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Item No. 9.1.1
Design Review Committee
March 8, 2018

TO: Chair and Members of the Design Review Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Kelly Denty, A/Director of Planning and Development

DATE: February 28, 2018

SUBJECT: **Case 21538: Substantive Site Plan Approval – 1505 Barrington Street, Halifax (Maritime Centre)**

ORIGIN

Application by WSP Canada Inc. for substantive site plan approval to enable the development of an addition at the base of the Maritime Centre building at the northwest corner of Barrington Street and Salter Street.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (HRM Charter), Part VIII, Planning & Development.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Design Review Committee:

1. Approve the qualitative elements of the substantive site plan approval application for the commercial development on lands located at 1505 Barrington Street, Halifax, as contained in Attachment A, with the condition that:
 - a) the proposed garage door at Salter Street not be permitted unless additional distinctive architectural treatment is included to comply with Visual Terminus obligations in the Design Manual.
2. Accept the findings of the qualitative wind impact assessment, as contained in Attachment B.

BACKGROUND

An application has been received from WSP Canada Inc. for substantive site plan approval to enable an addition to the existing building on lands located at 1505 Barrington Street, Halifax (Map 1). To allow the development, the Design Review Committee must consider the application relative to the Design Manual within the Downtown Halifax Land Use By-law (LUB). This report addresses relevant guidelines of the Design Manual to assist the Committee in its decision.

Subject Site	1505 Barrington Street, Halifax
Location	Lands of the existing Maritime Centre at northwest corner of Barrington Street and Salter Street
Zoning (Map 1)	DH-1 (Downtown Halifax) Zone
Total Size	926 square metres (9,967 sq. feet)
Site Conditions	Forecourt to existing building with steps to main entrance doors, private open space and plantings on Barrington Street façade; sunken entrance with steps and planters to building entrance at intersection of Barrington Street and Salter Street; significant grade changes along Salter Street
Current Land Use(s)	Retail and office commercial
Surrounding Land Use(s)	The subject site is surrounded by a mixture of uses, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Various institutional uses including St. Mary's Basilica and glebe house; Law Courts building, St. Matthew's Church and Dalhousie University Sexton campus;• Historic landscape exemplified by the Old Burying Grounds, forecourts and greens of the Provincial Law Courts, St. Matthew's Church, Government House, and the former Regional Library;• Various commercial uses including retail stores, restaurants, entertainment uses, offices, and hotels; and• Moderate density residential developments on the fringes.

Project Description

The proposed commercial building addition will include the following:

- Ground floor entrance lobby with stairs and escalators (to mezzanine level lobby, public lounge area, elevator lobby and retail space), retail-commercial space and potential restaurant uses (approximately 805 sq. metres) accessed from and fronting on Barrington Street;
- Ground floor entrance lobby (approximately 121 sq. metres) at the corner of Barrington and Salter Streets;
- 100 new vehicular underground parking spaces for the retail and office tenants with egress only onto Salter Street. The existing underground parking ingress/egress at Hollis Street will remain.

Information about the approach to the design of the building has been provided by the project's architect, and can be found in Attachments A, B, C, and D.

Regulatory Context – Municipal Planning Documents

With regard to the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPS) and the Downtown Halifax LUB, the following are relevant to the proposed development from a regulatory context:

- Zone: DH-1 (Downtown Halifax) Zone
- Precinct: Precinct 4 – Lower Central Downtown

- Pedestrian Oriented Commercial Street: The Barrington Street side of the site requires pedestrian oriented retail and restaurants to ensure a critical mass of activities to engage and animate the sidewalk;
- Building Height (Pre and Post-Bonus): The maximum pre-bonus height is 51 metres, while the maximum post-bonus height is 66 metres;
- Streetwall Setback: No minimum or maximum streetwall setback along the Barrington Street frontage. The required streetwall setback along Salter Street is permitted to vary between 0-4.0m;
- Streetwall Stepback: Where streetwall setback requirements of 0-4.0 metres are identified, the stepback is a minimum of 3 metres for those portions of the building that is a maximum of 33.5 metres in height;
- Streetwall Height: Minimum streetwall height is 11 metres, and maximum streetwall height is 18.5 metres;
- Prominent Visual Terminus Site: There are terminus views to the subject site from Spring Garden Road, to the Barrington Street façade and Granville Street, to the Salter Street façade;
- Development Abutting a Registered Heritage Property: The site abuts the St Matthew's Church to the south and the Freemason's Hall is across Salter Street to the north. Both are municipally registered heritage properties, and development on any lot abutting a registered heritage property is subject to the requirements of the Design Manual.

In addition to the above regulations, the Design Manual of the Downtown Halifax LUB contains guidance regarding the appropriate appearance and design of buildings and conditions for assessing any request to vary the built-form requirements.

Site Plan Approval Process

Under the site plan approval process, development proposals within the Downtown Halifax Plan area must meet the land use and building envelope requirements of the Downtown Halifax LUB, as well as the requirements of the By-law's Design Manual. The process requires approvals by both the Development Officer and the Design Review Committee as follows:

Role of the Development Officer

In accordance with the substantive site plan approval process, as set out in the Downtown Halifax LUB, the Development Officer is responsible for determining if a proposal meets the land use and built-form requirements of the Downtown Halifax LUB. The Development Officer has reviewed the application and determined that the use and built form elements conform to the Downtown Halifax LUB, namely:

- Ground floor height;
- Streetwall height;
- Streetwall setback; and
- Building height.

Role of the Design Review Committee (DRC)

The Design Review Committee, established under the LUB, is the body responsible for making decisions relative to a proposal's compliance with the requirements of the Design Manual.

The role of the Design Review Committee in this case is to:

1. Determine if the proposal is in keeping with the Design Manual; and
2. Determine if the proposal is acceptable in terms of expected wind conditions on pedestrian comfort and safety (Attachment B).

Notice and Appeal

Where a proposal is approved by the Design Review Committee, notice is given to all assessed property owners within the DHSMPs Plan Area boundary plus 30 metres. Any assessed property owner within the

area of notice may then appeal the decision of the Design Review Committee to Regional Council. If no appeal is filed, the Development Officer may then issue the Development Permit for the proposal. If an appeal is filed, Regional Council will hold a hearing and make a decision on the application. A decision to uphold an approval will result in the approval of the project while a decision to overturn an approval will result in the refusal of the site plan approval application.

DISCUSSION

Design Manual Guidelines

As noted above, the Design Manual contains a variety of building design guidelines that are to be considered in the development of new buildings. Items of specific consideration to this proposal are as follows:

- Section 2.4 contains guidelines that are to be considered specifically for properties in Precinct 4;
- Sections 3.1 and 3.2 contain guidelines regarding the design, detailing and character of the streetwall and the amenity and comfort of the pedestrian realm;
- Section 3.3 provides guidelines regarding building design including height and massing to be considered;
- Section 3.4 outlines guidelines respecting civic character including prominent views and notable civic sites;
- Section 3.5 provides guidelines addressing parking requirements and utilities;
- Section 4.1 contains guidelines for new buildings within a heritage context that are expected to emulate scale, architectural character and materials of neighbouring buildings; and
- Section 4.3 contains guidelines in relation to abutting developments to ensure a new building of distinction that is complementary to the locality and neighbouring buildings.

An evaluation of the general guidelines and the relevant criteria as they relate to the project are found in a table format in Attachment E. In addition, the table identifies circumstances where there are different possible interpretations of how the project relates to a criterion, where additional explanation is warranted, or where the Design Review Committee will need to give particular attention to its assessment of conformance to the Design Manual. These matters, identified as “Discussion” items, are addressed as follows:

Awnings and Canopies (2.4f, 3.1.1d, 3.2.3b)

For this location, the Design Manual encourages the use of awnings and canopies along sidewalks and building frontages to provide weather protection. The applicant is not proposing any permanent canopy or awning above the restaurant entrance at Barrington Street. The square arch is a positive feature for wind control and overall suitable wind conditions should be expected at the entrance. In combination with the overall mitigation of downwashing winds effected by the proposed design, pedestrian comfort should be enhanced. Any obstructions such as planters or screens on both sides of the entrance would improve wind conditions. These design approaches should adequately satisfy the criteria for weather protection.

Prominent Frontages and View Termini (3.4.1a)

The Design Manual speaks to existing buildings and sites that terminate important view corridors and recommends distinctive architectural elements be provided to strengthen visual connectivity across downtown. The subject site is identified as a Prominent Visual Terminus Site (Map 9 of the DHLUB) and contains two Terminus sites; the Spring Garden Road intersection with Barrington Street, and the Granville Street intersection with Salter Street.

The proposed addition’s main entrance at Barrington Street has been aligned to the Spring Garden Road view axis in accordance with the Design Manual. The proposed addition fronts on Barrington Street and wraps around the corner of Salter Street and Barrington Street but only continues for about 6 metres at which point the existing building continues.

A new parking garage door (egress only) is proposed on Salter Street at a location that aligns with the southern end of the Granville Street visual terminus corridor. The Design Manual identifies this corridor as a prominent Visual Terminus Site and distinctive architectural treatment is required at this location. The applicant has provided a vertically slotted projection surmounting the garage door in response to this requirement (see Attachment A – Sheet A-304). Staff advise the proposed approach does not meet the Design Manual and is a lost opportunity for a signature or landmark architectural treatment/feature in this location. The Design Manual obligation for the highest possible design and material quality has not been met.

The installation of a new egress-only door on Salter Street provides for the creation of an additional 100 interior parking spaces. Eliminating the Salter Street door would require reconfiguration of the new parking area to allow egress via existing doors elsewhere on the property. The loss of the Salter Street door generates a requirement for additional internal maneuvering space that would reduce the number of new parking spaces from 100 to 40.

Staff recommend the garage door not be permitted at the proposed location unless additional architectural treatment is included to comply with Visual Terminus obligations in the Design Manual.

Developments Abutting a Heritage Property (3.2.1d, 4.3.1a, 4.3.2a, 4.3.2b, 4.3.2d, 4.3.3a, and 4.3.3b)

The Design Manual attaches a great deal of importance to a building transition to an abutting heritage property. Items covered under the guidelines include:

- Maintaining a similar streetwall height/cornice height for the podium part of the new building;
- Maintaining a similar height of the first storey of the new building to the first storey datum line of the heritage building;
- Maintaining the rhythm of existing heritage buildings in vertical proportions;
- Referencing the rhythm above the cornice line for new buildings; and
- Maintaining other heights and proportions in the first storey for smaller details.

In this case, the project site abuts St. Matthew's Church, a municipally registered heritage property, on the south and the Freemason's Hall north on Barrington Street. There is a significant distance between the registered heritage church building and the proposed building due to the presence of the St. Matthew's burial grounds. The Freemason's Hall is on the opposite side of Salter Street from the proposal. The location of both heritage properties, relative to the subject site, to some extent reduces the need to employ all the transitioning techniques described above. Nonetheless, the design responds to the transitioning guidelines by proposing:

- A streetwall which will have a similar height as the cornice line of buildings north on Barrington Street and cornice (side elevation with cornice return) of St. Matthew's church;
- A first storey height for ground floor of the new building, expressed in clear glass, that is of similar height to the first storey datum line of the buildings north on Barrington Street;
- Varying width vertical bays along the streetwall which emulate the existing grain of buildings north on Barrington Street; and
- Active entrances at Barrington Street and Salter Street façades at the sidewalk edge and the surrounding square arches provide depth and texture and break down the building mass to a pedestrian scale.

Variance Requests

No variance requests are being sought for this application.

Wind Assessment

Proposed buildings greater than 20 metres in height are subject to either a qualitative or a quantitative wind impact assessment. A qualitative wind assessment was prepared, although not required, to inform the design and improve pedestrian wind comfort and safety conditions by mitigating existing wind impact.

A qualitative wind impact assessment was prepared by RWDI Inc. for the project (Attachment B). The purpose of the assessment is to determine the wind impact of the completed development on the public realm and private amenity spaces relative to the expected level of comfort for people sitting, standing, and walking in those areas and identify measures to mitigate those impacts as appropriate.

The assessment concludes that the proposed addition is a positive design feature for wind control. The study noted the following in particular:

- Improved wind conditions are expected for all pedestrian areas around the tower with the proposed addition in place as it reduces the impact of downwashing winds;
- Lower and suitable wind speeds predicted at the south walkway and green area next St. Matthew's church;
- Low wind speeds comfortable for sitting at second floor balcony (over the proposed garage door) with tall railings;
- Overall suitable wind conditions expected at proposed entrances at Barrington Street; and
- Reduced wind speed at sidewalks and at the corner plaza (Please note that the corner plaza, based on suggestion of a larger canopy in the RWDI report, has been extended to the sidewalk at Salter and Barrington Streets corner).

Conclusion

Staff advise that the project is generally consistent with the Design Manual; with the only exception being the proposed garage door at Salter Street that does not meet the guidelines respecting terminus of a view corridor. Staff therefore recommend that the Design Review Committee approve the substantive site plan approval application with the condition that the proposed garage door at Salter Street not be permitted unless additional distinctive architectural treatment is included to comply with Prominent Visual Terminus obligations of the Design Manual.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications. The HRM costs associated with processing this planning application can be accommodated within the approved 2017/18 operating budget for C310 Urban & Rural Planning Applications.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this report. The risks considered rate low. To reach this conclusion, consideration was given to hazard risks (wind impacts on pedestrian safety).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process is consistent with the intent of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy and the requirements of the Downtown Halifax LUB regarding substantive site plan approvals. The level of engagement was information sharing, achieved through the developer's website, public kiosks, and a public open house.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No implications have been identified.

ALTERNATIVES

1. The Design Review Committee may choose to approve without conditions the application as shown on Attachment A.
2. The Design Review Committee may choose to approve the application with conditions that differ from those recommended by staff. This may necessitate further submissions by the applicant, as well as a supplementary report from staff.
3. The Design Review Committee may choose to deny the application. The Committee must provide reasons for this refusal based on the specific criteria of the Design Manual. An appeal of the Design Review Committee's decision can be made to Regional Council.

ATTACHMENTS

Map 1	Location and Zoning
Attachment A	Site Plan Approval Plans
Attachment B	Pedestrian Wind Assessment
Attachment C	Building Floor Plans and Renderings
Attachment D	Statement of Design Rationale
Attachment E	Design Manual Checklist

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/drc/Agendas.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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