

DECISION/DIRECTION NOTE

Title: 331 Water Street – Revised Exterior Materials – DEV19000058
(Updated following BHEP Meeting and May 25 Council Meeting)

Date Prepared: May 27, 2021

Report To: Regular Meeting of Council

Councillor and Role: Councillor Maggie Burton, Planning & Development

Ward: Ward 2

Decision/Direction Required:

To consider a request to change the exterior materials on the north elevation (long façade/side facing the Murray Premises Hotel) of a new office and retail development at 331 Water Street.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

At the May 17, 2021 Council Meeting, Council referred the matter of 331 Water Street - Revised Exterior Materials back to the Built Heritage Experts Panel for further dialogue. There was no common ground reached between the applicant and the Heritage Panel. The matter came back to Council May 25 and was deferred pending further discussion with the developer. The developer has now submitted two renderings (attached) that show the vinyl Sagiper material in solid colours.

The application for an office and retail building at 331 Water Street was reviewed by the Built Heritage Experts Panel (BHEP) in 2019, approved by Council on June 9, 2019, and has since been granted development approval. Construction is underway.

Part of the Council directive was that the amount of brick shown on the 2019 drawings was to remain brick in the final design. Brick and stone are the predominant traditional materials in this part of Water Street and, given that the property is in Heritage Area 1, brick was the best material to help blend the modern building with the heritage area. The approved elevations are included in Council's agenda; however, as these flat elevations are hard to visualize, staff labelled the approved materials on a 3D rendering from the applicant (attached). Please note that the rendering does not show the final approved design but is close to it.

The applicant initially asked to revise the exterior materials on the north elevation (the long side of the building facing the Murray Premises Hotel) from brick to a faux wood product (looks like wood but is vinyl). As this application was approved by Council, revisions require Council approval. Now, the vinyl material is still being proposed, but instead of natural wood, it looks like a solid colour.

The subject property is in Heritage Area 1 (with the City's most stringent standards), in the Commercial Downtown District of the Municipal Plan, and is zoned Commercial Central Retail

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(CCR). The property borders the Water Street National Historic District of Canada and has frontage on Water Street, Bishop's Cove and Harbour Drive. It is next to the Murray Premises, which is a National Historic Site of Canada.

The BHEP met with the applicant and their two architects at its May 19 virtual meeting. The applicant explained that they are asking to replace the proposed brick façade along the north elevation with a product from a company called Sagiper. From their website, Sagiper offers high quality PVC (poly-vinyl chloride) products for contemporary residential and commercial projects, offering the look of wood and metallic aluminum finishes. The applicants first proposed the wood colour "mountain oak" in a channelled profile but are now proposing solid grey and black colours which would imitate aluminum (see attached). They explained that the reason for the request is that they will not be able to receive the amount of brick required for this side of the building in time to meet deadlines. Availability of materials has been an issue over the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The applicant explained that obtaining fibre cement panels is also difficult, so they have proposed to replace that portion of the building wall with Sagiper. While an earlier drawing showed stucco on the zig-zag part of the wall, the applicant does not want to use stucco due to maintenance concerns. The applicant was adamant that the Sagiper product is the only suitable product.

The BHEP raised concerns about this product, stating that a vinyl product is not appropriate to the site context or scale of the building and does not reinforce the unique character of Water Street where brick is a predominant material, used on the buildings to the east, west and north of the subject property and even picked up on the BierMarkt/Mill Street building and The Keg building on Harbour Drive. The many buildings with brick and stone along Water Street give the streetscape a sense of "solidity", "vintage", "character" that adds beauty and authenticity. The wood-like building material and profile is not typical of Water Street, and vinyl cladding is not permitted in Heritage Area 1.

The discussion confirmed the Panel's belief that this is not a suitable material for this area. The applicant pointed out that a similar material was used in the recent renovations to the Double Tree by Hilton hotel (the former Journey's End) at 2 Hill o' Chips (attached). However, that was an existing modern-style building in Heritage Area 3 (not Area 1), and the material was used as an accent. The product is also used on the new Rock restaurant at 7 World Parkway near the airport, but that is not a heritage area.

Using this product as an accent may be acceptable in some locations, but the Panel did not agree that using it for a full façade is acceptable in Heritage Area 1. They are concerned that this will set a precedent for future developments. Therefore, they have reiterated the recommendation to reject the request. No other materials were brought forward by the applicant, and any materials suggested by Panel members were rejected by the applicant in the discussion.

Staff agree with the BHEP's recommendation. Using brick in the final design was an important element to help the building blend with its setting in Heritage Area 1. While the north façade is not facing a public street, it is fully visible from Harbour Drive and faces the Murray Premises. The proposed PVC product should not be used in this area of Water Street in Heritage Area 1.

It is a modern material that does not replicate traditional materials in the area and does not, in the Panel's opinion, enhance the design of the building. Staff point out that the natural wood look is not found on buildings in Heritage Area 1. A solid colour could at least resemble masonry at a distance. The applicant rejected the use of stucco due to future maintenance needs, but stucco is common on downtown commercial buildings.

The applicant had also asked to remove the roof screen, but since the BHEP meeting, the applicant has proposed another solution. Staff propose to hold the BHEP recommendation about the roof screen until we can evaluate the new information.

Key Considerations/Implications:

1. Budget/Financial Implications: Not applicable to the City.
2. Partners or Other Stakeholders: Property owner; adjoining property owners and businesses; heritage groups.
3. Alignment with Strategic Directions/Adopted Plans:
St. John's Strategic Plan 2019-2029 - A Sustainable City – Plan for land use and preserve and enhance the natural and built environment where we live.
4. Legal or Policy Implications: The approved plans meet the requirements of Heritage Area 1 in the St. John's Development Regulations. Vinyl is not a permitted cladding material in Heritage Area 1, and the rooftop screen was required by Council.
5. Privacy Implications: Not applicable.
6. Engagement and Communications Considerations: Not applicable.
7. Human Resource Implications: Not applicable.
8. Procurement Implications: Not applicable.
9. Information Technology Implications: Not applicable.
10. Other Implications: Not applicable.

Recommendation:

That Council:

1. Reject the applicant's proposal to not use brick on the north elevation, as approved by Council, and replace it with a vinyl product, Sagiper Sagirev.
2. Reject the applicant's proposal to not use fibre cement panels on the zig-zag part of the north elevation, as approved by Council, and replace it with the vinyl Sagiper Sagirev product.

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