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December 7, 2004

Gerry McGeough, Senior Planner
Heritage Group
Community Services
City of Vancouver
453 W. 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mr. McGeough,

Re: P401857 and P401858; 24 – 30 Water Street (Grand Hotel and Terminus Hotel)

We wish to raise a number of concerns regarding the proposed heritage development of the above-noted sites, and related adjacent sites (Alhambra Hotel, the 'Garage', and Cordage Building).

We are very pleased to see the potential conservation of the Terminus Hotel façade and its incorporation into a new development. We are also encouraged to see that the City's new heritage incentives for Gastown are being taken up. We very much support re-investment in Gastown; however, aspects of this and other recent projects have led us to worry about the heritage incentives being used primarily as a redevelopment tool, with insufficient regard to conservation issues.

Our comments are related to two key issues:

- Façades
- Height and density

Façades

We understand that the current proposal, which will benefit from heritage incentives, actually involves demolition of the Grand Hotel, except for the façade. We understand that demolition is required to achieve a workable proforma, and specifically because:

- there are issues regarding structural decay
- the existing floor layouts, partitions, lightwells etc are unworkable and pose livability issues for a residential project
- demolition is necessary to permit excavation for underground parking

Aside from the feasibility of this particular project, its conclusions raise questions that require serious consideration because of their implications for the rest of Gastown and for our other historic districts, including Chinatown, Yaletown, and the Hastings Corridor. The implications are:

- Original buildings in historic areas have generally been neglected and likely have structural decay. Others require major seismic upgrades, and some rely entirely for structural support on adjacent buildings. If all or most buildings have these issues, will demolition/façade retention be the sanctioned City response? If so, when we say 'historic district', do we really mean historic façade district? And what about the historic alleys, which could be entirely replaced by new fabric?
- If the old, single-room occupancy style hotels are unworkable, will façade retention be the only option? Might the Terminus Hotel have been demolished anyway as part of this kind of project if it hadn't already been destroyed by fire?
- Heritage incentives permit, even encourage, parking relaxations to zero for retention and conservation, recognizing that existing structures cannot be retrofitted. It is assumed that in the downtown areas, occupants will walk or take transit. If residential developers believe that marketability of heritage projects requires parking, does this imply we will be seeing more buildings demolished to provide parking for façade developments?

Height and Density

The amount of additional density proposed for 24 and 30 Water Street far exceeds general practice and is highly inappropriate. Both addresses involve narrow frontages with low –rise elevations. The addition of multiple floors, visible from across Water Street and also from the west, will seriously compromise the heritage value of the existing architecture and will erode the general character of the historic district. Specifically:

24 Water (Grand Hotel)

- Proposed fourth floor addition without setback is not acceptable. This is not the case of a historic addition executed with period building materials and a particular aesthetic, but rather will be an obvious and visible contemporary addition. We are highly skeptical that there can be a successful outcome in this regard. In addition, this sets a dubious precedent for future projects.
- Additional floors (set back above 4th) will be visually obtrusive and will overwhelm the existing façade.
- All additional floors should be set back and should not be obvious at street level.

30 Water (Terminus Hotel)

- This façade is distinctive for its projecting bay windows and its pedimented parapet.
- Additional floors will be visually obtrusive, will overwhelm the existing façade, and compromise the geometry of the parapet by cluttering the background sky view.
- All additions should be set back far enough to permit uncluttered views of the parapet

8 Water (Alhambra Hotel)

- The proposed glassed structure has potential to seriously compromise the character, not only of this signature Gastown building, but of Maple Tree Square generally. This feature needs to be rethought.

We note that significant additional density is also proposed for the Garage, without setbacks. We agree with this approach. The existing two storey building has a relatively

broad frontage on Water, and has an unclad poured concrete exterior with simple Art Deco inspired details. The proportion and design of this building would be well-suited to additional floors designed with similar fenestration in the same materials. Therefore, we suggest it may be possible to shift some of the proposed density from the Terminus and Grand sites to the Garage, which may be able to absorb more density than that proposed. Perhaps this further density would need to be set back. Impact on views looking west across Maple Tree Square would need to be addressed.

Alternatively, consideration should be given to transferring some of the proposed density off site. The amount of density transferred could be relatively small, as a reasonable amount of density can be accommodated across the development without visual intrusion.

We look forward to a positive resolution to the rehabilitation of this site, and to further discussion of the issues raised by façade developments generally.

Sincerely,

Vice President

cc. Richard Keate, Chair, Vancouver Heritage Commission
Larry Beasley, Director of Current Planning