the existing plus 15 support structure to provide added transparency to that condition. There are no plus 15 bridges proposed as part of this project. We have had continual discussions with the city about the evolution of the plus 15 network to support the new development in the area. We have provided a north/south right of way allowance that will connect Plaza 54 to the existing plus 15 within the south lane, and connect across 4th Ave SW. Should the City decide to go ahead with these bridges, we have the space, structure and vertical circulation within our project to support this connection. As the city has no defined information available for if or when the network will be expanded and bridges installed, we have provided the required future accommodations but designed the building to prioritize the current urban condition.

Resilience

UDRP Commentary: *The Panel appreciates the resiliency efforts including the provision of at grade bike parking. Notionally, building performance was referenced, but further definition of a resilient approach should be considered if viable for the project overall.*

Applicant Response: Plaza 54 supports resiliency through the provision of at grade bike parking, below grade bike parking that provide diversity of vertical and horizontal racking, dedicated secure space for electric bike parking and charging,



provisions for 36 parking stalls for EV charging with the opportunity to expand to 72 stalls. We have dedicated bike washing and maintenance areas to further support active modes of transportation.

The project's energy performance was modeled to surpass the minimum energy code requirements of the 2020 National Energy Code for Buildings. It is targeting CMHC financing and will achieve a 25% improvement for energy use and greenhouse gas emissions over the 2017 energy code baselines. All LED lighting, with occupancy sensors in parking, service, and stairs will reduce unneeded energy usage. High efficiency heat recovery ventilators are provided in each unit to reduce the need to heat/cool fresh air. Operable windows are provided within the suites to allow residents to have access to fresh air.

Yours Truly,
GEC Architecture

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Benoit', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

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