Apr. 8, 2018

930 Fort Proposed Mid-rise Residential

Response to Committee of the Whole Report (Application 00502 and 00593)

Letter to Mayor and Council

The purpose of this letter is to provide a written response to the Committee of the Whole (COTW) Reports prepared by City staff for the upcoming COTW meeting scheduled for April 12, 2018. Specifically, to encourage COTW to approve not only application 00593 (as recommended by staff), but also application 00502. We have been working on this project for over a year and have met with all of you at least once, and in some cases multiple times. We have also received a lot of support from City staff and the Downtown Residents Association. We were in front of The Advisory Design Panel last year and received excellent advice/recommendations. We would like to thank all those who have contributed to the project thus far. We are very much of the opinion that the various input from the above-mentioned stakeholders has resulted in a better project.

We are very pleased with the Committee of the Whole Report regarding rezoning application no. 00593 and staff's recommendation to move forward our rezoning application and set a Public Hearing date. We do have some concerns with the report regarding the Development Permit with Variance application no. 00502. Over the past year, in working with staff and various other stakeholders, many revisions have been made to the proposed building. While perhaps not every recommendation and suggested change have been enthusiastically received and incorporated, a multitude of revisions have been made and we are pleased with the outcome. There are certain design recommendations from staff (as outlined in the COTW report) that we have been unable to embrace. This differing of opinions regarding certain design aspects has been in place since initial discussions began over a year ago. Our desire to build an extraordinary project, one that strays slightly from the design guidelines which typically driving building design in the city, has cost us considerable time, money and energy. Our design-centric approach is not without consequences, but is driven by passion with the best of intentions. It would have been much simpler to capitulate and design a building like all others. Likely, we would have been in front of COTW last year with full staff support. We have chosen not to compromise the design of the building to make our jobs simpler. Rather, we have chosen to fight for what we believe in. We believe we have an extremely elegant, understated building that will be timeless and serve the community well for years to come.

Our intention is not to disregard staff input. Quite the contrary. We have received and incorporated many excellent staff suggestions for which we are thankful. Rather, our intention in writing this letter is to convince you of the exceptional design of our building. It is so very difficult to get "it" right. We have tried very hard to do that (i.e., get the design right), engaging multiple designers from multiple firms. What makes a building pleasing versus ordinary or forgettable? Design is in the details and although some of the suggested staff changes seem inconsequential, we believe they could have dramatic and detrimental effects. Our hope is that the subtlety and elegance of our building will make it to stand apart. We have been working with staff for over a year and many of the design items mentioned in the report have been discussed since the beginning. We have enjoyed the process and feel it has been of great value. Nonetheless, at this time, we are unsure how valuable more discussion can be. With respect to Development Permit with Variance application no. 00502, we would encourage COTW to adopt

alternate motion option number 2 and approve the current proposal. Of course, if this is unpalatable, we prefer staff's recommendation to option number 1.

Understanding how busy you all are and that you may not have the time to contemplate each item in the COTW report, rather than incorporating into this letter, we have attached a schedule that responds to each of the items identified by staff. The responses are made up of excerpts from communication over the past year.

Sincerely,

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Dan Robbins (on behalf of Fraser McColl and Dan Robbins)

Responses to items listed in the COTW report (application no. 00502)

1. Provision of distinct, well-defined retail bays, consistent with the context along Fort Street.

The two retail bays are very distinct and well defined. There are east and west commercial units separated by the building entry. Not only is the east unit physically separated from the west unit by the entry and a low concrete landscaped planter, but also by the architectural fin defining the building façade which lands between the entry and east unit. Further, and perhaps most defining, the east unit is set back approx. 20' from the face of the west unit. This has been done in order to provide an outdoor patio containing tables and seating for the east unit. There are also three trees in front of the east unit. It is difficult to imagine better distinction between the two commercial units. With respect to consistency with the context along Fort Street, the developers have, in recent years, together or independently been involved in the development of six sites on Fort Street between Douglas and Cook Streets. These include 777 (VIATeC), 838 (The Summit), 1061 (The Mosaic) and 1030 Meares (The Jigsaw). We believe that the retail bays proposed at 930 Fort Street are contextually consistent with recent development. Further, in response to staff suggestions that brick be incorporated in order to recognize historical building materials, brick walls have been added to both units. That is, we have attempted to be consistent with current and past context.

2. Uniform appearance.

The repetitive and disciplined approach to the building design is intentional. A light, airy building using a minimalist aesthetic is the desired outcome. Nonetheless, many changes have been made to the elevations over the past year. We believe these revisions have either enhanced design and/or livability and functionality. For example, (as suggested by ADP) the increased depth of the bump outs on the east and west elevations to allow for north and south facing windows into the bedrooms located in the bump outs. As suggested by staff, more variation in the colour of the composite metal panels has been incorporated. We believe this disciplined approach to design is vital to designing a timeless building.

3. Podium.

We are confused as to why a larger podium is being encouraged. We certainly disagree that a bigger, heavier podium is in any way a more sensitive response to the immediate context. In fact, we believe quite the opposite. That is, the lower, lighter podium being proposed is far more sensitive. We did agree with, and implement, ADP's suggestion to raise the perforated screen to a height consistent with the Lunds façade. Our building is a slender, light and heavily glazed. While we understand the podium "does not meet the height requirements" outlined in the design guidelines, we disagree that "it is not tall enough to anchor the tower" nor "sufficiently frame the streetscape or reinforce a human scale". By far the longest discussion point at ADP was how to make the east patio at street level more inviting. Suggestions were made by our peers and incorporated into the design. These changes have positively affected the human interaction at street level. A larger, heavier podium would do the opposite.

Interestingly, our neighbours to the north reviewed and applauded our design. The only concern we received from them was about the podium. They wondered if it could be slightly lower, so as not to negatively affect their proposed building. This was another reason we liked and adopted ADP's

suggestion of raising the perforated screen to the height of Lunds. It helped to partially satisfy staff suggestions of a higher podium without negatively affecting our neighbours to the north.

4. Setbacks.

The site is small and challenging. Nonetheless, we have worked hard to have a generous rear yard setback in anticipation of the proposed development to the north. East and west setbacks are a function of the building core and the need to improve soil conditions adjacent to Lunds. We lose approximately one meter along the west property line (i.e., we cannot build our parkade to the property line) in order to protect the Lunds building. Doing so means the core is slightly off centre (i.e., shifted east about one meter). This has the effect of increasing the west side yard setback slightly above the desired minimum of 3m and decreasing the east side yard setback slightly below 3m. In fact, it is just the bump outs that are within the 3m on the east side. As mentioned previously, these bump outs were increased to allow for windows facing north and south in the bedrooms within the bump outs. The bump outs dramatically improve the livability of the units without having any real negative impact. They also better articulate the east and west elevations. A lot of thought was given to this issue as it was identified by staff very early in the process. The bump outs contain only bedrooms and limited glazing in the east and west directions (i.e., facing the side yard). The more abundant glazing in the living areas is predominantly north and south and any glazing in living areas which face either east or west is in walls set back further than 3m. While we understand that future development to the east (see below, unlikely any time soon) will need to contend with this, we believe it is relatively inconsequential. Our east setback at the bump out is over 2.5m. *If* there were to be development to the east and *if* there were similar constraints requiring a west side yard setback of 2.5m, that would mean a separation of 5m. Single family detached homes in neighbourhoods throughout Victoria are built less than 5m apart. In R1-G and R1-B (two of the most prevalent zones in Victoria) homes can be built 3m apart.

While “planning for the future” is sensible, it is unlikely that any development in the foreseeable future on the north side of the 900 block of Fort St. will occur. Specifically, directly adjacent to the west is 926 Fort. The property is approx. 40’ wide with little to no redevelopment potential. To the west of 926 Fort St. is the front yard of View Towers. It is difficult to imagine any development occurring to the west. Adjacent to the east is a property (938 Fort St.) which recently underwent a very costly renovation following a fire and has long term leases in place. West of 938 Fort St. are four “half” lots (i.e., 30 feet in width each). The third (to the east) of these is 946 Fort St. which was recently purchased and plans are underway for a small commercial building. Thus, between 938 and 946 Fort St are two half lots (i.e., one 60’ wide lot) and to the east of 946 Fort St. is one 60’ wide lot. Neither with any real development potential. While we fundamentally agree with the philosophy of “planning for the future”, it would seem likely that the foreseeable future will likely look very much like the present.

Of course, we would love to be able to further increase the east side yard setback (and all setbacks for that matter). We have tried multiple methods to achieve an increased east side yard setback and unfortunately, have been unable to achieve 3m. Due to the size of the site and the central circulation (which has been shifted west as far as possible), unit layouts are extremely tight. Following the prudent advice of the City, we oriented all units to the north and south. This has made for very livable units, all with an abundance of natural light. The east and west elevations of the building are predominantly bedrooms. The reduced setback at the bump out of the east elevation contains two bedrooms with limited glazing. The portion of the east elevation that steps back contains a bedroom and living area in

one corner unit and a living area in the other corner unit. Kitchens have been placed on these walls of the living areas. That is, while the setback may not be the suggested 3m, the building has been designed so that the east setback does not affect the livability of the units.

5. Perforated metal.

We believe the perforated metal is an excellent material for this application. It works well with the lightness of the building and will add interest as light shines through it at different times of the day. It would be a real shame to replace it with something heavy like brick for no reason other than to satisfy a design guideline. It could be a really wonderful feature of the building at street level. Please consider the building. It is this type of small design decision that creates an extraordinary building, rather than an ordinary one.

6. Mid-block walkway.

While the size of the site makes a mid-block walkway problematic, the easement along the west property line in favour of Lunds precludes the incorporation of a mid-block walkway.