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September 1, 2004

Mayor Campbell and Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Campbell and Councilors

Re: Woodward's Revitalization Options

Heritage Vancouver has reviewed the three Woodward's proposals – Concert /Holborn, Millennium, and Westbank – and wishes to go on record as strongly supporting the Concert / Holborn proposal, as being the option most respectful to the heritage value of this designated landmark, and most sensitive to its historic neighbourhood context in Victory Square, Gastown and the Downtown Eastside. Furthermore, the Concert /Holborn proposal convincingly demonstrates that accommodating a wide range of objectives, including housing and public space, as well as community, cultural, educational and commercial uses, is viable without sacrificing heritage objectives.

The following principles are fundamental:

- Woodward's is a *designated* heritage site. The highest standard of conservation is afforded designated heritage buildings. As this pivotal City/private collaboration will set the bar for future heritage conservation, it is crucial that Woodward's proposals meet or exceed conservation standards expected for other developments
- Woodward's is a pivotal building that anchors the historic core of the City, and presently complements its scale and character. That historic character is extremely fragile. Special attention must be paid to impact of redevelopment on adjacent buildings and streetscapes.
- Woodward's is located within the Victory Square planning area. The Victory Square Concept Plan (April 1998) sets a policy of heritage retention, with new infill development to reflect the typical low/mid rise streetwall. The Plan does not support *point tower* forms that would compete for prominence with heritage landmarks such as the Dominion Building and Sun Tower, and the Plan generally does not support heights over 70' (south side of street), and 100' (north side).

We have evaluated the heritage merit of the proposed development schemes according to three basic criteria:

- Scale of development
- Level of heritage conservation
- Impact on neighbourhood context

Scale of Development

Although a massive structure, the existing Woodward's building is essentially *low-rise*, similar to the prevailing scale and form of the surrounding streets averaging 3-5 storeys. We believe the addition of a significant new *point-tower* element – as proposed in both the Westbank and Millennium options – would be a major and inappropriate intrusion into this neighbourhood. A tower would dominate the neighbourhood, would compromise the prominence of nearby historic towers, and would eclipse the Woodward's 'W' as the new *defacto* landmark. This is implicitly recognized in the Millennium option, which reduces the 'W' to 'plop art' status at plaza level.

By contrast, the Concert/Holborn proposal maintains the human scale throughout, providing additional density in a broad mid-rise building tucked unobtrusively into the north west corner of the site. Appropriately, the 'W' will remain the dominant landmark element, and the overall project will respect the scale prescribed in the City's Victory Square Plan, within which this project is located.

Heritage Conservation and Neighbourhood Context

With the exception of upper floor 1950s additions, the existing Woodward's building exhibits a remarkable consistency of architectural expression over half a century of development beginning in 1903. Its signature red brick exterior, white cornices, and 'punched' wood sash windows define an entire city block, and complement the surrounding heritage streetscapes.

As a City and neighbourhood landmark, Woodward's most 'public' face is its south elevation along Hastings St. This frontage, surmounted by the 'W', has iconic status and should not be treated lightly. Significant removal of the original street-facing fabric would significantly erode the continuity of the Hastings Street corridor, which has recently been recognized as a significant intact historic precinct eligible for enhanced heritage incentives.

As noted above, Woodward's is a *designated* heritage resource. With the exception of the Concert/Holborn proposal, the proposed redevelopment options exhibit an almost wanton disregard for this designated heritage building and its context. On the justification of 'opening up' the building and courtyards to the public, both the Millennium and Westbank propose to cut gaping and unnecessary swaths the full height of the Hastings Street elevation. Also, examination of these proposals reveals that, apart from the small 1903/08 structure, most of the Hastings frontage is reduced to a token façade. In the Westbank proposal, the façade is deliberately 'deconstructed'; in one of two Millennium options, most of the frontage is replaced by new construction. This invasive and destructive approach would not be considered for designated heritage sites anywhere else in the city.

By comparison, the Concert/Holborn option appears to retain all exterior elevations to a depth of two or three structural bays, maintaining a strong sense of building integrity. Openings to the proposed interior courtyard spaces are clearly legible yet respectful of the scale and architectural expression of the original building. While significant additional work is needed to develop an appropriate architectural expression for the proposed new buildings, we are confident that this can be successfully achieved in the detailed design phase.

The following summarizes Heritage Vancouver's evaluation of the three proposals:

Option 1 – Woodward's Square – Concert Properties and Holborn Holdings

- Best overall proposal from a heritage perspective
- Approaches City standards for a designated heritage site
- High degree of heritage retention and restoration
- Maintains Hastings streetscape integrity
- Overall scale of development appropriate to surrounding low-rise neighbourhood
- Height and position of new structures has least impact on neighbouring landmarks
- Retention of 'W' as prominent skyline feature

Option 2 – Millennium Developments

- Least favoured approach
- Inappropriate level of intervention, particularly along Hastings frontage
- Minimal heritage retention, facadism, tokenism
- Negative impact on existing Hastings streetscape
- Point tower options inappropriate; tower heights would dominate neighbourhood and adjacent landmarks
- 'W' should not be removed from skyline prominence

Option 3 – Woodward's Redevelopment Group – Westbank Projects

- Inappropriate level of intervention, particularly along Hastings frontage
- Minimal heritage retention, facadism
- Negative impact on existing Hastings streetscape
- Point tower inappropriate; added 'greenery' does not complement historic character

For the above reasons, we believe the Concert/Holborn proposal to be a win/win solution for heritage and overall project objectives, and encourage City Council to allow the proposal to proceed to the next stage of design development.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors, Heritage Vancouver

cc. Richard Keate, Vancouver Heritage Commission
Gerry McGeough, Heritage Group
Larry Beasley, Current Planning
Christine Tapp, Central Area Planning