Giannone Petricone Associates Inc. Architects

Peer Review Report – 148-152 MacDonnell Street, Guelph, ON

First Review: March 5, 2012

The firm of Giannone Petricone Associates was asked by the City of Guelph to provide services in the form of Peer Review Architect for a new mixed-use residential condominium building located at 148-152 MacDonnell Street, Guelph, Ontario.

In initial discussions with planning staff it was understood that the site was of utmost importance to the future development of downtown Guelph, both in terms of its proximity to downtown as well as being seen as a positive catalyst for future development in the downtown area.

It was further understood that much discussion had taken place with the applicant, the Tricor Group, and as a result a much improved proposal was prepared. Our firm was then retained to act as a Peer Review for this proposal.

The following documents have been provided for our review:

2. Urban Design Brief prepared by Stantec Consulting Ltd. dated February 2012 and stamped received by City of Guelph on February 8, 2012

These background documents were reviewed by myself and along with background discussions and clarifications became the basis for the urban design peer review. Further to this, in the first meeting with staff, further clarification of zoning and urban design principles were provided in order to assess this application.
The following documents were provided to the City by the applicant for review. These comprised drawings and renderings for initial peer review and are dated February 13, 2012 and stamped received by City of Guelph on February 17, 2012.

Architectural Drawings: A100-A103; A203-204; A216-A219; A401-A404; L400; SP1; L-430; S1.1-S1.11; S2.0-S2.8; S3.0-S3.1; proposed 3rd floor amenity drawing sketch; series of coloured 3-dimensional renderings and 2-dimensional elevations.

First Review
A meeting was held with City of Guelph staff on March 5, 2012. As stated above, this meeting allowed for a discussion of the regulatory background documents in relation to this application as well as a discussion around the changes and progress that the applicant had made prior to this first review. As well, many questions of clarification were dealt with during our meeting. Most importantly a site walk with staff provided clear understanding of the surrounding context’s specific grade issues. It was agreed that this site is very prominent and an important entry point to downtown Guelph. It must be stated that the documentation provided by both City staff and the applicant was very thorough and comprehensive. Further to this the applicant, his staff and his consultants provided much assistance in understanding the resultant design.

The building is understood to be an 18-storey mixed-use residential, commercial building located at the intersection of MacDonnell and Woolwich Streets in Guelph, Ontario. The building comprises a 16-storey residential tower sitting on a 2 - 2.5 storey podium which holds residential lobby/amenity, a retail commercial component and a below and above grade parking structure.

The following commentary results from review of all particular documents provided (listed above) and as a result of discussion with staff, applicant and a thorough site visit.
1. **Grade Relationships**
   1.1 The grade related experience is tantamount to the success of the building’s relationship to downtown Guelph. Much discussion was had regarding both reducing the enclosing façade of the parking structure especially along MacDonnell Street. This included the addition of active uses such as more amenity space along the frontage and the reduction of the parking at grade. As well, enhanced landscaping would assist in mitigating the presence of the parking structure. It was appreciated that the parking structure was clad in the same material and articulated as the rest of the podium.

   1.2 The site has significant grading issues and will require very careful design solution to mitigate the existing grades with the new building. This was very evident at the corner intersection. Much work was needed to improve the “public” experience at the intersection of MacDonnell and Woolwich Streets. An improved landscape solution was requested that would result in a proper public/private relationship at this important corner. As well, the public pedestrian sidewalk experience along Woolwich and MacDonnell needed to be improved both in terms of width as well as in terms of the perception of the eventual built form of the proposed building and its street-fronting relationships of building corners and retaining walls.

2. **Functional Servicing**
   2.1 The applicant was asked to readdress the garbage and loading relationship which results in an unacceptable loading area along the Woolwich frontage. A suggestion was made to shift the loading area to the north side of the building. As well, it was felt that the design should better reduce impact of functional servicing on the public realm. This would require minimizing impact of garage entries, turning radii and fire exits.

3. **Building Design**
   3.1 Massing: It was understood that much effort was made regarding the building massing prior to this submission. This work revolved around minimizing the footprint (floorplate) size of the point tower. It is our opinion that the general
approval of point towers and base strategy was well executed. The size of the building shaft was mitigated by the vertical articulation of the building resulting in a more slender proportion.

The proportion of base to tower was also well executed with the base being properly scaled to the context of downtown Guelph.

Concern was raised with regard to the top of the building. The penthouse and mechanical spaces resulted in an overcomplicated and over scaled building mass at the top of the building. This was evident in the distant view renderings of the building. Provided by the applicant as well, some work needed to be done in relation to the maximum height of the building with respect to the height of the historic church.

3.2 Building Architectural Articulation: Much attention was given to comments on the pedestrian level experience. As mentioned earlier in this report, the ambition is to create as much activity as possible at grade. To that end, the request was made to extend the lobby amenity space along MacDonnell as much as possible. One additional bay was discussed which would reduce the parking at grade and extend the lobby along MacDonnell. As well the landscaping should be such as to create a positive flow from the sidewalk to the building at grade functions - whether building entrance or retail uses. The ambition is to create much more interaction between exterior and interior uses which will enliven the streetscape experience - by day and night.

It was felt that the materiality at grade be more “humane” in scale. The request was to incorporate stone masonry in more than just piers and to reduce the large expanses of precast concrete at the base.

Along with the discussion of materiality at the base, the request was made to see samples of the exterior materials to best understand both their colour and texture.
The general approach of a strong vertical architectural expression was appreciated. This was particularly successful on the east and west facades. Small changes were requested at the balcony edges to replace freestanding columns with engaged piers at the building face. It was felt that this would create a stronger, simpler silhouette for these two facades.

Concern was raised with the south and north facades. It was felt that these two facades created disharmony with the more successful east and west sides, which were symmetrical in nature. It was understood that the attempt was to create an asymmetrical composition. This however was felt to be too timid.

It was requested of the applicant to reconsider this approach. As well, the offset balcony edges on the east and west facades though understood given the structural system, required rethinking.

Again, as discussed earlier, the mechanical penthouse required reconsideration. The proposal presented a very large, over-scaled mass at the top of the building. Once again the applicant offered to reconsider this element.

All in all it is our opinion that the general direction of the building design is positive and it was felt that the design was moving in a positive direction.
Second Review

It was acknowledged that the applicant made significant attempts to incorporate many of the comments raised in the initial first review.

The garbage/loading area had been shifted away from the front of the east façade to an area between the north wall and the existing car wash. This is seen as a positive resolution. A request was made to coordinate curb cuts and radii at the intersection with respect to the existing condition along Woolwich Street.

A new landscape sketch was presented by staff during the meeting which was felt to be a successful improvement to the MacDonnell/Woolwich intersection. The concept which also attempts to tighten the existing corner radii creates an elegant balance of steps and planters that together create a harmonious resolution for both pedestrians and the eventual restaurant/café patio.

The applicant presented a series of perspectival renderings along with rendered elevations which represented many of the requests made during initial first review.

Most successful was the enlargement of the lobby to reduce the extent of parking structure at grade. A discussion was had regarding the remaining two bays of parking along MacDonnell. A suggestion was to have these two bays’ façade run parallel to MacDonnell with a small setback of landscaping. The applicant was concerned with the potential loss of parking and complexity it may cause but offered to consider the request.
Again, much attention was paid to the base articulation. It is my opinion that the base should be of a stone masonry, much like many buildings found in downtown Guelph. The precast, though meant to tie in with the rest of the building did not offer that intimate “humane” scale that was needed along the streetscape.

As well, it was felt that the fixed canopies were in conflict with the “ordered” base and that they should only be placed above the residential entry. It was felt that the restaurant/café would not prefer them and would rather incorporate fabric awning structures, whether fixed or preferably retractable.

The north and west base podium elevations seem stark and/or unfinished. It was requested that given the potential exposure that these facades will have to the public realm that they incorporate similar detailing as is done on the other facades.

A request was made to remove the recessed area at the base of the east elevation which originally incorporated the garbage access. The intent was to allow the base to come out to align with either side of this recess and present a more street related relationship.

Two major areas identified in the first review resulted in further discussion. These areas were the north and south tower elevations and the mechanical penthouse articulation.

The prior request to look at the north and south elevation revolved around the notion of symmetry versus asymmetry approaches. The applicant chose to attempt an asymmetrical approach. The result proposes a strong vertical element in a contrasting colour. It is my opinion that the building is now presenting competing visions. This was most evident in some of the perspective renderings. It was felt that there is almost two different building approaches visible - the east and west facades which are quite symmetrical in nature was felt to be most successful. It was my opinion that a similar strategy should be employed on the north and south facades (with minimal resultant changes to the plan) the elevation can be altered and simplified to create a more harmonious building presence.
The top of the building as well, attempted to reflect the commentary made in the first review. Again much progress was made and appreciated. Similar to much of the commentary previous, a stronger, clear and simple articulation was requested. Sketch overlays were provided which spoke to a simpler resolution and clear articulation of cornices.
Third Review

A revised drawing package was received March 30, 2012 for our review. As well the revised drawings incorporating the requested changes, the package also included a servicing drawing and more definitive grading and landscape plans.

The streetscape landscaping at the MacDonnell / Woolwich intersection has improved and reflects much of that discussed in the previous meeting. The drawing expresses the intermediate landing at the intersection of MacDonnell and Woolwich as coloured/patterned concrete. It is my opinion that this should be similar decorative paving as the corner apron and the terrace above.

In our prior review it was requested of the applicant to review the potential of the streetwall along MacDonnell from gridlines 1 to 5 to run parallel to the streetline with a 6-8 foot landscaped setback. It was understood that this would be difficult due to construction cost and loss of parking. It is my opinion that our request should still be examined and that clarification of the loss of parking be requested.

The base relationship has improved as well. The addition of stone masonry at the base will create a proper pedestrian scaled articulation to the street and with the selection of appropriate stone will create a complimentary addition to the existing stone architecture found in downtown Guelph.

The fixed canopy has been reduced. A small change here which would further reduce the canopy to gridline 11 would be all that is needed.
The recessed area along the Woolwich façade has been removed and been brought out to gridline 16. This improves the base condition along the street edge.

The north and south facades have been revised to reflect the requested changes. Again, it is our opinion that this strategy will result in a more harmonious building design.

It was appreciated that these changes were rushed and that not all drawings were coordinated and that the design will still need to be refined and developed. Notwithstanding this, the south elevation will need further refinement. The two vertical masses need to be symmetrical in plan. Presently they are not the same dimension and will result in an uncomfortable, unresolved solution. It is my opinion that this can be easily improved and should be modified.

As well the recessed corner window at gridline 5-C is appreciated. It is my opinion that the north face of this corner should be similar to its west face so as to create more contrast with the (eventual) symmetrical façade further along gridline “C”.

As well the balcony adjacent to gridline 5 will need to be reconsidered. The thin wall at gridline 5 is not acceptable and should be similar to the pier approach so successful elsewhere in the design. The balcony should recess slightly from the façade plane at gridline “0”.

As well it is assumed that the applicant did not have enough time to resolve the mechanical penthouse and is in need of further refinement; however I feel that a solution can be reached.

As I stated in my first review, I believe that this building will be a positive addition to downtown Guelph.