

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

January 9, 2014

PRESENT:

Ramzi Kawar, Chair
Kourosh Rad, Vice-Chair
Louis Lemoine
Noel Fowler
Steve Murphy
Mary Black
Roy McBride
Sue Sirrs
Cesar Saleh
Kevin Conley
Anne Sinclair

STAFF:

Kurt Pyle, Supervisor HRM Planning Services
Richard Harvey, Acting Urban Design Project Manager
Sherrill Murphy, Deputy Clerk
Jane Crosby, Legislative Support

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1. CALL TO ORDER – Introduction of New Members

Ms. Murphy, Deputy Clerk, called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. in Halifax Hall, City Hall, 1841 Argyle Street.

Ms. Murphy welcomed the four new members of the Committee. There was a round table of introductions.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Ms. Crosby, Legislative Support, called for nominations for Chair of the Design Review Committee.

MOVED by Ms. Black, seconded by Mr. McBride that Mr. Kavar be nominated to serve as Chair of the Design Review Committee.

Mr. Kavar accepted the nomination.

Ms. Crosby called a second time for nominations.

Ms. Crosby called a third time and final time for nominations and, hearing no further nominations, called for the vote on Mr. Kavar's nomination.

MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.

Ms. Crosby turned the conduct of the meeting to Mr. Kavar, Chair.

Mr. Kavar called for nominations for Vice-Chair.

MOVED by Mr. Saleh, seconded by Ms. Sinclair that Mr. Rad be nominated to serve as Vice-Chair of the Design Review Committee.

Mr. Rad accepted the nomination.

Mr. Kavar called a second time for nominations

Mr. Kavar called a third time and final time for nominations and, hearing no further nominations, called for the vote on Mr. Rad's nomination.

MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – November 14, 2013

The following correction to the minutes was noted:

Mr. Connelly was noted as being present, however he was not.

Item 8.1 add a final sentence: “The members of the Design Review Committee thanked The Chair for his time with the Committee.”

MOVED by Mr. McBride, seconded by Ms. Sinclair, that the minutes of November 14th, 2013, be approved as amended

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

The Committee agreed that the following items would be added to the agenda:

8.1 Downtown Halifax Site Plan Approval Process

8.2 Correspondence – Mr. Bill Hyde – Former Vice-Chair, Design Review Committee

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES: None

5. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS: None

6. CORRESPONDENCE/PETITIONS/DELEGATIONS:

6.1 Revised Letter from Terry Smith Lamothe, November 14, 2013

The Committee received the revised correspondence from Mr. Smith-Lamothe.

Given there were a number of new members who required some orientation to the work of the Committee, the Committee agreed to deal with item 8.1 at this time.

8.1 Downtown Halifax Site Plan Approval Process

Mr. Harvey introduced himself and indicated that he would like to provide members with some context surrounding their role as a Committee. Mr. Harvey provided the Committee members with a handout explaining the approval process and how projects are reviewed based on HRM's site plan approval system. He explained that the Committee reviews projects based on the Site Plan Approval System. He noted that this is a unique system for Downtown Halifax and is enabled by special legislation. He indicated that all the matters pertaining to the building envelope are set out in the by-

law. Mr. Harvey then explained the purpose of the Design Manual, or S-1 of the land-use by-law, and noted that it is the responsibility of the Design Review Committee to review this manual against a project.

The Chair stressed that the role of the DRC is not a prescriptive one of simply going down the checklist provided by staff, rather in deciding on applications, the DRC members should rely on their knowledge, experience and judgment. This was emphasized to the DRC in a special meeting with Andy Fillmore (April 15, 2011 Workshop) about the role of the DRC and at the July 15, 2013 Lunch and Learn. Mr. Kawar went on to indicate that it is this Committee's responsibility to act on behalf of the people of Halifax with regards to design and protect them from bad design.

Mr. Harvey then explained variances that come forward to the Committee for consideration and possible approval. He then explained the responsibility of the Design Review Committee for requested changes to planning documents. He indicated that the Design Review Committee acts as a recommending body and would provide Council with recommendations on the potential changes to a planning document.

Mr. Harvey noted that for the application before the Committee tonight includes heritage alteration and therefore the approval process would be slightly different. He indicated that Mr. Pyle would provide Committee members with an overview of this process for heritage applications.

Mr. Connelly asked about the terminology used for the applications and presentations. He indicated that this could be confusing for Committee members. Mr. Harvey explained the difference between a preliminary presentation, a pre-application, and a full site plan approval application. The Chair asked about timing on some of the applications. Mr. Harvey responded that once an applicant has a full site plan approval application, the Committee has 60 calendar days in which to render a decision. Mr. Harvey also explained that once the Committee renders a decision it may be subject to an appeal, heard by Regional Council.

7. REPORTS/DISCUSSION

7.1 Site Plan Approval Application – 22nd Commerce Square

Mr. Pyle introduced himself and provided the Committee with a brief overview of the application and explained the site plan approval process as it relates to heritage sites. Mr. Pyle indicated that this application includes five heritage sites and is subject to different legislation. He added that changes to heritage sites have to go through Council. He noted that this application would come back to the Committee for the February 13th, 2014 meeting. Mr. Lemoine asked what would happen if the Heritage Advisory Committee didn't approve of the project, but the Design Review Committee did approve the project. Mr. Pyle explained that Halifax Regional Council has the final decision on this application due to the heritage implications and noted that the matter

would be considered by Regional Council regardless of the decisions made by either Committee.

Ms. Sinclair expressed concern that the Committee has, at times, not had the information from the Heritage Advisory Committee available to them to help make a decision. Ms. Murphy explained that the Heritage Advisory Committee reports directly to Council. She added that the Clerk's office would provide a draft extract of the minutes to the Design Review Committee. She indicated that, due to timing, the minutes are often not yet approved. Ms. Sinclair indicated that one of the responsibilities of the Committee is to acquaint themselves with reports from the Heritage Advisory Committee. Mr. Pyle explained that the Heritage Advisory Committee works with the Heritage Advisory Standards, and the Design Review Committee works with the Design Review Manual. Mr. Harvey explained that they are asked to consider the reports from the Heritage Advisory Committee; however their duty is still tied to the Design Review Manual.

Mr. Pyle then introduced Mr. Eugene Pieczonka, Principal, with Lydon Lynch Architects. Mr. Pieczonka introduced the 22nd Commerce Square project to the Committee and indicated that it has been in development for a long time, given the scope and complexities of the project. Mr. Pieczonka introduced the location via an aerial photograph and described the current buildings on the site. He provided the Committee with an outline of the heritage resources on the site and described their history and outstanding features. He indicated that some of the heritage sites would require a substantial amount of upgrading to have them remain intact.

Mr. Pieczonka explained the heritage retention strategy that they would be using on this development. The Committee was then shown a massing model of the site and Mr. Pieczonka provided Committee members with a high level overview of some of the features of the development including underground parking, a pedway and an atrium between the two towers. He indicated that this would be a mixed-use development and would include a boutique hotel, as well as residential and office spaces.

Mr. Pieczonka described the importance of having a unifying strategy for the two towers. He described the ribbon of ceramic tile that would descend from the roof plane down around the towers. The floor plans were presented and some of the interior features were described to Committee members. Mr. Pieczonka noted the 9 ft. set-back on Hollis Street as a way to create more civic space and as an opportunity for pedestrian priority. Ms. Sirrs asked if the set-back was on the developer's property. Mr. Pieczonka responded that it was indeed on the developers land. The Chair asked if the atrium would be a public space. Mr. Pieczonka responded that it would be, but in a controlled way. He then indicated some of the open public spaces and described some of the materials that would be used and the features of the spaces including bike racks, benches and water features such as outdoor reflecting pools.

Mr. Pieczonka then described the pedway connection but noted that no application has been made in this regard at this time. The mechanical floors, and the site's elevations and sections were also presented. Mr. Pieczonka noted that the intent is to design to LEED Platinum standards and described a number of the features that would be incorporated in the development to achieve this including:

- Rainwater capture and reuse,
- Use of high albedo roofing materials,
- Water conserving fixtures,
- High efficiency mechanical heating,
- Photovoltaics, and
- A waste heat collection system

Mr. Pieczonka described the photovoltaics as it relates to a variance request as no dark tinted glass is permitted. He then described other materials that would be used in the development. The Committee was then presented with various renderings of the development. Mr. Pieczonka concluded his presentation and asked for comments, clarifications and questions from Committee members.

Ms. Black asked for clarification on the heritage buildings. Mr. Pieczonka indicated that the Bank of Commerce would remain intact, except for an entrance to the restaurant. He noted that for the other heritage sites, only the façade would remain. Mr. Saleh asked that Mr. Pieczonka describe the rationale and philosophy behind working with the old and the new, especially as it relates to the south facing side of the building. Mr. Pieczonka noted that they wanted to create some separation between the new building and the Bank of Commerce so that the heritage site could be appreciated. He described the features of the space between the buildings. Mr. Rad asked if Mr. Pieczonka could describe the pedestrian experience along Hollis Street. Mr. Pieczonka noted the simple granite wall and the granite plinth. He described it as a place for respite for the pedestrian. He noted that the large glass window looking into the bike storage space would punctuate the area.

Mr. Lemoine thanked Mr. Pieczonka and commented that this project was very ambitious especially given its complexity. He indicated that one of the important aspects for him is the experience at street level, as a pedestrian. He noted that the renderings don't articulate the whole experience. He then asked about the streetscape canopies over the sidewalks. Mr. Pieczonka responded that there are three sets of canopies and indicated the location of the canopies on the renderings. Mr. Lemoine commented that he believes the use of canopies is important for the pedestrian experience.

Mr. Lemoine asked if there was any view plane impact. Mr. Pieczonka and Mr. Harvey confirmed that the development does comply with the view plane. He added that the height of the development is at its maximum. Mr. Lemoine then commented on the entrance to the building on the North facing façade along Hollis St. He indicated that he

doesn't believe the entrance to the building is prominent, making it difficult to connect to the street.

Ms. Sirrs echoed Mr. Lemoine's comments on the complexity of the application. She asked about the site plan, indicating that she hadn't received one in her meeting package. She was hoping to see a summary of what the public spaces look like. Mr. Pieczonka indicated that this could be provided. The Committee entered discussion and it was noted that there would be a benefit in receiving additional images and information on the development.

Ms. Sinclair commented on the development and used the analogy of the Bank of Commerce as a gem. She indicated that she believes the setting for a gem should be simple. She added that the elements of the new development are incredible yet it is working against the Bank of Commerce. She noted that she feels the boutique hotel is working against the heritage site. Ms. Sinclair would appreciate additional views of the site. She pointed to the model of the development and indicated that she prefers it to the renderings. She expressed that this is likely because it is more monotone. Mr. Pieczonka responded to Ms. Sinclair's comments and indicated that the hotel space was often a point of contention in their design process. He noted that the space is almost idiosyncratic and it creates an interesting dialogue.

Ms. Sinclair asked about the effect of the shadows on the Granville mall area. Mr. Pieczonka responded that there would be some effect, however, the exact impact has not been confirmed. The Committee continued their discussion on the relationship between the Bank of Commerce and the new development. Mr. Fowler expressed that the development is perhaps too complex. He indicated that he finds the development really interesting; however there may be too much going on.

Ms. Black indicated that she appreciates that there is a lot going on with the design. Mr. Lemoine indicated that he also appreciates the architecture of the development and noted the drama of the site. Mr. Pieczonka outlined that this design is what is possible with HRM by Design and that great things can be achieved working within that framework. Ms. Sinclair agreed that there are many wonderful things about this development; however she noted that the one design guideline that she is concerned about is 4.4.3 on façade articulation and materials.

The Chair echoed Mr. Fowler's comments and indicated that he appreciates the architect's effort and imprint on the city; however he feels the impact of this project on a macro level is big. He indicated that though it is beautiful on an architectural and intellectual level, he feels it is too much for Halifax. He noted that, similar to Ms. Sinclair, he likes the model.

The Committee concluded their discussion and thanked Mr. Pieczonka for the presentation.

7.3 Lunch and Learn Outcomes (July 15, 2013) – Next Steps

Due to time constraints the Committee agreed to defer this item.

8. ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Downtown Halifax Site Plan Approval Process

This matter was dealt with earlier in the meeting.

8.2 Correspondence from Former Vice-Chair

Ms. Sinclair suggested that perhaps this item could be addressed via email.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Thursday, February 13, 2013

Mr. Pyle indicated that the agenda for the next meeting would be full. The Chair noted that one of the issues they discussed at the Lunch and Learn was the timing of applications. Mr. Pyle indicated that they try to encourage that applicants come forward as soon as possible.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.

Jane Crosby
Legislative Support