

March 2, 2026

Dear Members of the Vancouver Heritage Commission,

**Re: March 9 2026 Agenda Item Office Tower Proposal at 601 West Cordova Street**

I am writing to you as a former member of the Vancouver Heritage Commission and as a long-standing member of the Downtown Waterfront Working Group, which is a volunteer, non-partisan group of planners, architects, urban designers, and urbanists committed to the creation of a world-class downtown waterfront for Vancouver.

We wish to express our strong opposition to the preliminary development application for an office tower at 601 West Cordova Street. We are most disappointed that this proposal is coming to the Heritage Commission for the fourth time over the last 12 years, as it is disrespectful of your volunteer time, the public's time and that of staff and Council. See attached timeline for the chronology of this project.

We understand why Cadillac Fairview is persistent in seeking greater financial return by attempting to add over 400,000 square feet of office space to their Waterfront Station property. That is their profit mandate as an office developer. Unfortunately, this mandate of a single landowner is in direct collision with achieving the best possible outcomes for the historic precinct and the future of the Central Waterfront for current and future generations to enjoy.

As a preliminary development application, City staff will ask you to focus on whether the following two elements are supportable 1) overall concept and 2) massing of the project. These two elements have resulted in the project failing to be approved in the past and why this current proposal remains unsupportable, as described below.

**1) Overall Concept: Central Waterfront Planning instead of "Projects Before Plans"**

Council's Central Waterfront Hub Framework (2009) remains the governing City site planning policy for this area and explicitly calls for:

- a) careful siting and scale to preserve the prominence and setting of heritage buildings,
- b) significant setbacks from Waterfront Station, and
- c) coordinated phasing tied to transit infrastructure, public realm improvements, and a public benefit strategy.

The illustration in the Hub Framework suggested a much smaller building (11 storeys and 66,000 square feet) to potentially meet these conditions.

None of these preconditions have been satisfied for the current proposal. The continued advancement of a major office tower proposal ahead of the completion of an updated Central Waterfront Plan undermines comprehensive planning and risks the loss of public benefits such as a majestic civic plaza at the entrance to Gastown, celebrating the visual effect and place-making attributes of the historic buildings.

Council reaffirmed its desire to create plans before projects, following the Heritage Commission’s decision to not support the proposed office project in December 2020. At its Council Meeting on April 26, 2022, Vancouver City Council unanimously approved a motion titled “*Catalysing Planning for the Future of Central Waterfront District*”. The intent of the resolution was to restart and re-energize a comprehensive planning program for the Central Waterfront as a priority in the City’s work program.

The key resolutions are:

*THAT Council re-affirms the intention to embark on planned regeneration and renewal of the Central Waterfront in collaboration with federal and provincial levels of government, the three host nations, private and community sectors;*  
*FURTHER THAT this intention and planning inform future development proposals for the Central Waterfront District.*

Unfortunately, this work has not yet been completed but we understand from City staff that significant progress has been made through an alliance of the City, relevant provincial and federal government departments, private landowners, Vancouver Port and CPKC railway company.

*Plan Area for Central Waterfront Plan*



**2) Project Massing:**

At its meeting of December 7, 2020, the Heritage Commission formulated a strong, clear position which remains sound and current today:

*THAT the Vancouver Heritage Commission does not support the application to build the Waterfront Tower, or any other tower of the same materiality or size, on the proposed site.*

*THAT the Vancouver Heritage Commission requests that staff explore tools including zoning, transfer of density and density banking to relieve any future development pressure on the land adjoining Waterfront Station*

Source : ([Minutes – Vancouver Heritage Commission, December 7, 2020](#))



**Cadillac Fairview's Proposal, 2026**  
More than 6x larger than recommended by the city. It adds 34,000 sq ft of floor space to the size of CF's rejected 2020 proposal.

The current proposal does not materially differ from the earlier scheme in the aspects that matter most to the Commission's decision: height, bulk, massing, and proximity to Waterfront Station and the Landing Building. In fact, it is bulkier and taller than the 2020 proposal. As such, the fundamental conflict identified by the Heritage Commission in 2020 has not been resolved.

The proposal remains in conflict with multiple adopted policies and guidelines, including:

1. The Downtown Official Development Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines, which rely on performance criteria—not entitlement—to earn height and density, particularly in sensitive historic contexts.
2. Parks Canada's Standards and Guidelines for the Preservation of Historic Places, which require that new construction be:
  - I. physically and visually compatible with the historic place,
  - II. subordinate to it, and
  - III. distinguishable in a manner that is sympathetic rather than dominating.

The proposed tower, by virtue of its oversized scale and aggressive massing, continues to overwhelm rather than defer to the Waterfront Station and adjacent heritage buildings. While distinguishable, it is so in a way that prioritizes visual assertion over contextual compatibility, contrary to the intent of the Standards and Guidelines.

## **Conclusion**

The Vancouver Heritage Commission provided clear and principled guidance at the time of the last office proposal in 2020. It demonstrated why both the overall concept and the massing of an office tower is not supportable in this location, and before a Central Waterfront Plan is completed.

We respectfully advise the Heritage Commission to not attempt to provide any guidance on a supportable concept or massing as this cannot be done in isolation of an overall Central Waterfront Plan. We urge the Commission to continue advocating for planning solutions that relieve development pressure on the Waterfront Station property.

Thank you for your continued stewardship of Vancouver's historic places and cultural landscapes.

Sincerely,

Anthony Norfolk,  
On Behalf of Downtown Waterfront Working Group

Michael Alexander, Urbanist, and former convenor of SFU City Conversations

Christina DeMarco, former regional and City of Vancouver planner  
Charles Dobson, Professor Emeritus, Emily Carr University  
Frank Ducote, former City of Vancouver urban designer  
Richard Johnson, former City of Vancouver planner  
Peter Kreuk, former partner Durante Kreuk Landscape Architects  
Tom Phipps, former City of Vancouver planner  
Ray Spaxman, former Director of Planning, City of Vancouver

cc.

City of Vancouver Mayor and Council  
Donny van Dyk, City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Josh White, General Manager, Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability  
Matt Shillito, Director, Special Projects  
Zlatan Jankovic, Senior Heritage Planner, Vancouver Heritage Commission Vancouver  
Elijah Sabadlan, Heritage Planner (Gastown) Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee  
Joseph Smallwood, Project Facilitator

### **Attachment: Chronology of Cadillac Fairview Proposals and Central Waterfront Planning Initiatives**

**June 2009:** Council endorses the **Central Waterfront Hub Framework** as a policy document to guide and evaluate development proposals with the Hub framework area. The Framework includes the Waterfront Station parking lot in its study area and provides specific guidance for the site. An illustrative site plan, with guidelines for protection of historic precinct provides a suggested mass of additional building on station site of 11 storeys and 6,100 square metres. The Framework is a current City guideline and therefore needs to be considered in evaluation of development applications. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/C031-central-waterfront-hub-framework-2009.pdf>

**2014:** Cadillac Fairview submits its first Development Permit Application for a building of 37,503 m<sup>2</sup> (403, 678 square feet) and height of 127.10 metres (417 feet). It was scheduled for a Development Permit Board (DPB) decision in March 2015. Prior to DPB, the Applicant was asked to present at the following Advisory committees: Vancouver Heritage Commission, Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee, and the Urban Design Panel.

**November 19, 2014:** The Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee resolved to defer a motion, either in support or non-support until the tower reaches its final design stage.

**December 8, 2014:** The Vancouver Heritage Commission supported the application.

**January 28, 2015:** The Urban Design Panel voted to not support the application. Panel members felt that *“the proximity and relationship of the tower with the Station building was ultimately a disservice to the site. The Panel recognized that this is a critical site in the City as it*

*will set precedent for development that will occur in the future as outlined in the Framework. It is also an important site as it has visual access points to the mountains and the waterfront and it is at this point where Gastown begins.* (Excerpt from minutes, Urban Design Panel, January 28, 2015)

Cadillac Fairview decided to not proceed and withdrew this application.

**October 17, 2017:** Vancouver City Council endorses a work program to update the Central Waterfront Hub Framework and expand the waterfront study area to Main Street [Report - City Core 2050 & Related Planning Programs: 2017 Oct 17 \(vancouver.ca\)](#)

**May 2018:** Cadillac Fairview presents a revised design to workshops for the Heritage Commission and the Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee. While there were some favourable comments concerning the re-design, many comments related to the incompatibility with the historic landscape and gateway to the Historic Area of Gastown, and the conflict with policies in the Central Waterfront Hub Framework.

The height and floor area of the current proposal remain about the same as the 2014 proposal.

The main design changes in the re-design included reducing the footprint to free up more plaza space and moving the building back in the site, which resulted in the building hovering over and crowding the Waterfront Station.

**December 20, 2019:** Cadillac Fairview submits a new development permit application. The height and floor area of the current proposal remain about the same as the 2015 proposal and was a similar design proposed at the 2018 workshops.

**February 18, 2020:** Cadillac Fairview hosts an Open House at the Fairmont Waterfront. The Open House provided negligible background on the regulatory and policy background to the proposal. Development applications, under legal authority, need to conform to City regulations and policies. The public should have been given the opportunity to make judgement on the fit of the development within the regulatory and policy context. Unfortunately, this was the only planned event where the public could review the proposal in advance of the Development Permit Board meeting.

Due to COVID, March and April advisory committee reviews were postponed, as well as the DPB meeting.

**December 7, 2020:** Vancouver Heritage Commission voted against the proposal. They passed the following resolutions:

*The Vancouver Heritage Commission does not support the application to build the Waterfront Tower, or any other tower of the same materiality or size, on the proposed site.*

*And furthermore, the Commission requests that staff explore tools including zoning, transfer of density and density banking to relieve any future development pressure on the land adjoining Waterfront Station.*

*And furthermore, the Commission requests that staff become engaged in finding a permanent solution to halt the deterioration of the Angel of Victory statue, which may involve its move inside the Waterfront Station...*

*And furthermore, the Commission requests that the future plaza design reflect consultation with the local First Nations.*

**December 16, 2020:** Gastown Heritage Area Planning Committee cancelled at applicant's request.

**January 20, 2021:** Urban Design Panel cancelled at applicant's request.

**March 22, 2021:** Development Permit Board cancelled at applicant's request.

**April 26, 2022:** Vancouver City Council unanimously approved a motion titled "*Catalysing Planning for the Future of Central Waterfront District*". The intent of the resolution was to restart and re-energize a comprehensive planning program for the Central Waterfront as a priority in the City's work program.

*THAT Council re-affirms the intention to embark on planned regeneration and renewal of the Central Waterfront in collaboration with federal and provincial levels of government, the three host nations, private and community sectors;*

*FURTHER THAT this intention and planning inform future development proposals for the Central Waterfront District.*

**December 2022/January 2023:** The two major private landowners, Cadillac Fairview and GHD Equity Holdings (Kerfoot) co-sponsor a charette focusing on the expanded waterfront area. The stakeholders involved were numerous and varied. Four distinct visions for the waterfront were presented and demonstrated the benefits of comprehensive Central Waterfront planning before any projects area approved.

**May, 2024:** The following parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding and agreed to work together to establish a shared, preliminary Transportation and Development Vision for the Central Waterfront. This group is known as the "Planning Alliance" . All parties have signed Non-Disclosure Agreements and no information is available to the public

**SIGNATORIES:**

**THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**THE CITY OF VANCOUVER**

**TRANSPORT CANADA**

**VANCOUVER FRASER PORT AUTHORITY**

**CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY**

**GHD EQUITY HOLDINGS LTD ( GREG KERFOOT)**

**THE CADILLAC FAIRVIEW CORPORATION LIMITED**

**November 19, 2024:** A memo to Council from City Manager provides an update on the work of the Planning Alliance and the memorandum of understanding. The memo notes Transportation and Development Vision is expected to be completed in early 2025. This Vision has not been released and no further updates have been provided to Council, that are available to the public. Some City Staff and other alliance members say considerable progress has been made as of February 2026. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2024-11-19-memo-to-mayor-council-central-waterfront-district-planning.pdf>

**November 25, 2025:** Cadillac Fairview submits a preliminary development application for a revised proposal. The proposed area is 417, 016 sq feet (38,742 sq m.) and the proposed height is 416 feet (127 m).

**February 23, 2026.** Cadillac Fairview hosts an Open House at the Fairmont Waterfront. The Open House provided negligible background on the regulatory and policy background to the proposal. Development applications, under legal authority, need to conform to City regulations and policies. The public should have been given the opportunity to make a judgement on the fit of the development within the regulatory and policy context. Unfortunately, this is the only planned event where the public can review the proposal in advance of the Development Permit Board meeting scheduled for May 11, 2026.