

“Erickson recommended using building form to ‘reflect the natural topography of the False Creek basin.’”

Preliminary Proposal



MAY 2003



MAY 2003

Proposal Supplement



MARCH 2004



MARCH 2004

Final Proposal



DECEMBER 2004



JANUARY 2005

Commitment to Sustainability and Livability

In May 2003, VIA Architecture submitted an official development plan proposal for SEFC to the City of Vancouver. Rooted in sustainability and livability, the proposal presented a rethinking of “standard” building forms in Vancouver. It promoted enhanced comfort and high-performance green design. The design featured low-rise buildings of up to six storeys built on an east-west axis. Units would draw upon north-south natural

ventilation and benefit from solar access. The plan showed several mid-rise terraced buildings oriented north-south. These buildings were designed for optimal efficiency and offered the opportunity for large roof gardens. The submission explored the possibility of reducing building heights while increasing overall density. The average unit size was 900 square feet on a 6,500 square foot floor plate.

Commitment to Flexibility and Neighbourhood Character

In February 2004, VIA Architecture submitted a proposal supplement to augment its 2003 submission. This plan refined the neighbourhood’s massing and density while maintaining the opportunity for flexible development. The supplement also addressed the neighbourhood’s three areas of distinct character: worksyard, shipyard and railyard. An emphasis on family housing enabled a five per cent increase to total residential density. Of the proposed 2.1 million square feet of development, less than 20 per cent was above 12 storeys. This reflected a decrease in the square footage above 12 storeys from the original 2003 submission.

The plan demonstrated a building form that was distinct from Vancouver’s downtown towers, displaying a more slender upper superstructure built on a mid-rise base. The approach to “place” was inspired by the diversity of the city’s West End neighbourhood – human-scale, with a diversity of heights – as opposed to the uniformity of the high-rise residential model.

In response to the proposal supplement, the City directed the VIA team to animate the waterfront, move some of the parklands to the east, leave heritage buildings in their original locations and decrease overall building heights.

- 1 ODP preliminary submission by VIA Architecture
- 2 ODP submission supplement by VIA Architecture
- 3 ODP preliminary submission by SEFC Urban Design Team

Commitment to Low- and Mid-Rise Forms and the Natural Topography

The preliminary submissions were reviewed by City staff and subject to public consultation. Following the review, five themes were identified for further exploration: park integration, water experience, chronicling history, small grain development and distinctive urban form. During this period, the City moved to incorporate the private lands south of First Avenue into the SEFC site area.

In the fall of 2004, in response to a series of reviews of the prior submissions (see page 10, The Architects’ Letter), the City hired Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden Architects, VIA Architecture, Stantec Architecture and Philips Wuori Long Partnership Landscape Architects Inc. to submit a further revised urban design framework. The City gave

the team three months to create the updated submission, which was ultimately adopted as part of the approved ODP. Maximum tower heights were set at 13 storeys, with three locations allowing “signature” buildings to reach up to 17 storeys. What drove this approach was the advice that renowned architect Arthur Erickson gave to the City of Vancouver’s director of planning at the time, Larry Beasley. Erickson recommended using building form to “reflect the natural topography of the False Creek basin.” As a result, the plan showed buildings stepping down from 13 storeys on the south end of the site to three or four maximum on the waterfront. Unfortunately, this sense of the “basin” was ultimately diminished as higher densities were sought on the Olympic Village site.