




Mount Pleasant Heritage Group

mountpleasanth heritage@gmail.com

www.mountpleasanth heritagegroup.org

 @MPHeritagegroup

January 26, 2017

Re: **Facilitating Growth in Mount Pleasant's Innovation Economy—Mount Pleasant Industrial Area/Amendments to the Zoning and Development By-law**

Dear Mayor Robertson and Members of Council,

Members of the Mount Pleasant Heritage Group attended the open house outlining the proposed changes for the east side of Quebec Street from 2nd to 6th Avenues and have also reviewed the City's Policy Report dated November 29th, 2016. We support increasing available job space to house Vancouver's innovation economy and rapidly expanding tech sector. We do not support the proposed rezoning of the industrial zone along the east side of Quebec Street from 2nd to 6th to allow larger and taller buildings as presented by the City for the reasons below. Each of these reasons relates to heritage and community identity-factors which the principles and intent of the Mount Pleasant Community Plan (2010) and the Implementation Package (2013) - Lower Main Urban Design Framework are built around. The rezoning proposal does not align with these principles, the intent and framework which the City and community worked jointly to establish for the future growth of Mount Pleasant.

While the area under question is part of the industrial zone it was included in discussions as part of the Community Plan process (see Map 1 p 5 - Community Plan) and recognized as an important transition zone between the residential/commercial and industrial lands.

1. OPTIONS PROPOSED FOR SIMON FRASER ANNEX

In response to the options proposed by the City for this 1926 school, Heritage Vancouver's letter of November 13th, 2016 to the City declares "the option of demolition is unnecessary and inappropriate". We wholeheartedly agree. Principle 9 of the Implementation Package states: "Support architectural innovation by welcoming contemporary buildings that fit into the existing neighbourhood character, **while also retaining and enhancing existing older character buildings.**" (p 36 Implementation Package – Lower Main) Not only is retaining the school as an individual heritage building important, but it is part of a greater whole in its close proximity to the Heritage Heart at Main & Kingsway and the surrounding remaining structures of Old Mount Pleasant Village. Together these buildings are key to maintaining the community's story as the first suburb of Vancouver. We also support Heritage Vancouver's idea of including a "modest urban park" on the site. It was noted in the City's Policy Report that "a lack of public space and parks in the area" was one of the public's concerns raised in the feedback it received.

2. AFFORDABILITY AND CHARACTER

Avison Young, in an opinion paper commissioned by the City, outlines the reasons why technology businesses are attracted to Mount Pleasant including: “Non-corporate culture”, “Lifestyle and culture is attractive to employees”, “Area has a reputation as edgy and relatively affordable...”

The November 29th Policy Report states that the City’s self-described “modest” 2013 zoning changes have triggered a significant transformation of the area. As residents who live nearby we can attest to this and counted 10 redevelopments/new developments. These are providing the kind of space the innovation economy needs within a built urban form which supports and maintains the community’s identity and character. The Report also mentions the 50% rise in land values since 2012 and that subsequent increases in property taxes and leases are threatening traditional tenants. We are concerned that the kind of large scale industrial/commercial buildings being proposed along Quebec Street will further accelerate speculation, land values and existing rents at an unnaturally fast pace and quickly push out small, low margin businesses and repel lean start-ups. We believe it is preferable to maintain building heights at 60 feet as per the recent 2013 I-2 zoning changes and include information technology in the general office definition for the proposed I-1A and I-1B industrial zones. This would result in the allowable FSR of 3 to be composed of 1 FSR of Industrial and 2 FSR of Digital thus still addressing the needs to grow technology job space without jeopardizing the existing eclectic, creative, local, independent businesses in the area which are part of the prized character of Mount Pleasant and directly tied to its economic affordability.

3. MOUNT PLEASANT’S HILLTOWN IDENTITY

Mount Pleasant’s ‘hilltown’ identity is put forth as both historically important and a key design principle in both the Community Plan and Implementation Package. These documents provide the guideline for development relative to this identity - “that its slopes are natural form-makers on which a low profile for residential and commercial properties helps keep the sense of hill intact.” (p 9 Community Plan) This guideline is reinforced with the intent of the Community Plan which puts forth to “seek to distinguish new development in Mount Pleasant from predominant forms of development in other parts of the City in ways that respond to the unique social, economic, and physical qualities of the neighbourhood.” (p 9 Community Plan) The importance of the ‘hilltown’ identity was one that the community consistently embraced during the community planning public consultations. The height and massing proposed in the rezoning of Quebec 2nd to 6th does not respond to the physical historical ‘hilltown’ identity recognized in the City’s Community Planning Documents. As depicted in the illustrations of the rezoning presentation, the proposed height limit of 125 feet at an FSR of 5 will overshadow the heights outlined in the Implementation Package – Lower Main of 6 storeys between 3rd and 6th Avenues along Main Street (p 37 Implementation Package) and the identity of Main as an historic main street.

We thank you for this opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

MPHG Founding Members
Alyssa Myshok
Danielle Peacock
Jennifer Chernecki

Tuerlings, Leslie

From: Reilly Wood s.22(1) Personal and Confidential
Sent: Thursday, January 26, 2017 7:57 PM
To: Correspondence Group, City Clerk's Office
Subject: Mount Pleasant Industrial Rezoning comments

Hi, my comments on the Mount Pleasant Industrial Rezoning that is at council tonight follow:

Good evening, mayor and council. My name is Reilly Wood and I'm a software engineer. I'm speaking on my own behalf tonight.

First, I'd like to say that the intent of this rezoning is very much appreciated. Jobs and office space are great. However, the details of this rezoning don't look so good. Specifically, I'd like to talk about the office space that is reserved for digital firms. As you know, this rezoning would allow 2 FSR to be used as office space, but only for companies that fall under the City's definition of a "digital" firm.

I exchanged emails with a City planner named Vincent who confirmed that staff will be enforcing this very strictly. Vincent said that the City expects "100% of a firm's business to fall under the definition of a digital business". This might seem reasonable at first, but anyone who works in tech will tell you that the distinction between digital and non-digital businesses is often not that clear.

For example, Amazon is one of the biggest employers of tech workers in Vancouver. They also have brick and mortar stores now. They have massive physical logistics operations. By any standard they're not a 100% digital company, so they might not be allowed in this office space.

We're also in an era where a lot of interesting computer science research happens at companies in more traditional sectors. For example, a lot of people who study computer vision end up working on self-driving cars at research arms of automotive companies. That's a more traditional sector, so those jobs wouldn't be allowed in that office space even though they're a perfect fit for a partially industrial zone.

To give a more personal anecdote, I graduated from UBC computer science in 2011 and about half the people I know from my graduating class work for firms in non-digital sectors. They are tech workers, but their jobs wouldn't be allowed here. My wife has two computer science degrees, she's a highly educated tech worker, and her job wouldn't be allowed here either.

This policy is narrowly focused on certain sectors, but it ignores the reality of our world where many companies and jobs don't fit neatly into a single sector.

This digital office space restriction also limits companies' business models. Imagine you run a tech firm in this digital office space and you see an opportunity to start a line of business in a more traditional sector. Or maybe you provide software as a service and a company in another sector is thinking of acquiring your company. In both cases, you now have to decide whether that's worth losing your office space.

This also adds an extra burden to the process of leasing office space, for City staff and potential tenants. Staff confirmed that companies should give the City a "detailed operational letter and floor plan layout" to confirm that they are, well, digital enough. This does not seem like a good use of anyone's time, and the fixed cost falls especially hard on small companies.

So, hopefully by now I've convinced you that there are a lot of problems with the proposed digital office space. The good news is that this is really easy to fix. If the extra 2 FSR is simply zoned as regular office space, all of these problems go away and Hootsuite will still get to build their new headquarters.

I urge you to send this proposal back to staff and ask them to eliminate the requirement for digital firms. It's counterintuitive, but that would be better for digital workers and firms, as well as everyone else. Thank you for your time.

Reilly Wood

s.22(1) Personal and Confidential

