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Letter to Mayor and Council

May 31st, 2018

City of Victoria
 1 Centennial Square
 Victoria, BC V8W 1P6



Dear Mayor Lisa Helps and Members of City Council,

Re: Application for Heritage Designation of the Principal Façade of 819-823 Fort Street

825 Fort Holdings Ltd. c/o The Salient Group is pleased to enclose our application to designate the historic principal façade of 819-823 Fort Street as heritage under the City of Victoria's Register of Heritage Properties.

Salient has applied for a rezoning, development and heritage alteration permit to redevelop the properties located at 819-827 Fort Street. The proposed redevelopment comprises a 10-storey, 98-unit purpose-built rental building with historically scaled retail at the ground level. The project strives to build on the existing character of the area. The built form of the redevelopment is rooted in the retained and rehabilitated façade of 819-823 Fort as well as the façade of the already designated 825 Fort Street building.

Although 819-823 Fort was constructed prior to 825 Fort, it is not currently designated as heritage. Salient is proposing to designate, retain and rehabilitate the 819-823 Fort façade as part of the redevelopment application, based on archival images from circa 1960 as documented in the City of Victoria's Archives. Its relationship to the façade of 825 Fort further strengthens the historic streetscape of Fort Street, while enabling the sensitive introduction of much-needed residential space above.

An initial redevelopment application was made in November 2017 and following comments received from City staff and community stakeholders a revised submission was made in April 2018. In May 2018, the redevelopment application was presented to and approved with consideration by the Advisory Design Panel.

Historical Criteria

819-823 Fort is an example of Edwardian-era development in Victoria during the upswing of the pre-World War One real estate boom. The building was originally constructed in 1908 as a one-storey purpose-built brick building for G. Bergstrom Bjornfelt as a Turkish Bath House and Swedish massage parlour. A second-storey was added to this building in 1913 to double the size of the commercial operation.



The building changed hands shortly after the second-floor addition and the second floor was then converted into a rooming house with the commercial bath operation remaining on the ground floor until 1914. Following this, a variety of businesses subsequently occupied the building including a cake shop, a furniture store and a curiosity shop.

The building has been continuously used for commercial purposes and represents the eastward expansion of Victoria's commercial core. The variety of retail uses attest to the adaptability of this structure and the commercial vitality of Fort Street. Salient intends to continue the commercial use of the ground floor and maintain the historic character and scale on Fort Street.

Architectural Criteria

819-823 Fort is modest 2-storey Edwardian building designed by the firm of Hooper & Watkins, a partnership made up of Thomas Hooper and C. Elwood Watkins, and constructed by the Luney Brothers, William and Walter Luney.

The key elements of the 819-823 Fort façade include the simple decorative pressed metal cornices at the roof line and above the storefront, and the second-storey fenestration on the front elevation comprised of double-hung wood frame and sash windows that feature multi-pane upper sashes. The windows also feature wooden horns, projecting sills and lintels with tapered rectangular keystones.

It was determined by our heritage consultant and following a walk-through with our heritage planner that the building's interiors hold no historic value. The building has undergone several alterations to both the interiors and exterior façade following various commercial uses, with the exception of two arched wood-frame window assemblies on the rear of the property that Salient will refurbish and feature within the redevelopment.

Other items of significance include the façade's location on the property line with no setbacks, masonry construction, 2-storey scale and a full retail storefront on the ground level facing Fort Street.

Integrity

The historic scale and rhythm of the retail storefronts are characteristic of Fort Street's past and inform the design of the overall redevelopment. The project design concept began with the historic façades, resulting in a building parti consisting of 3 aggregate forms that respond to the historic pattern of building lots on Fort Street, and give the impression of separate urban infill additions built over time.

The application by Salient proposes to retain the 819-823 Fort and 825 Fort façades in situ to rehabilitate them. The ground-floor retail storefronts feature inset front entrances and large glazed windows constructed using the remaining authentic wooden components and new wooden components maintaining the historic rhythm of Fort Street. The existing aluminum storefront at 819-823 Fort will be removed and reconstructed in wood to the original character and configuration of the building based on the circa 1960 configuration.

The second-floor windows on the front façade of 819-823 Fort will be refurbished and the cornices and parapet will be repaired and seismically restrained back to the building structure.



The contemporary addition is complementary to the historic façade yet thoughtfully differentiated in details, materiality and pattern. It is set back above the second level to feature the façade and show the redevelopment as continuing to grow in its existing modules. The large setback above the second and third level maintains a human scale street wall to activate retail services at the ground level.

Although Salient intends to be the long-term owner and operator of this property, a designation of this façade will ensure its distinguishing features are retained and maintained in their historic form for the life of the building, and that it cannot be demolished or altered without consent of City Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this application to designate the principal façade of 819-823 Fort as heritage. We look forward to working with City Staff and with the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust team to rehabilitate this historic façade.

Sincerely,

825 Fort Holdings Ltd. c/o The Salient Group

Robert Fung
President

cc: Merinda Conley, Senior Heritage Planner