



Heritage Vancouver

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March 2, 2026
City of Vancouver
Joseph Smallwood, Project Facilitator
453 West 12th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Re: 601 W Cordova St - formerly 555 W Cordova St (DP-2025-00916) preliminary development application

Dear Joseph Smallwood,

Heritage Vancouver Society (HVS) is writing to express opposition to the preliminary development application for an intervention in the historic Waterfront Station and the development of a 22-storey building at 601 W Cordova Street (formerly 555 W Cordova St), submitted by James K.M. Cheng Architects.

HVS believes that different ideas about heritage, as expressed, experienced and practiced by the rich variety of communities present in Vancouver, can co-exist. Whether it concerns buildings, languages and other traditions, heritage conservation should serve the communities to whom the places at stake matter. HVS is not against development but believes that new development should take into consideration the context of a place from various viewpoints. We are sending this letter to present one of them.

The Building is an Addition

It is stated in the Heritage Impact Assessment that the only point of contact between the Waterfront Station and the proposed development is a light, non-load bearing glazing enclosure on the station's east elevation. This statement obscures the fact that the proposed building adjacent to the Waterfront Station is an addition to the historic building. Meanwhile, this proposal centres the tree-shaped design as the centrepiece of the application in all its facets, including the intervention to the heritage building (below-grade staging and storage area) and economic benefit to the site, proposing a significant square footage of office space.

Waterfront Station & the Proposed Building

The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada is a document that guides Canada's built heritage conservation. It prescribes three criteria that an addition to a historic structure should meet: they need to be physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to, and distinguishable from the historic place.

There is no question that the proposed building is distinguishable from the Waterfront Station (as well as the Kelly, Douglas and Co. Warehouse next to it). But an addition to a heritage site requires the existing historic structure, and not the addition, to be the centrepiece of the site. While the applicant claims that by lifting the building mass off the ground the impact on the two heritage buildings is minimized, the proposed addition will still physically and visually overshadow its immediate environment through the combination of contemporary materials and building height, form and massing.

The proposed building's design is based on the idea of a maple tree, in reference to Skwxwú7mesh relations to this area (through naming of the place - K'emk'emeláy). There could not be a bigger contrast between a design that claims the acknowledgment of traditional Indigenous understandings of place and the settler colonial Waterfront Station, which became the final destination of the railway that connected Canada as a colonial nation from east to west. Given the social intent of the applicant to address Indigenous perspectives and meanings of place important to Indigenous peoples, this raises the question of how to understand and approach what goes on this site.

The Future of the Site

HVS believes that the site provides the ultimate opportunity for dialogue, for learning and for the co-existence of heritage in what we also know as Vancouver today. It provides a place where Indigenous worldviews of the three host First Nations, Skwxwú7mesh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm and səlilwətał, can be presented. It can become a place where the thousands of migrants who contributed to the completion of the railways can be acknowledged. It can become a place where people can learn different stories about different pasts and where different ideas about heritage can co-exist.

Respectfully submitted,

Heritage Vancouver Society