

12 April 2006 - Notre Dame 2880 Venables Street

DE: 410128

Use: Secondary School
Zoning: RS-1S
Application Status: Complete
Architect: Killick Metz Bowen Rose
Owner: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver
Review: First
Delegation: Cristina Marghetti, Lynne Varhol, Patricia Campbell
Staff: Dale Morgan

EVALUATION: NON SUPPORT (0-9) (*emphasis added by Notre Dame Neighbours*)

Introduction: Dale Morgan, Development Planner, introduced this application to replace the existing Notre Dame Secondary School located on the site bounded by Renfrew, Venables, Kaslo and Parker Streets in the RS-1S zone, surrounded by single family housing. The new school will accommodate a student population of 800 (currently 665). The existing gymnasium and auditorium will be refurbished and retained and a new academic wing and infill block containing a cafeteria and chapel will be constructed in phases over a five year period. 79 surface parking spaces are proposed. The site is 4-1/2 acres in size with a moderate slope northward, dropping approximately 16 ft. across the site. There are existing Lombardy poplar trees around the north and western edges of the site.

School use is conditional in the RS-1S zone. The proposed height is below the maximum allowable 35 ft. and the sideyard requirements for schools are met. The site strategy is to maximize the amount of open space on the site in order to create a useful playing field, to minimize impact on northerly views and to integrate the two existing building elements with the addition. The intent is to maintain the existing school in operation during construction.

The form of development is a two-storey L-shaped massing with slab roof construction. Mr. Morgan briefly described the various components of the development, the proposed phasing program, and proposed materials. ***The playing field is intended to be dealt with in a future application and does not form part of the subject proposal.*** He noted the proposed 79 parking spaces exceed required parking by 16 spaces and bicycle spaces are fewer than recommended. ***Mr. Morgan reviewed the landscape plan noting it is intended to remove the existing Lombardy poplars at the start of construction and to eventually replace them with other perimeter trees. An arborist's report indicates the poplars are at approximately mid point of their relatively short life span.*** Sustainability has not been addressed except for screening devices for windows.

Areas in which the advice of the Panel is sought include:

- Site plan including location of entries, parking, and the proposed re-grading of the centre of the site and any associated CPTED issues;
- Architectural treatment, general architectural character, façade treatment, and general cohesiveness of the scheme;
- Material expression;

- Landscaping, including whether it provides a sufficient buffer for the neighbours, and comments on the proposal to remove the existing Lombardy poplar trees.

Applicant's Introductory Comments: The applicant team presented the scheme and responded to questions from the Panel. With respect to the existing Lombardy poplar trees, Patricia Campbell, Landscape Architect, said this is seen as an opportunity to uproot them and replace them with more appropriate urban trees that will last the life of the school.

Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:

- There needs to be a simpler approach to the architecture of the building, with design development recommended to the building massing which the Panel found quite jumbled. The architectural expression appears disjointed and the materials do not articulate themselves clearly;
- More glass is needed in the circulation spaces;
- There is a lack of outdoor gathering places;
- The building entry lacks definition;
- More landscaping is needed in the surface parking lot;
- Removal of the Lombardy poplar trees is supported provided they are replaced immediately with sizeable trees;
- Design development to the ramp to make it less convoluted.

Related Commentary:

The Panel did not support this application and thought considerably more design development was required to make the scheme work.

The overall site planning was considered to be fairly well resolved and appropriate given the proposed phasing program. The "big moves" seem correct in locating the various elements but the Panel was concerned with the finer grain issues.

Not locating an entrance off Renfrew Street was questioned and in general it was thought that the entrances need to be announced more clearly. The Renfrew elevation appears quite fragmented, and a more significant entry and stronger expression of the chapel might give it more emphasis. There was also a recommendation to take advantage of the opportunity for the chapel to express the culture of the school. In general, greater simplification was recommended throughout in the material expression. There was a suggestion to consider a new base treatment or adding new material to the existing structures to improve overall cohesiveness. It was noted the existing chapel appears to be a stand-alone element which helps break up the school and relate it better to the texture of the neighbourhood and it was thought it might improve this scheme if the massing was broken up into a few more discrete elements.

Notwithstanding the budget restraints on a project of this nature, the Panel had concerns about the choice of materials which seem very basic and a bit harsh. They should also be resistant to graffiti.

The public access to the grotto was questioned with suggestions that it would be better if this was truly a private garden with some views to the public. Its location on Renfrew was also questioned given this is a busy thoroughfare, which seems inappropriate for a meditation garden. It is also in a circulation area.

Concerns were expressed about the proposed sunken playing field becoming waterlogged, noting its severe slope will inhibit growth. Drainage must be fully addressed, and a comment was made that the new classroom block might act as a dam. CPTED issues need to be reviewed to ensure visibility, e.g., tree canopies should be high.

The Panel thought it would be essential to incorporate more planting in the parking area in favour of extra parking spaces, both to soften its appearance for the neighbours and to break up the parking a bit. A permeable surface was also recommended for the parking area.

The fairly simple and minimalistic approach to the landscaping was supported but there was thought to be superfluous shrub planting in some areas. It was suggested better use could be made of the shrubs, and to resolve some of the grading issues with retaining walls, providing a more urban approach to the landscaping.

The Panel was concerned about the lack of places where students can congregate, and a request to consider better paving materials in some areas noting that concrete provides no sense of permanence or character. A suggestion was made that the area along the auditorium seems to be a natural place for congregation and might be explored.

The Panel had no concerns about removing the Lombardy poplar trees noting their relatively short life span and maintenance difficulties. They also offer little shading. Replacing them with something more appropriate was supported. However, it was also strongly recommended that replacement trees should be large and installed immediately to soften the impact on the neighbours.

It was noted the shape of the building does not maximize potential for heating and cooling and the new scheme creates greater westerly exposure than the existing school. The most optimum shape would be a U-shape for maximizing daylighting. The school seems to be quite dark with few skylights and the glass on the north elevation is not maximized for daylight access. A lot more glass throughout was recommended. The grotto will be in shade for most of the day. The screening on the west side was supported although the short columns will still allow sun into the windows on that elevation. It was noted that natural ventilation appears not to have been considered and it was strongly recommended that this be investigated as early as possible. It was noted that, in general, schools are easily naturally ventilated.

It was stressed there needs to be an adequate drop-off area which does not inconvenience the neighbours. Because the existing entrance is on Parker Street, it was suggested that people may pull into the parking lot for drop-off.

There were concerns about the design of the handicap ramp which needs to be much better integrated.

In general, the Panel found the massing too complex and not relating well to the functions or hierarchy of the building.