
ARMITAGE ARCHITECT

1251 Victoria Avenue, Victoria, B.C. Canada, V8S 4P3

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The City of Victoria,
Sustainable Planning and Community Development,
Development Services Division,
1 Centennial Square,
Victoria, BC. V8W 1P6.

To: The Mayor and Council,

Re. 582 St. Charles Street, Lot 4, Section 68, Victoria City, Plan 26646.

Heritage Alteration Permit with Variance – Exterior Fire Escape Addition.


On behalf of the owner of this property, I wish to outline the history and rationale for this application.

In 2019, the owner of this property received a notice from the Fire Department requiring the reinstatement of an exterior fire escape from the third floor apartment that was included on building permit plans at the time of its 1983 conversion into five suites. The documentary record is elusive as a notation by a City official also records it as "not included". There is no "as-built" record and the property has seen several changes of ownership since that time.

An application for a Delegated Heritage Alteration Permit was submitted September 29, 2020 and was reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Panel and Senior Heritage Planner.

A Building Permit application was submitted December 2. During the Planning review, it came to light that a third floor balcony had been constructed without a building permit and is the subject of this request for a variance.

This property had received heritage designation in 2002 by which time any fire escape had been removed and the new balcony had been added, with no official commentary on its non-conforming status. No alterations to the property by subsequent owners appear to have been made since that time.

The proposed fire escape attaches to this balcony to permit a second exit from the suite via a door, rather than a window, as requested by the Fire Department. This door is located in the NW corner of the suite's living room and is a much safer exiting option than the bedroom window as proposed in the 1983 BP documents.

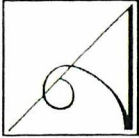
The existing balcony is approximately 2.0 x 3.4m or 6.8sm (73sf) with the door in the SE corner and the fire escape in the NW corner. For a properly designed exit, an "area of refuge," in the form of an expanded top landing, should be provided for persons with mobility difficulties. Taking these factors into account, if this balcony did not already exist, the new fire escape would still require a landing and exit route of about 60% of this area. And the visual impact from the exterior would be identical, with the same extent of guardrail visible.

The fire escape stair is designed to terminate at an area of refuge at second floor level as proposed in the 1983 BP documents. Therefore it will not impinge upon required parking or Fire Department manoeuvring areas at ground level.

The balcony and fire escape are located on the west side of the building and will not be visible from the front approach to the property. Viewed from the Government House grounds to the west, the balcony is set within the profile of the building mass. The stair presents as narrow a profile as possible that will blend with the mass of the building behind and will be screened by the original coach house to the west.

There are no known overlook issues with neighbouring properties. As noted above, the requirements for the new fire escape would essentially recreate the existing balcony configuration were it not already existent.

The design is in conformance with Section 3.4.7 of the B.C. Building Code using wood construction, with detailing and colour to match existing adjacent wood elements, and is in accordance with Parks Canada's *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*.



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This proposal is consistent with a number of objectives in the OCP, the Rockland Neighbourhood Design Guidelines and the 1987 Rockland Neighbourhood Plan from which they derive.

- "Encourage a diversity of...housing in consideration of the neighbourhood's heritage and estate character."
- "Continue to conserve the historic architectural and landscape character of the neighbourhood."
- It respects the traditional siting and orientation and will "not intrude upon views of (this) historic building from the street" and the traditional approach route.
- "Suites in converted houses are an established and important component...which should be conserved."

I trust you will find the proposed application to be a satisfactory resolution of life safety requirements and to be a respectful alteration that is consistent with the form and character of this heritage property within its established neighbourhood.

Respectfully submitted,

John Armitage, Architect AIBC, LEED-AP.