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Statement of Significance

840 Fort Street

Description

The two-storey, Edwardian façade of the Sawyer Building is a fine representative of the working class, retail zoning indicative of upper Fort Street. Located on the north side of Fort Street near the Quadra Street crossing, its' presence among a collection of old and new buildings reflects the characteristic diversity of development that has been allowed to occur there.

Heritage Value

The Sawyer Building is valued for its mainstay as a commercial building, offering paint and paint supplies to the retail consumer for a period of 60 years and then sewing machines and supplies for the next 35 years. Constructed in 1909, Walter E. Staneland, along with his brother Frank, was preparing to take advantage of the pre-World War 1 real estate boom, providing paints, varnishes, and associated supplies. Two years later, in 1911, Charles Watkins Elwood was commissioned to draft details to set back the front façade. It is believed that this work was commissioned to accommodate the widening of Fort Street. The drawings noted that the present materials of the original façade were to be utilized in the new façade. In 1946, Walter would sell the business and building to Mowat-Grant Ltd. Continuing to operate as a retail store supplying paint and paint supplies, Mowat-Grant would occupy the building until 1969. Sawyer Sewing Machines Ltd. then moved in and provided the building with its' title for the next 35 years. Further alterations to the storefront entrance, including relocating the main entrance, were completed at this time to accommodate the needs of the new enterprise. In the 1970's, the building was subdivided into additional units offering space to a variety of retailers and professional firms. Through the 90's, a variety of non-descript businesses would occupy the space with Sawyer Sewing Machines until 2005 when the building is noted to be vacant.

The location of 840 Fort Street manifests the development of Victoria's gateway economy. Walter Staneland strategically located his building along the arterial commercial and transit corridor of Fort Street that would link traffic flowing from the downtown core to the outlying neighbourhoods of Rockland and Jubilee, taking advantage of the streetcar system that was constructed in the 1890's to service the Royal Jubilee Hospital. Today, the Sawyer Building is located in the transition between the Core Business and Corridor Heritage areas adding to a blend of modest historic and modern buildings that provide a characteristic streetscape that transcends the value of the individual buildings themselves.

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The Sawyer Building is an example of a modest, Edwardian, commercial style, typical of the era and location on upper Fort Street. Despite the layers of alteration, restoration and renewal works, the street façade notably retains many of the buildings' original character defining elements including the wood frame, store front glazing with large glass panes beneath multi pane transom windows, the cast iron columns delineating the glazing bays, and the sheet metal cornices providing horizontal definition.

Character Defining Elements

The key elements that define the heritage character of 840 Fort Street and support its' heritage values are:

- Nearly a century of continuous use as commercial retail space
- Location along the heritage corridor of Fort Street connecting the downtown town core to the Rockland and Jubilee neighbourhoods, enhancing the diverse character of the local streetscape.
- Modest, functional, two-storey, Edwardian design and detailing
- Triple, sheet-metal cornices defining the street front facade
- Cast iron columns delineating the storefront glazing
- Wood frame commercial storefront glazing
- Proportionally spaced, second storey window openings