



Calgary Assessment Review Board

DECISION WITH REASONS

In the matter of the complaint against the property assessment as provided by the *Municipal Government Act*, Chapter M-26, Section 460, Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000 (the Act).

between:

***Prime Properties Inc. Immeubles Prime Inc. (Represented by Altus Group Limited),
COMPLAINANT***

and

The City Of Calgary, RESPONDENT

before:

***I. Weleschuk, PRESIDING OFFICER
H. Ang, BOARD MEMBER
T. Livermore, BOARD MEMBER***

This is a complaint to the Calgary Assessment Review Board in respect of a property assessment prepared by the Assessor of The City of Calgary and entered in the 2013 Assessment Roll as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| ROLL NUMBER: | 068107200 |
| LOCATION ADDRESS: | 221 8 Avenue SW |
| FILE NUMBER: | 72598 |
| ASSESSMENT: | \$6,160,000 |

This complaint was heard on 2nd and 3rd days of July, 2013 at the office of the Assessment Review Board located at Floor Number 4, 1212 – 31 Avenue NE, Calgary, Alberta, Boardroom 4.

Appeared on behalf of the Complainant:

- *M. Cameron*

Appeared on behalf of the Respondent:

- *E. Borisenko*

Board's Decision in Respect of Procedural or Jurisdictional Matters:

- [1] Neither party objected to the members of the Board, as introduced, hearing the evidence and making a decision regarding this assessment complaint.
- [2] The Board noted that their file included a completed copy of the Assessment Review Board Complaint form and Assessment Complaints Agent Authorization form.
- [3] The Complainant Rebuttal was disclosed late (due June 24; received June 28) as a result of the Altus Group Limited (Altus) offices being closed for a number of days due to the flooding in downtown Calgary. The Respondent did not object to the Rebuttal being entered as evidence, given the circumstances.
- [4] No preliminary issues were raised by either party.

Property Description:

- [5] The subject property is a three level (lower, main and upper) retail building located at 221 8 Avenue SW, along Stephen Avenue in downtown Calgary (Sub-market area DT8). This property is also known as the Christopher Building. Stephen Avenue has been developed into a pedestrian friendly street, with a number of restaurants and bars. The subject is leased by one tenant who operates two businesses in the building. The building has 4,183 square feet (SF) of assessed area on the lower (basement) level which operates as the "Below Deck" pub, 4,366 SF on the main and 4,383 SF on the upper which operates as the "Libertine" restaurant. The lower level has direct access from the street. The upper level has access via stairs inside the restaurant from the main level. The current assessment is \$6,160,000, using an Income Approach which assigned a different rental rate to the lower, main and upper levels.

Issues:

- [6] The Complainant raised the first two issues identified below, and the Respondent raised the third issue.

Are the assessed rental rates correct?

Is the assessed vacancy rate correct?

Does the assessed value reflect the market value of the subject property?

Complainant's Requested Value:

Alternative 1: \$4,010,000

Alternative 2: \$4,330,000

Board's Decision:

- [7] The Board confirms the 2013 assessment of \$6,160,000.

Legislative Authority:

- [8] Section 4(1) of Matters Relating to Assessment and Taxation Regulation (MRAT) states that the valuation standard for a parcel of land is "market value". Section 1(1)(n) defines "market value" as the amount that a property, as defined in Section 284(1)(r) of the Act might be expected to realize if it is sold on the open market by a willing seller to a willing buyer. Section 467(3) of the Act states that an assessment review board must not alter any assessment that is fair and equitable, taking into consideration (a) the valuation and other standards set out in the regulations. The issues raised in the Complaint may refer to various aspects of the assessment or calculation of the assessed value, and may be addressed by the Board. However, the ultimate test that the Board must apply is whether the assessed value reflects the market value of the assessed property.

Issue 1: Are the Assessed Rental Rates Correct?**Complainant's Position:**

- [9] The Complainant noted that the rental rates applied by the City for retail space in DT8 are different for each level, being \$20.00/SF for the lower (below grade) level, \$36.00/SF for the main (street) level and \$30.00 for upper levels. The Complainant took the position that for buildings that are occupied by one tenant, or where one tenant occupies more than one level, one rate should be applied to the entire space so leased. Alternatively, the Complainant took the position that if a different rental rate is to be applied to each level in a building in DT8, that the rental rates used by the City are not correct.

- [10] The subject property is occupied by one tenant who recently (February 1, 2011) entered into a lease agreement for the entire building. The tenant pays a rental rate of \$21.65/SF for the space leased on all three levels (page 26, Exhibit C1). The Complainant argued that where one tenant occupies the entire building or multiple floors, that it is common to pay one rental rate for the entire leased area. This was a common situation in DT8. The Complainant presented a table (page 28, Exhibit C2) that purported to show that about a third (eleven) of the 34 DT8 properties had either a single tenant or a tenant leasing more than one level. Based on the subject lease, the Complainant concluded that the appropriate rental rate to apply to situations such as the subject with one tenant in the entire building is \$21.65/SF.
- [11] Alternatively, if a different rental rate is to be applied to each level, the Complainant presented evidence (page 38, Exhibit C1) of leases for two comparable buildings with a main floor retail lease rate of \$31.00/SF and \$21.00/SF, resulting in a mean and median of \$26.00/SF. The Complainant argued that these two lease comparables represent buildings that were similar to the subject. In rebuttal, the Complainant defended the position that these two leases were the best indicators of the rental rate for the main floor of the subject. The Complainant did not present any upper level comparable leases but argued that the upper level would not be more than the lease rate for the main level, and therefore a rental rate of \$26.00/SF should apply to the upper level. For the lower level, the Complainant presented one lease comparable at a rate of \$17.50/SF (page 42, Exhibit C1), and argued that this indicated the correct rental rate for the lower level of the subject property.
- [12] In rebuttal, the Complainant provided information on a number of the lease comparables presented by the Respondent (page 41-42, Exhibit R1), arguing that a number of the lease comparables were from buildings that were not comparable to the subject. The Complainant noted that the lease comparables within the Scotia Centre have access from both Stephen Avenue and the interior corridor of the Scotia Centre, which results in superior traffic through those retail outlets. The Complainant also noted that the leases in the Alberta Block (also known as Fashion Central) refer to spaces that have no direct access from Stephen Avenue, but access to the retail units is via interior walkways. The Complainant concluded that only the lease comparables presented in Exhibit C1 are truly representative of the subject property.

Respondent's Position:

- [13] The Respondent explained that the City has sufficient rental information to derive a specific rental rate for the lower, main and upper retail levels in DT8. This analysis is presented on page 41-42 in Exhibit R1. For the lower retail level, based on four leases with a mean of \$22.88/SF and median of \$22.00/SF, the City applied a rental rate of \$20.00/SF. The upper rental rate is based on two lease comparables, with a mean of \$31.71/SF and median of \$31.71/SF, supporting the City's assessed rental rate of \$30.00/SF. For the main level, based on nine leases with a mean of \$45.44/SF and median of \$45.00/SF, the City applied a rental rate of \$36.00/SF. This analysis was also done ignoring three leases in the Alberta Block, resulting in a mean of \$35.67/SF and median of \$35.50/SF, again supporting the \$36.00/SF rate used by the City.

- [14] The Respondent argued that the \$21.00/SF lease rate for the main level in the Ward Block (105 8 Avenue SW) is below market because there are some issues with the building. These issues include damage to the building as a result of construction of a building behind the Ward Block.
- [15] The Respondent argued that the Complainant did not present the lease agreement to demonstrate that one rental rate is applied to all levels of the building, and to demonstrate that the \$21.65/SF rate was not a blended or average rate for the entire building.

Findings of the Board on this Issue:

- [16] The Complainant's Alternative 1 is based on the using the Income Approach and applying only one rental rate to the entire leasable area (lower, main and upper levels) within the subject building. The requested rental rate was \$21.65/SF, based on the one lease comparable from the subject property. The subject is not a unique building, based on the evidence and argument presented by both parties. The Board accepts that where one tenant leases more than one level in a building, that there may be only one rate established for the entire leased area, however, that is not at issue. The issue is whether the Complainant convinced the Board that in such a situation, a rate of \$21.65/SF reflects the market rental rate. Since only one lease comparable was presented to support the requested rate of \$21.65/SF, the Board is not persuaded that this rate reflects the market rate. The Board rejects this alternative as presented by the Complainant. The Board then considered Alternative 2, which consists of a unique rental rate for each retail level.
- [17] With regard to the rental rate for the retail lower level, the Respondent presented four lease comparables (page 41, Exhibit R1) including the Complainant's one lease comparable (page 42, Exhibit C1). These lease comparables support the City's assessed rental rate of \$20.00/SF for such space. The Board finds that the rental rate of \$20.00/SF for lower level retail space is appropriate.
- [18] With regard to the rental rate for the retail main level, the Respondent presented nine lease comparables (page 42, Exhibit R1), including the two presented by the Complainant (page 38, Exhibit C1). The Board heard qualitative argument from the Complainant as to why some of the main level lease comparables should not be considered comparable to the subject. Without some quantification to demonstrate the differences, the Board was not persuaded that certain lease comparables should be excluded from the analysis. That said, even excluding the Alberta Block leases, the remaining six leases, including the two leases presented by the Complainant, support the assessed rental rate of \$36.00/SF for main level retail in DT8. The Board finds that the rental rate of \$36.00/SF for main level retail space is appropriate.

- [19] With regard to the rental rate for upper level retail space, the Respondent presented two lease comparables supporting the City's assessed rental rate of \$30.00/SF. The Board notes that the Complainant did not present any lease comparables for the upper retail level. The Board finds that the rental rate of \$30.00/SF for upper level retail space is appropriate.

Issue 2: Are the Assessed Vacancy Rates Correct?

Complainant's Position:

- [20] The Complainant presented a table showing the vacancy rates for all 34 properties that are located in Sub-market area DT8 (page 33, Exhibit C1), and considered by the City as being the "Stephen Avenue" properties. This table indicates that 69,361 SF of area is vacant, from a total available rentable area of 550,862 SF, resulting in a vacancy rate of 12.59%. This is the basis for the Complainant's request that the vacancy rate for the 2013 assessment calculation should be 12.5%, not the 5% used by the City.
- [21] This table includes the Bank of Montreal building (BMO) located at 140 8 Avenue SW, which has 100% vacancy (44,791 SF). The Complainant contended that this property was part of the supply for the Stephen Avenue rental market. To support this position, a copy of a marketing brochure used by the Taurus Property Group offering the retail portion of the building for lease (page 41-50, Exhibit C2) and a copy of a marketing brochure used by Colliers International (page 51-60, Exhibit C2) offering the upper office levels for lease were presented. An email from Chelsea Harding, Asset Manager for Steiner Properties Ltd. (building manager) dated June 19, 2013 is presented on page 62, Exhibit C2. This email states that the retail portion of the building was listed with Taurus on December 14, 2011 and the office portion was listed with Colliers in mid-January 2012. The email also states that the space will not be available before August 2013, at best, and that "a binding deal (*is*) in place for the office since September 2012 but the Tenant cannot take possession until the space is ready for occupancy."
- [22] A copy of the 2012 Assessment Explanation Supplement and 2013 Non-Residential Properties-Income Approach Valuation (original) was presented on page 63 and page 64-65 respectively, in Exhibit C2. This was presented to demonstrate that the City was assessing the BMO building at the same rental rates as the other buildings in DT8.
- [23] The Complainant concluded that the BMO building was actively being offered for lease since December 2011/January 2012, and that the City recognized it as being available for lease based on its 2013 Assessment valuation. Therefore, this building is part of the rental market on Stephen Avenue and should be included in the vacancy rate calculation.

Respondent's Position:

- [24] The Respondent stated that the BMO building was not included in the City's vacancy study for DT8 properties because it has been vacant for a number of years and has been undergoing a total renovation, including roof replacement, for more than a year. The Respondent pointed to the email from Chelsea Harding (page 62, Exhibit C2) which confirms that as of the condition date for the 2013 assessment year (December 31, 2012) the building was not in a condition that could be leased.
- [25] The Respondent stated that in response to its 2013 Assessment Notice, the City received a request from the building manager to inspect the building. Ms. Borisenko, the assessor appearing on behalf of the City in this hearing, inspected the subject building on February 13, 2013 and concluded that the building was not capable of being occupied. She stated that the roof was still under construction at the time of her visit, and the interior was essentially a shell. Photographs taken on this visit are presented on page 35-37, Exhibit R1. As a result of this visit, the City issued an amended Notice of Assessment based on land value and some improvement value. A copy of the amended 2013 Assessment Explanation Supplement is presented on page 38, Exhibit R1.
- [26] The Respondent presented three pages apparently taken from the 2009 assessment complaint report (authored by Altus Group Limited) which indicated that the BMO building has been vacant since 2003 and that the "cost to cure the physical problems" exceed the value of the property. Assessment Review Board Decision 0503/2009-P was presented (pages 30-34, Exhibit R1). The Respondent noted that in that Decision, the Board acknowledged the condition of the building and reduced the assessment to reflect the value of the property as vacant land.
- [27] The Respondent argued that the property did not yet have an Occupancy Permit from the City. No evidence was presented to support this statement. There was no discussion of whether an Occupancy Permit is required before the property can be offered for lease, nor the role of an Occupancy Permit.

Findings of the Board on this Issue:

- [28] Both parties used the same set of data, being the properties in DT8, to derive their vacancy rate. The only issue in dispute is whether the BMO building should or should not be included in the data set. The BMO building is one of the larger buildings in DT8, therefore how it is treated for the purpose of deriving a vacancy rate makes a significant difference (12.59% if included and 4.85% if excluded).
- [29] In considering the vacancy rate, the Board first needs to set out the test that it will apply to determine if the BMO building should be included in the data base used to calculate the vacancy rate. As neither party provided any authority or detailed definition of vacancy rate, or more importantly how to calculate such a rate, the Board sought direction from information in the public domain. According to Appraisal of Real Estate (Eleventh Edition, Appraisal Institute, Chicago, Illinois, 1996)

"a vacancy rate is an allowance used in an Income Approach to reduce potential income attributed to vacancies or tenant turnover. The allowance is usually estimated as a percentage of potential gross income, which varies depending on the type and characteristics of the physical property, the quality of its tenants, current and projected supply and demand relationships, and general and local economic conditions. ... It reflects typical investor expectations over the specific holding period assumed or projected in the income capitalization approach." (page 489-490)

The Board understands this to mean that in deriving a vacancy rate, it should be based on properties that are competing with one another in the same market for the same potential lessee. The definition of the market must be carefully considered, because all vacant space or property in a geographic area does not necessarily compete for the same potential lessee. The specific market may be defined by location, size of the space, utility of the space, price, amenities or some combination of these factors. Vacancy rate is defined not just by the existing space that is available, but also by the anticipated supply and demand considering new space coming into the market (if it will compete against the subject property type) and changes in economic climate that may affect supply and demand. In other words, what would a purchaser contemplating buying a rental property in that "market" consider as the typical or expected vacancy rate for that property type?

- [30] The Board notes that of the 34 DT8 properties presented on page 33, Exhibit C1, only six have any vacancy. The other 28 properties are all fully leased. Of the five with vacancies (not including the BMO building) the vacancy appears to be an entire floor, suggesting that it is in the process of renovations. There was some discussion to this effect, but no evidence was presented demonstrating that these properties were in fact undergoing renovations. The Board finds what appears to be a strong rental market for Stephen Avenue properties. Vacancy appears to be triggered by renovations, either initiated by the building owner to upgrade the quality of the space or the lessee to add tenant improvements, and this vacancy tends to apply to only a portion of the building.
- [31] The Board considered the BMO building to be atypical for the Stephen Avenue market, in that it has been vacant since 2003, and it is undergoing a total renovation (except for the exterior facade). Unlike the other buildings in the Stephen Avenue rental market, the BMO building is not "temporarily" under renovations or under renovations to allow for a transition of tenants. While the space in the BMO building is being actively marketed, the building was not close to a condition or state that tenants could take possession of the building as of the condition date (December 31, 2012), as the roof was under construction. For these reasons, the Board finds that the BMO building is not part of the Stephen Avenue rental market as of December 31, 2012. Therefore, for the purpose of deriving the 2013 assessment and factors to be used in the Income Approach assessment calculation, the BMO building should not be considered in deriving the vacancy rate.

- [32] The Board finds that the 5% vacancy rate used by the City in its Income Approach calculation for DT8 properties reflects the typical market rate for this property type.

Issue 3: Does the Assessed Value Reflect the Market Value of the Subject Property?

Complainant's Position:

- [33] The Complainant did not present any sales evidence. The Complainant presented evidence in rebuttal arguing that five of the six sales presented by the Respondent (page 53, Exhibit R1) did not meet the definition of market value.
- [34] The Complainant presented an email from Janet Jesson, Real Estate & Development Coordinator for Joey Restaurant Group, which purchased the Saltlik property (101 8 Avenue SW) on page 108, Exhibit C2. This email indicates that the vendor had a listing agent but that this was a sale negotiated between the two parties, likely because Joey Restaurant Group was the tenant and had a clause in the lease agreement that gave them a right of first refusal. No other evidence was presented regarding details of this transaction, or what the "right of first refusal" actually meant.
- [35] The Complainant presented a press release from Allied Properties REIT and RealNet transaction summary (page 109-118, Exhibit C2) as evidence that the Bang & Olufsen property (129 8 Avenue SW) was part of a portfolio sale and therefore the price of \$3,600,000 shown on the RealNet transaction summary sheet was not a reliable indication of market value.
- [36] The Complainant presented a press release from Allied Properties REIT and RealNet transaction summaries (page 119-129, Exhibit C2) as evidence that the Alberta Block (805 1 Street SW) and Alberta Hotel (804 1 Street SW) properties were part of a portfolio sale and therefore the respective sale prices of \$13,000,000 and \$20,000,000 as shown on the RealNet transaction summary sheets were not a reliable indication of market value. The two remaining sales, the Thai Restaurant at \$536/SF of building area and Leeson Lineham at \$321/SF of building area average an indicated market value of \$428/SF of building area. The Complainant argued that the Thai Restaurant is only 6,304 SF in size, therefore the per SF sale price likely overstates the market value of the subject property.
- [37] The Complainant stated that the assessed value on a per square foot of assessed area for the subject is \$476/SF, then argued that this was substantially more than the average sale value of \$428/SF of building area (clause 36) and demonstrates that the subject is over assessed.

Respondent's Position:

- [38] The Respondent presented photographs of the subject property and a copy of a Building Permit dated December 7, 2010 for a major renovation to the subject property (page 19-21, Exhibit R1). This renovation was completed in 2011, and the subject least started on February 1, 2011 (page 26, Exhibit C1).
- [39] The Respondent presented six sales in the DT8 area on page 53, Exhibit R1 that indicate a mean of \$444/SF of building area and a median of \$457/SF of building area. The City has vetted all these sales and considers them market value transaction. This table of sales is also presented to demonstrate that the 2013 assessment reflects the sale prices, with a mean Assessment to Sales Ratio (ASR) of 0.98 and median ASR of 1.01. The Respondent argued that this demonstrates that the factors used by the City to prepare the 2013 assessments for the DT8 retail properties results in assessed values that reflect market value.
- [40] The Respondent argued that the Complainant did not provide any evidence to show why the portfolio sales and the prices assigned to the properties within the portfolio sales are not their market value.

Findings of the Board on this Issue:

- [41] The Board is not convinced that the Saltlik sale or the three portfolio sale prices do not reflect their market value. In the Saltlik sale, it appears that both parties are sophisticated and know the market. There was no evidence presented to suggest that the vendor sold the property at a discount or that the purchaser paid a premium over market value. With regard to the portfolio sales, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT's) are a significant part of the market in downtown Calgary, therefore their involvement cannot be summarily dismissed simply because they are a REIT. REIT's are sophisticated property investors and would be expected to pay fair market value for properties they acquire. No evidence was presented to demonstrate that the sale prices assigned to these three sales did not reflect market.
- [42] The Board understand that the purpose for presenting the table on page 53, Exhibit R1 is to demonstrate that the factors used by the City to calculate the 2013 assessments for retail buildings in DT8 results in assessed values that reflect market. The range of sales values is \$321/SF to \$536/SF of building area. This is a wide range, which is likely affected by the differences in building characteristics, including age of building, size and renovation history. The assessed value of the subject (\$476/SF of building area) falls into the sales range and in the upper end of the range of sale prices. Given the recent major renovation to the subject property, the Board would expect the assessed value to be in the upper end of this range.

- [43] The Board finds that the 2013 assessment is within the range of sale prices and reflects the market value of the subject property.

Board's Reasons for Its Decision

- [44] The Board concluded that the Complainant did not present sufficient evidence to establish a market rental rate for leases in DT8 that include an entire building or more than one level of retail space.
- [45] The Board noted that the Respondent provided a number of lease comparables to support the rental rates used by the City for each of the lower, main and upper retail levels. The Respondent's lease comparables included all the lease comparables presented by the Complainant. The Board notes that the Complainant did not provide any evidence for upper level retail lease comparables. The Board concludes that the rental rates used by the City to prepare the 2013 assessment for retail buildings in DT8 are supported by market lease evidence and reflect typical market rates.
- [46] The Board considered the vacancy rate issue and specifically whether the BMO building should be included in the vacancy analysis. The Board concluded that the BMO building was not in fact competing in the Stephen Avenue rental market with the other 33 retail buildings in DT8, therefore it should not be included in the vacancy analysis. This confirmed the City's vacancy rate of 5% is reflective of the market.
- [47] The Board finds that the assessed values for retail buildings in DT8 reflect market value, based on an analysis of six sales. The subject assessed value falls into the range of value on a "per square foot of building area" basis, supporting the conclusion that the assessed value of the subject reflects its market value.
- [48] While equity was not raised as a specific issue in this complaint, the Board finds, for the reasons discussed above, that the assessed value is fair and equitable, since all these properties were assessed using the same Income Approach calculation.

DATED AT THE CITY OF CALGARY THIS 30th DAY OF July 2013.



Ivan Weleschuk
Presiding Officer

APPENDIX "A"**DOCUMENTS PRESENTED AT THE HEARING
AND CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD:**

| NO. | ITEM |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. C1 | Complainant Disclosure |
| 2. R1 | Respondent Disclosure |
| 3. C2 | Complainant Rebuttal Disclosure |

An appeal may be made to the Court of Queen's Bench on a question of law or jurisdiction with respect to a decision of an assessment review board.

Any of the following may appeal the decision of an assessment review board:

- (a) the complainant;*
- (b) an assessed person, other than the complainant, who is affected by the decision;*
- (c) the municipality, if the decision being appealed relates to property that is within the boundaries of that municipality;*
- (d) the assessor for a municipality referred to in clause (c).*

An application for leave to appeal must be filed with the Court of Queen's Bench within 30 days after the persons notified of the hearing receive the decision, and notice of the application for leave to appeal must be given to

- (a) the assessment review board, and*
- (b) any other persons as the judge directs.*

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| Subject | Type | Issue | Detail | Issue |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|---|
| CARB | Retail | Stand Alone | Income Approach | Rental rates Vacancy rates Equity |