Committee members:

- Marta Fry, Landscape Architect
- Peter Pfau, AIA
- Rod Henmi, AIA NOMA
- Andrew Chandler, AIA, Chair of City College Architecture Department

Project Reviewed: Design of Lot 5 building, Chinatown/North Beach

The Committee reiterated its commitment to review the design of the Lot 5 building using the Secretary of Interior Standards. Even though it is not located within a historic district, it is adjacent to a City designated landmark with proximity to other designated or proposed historic districts. It also recognizes the Agreement between City College and the Friends of the Colombo Building that requires compatibility of the new building on Lot 5 and the historic fabric of the surrounding neighborhood. It further believes that the building needs to fit into the larger fabric of the city, reflects its context and responds to the complex and multivariate environs – both historic and contemporary in nature – that define the essence of an historic and evolving sector of the city.

Two basic design schemes were presented by EHDD.
- Scheme A has a contemporary design on the Washington Street façade that utilizes the same detailing and design approach as the larger building on Lots 9 & 10 which the Board approved in April.
- Scheme B is a design concept that is intended to relate in a more literal sense to the nearby Jackson Square District and to the adjacent Colombo Building. It is the product of several meetings with Alice Carey, a Preservation Architect required by the settlement agreement to be hired by the College to work with the Friends of the Colombo Building, and working sessions with a representative of the Friends. It is understood that neither Alice Carey nor the Friends considered the design final.

Washington Façade:

The Committee stated that the goals of this façade are:
- to be compatible with and to reinforce the existing context;
- to state to the public the important civic nature of the building with its theater; and
- to relate to the language of the building on Lots 9 & 10 in order to create a sense of campus and to reinforce the commitment of City College to the larger neighborhood.

The Committee is unanimous in its opinion that the urban context of Washington Street is a transition between the Financial District and the historic
neighborhoods of Chinatown and North Beach. The context of this part of Washington Street is a diverse mixture of old and new, large and small. The north side of the street will be a combination of smaller scale, finely textured older buildings and the new high-rise City College Building. The south side is dominated by the high-rise Hilton Hotel and the Montgomery-Washington Tower.

The Committee therefore finds that Scheme A meets all three of the specified goals. Its language states the public nature of the building and its role as part of a new campus. Finally, the large opening with louvers creates a finely textured response that relates well to the smaller, older buildings on the street.

The Committee feels that Scheme A is successful in both scale and texture. The strong horizontal band added since the last design review creates a strong relation to the Colombo Building and emphasizes the open first floor common to the neighboring areas. The upper levels of the façade design relate to the scale of the remaining buildings on Washington Street (to the west) between this building and the main campus building. The contemporary character of the façade design and its bold graphic are compatible both with the large scale of the buildings on the south side of the street and its important role in its expression of the public nature of the auditorium space on the interior.

In comparison, the Committee finds Scheme B is an overly literal attempt to mimic older buildings with punched windows which is neither required nor encouraged by the Secretary of Interior standards. The standards state that “each property shall be recognized as a physical record of it’s time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.” (The Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, Department of Interior Regulations, 36 CFR 67.7 (3)) By doing so, the façade loses its civic, public nature as well as its connection to the rest of the campus, and fails to tie the two buildings together. Finally, the ordinary nature of this façade treatment fails to provide the level of inspiring design that the Committee believes to be critical for these important new buildings.

Scheme B was understood as an attempt at replicating window patterns and openings of the older surrounding buildings relating the façade design to Jackson Square and North Beach and to older buildings within the city fabric in general. The Committee understood this effort but believes this to be a secondary (less prominent and less visible) façade to North Beach and should primarily connect visually to the main Campus building. The Committee believes that Scheme B camouflages its purpose by mimicking a historic District of apartments, offices and warehouse functions but characterized primarily by a bland and mediocre design scheme.

Café (Columbus Avenue) Façade
Two options for this façade were presented. Option 1 included full height windows on the mezzanine level. Option 2 included smaller windows that partially concealed the view from the mezzanine. The two options were otherwise similar. The Committee recommends option 1, partially because of the visual access from the mezzanine but also because the scale of the upper floor windows and cornice relate much better to the cornice and second story windows of the Colombo building. The Committee recommends that the pilasters that separate the windows at the lower level should be extended to the sidewalk, again to relate to the Colombo Building.

**East Façade (above the Colombo building)**

The design called for a series of regularly spaced punched windows between the two solid sheer wall sections at either end. The Committee understands that this design is an effort to relate the building to Jackson Square and be compatible with the Colombo Building. The Committee believes this façade does not respond to its context by failing to recognize the full context of this transitional block. Instead of relating to it, it competes visually with the Colombo Building. Also, it violates, or disguises the function of the interior space by significantly reducing the amount of natural light entering into the public circulation area behind it. This circulation corridor serves as the source of natural light that the classrooms on its west side “borrow” to provide adequate natural light to meet today’s energy use requirements. Reducing this light contradicts the function of the corridor and produces reduced the quality of classroom space adjacent to it and contrary to the principles of designing a sustainable “green” building.

EHDD is directed to provide additional study and offer an alternative design to the East façade above the Colombo Building. The Committee indicated that, given its position along Columbus Avenue, it should be treated more as a main façade and should recognize that Washington Street is also a “gateway” to Chinatown, one of the main one-way streets into Chinatown. This façade’s role as a gateway needs to be balanced with its other important role as a compatible neighbor to the Colombo Building. The façade design should be a sophisticated response to the complex nature of its surroundings, including the Washington façade, the café design on Washington and Columbus Avenue, the scale and textures of surrounding areas (with particular emphasis on North Beach since it visually faces those areas), as well as the high rise vertical structures to the south, west, and north. This eastern facing façade design should bring out the best of the Colombo Building, relating to it without mimicking it, complimenting but not competing with it thereby detracting from the historic building’s primacy on this major intersection.