

NORTH PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

**COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION LAND USE COMMITTEE (CALUC) MEETING
Re: 1050 Pandora Ave/1518 Cook St. Redevelopment proposal**

MINUTES

[N.B. The figures quoted for the number of retail parking stalls (p.2, third question under "Discussion") and setbacks of new construction (p.4, mid-page) were unable to be confirmed by NPNA at the time that these minutes were submitted.]

PROPONENT:

Brandon Crema, Executive Vice-President & COO, District Group

ARCHITECT:

Marie-Claire Bligh, Associate Architect, Michael Green Architecture

ATTENDANCE:

Twenty-one people signed the attendance register.

Attendees were primarily North Park and Fernwood residents and business owners.

Also present were Victoria Councillors Alto and Thornton-Joe, and representatives of Victoria Planning Department, Downtown Residents Association, Victoria Heritage Advisory Panel.

OPENING REMARKS:

1. North Park Neighbourhood Association (NPNA) — Jenny Farkas, President
 - This is the second CALUC meeting for this property, hereafter referred to as the "Wellburn's site". Because more than six months have passed since the initial CALUC meeting for the Wellburn's site, it was necessary to call a second CALUC meeting for presentation of a revised proposal.
 - NPNA requested that the developer and the architect introduce themselves and give a brief summary of their companies' history and approach.
2. District Group — Brandon Crema, Executive Vice-President & COO
 - District is a development company with a 15-year history on Vancouver Island.
 - District prefers working on projects that are moderate in size. They are committed to long-term rental projects.
3. Michael Green Architecture (MGA) — Marie-Claire Bligh, Associate Architect
 - MGA is a Vancouver company.
 - MGA's main focus is wood construction.
 - MGA wants its projects to be good neighbours to the surrounding buildings and their occupants.

PRESENTATION:

- The Wellburn's site is on the edge of downtown and is transitional between the Harris Green (Downtown) and North Park neighbourhoods. It is the northern gateway to the downtown core.
- At this transitional area, there is a building height change from taller structures in Harris Green to lower buildings in North Park.
- The allowed maximum density is 5.5:1, which represents 5X the site's area. [Either height or footprint can affect density.]
 - Proposed density for this project is 3.3:1, which would serve as a bridging factor from Harris Green to North Park.
- Pandora Ave. and Cook St. are the two main streets. The plan is for the building to face both streets, as well as Franklin Green.

- The intention is to restore and retain the historic Wellburn's façade, and to apply for heritage designation.
- The Wellburn's building needs a structural upgrade. Restructuring of the interior would include seismic protection and full underground parking. Reports from a structural engineer are pending.
- Use of the building would be kept similar to the current use, with commercial tenants on the ground level and residential tenants above.
 - Café space is planned for one corner (northeast corner, facing Cook St.)
 - A new residential block would be built above the current Wellburn's space. New construction at the north side (current parking lot) would be mixed use. Heights step down from six, to four, to two storeys.
 - The Wellburn's façade would be allowed to speak for itself without too much contrast.
 - A mews entry space would be built for tenants' use. There are generous balconies on the upper floors
 - As much greenery as possible would be provided.
- Priorities:
 - a. Retain historic façade.
 - b. Look at proximity of new construction to existing structures
 - Entrance mews
 - Maintain street wall
 - New volume to be subordinate to existing volume
 - 13.5 meter setback from Cook St.; further setback to six-story residential block
 - Avoid top-heavy proportions
 - Façade articulation of new rental units would have diagonal recesses
 - c. Surrounding context
 - Maintain northern gateway to downtown in context
 - Building height in context
 - Residential access through mews, off Cook St., with gate closed after working hours.
 - Residential-only courtyard and garden area
 - Multiple residential entrances and patios open onto public walkway from Cook St. to Franklin Green. Low fencing, soft landscaping would form delineation, not barrier, between residential and public space.
 - Boulevard tree planting would be part of the project.
 - Ground floor retail space could be large (e.g. grocery) or subdivided
 - Three meter setback from neighbouring Cook St. property (cinder block building at Cook and Mason Streets). This neighbouring property also must have a three meter setback.

Drawings available at <https://districtgroup.ca/portfolio-item/parkway/>.

DISCUSSION:

Q: Is the parking entry off Cook St.?

A: Yes; according to bylaw, Cook St. is classified as the lesser-used street. In addition to this, the bike lane is on Pandora.

Q: How close is the parking entry to Mason St.? What would the parking entry's impact be on Mason St.?

A: The developer always looks at traffic impact. A traffic engineer currently is looking at this.

Q: Does the underground parking include parking for the retail portion of the building?

A: Yes, there are 17 retail stalls.

Q: What is the market rent for a 550 sq. ft. one-bedroom unit?

A: At \$2.90 - \$3.20/sq. ft., a one-bedroom would rent for approximately \$1,700.

Comments (speaker lives and works on Mason St.):

- The current Wellburn's was built in approximately 1912. The proposed development would mean losing a piece of heritage. In addition, it would mean loss of residential space (currently 11 units) with affordable rents, and a grocery store with lower prices.
- The speaker referred back to the neighbourhood's ideas about having more open and shared space around Franklin Green, which had been formed prior to the nearby development at the corner of Pandora Ave. and Vancouver St.
- The speaker is opposed to "façadism", which will be expensive to achieve. It would be better to retain the current Wellburn's and build on the parking lot instead.
- The height of new construction should be dropped down and/or it should step back from Franklin Green, to save Mason St. from further shading.

Q: Is there storage for tenants outside of the residential units?

A: There will be approximately 140 bike parking stalls, which can be multi-purpose.

Q: How long would the new building remain as rental?

A: The developer plans to keep it as long-term rental. A rental agreement has not yet been determined with the City. There is a possibility that it could be rental in perpetuity.

Comment: The neighbourhood would be interested in learning the terms of the rental agreement once it is confirmed.

Comment: It is a benefit to the community that Franklin Green is shared space, both visually and in terms of activities in the park.

Q: The current residential units are quite reasonable in price. Would the developer apply to governments for grants to allow affordable rents according to CMHC guidelines?

A: Yes, the developer is looking at this. It is a long process and they still are investigating possibilities. In addition, District Group is looking at re-location strategies in the area for current tenants, in other buildings owned by District with business partners.

Comments (speaker is a current resident in Wellburn's building):

- The current building is aging and in need of a change.
- Recent developments such as the Atrium are good, as they foster engagement with the community. Other developments are unfriendly, as their commercial tenants are appointment-only businesses. The speaker is concerned that this proposed development provide a welcoming atmosphere (e.g. coffee shop that includes outdoor seating).
 - A: Commercial tenants probably would be allowed to do their own planning.
- Loss of light on Franklin Green shouldn't be a problem. The park already is shaded by trees.

Comments:

- The speaker would like NPNA to urge that perpetuity rental be put in place.
- The proposed units provide small rental space, but these days, "the living room is the street". Furniture is smaller now and storage space is built in. We have to change the way we look at things.

A: Storage space is at a premium. Space needs to be looked at in terms of whether it can be used in multi-purpose ways.

Q (the speaker uses Wellburn's and Franklin Green):

- The current open interface with the park is good. The proposal's effort to interface with the neighbourhood is appreciated. The property gains more from the park than the other way around. Would the developer add landscaping or some other arrangement?
- Is the underground parking the full width of the Wellburn's building?

A: Yes, the parking is full width of the building.

Q: It is hard to find an affordable unit. Can the proposed development be made more dense? Increased density would make it more affordable.

A: Increased density can only happen if the commercial space is included. It would not make the residential rents more affordable.

Q/Comments:

- Comment: Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) is a program that low to moderate income seniors can use to make rents more affordable.
- How wide is the Cook St. sidewalk?
 - A: Curb to building is 16 ft.
- How will deliveries be made to retail tenants?
 - A: There will be a loading area to the left of the residential/public walkway. Delivery times will be managed.
- Q: Are we keeping Wellburn's grocery store?
 - A: Discussions are continuing. Garbage, loading, etc. need to be considered. District Group needs to learn Wellburn's needs and plans. Commercial tenants need to be amenable to the community.
- Comments:
 - The lower walls along the residential/public walkway are good. The speaker has seen a similar arrangement working well in other locations.
 - The barber shop next to Wellburn's is a great asset to the community — it has a lot of engagement with the neighbourhood.

Q: What does tenant re-location entail?

A: The city has a process.

- District Group wants to find homes for everyone currently living in the Wellburn's building. The property manager needs to sit down with everyone to learn their needs and plans.
- Some re-locations could be temporary, then the tenant would move back into the new building.

Q (speaker is from Downtown Residents Association):

- What is different in this design in terms of setbacks and massing? Setback from the heritage façade and the new construction looks insignificant.
 - A: The setback is seven feet. The standard is six meters. Increasing the setback is being considered.
- What is the material of the exterior surface of the new part?
 - A: Ceramic tile, of similar pattern to the current exterior.

Comment: It would add continuity if glazed brick could be carried over to the new part.

Q: Comments from Heritage Advisory Panel?

A (member of panel):

- One or more façades should be retained.
- Setback has been increased; maybe it could be more. Heritage always looks for a greater setback.
- Any new development should be compatible, with similar type or quality of materials. There are various ways of making this possible.
- There are no prescribed guidelines for setback.

Q: Previously there was an understanding that Wellburn's grocery store was leaving and there would be smaller commercial spaces. Local businesses and local proprietors are appreciated.

A: Options are being kept open for now. There are two additional recessed entries if small businesses go in; therefore there are various opportunities.

Q/Comments (speaker is owner of barber shop in current Wellburn's building):

- Nobody from District Group came to the barber shop yet about re-locating.
 - A: District Group is working on strategy and getting a more confident timeline first.
- Barber shop might be interested in returning to the wellburn's site.
- The six- and four-storey setbacks are good; they allow space for interaction.

Q/Comments:

- Comment: The heritage building is being used to "buy space" now.
 - A: The standard setback from the sidewalk is 4.19 meters. The developer is talking to the City about the current Wellburn's to allow a bridging effect to the new part.

- Comment (member of Victoria Planning Dept.): Setbacks depend on context.
- Q: What will happen where the current Wellburn's roof is?
 - A: It's not definite how it would be.
- Comment: If the proposal were more dynamic (e.g. more condos) that would offset affordable rental. More diversification might be more beneficial to the community.

Q/Comments (member of Heritage Advisory Panel):

- Comment: There is a Downtown Core Development Plan. North Park has a deficit of heritage buildings. There are many policies that come into play. In development presentations it would be helpful to talk more about that. It would be helpful to talk more about comments from the Heritage Advisory Panel.
- Q: How many heritage buildings has this architect worked on?
 - A: This is the first.

Q: Would retention of the façade be eligible for tax exemption?

A: No, but the parapet might be.

Comment: Thank you to everyone for the open discussion.

Q: How can a developer control the nature of local businesses that wish to be tenants?

A: It is in the interest of the developer to retain valued, interactive, dynamic businesses.

CLOSING REMARKS — Jenny Farkas

In relation to land use, it is important for communities to ask, "What are the policies?" "What do we gain or lose as a community?" We need to make informed decisions.

Thank you to all for attending and participating in this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Recorder: Penny Bond, NPNA