Mayor Helps and Victoria City Council

RE: SMALL LOT SUBDIVISION, REZONING AND DEVELOPMENT PERMIT FOR 202 RAYNOR AVE

To the Honourable Mayor and Council members,

The following letter is respectfully submitted to provide a design summary for the lot subdivision and rezoning required of 202 Raynor Ave in order to build a new house on Alston St. We will begin with an explanation of the design rationale for the subdivision of the lot and then describe the process that determined the location of the new building on the newly proposed lot. Finally, the summary will describe the process and decisions that governed the form and character of the proposed house.

The existing property is a corner lot, facing Raynor Ave, with a long side lot exposure on Alston St. It was determined that the existing lot could be divided such that a new lot facing Alston could be created that offered reasonable street frontage while maintaining the general character of the existing corner lot. Both lots will need to be rezoned as Restricted Small Lots.

It was determined that a new partitioning lot line could not be placed far enough to the south to prevent a rear-yard set back variance of the existing house, without reducing the new lot to an area below the allowable threshold. This variance is noted in the site plans and addressed in the Heritage Alteration Permit. The location of the new partitioning lot line - running east-west to create a new property to the south of the existing house - was subsequently placed in a location that allowed an existing rear yard patio to remain behind the existing house, while allowing enough space for off street parking between the new and existing buildings. The resulting lot line creates a street frontage of 17m along Alston and a reasonable balance between the new and existing house lot.

The new house is intended to be a small building, at only 128m2 over two stories (approximately 1400sf). It is also intended to meet passive house standards and be a net zero energy building. This requires its small size to be contained in an extremely efficient envelope, with careful consideration for solar orientation, shading and fenestration. A cubical form with south-facing roof overhangs met these requirements best. Variations and evolutions of this basic form were then developed from the local context, environment and interior floor plans.

The placement of the new building on the new lot was studied a great deal and several variations were considered. The results of our study revealed primary concerns of the new occupants and neighbours related to the yards and living spaces of the immediate neighbourhood. Creating a new building without crowding its neighbours became the primary objective. An immediate consideration was the effect of shading the sunny rear patio of the existing heritage house. Moving the new building far enough south to prevent shading the existing patio would crowd the neighbour to the south. It would also limit the solar gain required to meet Passive House standards in the new house.

Another equally compelling consideration was the neighbour to the west and the upper level balcony space that they enjoy. Moving the new building too far into the rear yard would place the home directly under the nose of the neighbours, restricting their views and creating privacy issues for the new occupants. The resulting placement of the new building on the new lot is based in part on finding suitable proximities to the neighbouring homes on the north, west and south boundaries. These considerations were discussed at length with the neighbours who took part in the CALUC meeting held in June of 2019.
The other important consideration was the intended use of the yard space surrounding the new house. To begin with, there were requirements for two off-street parking spots, one for each new lot. These were combined in the space between the buildings to reduce the impact on the street. This occupied the majority of the north yard and meant that the outdoor living space would be restricted to the rear yard and the southern side yard. In order to provide adequate living space in the rear yard, the building was pushed closer to the street. This created several synergies, while creating a variance requirement at the same time.

Moving the building closer to the street creates new eyes on the street, in a neighbourhood that could certain benefit from added design efforts to curb crime. It also opened the rear yard of the heritage house to the sunlight that the existing patio had long exploited. In addition to this, the neighbour to the west has more room to enjoy the views from their second story deck space and are a little further away from the windows of the new house.

The new house, as noted above, is designed to meet Passive House and net-zero energy criteria. The required control of solar gains meant that large south facing windows would be required to gain heat in the winter months, while overhangs would be needed to protect from overheating in the summer. Additionally, the need for south facing solar panels on the roof resulted in a primary roof face sloping to the south and extending about 1.5m over the south facade.

The street facing facade was developed to reference a few dominant forms of the buildings in the neighbourhood:

The neighbourhood is a mixed group of building forms and types, including a variety of ages and styles, as shown on DP-001.1. There were a few buildings in the neighbourhood that we felt demonstrated refined compositions, including some heritage buildings as well as few more modern examples.
Some of the more refined single family homes tended to have a massing that is about equal in height to width, but with a primary and secondary component to the facade.

The main entry is often set into the smaller massing, sometimes in the form of a porch. The entries are often accessed by a short flight of stairs that raised the main floor of the house about 1m above the street. In some cases the stairs are accessed directly from the sidewalk, and from a driveway or sideboard in other locations.

The front yards are manicured, but decorative and not functional outdoor spaces. They expose the foundation walls of the house, sometimes with small windows to a basement space.

The street facing facade of the new building will carry several of these themes forward. The facade is broken into major and minor elements by creating glass corner in contrast to the larger, more solid wall. The glass corner is similar in its massing to the neighbourhood front porches and also hosts the front door of the door. The front door is accessed from a porch that sits about 1m above the street and is accessed from stairs and a path from the parking area in the north side yard. The foundation walls below the principal cladding are increasingly exposed as they lead to a basement entry around the north side of the house.

It should be noted that while these features of several heritage homes were carried in the modern design, the building will not attempt to mimic heritage details or copy heritage forms verbatim. A point taken from the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places is that modern buildings should not attempt to replicate or mimic features of historic buildings.

The immediate site context has guided significant aspects of the house and landscape design. The existing house is situated atop a plateau as both Raynor Ave and Alston Street fall away to the north east. A large stone retaining wall was built in two steps to hold the grades. The lot subdivision requires two parking spaces to be accessed from the street, and as a means to maintain as much of the stone wall as possible, a single opening in the wall will be made. The parking spaces will require new retaining walls that will be tiered like the old stone ones and will tie into the existing walls at the north side. The white picket fence that sits atop the stone wall around the heritage house will be maintained and modified to follow the new stone wall around the parking spaces.

The yard in front of the new house will be planted over the original parking space and to facilitate the new grades the existing curb cut will be modified with a new stone wall that ties into the existing wall along Alston. The new front yard will be planted to complement the adjacent gardens along Alston.
The character of the neighbourhood is quite varied, as the homes in the area vary from turn of the century heritage buildings to 80’s and 90’s rental stock to brand new townhouse developments. Materials and colour palettes are similarly varied and include wood shakes, shiplap boards, a variety of stucco styles, vinyl siding, concrete block and cement fibre board. While the materials themselves offer no theme in particular, they are each placed on their buildings in a utilitarian way, with little in the way of decorative details. The exception are a few of the heritage homes that offer some of the typical details of their time period. The exterior trim and detailing that is most common in the area seems to be a use of wood, derived from the heritage trims, but executed in a simplistic and utilitarian fashion.

The treatment of the exterior cladding and trims on the proposed house will be similarly simple in colour and materials, and indeed utilitarian in purpose, however as a Passive House building, the utility will be an important part of an extremely high quality construction. The material of the facade is proposed to be a high quality fibre-cement material with hidden fasteners, like a Swisspearl product. This will be accented by cedar soffits and wood trim around the deep windows. Windows themselves will be Passive House certified vinyl windows, although there are options for fibreglass and aluminum clad options that are also Passive House certified. The cedar soffits will be mirrored on the patios below, which will be supported by smooth cast-in-place concrete foundations. Roof materials will be dark coloured standing seam metal, with accompanying flashings and roof gutters. These materials are similar to other newer buildings in the surrounding residential areas.

The new house will be a unique building. It will however carry many of the most useful design typologies of the homes in the area, and its character will be exemplified by the simple uses of high quality materials and construction details. Building to Passive House standards will also offer another demonstration of the quality buildings that our city must create to reduce our carbon footprint for the generations to come.

Sincerely,

Will King, Architect AIBC, MRAIC, LEEP AP