



Heritage Vancouver

www.heritagevancouver.org
info@heritagevancouver.org
604 254 9411

PO Box 74123, Hillcrest Park PO
Vancouver BC V6G 3E1
Canada

July 24, 2017

Mayor Gregor Robertson and Vancouver City Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 W.12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1V4

RE: 969 Burrard Street and 1019-1045 Nelson Street Rezoning

Dear Mayor Robertson and Members of Council,

Heritage Vancouver is in support of the conservation of First Baptist Church at 969 Burrard. However, we have reservations regarding the tower component of the project.

For several years, Heritage Vancouver has listed churches on our annual Top10 list noting the threat of loss of important community assets for the countless social and cultural activities that they host. First Baptist Church is exemplary for its role in increasing quality of life and building and maintaining healthy communities through its emergency shelter, community kitchen, youth social programs, services for new immigrants, child care services, and social housing.

Its architectural value is also significant both on its own, with the municipally “A” designated exterior and interior, as well as part of a collection of heritage buildings on Burrard Street to be taken in as one heads towards the Downtown core.

Heritage Vancouver fully supports the rehabilitation of the church through the preservation of the original character defining exterior and interior elements, the restoration of altered character defining features, and the necessary seismic upgrade. We also find very positive the project’s inclusion of the rental/social housing units as well as provision of increased social infrastructure for the church to carry out its social programs for the well-being of the community.

We would like to note the three houses of historic merit on the proposed development site. In particular, the Mitchell House at 1021 Nelson is from the original development of the West End and one of the last 1890s houses in that neighbourhood. We suggest that documentation, deconstruction and relocation of the houses to other sites be part of any redevelopment package for this site. Additionally, we suggest commemoration, perhaps as art displays, to preserve the visual memory of the houses and their historic value be considered as part of the redevelopment package.

Importantly, since heritage does not solely reside on individual sites but rather, extends to the broader urban area shaped by social, cultural, and natural values and features as espoused by approaches such as, most notably, UNESCO’s Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation, we note the following as deserving attention:

1. The West End Community plan raises the issue of ongoing development pressure jeopardizing the distinct neighbourhood character valued by the community. Specifically, as laid out in Figure 14.1 (p.97) of the plan, the median household income is materially below the city average and the percentage of rented dwellings is exceptionally high at 81%. This is a defining characteristic of the neighbourhood. The 331 units of market strata housing as designed will surely be out of reach of the demographic in this neighbourhood and is not consistent with the character of the West End. More recently, the Housing Vancouver Emerging Directions adopted in principle by Council on March 29, 2017, acknowledges the importance of connecting new housing supply with local residents' incomes, tenure, location and so forth. What we believe is extremely important to be mindful of is whether the addition will protect and enhance the values of the broader urban area which is the West End.
2. One of the defining characteristics of the First Baptist Church is its landmark status both for its religious architecture and for the social role it plays in the city (which the proposed conservation work is supporting). It is very likely that the condo tower will become the landmark and the church become subordinate to it. Standard 11 of Parks Canada's Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada advises that the "addition must not detract from the historic place or impair its heritage value". This does not necessarily mean the size of the addition but the type of presence the addition has.

In conclusion, we support the conservation of the church as well as the expansion of social infrastructure to carry out its community programming. The efforts of the project team to preserve the church and enable it to serve more in need is commendable. However, we also advise the necessary attention to the context of the site and the West End neighbourhood.

Sincerely,



Bill Yuen
Manager
Heritage Vancouver Society

Cc Gil Kelley, General manager of Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability
Karen Hoese, Acting Assistant Director, Downtown
Yan Zeng, Rezoning Planner