

March 8, 2018

Mayor Lisa Helps & Council  
City of Victoria  
1 Centennial Square Victoria BC  
V8W 1P6

**RE: 210 GORGE ROAD EAST REZONING AND DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPLICATION**

Dear Mayor Helps & Council:

Victoria Cool Aid Society (Cool Aid) is pleased to submit this application for the Rezoning and Development Permit approval for the property located at 210 Gorge Road East (former Cedar Grove Motel). Our request is to rezone the property from its current *T-1 Limited Transient Accommodation* zone to a new site-specific residential zone that will accommodate 50 affordable rental apartments and 32 self-contained permanent supportive rental apartments units. Our proposed project is the result of a high level of collaboration and support from all three levels of government in addition to substantial private donations. This proposed project will renew an asset which has reached the end of its useful life and at the same time, will have the collateral impact of regeneration for the surrounding neighbourhood.

Cool Aid's initial application with Letter to Mayor and Council was submitted to the City on October 31, 2017. Since that time, we have revised our plans in consultation with the Planning and Engineering Departments. These revisions included incorporating additional design elements to achieve a more residential aspect to the building façade and roofline. The result has been a proposed development which will complement the existing neighborhood character and at the same time, bring a new modern influence to an area under transition. We have also given consideration to additional design elements which will offer more benefits and amenities for the surrounding neighbourhood. These elements include extensive garden beds and landscaping treatments along the Carroll Street frontage which act as a way of bridging the local community with 210 Gorge residents. These revisions will ensure that this new proposed development becomes a true asset for the local community.

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

Our proposal will see the redevelopment of Cedar Grove which currently contains 21 supportive homes for members of the community who are marginalized for a variety of reasons. The property was acquired by Innovative Communities about 20 years ago, and converted to supportive housing under contract with Island Health. In 2006, Cool Aid assumed operations of Cedar Grove, and subsequently purchased the property in 2009. The site currently contains two buildings, which were originally designed for motel use. Built to modest standards, the buildings have traditional motel-style exterior access to each unit. Now more than 60 years old, the buildings have reached the end of their useful life. They were not designed for permanent residential housing, and leave the site significantly underutilized.

The redevelopment of this site will achieve a net benefit of 50 new affordable rental units and an additional 11 supportive housing units for the community. The project targets an integrated resident population: working singles, low income couples, seniors, and adults needing supportive housing.

Part of the Regional Housing First Program (RHFP), and the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness' "Priority Housing Projects List" (PHPL), this project has support from the Capital Regional District, CMHC, and BC Housing, with significant equity coming from Cool Aid with both land and cash contributions.

### **COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND AMENITIES**

The Development Proposal will result in many significant benefits for the immediate neighbours and the City at large. First and foremost, we are replacing an aging asset on a prominent corner along a major arterial road with a modern, residential building which contributes to the revitalization of the local neighbourhood. The addition of 61 new housing units has the corollary effect of increased activity for the local economy and The thoughtful landscape design of the Carroll and Gorge Road frontages contribute to a positive pedestrian experience. Great care has been taken to ensure the preservation of the existing horse chestnut trees along Gorge Road. An extensive boulevard garden has been incorporated into the design along Carroll Street to act as a medium for interaction between existing neighbours and the new residents of 210 Gorge Rd. The vision for these garden boxes and fruit trees is to provide enhanced food security and nourishment for both the residents and neighbours in addition to the significant therapeutic and social benefits of gardening.

More broadly, this Development Proposal responds to the City of Victoria's Housing Strategy 2016-2026 which targets 800 affordable rental units by 2026 "to ensure adequate supply and avoid putting downward pressure on housing supply". In Greater Victoria, the key indicators for affordable rental housing need are 1) the current low vacancy rate, and 2) high average monthly rental costs. Additionally, the need for shelter rate housing is evidenced by the Greater Victoria Centralized Access to Supportive Housing's (CASH) long waitlist, and the growing number of individuals with a history of chronic shelter use.

The Victoria Foundation's annual *Vital Signs* publication provides indicators of substantive housing affordability issues. Current affordability statistics include:

- The annual income of a person earning minimum wage is \$22,568. Devoting 30% of this income to housing would only support a monthly rent of less than \$564, which is well below current average market rents.
- The annual income of a senior receiving CPP/OAS and GIS is \$23,604. Devoting 30% of this income to housing would only support a monthly rent of less than \$590, which is well below current average market rents in the Capital Region.

The majority of the proposed building will be allocated to affordable rental apartment units for those with low-to-medium household incomes. Housing is deemed "affordable" based on median household income as recognized by a Housing Affordability Index, such as the one administered by Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation (CMHC). These affordable housing units will provide much needed rental housing stock.

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD**

Located in a mixed-residential neighbourhood, 210 Gorge Road East is close to downtown, with convenient transit and walking access to a full spectrum of wellness, recreation, and commercial services. Situated at the northeast corner of Gorge Road and Carroll Street, the property is ideally suited for a new purpose-built residential development. The surrounding land uses include several rental apartment buildings to the south, a large condominium to the east and a townhouse complex to the north. The site slopes from northwest to southwest and includes a significant elevation difference of 4.63 m (15 ft) from the highest point to the lowest point.

The siting and design of the building are specifically intended to minimize impacts on neighbours. Shadow studies demonstrate that with the proposed setbacks and stepping back of the building, there is virtually no shadowing on neighbours except at the winter solstice when the sun is at its lowest, and even then shadowing is minimal. Strong consideration has been given to the building's form, proportion, and detailing (particularly at street level), including the provision of amenity space along Gorge Road to create more animation of the street frontage. The location of the main living area of each unit has been carefully considered to avoid overlook and to ensure privacy for neighbours. Fencing and landscape screening will augment privacy intentions.

## **GUIDELINES**

The proposed project meets many policy objectives of the City's Official Community Plan and the recently adopted Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan. Under the OCP, this site is designated as Urban Residential which supports low and mid-rise multi-unit buildings up to approximately six storeys. The architectural form is highly complementary to surrounding sites which are all low to mid-rise multi-family developments. Please consult Appendix A Land Use Policies for a fulsome analysis of the OCP and Neighbourhood Plan guidelines which this Development proposal responds to. Variances are being requested for a reduced setback along the northern and eastern boundaries and a reduced setback of the surface parking space from Carroll Street.

## **COMMUNITY INPUT**

Cool Aid has made a concerted effort to engage with the surrounding neighbours and the City during the concept plan development process as outlined below. Written feedback received from these events is attached to this application.

|           |                                                                                              |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May 30    | Meeting with City of Victoria (planning, engineering, traffic, parks)                        |
| June 13   | Preliminary Meeting with Burnside Gorge Community Association Land Use Committee (CALUC)     |
| June 22   | Community Open House #1 (with neighbours within 100 m)                                       |
| July 4    | Meeting with Carrington Court Strata Council Members (most immediate neighbours to the east) |
| August 2  | Presentation to Carrington Court Strata Annual General Meeting                               |
| August 10 | Community Open House #2 (with neighbours within 100 m)                                       |

|              |                                                         |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| September 18 | Burnside Gorge Community Association CALUC presentation |
| Other        | Various individual communications                       |

Since the original concept drawing process began in April 2017, the design has evolved significantly to address issues and requests expressed by the City and by neighbours throughout the various consultation activities. While changes in the design development have been informed by all of this feedback, we have been most diligent in observing comments made by the residents of Carrington Court (the strata building located immediately to the east). Their comments have inspired a very significant shift in the floor plan to mitigate impacts on our most immediate neighbour. In the architectural submission for this application, Sheet A-17 demonstrates the evolution of the building during the design development process.

Other significant changes resulting from conversations with neighbours and the City include:

- Relocation of the front entrance from Carroll Street to Gorge Road.
- Reorientation of the units so none directly face the east property line (Carrington Court).
- Greater stepping of the building facade on both Gorge Road and the side yard adjacent to the townhouse building on Carroll Street, in order to create visual interest and meet the built form objectives of the Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan.
- Realignment of the underground parking structure to maintain existing trees
- Re-design of the front entrance, and common amenity spaces to provide improved access, a better control plan for staff, integrated amenities, greater floor plan efficiency, and to address Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CEPTED) objectives.
- Enclosure of the recycling centre, ensuring that it is well screened from neighbours, and easy to access for residents.

## **PLANNING & DESIGN PROCESS**

### **Building Design**

The 210 Gorge Road East site is relatively challenging terrain that includes a more than one-storey (4.63 metres) slope from northwest to southwest. The adjacent building (Carrington Court strata) is elevated at least a full storey above the first floor of the proposed building, which allows for a taller building on the site with limited additional impacts.

By massing the building up to six storeys on the south side and five-storeys on the north side (rather than five storeys for the whole building), a smaller overall footprint is possible. The smaller floorplates provide a more efficient interior layout that reduces corridors, which in turn, reduces the costs for this budget conscious non-profit project. Combining the smaller footprint with the underground parking allows for

less site coverage, greater open site space, and a larger setback from the adjacent Carrington Court on the east side. Also, by stepping back the top two storeys on the Gorge Road frontage, the perceived massing of the building is greatly reduced.

### **Landscaping**

Key elements of the landscape plan include:

- Preservation of prominent chestnut trees along the Carroll Street frontage, and the large maple tree whose dripline extends across the property line from the adjacent neighbor at the northeast corner.
- Introduction of new large deciduous trees along Gorge Road, with special attention to tree and shrub planting along the eastern property line.
- Perimeter fencing.
- Planter boxes for residents along the Carroll Street frontage.
- Special paver feature entrance into the parking area
- Green roof over the exterior area of the underground parking, and over building areas that are below grade.
- Outdoor amenity space for residents.
- An enclosed and screened garbage and recycling centre.

### **Design for Safety & Security**

The building has been designed with CPTED principles in mind. The first floor entrance area has been carefully designed to provide uninterrupted sight lines from the staff office to the controlled front entrance, amenity lounge, outdoor patio space, elevators, and laundry rooms. Visitor parking is located at the driveway entrance off Carroll Street, while resident parking is underground inside a controlled gate. Access to the fenced yard space around the building will be via controlled gates, and all exterior areas will be monitored. Landscaping has been designed to avoid any hidden spaces.

### **Transportation**

An analysis of parking demand for the supportive and affordable housing units has been undertaken. Twenty-four stalls have been provided, and a breakdown is provided in the following table. An analysis of supportive housing parking demand is attached to this application, but it has been well demonstrated that there is essentially no need for any stalls. The most recently revised Schedule C Off-Street Parking Regulations recommends the following parking space requirements for affordable housing units: 0.2 stalls per unit under 40 m<sup>2</sup>, and 0.5 stalls per unit greater than 40 m<sup>2</sup> but less than 70 m<sup>2</sup>.

### Breakdown of Parking Stall Allocation

| USE                         | UNITS | RATIO | TOTAL STALLS |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Supportive Housing          | 32    | .03   | 1            |
| Affordable Housing          | 26    | 0.2   | 17           |
|                             | 24    | 0.5   |              |
| Staff Parking               | 1     | 1.00  | 3            |
| Visitor Parking/Misc.       | 3     | 1.00  | 3            |
| Total Demand                |       |       | 24           |
| <b>TOTAL PARKING STALLS</b> |       |       | <b>24</b>    |

The property is well served by public transit, with BC Transit routes 8 and 11 serving Gorge Road. The site is also very close to the Galloping Goose, which is a less than 10-minute bicycle ride to the downtown business centre, where many of the affordable housing residents are likely to work.

Further Transportation Demand Management measures have been incorporated by way of providing Ninety (90) enclosed bicycle stalls, and 12 open bicycle stalls which exceeds the requirements as laid out in the newly revised Schedule C. In addition to this, a Bicycle Repair area has been proposed to further support alternative and environmentally sustainable transportation for the residents. Cool Aid will also offer a limited number of carshare memberships to residents of 210 Gorge. These proposed TDM measures are more than adequate to mitigate the small variance in off-street parking that we are requesting.

### Operations

The controlled entrance and interior hallway access to all units will significantly improve building management and client support when compared to the current motel-style arrangement. The larger number of affordable housing units (60%) will also have a stabilizing influence on the general social environment of the building, with the opportunity to create a significant sense of community within the new residential building.

The 32 self-contained supportive housing units will provide permanent housing that is subsidized, and has on-site supports, including 24/7 staffing. Support services are generally designed around an individual resident's needs related to physical or mental health, developmental disabilities, or substance use. These are permanent housing units, and there is no time limit on how long an individual can access this supportive housing.

- The building will be staffed 24/7.
- A range of community building and supportive services will be provided in the building
- Pets (dogs and cats) will be permitted.

- Eight units will be barrier-free for those with physical disabilities or challenges, and will include one and two-bedroom units in addition to studios.
- All dwelling units are fully self-contained.

### **Green Building Features**

This project will be targeting Step 1 Plus of the BC Energy Step Code, and will include the following green building features:

- Preservation of significant trees.
- Underground parking that will reduce hard-surface site coverage.
- Permeable pavers for the patio area and the driveway entrance into the underground parking.
- Garden plots for residents.
- Low-flow plumbing fixtures.
- LED lighting fixtures.
- The final determination for the heating system has not yet been confirmed, but energy efficiency is one of the main selection criteria.

### **Infrastructure**

A preliminary civil engineering drawing has been provided along with the architectural submission for this project. Sanitary sewer, domestic water, storm water, and a hydro kiosk are shown on the site plan.

### **ABOUT VICTORIA COOL AID SOCIETY**

Cool Aid's mission is to provide housing, shelter, health, and employment services. Cool Aid operates 13 supportive and affordable housing buildings, accounting for 457 residential units throughout the region. Four of our buildings (Fairway Woods, Hillside Terrace, Olympic Vista, and Cottage Grove) offer supportive and affordable housing for seniors.

We also operate the Access Health Centre; REES Employment Centre and the Community Casual Labour Pool, the Every Step Counts Running Program, and we provide outreach, counselling, and volunteer opportunities. Our Downtown Community Centre offers thousands of individuals a variety of free recreation, wellness, food, arts, and vocational training opportunities. We are proud to be celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> year of providing housing, health and support services for our community's most disadvantaged people.

In terms of our supportive housing buildings, Cool Aid staff actively involve residents in building a strong and healthy community within each building. Residents are supported in developing the skills they need to live independently, and as members of the larger community. Our purpose-built supportive housing buildings have the appearance of any other market rental apartment buildings in the community and oftentimes, community members are not aware of any difference.

In conclusion, Greater Victoria, like many larger urban centres in BC, is experiencing a housing affordability and homelessness crisis. The redevelopment of 210 Gorge Road is an opportunity for our community to positively impact this crisis by creating 61 new homes of quality, affordable housing for a total of 82 units of housing that will be owned and operated by a local community non-profit in perpetuity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deanna Bhandar".

Deanna Bhandar,  
Director, Real Estate Development  
Victoria Cool Aid Society

Attachs.

cc: Kathy Stinson, CEO, Victoria Cool Aid Society