

To:

Pam Hartling and Chris Fleming, North Park Neighborhood Land Use Committee

Lucy Poskitt and Kevin DeCoste

Mayor Lisa Helps

Councillors Coleman, Isitt, Loveday, Lucas, Madoff, Thornton-Joe, Alto and Young.

J. Johnson – City Manager;

J. Jenkyns – Deputy City Manager;

J. Tinney – Director, Sustainable Planning & Community Development;

A. Hudson – Assistant Director, Community Planning;

A. Meyer – Assistant Director, Development Services;

S. Thompson – Director, Finance;

F. Work – Director, Engineering;

M. Miller – Senior Heritage Planner;

A. Brett – Heritage Planner;

B. Sikstrom – Senior Planner;

C. Wain – Planner;

R. Bateman – Planner;

C. Coates – City Clerk;

C. Mycroft – Executive Assistant to the City Manager;

J. Schmidt – Manager, Legislative & Regulatory Services

Michele Blumberg, 942 Mason Street

Jim and Keith, 940 Mason Street

From:

Julie Poskitt, 944 Mason Street

Re: Development Proposals 926-932 Pandora, and 953 Balmoral

June 16, 2017

Dear People,

On June 13, I paid my property taxes (over \$3000), went for dinner and then attended two back-to back and very disheartening development proposal consultations.

The first, at 7 pm, proposed a ten-storey residential tower between Mason and Pandora directly in front of my house, and the next, at 8 pm, for the second time, proposed a six-storey residential build directly behind my house (953 Balmoral).

I am writing to protest the height of these buildings, the noise-and-exhaust levels arising from the parking decisions of these builds for our home, located between them; the loss of sunlight, impacting the enjoyment and use of my property and the destruction of the small-scale, pedestrian and heritage flavour of Mason Street.

My context and reasons are outlined below, and my demands follow at the end of this letter.

How I came to own 944 Mason

Over the course of 2011 I watched 944 Mason being built by Chris LeFevre from my then-daily parking spot owned by Mr. Gazzola. I watched it put up for sale, and I ultimately purchased it for our family late in 2011 -- before the latest version of the City's official community plan was created. In 2015, before my family moved to Victoria, and before the tide of Vancouverites came over, I put 944 Mason up for sale, but I've been so glad it did not sell, because I've been able to help my daughter and her husband relocate to Victoria and enjoy this neighborhood, with all its diversity, industry, homeowners, services, small-scale entrepreneurs and proximity to downtown life.

I'm recently retired from the public service, having worked at 800 Johnson since 1995, with a 6 year hiatus in Ottawa, returning in 2006. For 22 years I have loved Mason's little houses, the urban farm and the rezoned-for-commercial heritage buildings behind the Health building, despite their different uses and uneven states of care. I have loved the mix of churches, light industry (including the one currently across from me with its good mural), park space and businesses along all along Mason up to Cook and past Cook. I have watched the growth in numbers of street-involved people, their occasional misbehavior both within my property boundaries and, lately in the church/Scout Club parking areas, the demolition of the Catholic school, the building of the bike lanes and the constant development going on near the City Centre.

The value of smaller scale dwellings in the City

Small, single-family houses, owner occupied or rented, that persist near the City core are a reminder of what Victoria has been and how people have lived there. Although my house is a new build, it has "played nice" in its architectural principles and fits the occupation "story" that has been told up and down this street for a long time. 944 Mason has 2.5 stories, the loft of the main house being used by my daughter as an artist studio, and a rented legal suite attached at ground level which, in my later years, is a place where I can live next to my daughter and son-in-law and their children. Since Lucy and Kevin moved in last year, the front and the back have been cultivated and there is a great 2017 crop of vegetables and flowers. Our neighbor to the east has an apple tree planted at the yard boundary which gives fruit for baking, thanks to the good light and air circulation currently available. Our neighbor to the west has a beautiful rose bush that leans into our front yard. Neither Lucy nor Kevin drive, so their walking access to work and/or buses or bike transportation has been excellent.

Obviously we will all be inconvenienced by construction noise and dust. Obviously these will impact our tenant and any vehicles we'll be parking on the street or in our driveway.

Obviously, due to the Pandora development's shadow, our house will become colder and the yard not as useful for growing or as pleasant for relaxation.

Obviously car traffic will increase (parking entry for the Pandora development). Car emissions will rise (including the parking spaces for the Balmoral development where the exhausts will be directed toward and through our fence into the garden). Whatever we grow will be coated with many more unhealthy substances.

But my concern is not only for my home and my street. Nor is it exclusively for single-home owners abruptly subject to a 20-Year plan, although we feel the brunt of change acutely. It is something larger, and it has to do with a loss of connection to history and older, more land-tied ways of life that existed before we got here.

The developer for Pandora noted the success of the Woodward's development in downtown Vancouver, how street people and new high-rise owners are happily co-existing. But here are my observations from my lived experience of DTES, where Lucy was born, and the lives of friends who've lived in the DTES

since. I would point out how some of these tall builds are subsidized housing developments (good and necessary) and some of these are market and the news is not all good. There is a lot of concern about the gentrification of the DTES, and a great deal of social action, as there has been for generations and which continues, to support the disadvantaged and addicted. For me in the 1980s and for my Vancouver acquaintances who still live and work in the DTES, the single, two or three-storey dwellings of Strathcona with its long-preserved green walkway and its quiet streets, are a kind of shared refuge within the City – a place to live and walk through: THE calm refuge for the Downtown Eastside, not the chilly wet streets below the locked-up developments.

This is what Strathcona teaches us: People, and I'd argue the vulnerable elderly and the young most especially, need to observe close-up, at eye-level, human-scaled dwellings on their distinct plots of land. They need to see humans caring for their scraps of immediate natural world. They need to see how people choose to accommodate (or not) the changes imposed by growing environments day in, day out, from season to season; they need to see the choices forced by leaves, grasses, weeds, berries, apples and weather on dwellers. How street drains are blocked and unblocked by the folks who live behind them, what a barbeque or a lilac smells like, how sidewalks are cleared of snow, who owns which dogs, what blue boxes are for, how unstoppable dandelions are. It's not that every person can afford a single family home in the city, and it's not that every homeowner shares the same concerns, but people, at some unconscious level, want to know that such living was possible once, is still possible. The single family home deep in the city is a locus of dreams and memory, a teacher of small, homely lessons, an imparter of old skills, and a site of greeting.

The small homes that line Mason Street belong not only to individual owners, they belong, in other way, to the imaginations and senses of all the people on the sidewalk, as I was for all those years of parking and walking to work. Mason St. is a place to observe the interface of the human and the natural, to observe a significant span of time in architecture, to speculate and imagine. Although some of this can be said of well-designed taller buildings, it is progressively less true with each storey added to the stack. I contend that small dwellings in the city, like ours, have a value much greater than their dollar worth: they are an intrinsic good. It is, after all, the view of the small Mason Street houses across the street that will incite those who can afford the Pandora townhouses to pay extraordinary prices. This is because the occupied street and life lived on the surface of the living earth, is valuable to everyone: occupants, neighbours and passers-by alike.

What I want:

- LOWER buildings: for Pandora, max 6 storeys, for Balmoral max 4. There is no need at this time to approve variances and build the first big builds to the maximum allowable or permitted height even if that is foreseen for the 20 year plan. As this plan is implemented we should START with lower density, and NUANCE the transition zone to complement existing dwellings and build up toward the 20th anniversary.
- Don't just reference green space, don't just remind people that things grow: show us how you plan for fully grown shade trees.
- Build with fewer parking spaces than units. Incentivize the units without parking. Offer all-week diagonal parking (currently offered on Sunday) with some residential spaces reserved on Balmoral. Be leaders: give tax breaks for carless and shared-car owner-occupants, so that you are not building for cars, but for people and their lungs.
- City Staff should reach out to residents as much as they work with developers. The time that developers spend with the City officials I help pay for, is built into developer costs. It is therefore unnerving to be told how happy the City is with their proposals, to show us, the affected, the number of bike lock-ups they will be providing, that their hands are tied, they MUST provide this

many parking spaces. What I hear is that the taxes I paid earlier in the day on the 13th have been deployed in lots of conversations with Mr. Gill and Mr. Sahota or their staff, so that they can dutifully come and explain to me that this height, these shadows, this decreased privacy, this increased concrete and these fumes have met all the City's demands. And now it's up to me to see the merits of their proposals. Well no thanks: Come to my house and see what is being affected.

Julie Poskitt