

HERITAGE VANCOUVER

Mayor Owen and Council
City Hall
453 W. 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

May 11, 1999

Dear Mr. Owen and Council

RE: Proposed Development at Granville and Dunsmuir - XXXX Dunsmuir St.

We understand a development application has been filed for the above-noted. The proposal involves demolition of the entire 600 block (east side) of Granville Street, north of the Bay, except for the facades of the former B. C. Electric Showroom at the corner of Dunsmuir and Granville.

As the attached report reveals, the 600 block Granville Street contains remnants of the earliest development outside of the original Gastown boundaries and several architecturally significant buildings. These include the first Granville Street premises of the Hudson's Bay Company, constructed 1888-89, a Victorian Italianate façade (1892), the former B. C. Electric Showroom (1928), and the Moderne-style Saba's façade (1948).

Only the B. C. Electric site is listed on the City's Heritage Register. This is an unfortunate oversight due to the limitations of the city-wide inventory conducted in 1986, which was not able to do in-depth archival research on a block-by-block basis. Many buildings were simply discounted because the original frontages were concealed by later renovations, as is the case with the 1892 Italianate façade, which is covered by a corrugated sheet metal overlay.

The B. C. Electric Showroom, now sadly neglected, is one of Vancouver's most urbane and elegant commercial buildings, and merits a more respectful treatment than that shown in the applicant's current drawings. What is needed here is a design that is responsive to the corner site in a way which, at the very least, allows the original facades to read as a volumetric space, and not as two facades tacked to an office tower. Serious consideration should also be given to retention of the main showroom interior, which has significant period detailing.

Heritage Vancouver's position regarding development of the 600 block is summarized as follows:

- The 1888/9 Crewes Block (Hudson's Bay) at 622 Granville is a very early building of historical significance and should be retained.
- The 1892 Italianate façade adjacent to the Bay should be revealed and incorporated into the new development.
- The 1948 Saba's façade (renovation of 622 above) is an important Moderne façade and should be incorporated into the design of the new development.
- The unlisted buildings with heritage merit should be added to the Register, and their retention be eligible for heritage incentives, including additional density for the proposed development.
- The B. C. Electric Showroom should be rehabilitated and reused as a discrete structure. At the very least, the corner site should read as a distinct volumetric entity, and not as facades pasted to a tower.
- The Granville street-level elevation should have a continuous fine-grained retail frontage with primary orientation to Granville Street.
- The placement of the office tower and the scale/massing of the cinema complex should respect the scale and character of the retained heritage buildings.
- A heritage density bonus or other incentives should NOT be provided for the project as currently proposed.

Since the Bramalea retail mall proposal for this and the 500 block almost 10 years ago, the heritage community has had great apprehension regarding the future of these blocks, given their historic significance in the early development of the downtown. We now fear that the program requirements of a multi-screen cineplex may prove to be as disastrous and inappropriate for this block as would the previous retail mall proposal.

We all recognize the need to revitalize Granville Street. Let us not bend too far backwards to facilitate an inappropriate development at the cost of yet another piece of our heritage.

The attached document is the product of archival research conducted by Heritage Vancouver and includes information not known at the time of the 1986 heritage Inventory.

Sincerely,

Susanna Houwen, President
Heritage Vancouver

c.c. Heritage Planning Staff

Larry Beasley, Director of Central Area Planning

Hal Kalman, Chair, Vancouver Heritage Commission

Urban Design Panel

Rick Scobie, Development Permit Board

+++++, Architects

Don Luxton, Canadian Art Deco Society

Rick Goodacre, Heritage Society of BC

Alastair Kerr, Heritage Conservation Branch, Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and
Culture