



December 23, 2020
City of Victoria
Mayor and Council
1 Centennial Hall
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

RE: Renovations and Addition to Victoria High School – Bylaw Variances

Dear Mayor and Council,

We are pleased to present to Council our proposed plans for the Victoria High School Seismic Renovation and Addition and to request approval of five variances to move this project forward. Our team has worked diligently over the last year to create a state-of-the-art, modern school while respecting this cherished heritage building in the heart of Fernwood. The work being carried out at Victoria High School will ensure it survives a major seismic event while preserving the school as both a pivotal institution of secondary education and a piece of built heritage.

Briefly, the variances required for this project are:

1. General Regulation 14(2)(b) - Relaxation to all the related lots for setbacks, site coverage, height and open site space requirements
2. General Regulation 19 - Relaxation to permit building over property line and onto closed street
3. Schedule C Section 2.2.1 - Relaxation to permit parking spaces on separate lots
4. Schedule C Section 1.2.1 – Relaxation of required parking from 283 to 149 spaces
5. R-2 Zone 2.1.4.C – Roof deck not permitted.

However, before discussing the variances required for this project, we would like to take the time to discuss the existing building, its historical context and significance, the necessity of the work we are proposing, and how the project will address concerns regarding these variances.

Project Background and Historic Significance

The original Victoria High School, designed by architect C. Elwood Watkins, was constructed between 1911 and 1914, as a replacement to an earlier school on another lot which was first established in 1876. In the book titled, *Come Give a Cheer! One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976*, by Peter L. Smith, it has been claimed that Vic High is, “not merely B.C.’s first secondary school” but also, the “oldest public high school west of the Great Lakes”. At the time of its construction, Vic High was considered a state-of-the-art school, “incorporating all the best elements of modern school buildings throughout North America.”

The purpose-built structure located in the Fernwood Neighborhood, is situated on a parcel of land facing Grant Street and Fernwood Road. The original building consisted of 29 classrooms, an auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria and other ancillary spaces. There have been two major additions and many

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smaller renovations and upgrades over the years, between 1950 and 2011. In the 1950's an arts wing and second gymnasium with two additional stair towers were added. In the 1970's, fire exits were updated and another set of exit stairs were added to improve exiting from the third and fourth floors. In 2011, the Fairey Tech addition was added to house the autobody, metal shops, wood shops and a concourse space. Currently, the exterior site consists of a running track, spectator bleachers, a student garden, tennis courts, parking lots and green space.

Heritage Value and Defining Characteristics

Vic High is a registered institutional heritage building with enormous heritage value, including aesthetic, historic and social values. The following are a small number of character-defining elements that describe the building.

- Primarily constructed of granite, brick masonry and glazed terra cotta units and detailing.
- A four storey, plus basement building, with an E-shaped massing and with light wells;
- Classical Revival Style: use of ionic orders, proportion, symmetry, repetition of architectural elements (such as windows and detailing), references to classical architecture.
- Original wood windows, pairs of nine-over-one single-hung, and half-moon shaped over-sized windows with star patterned muntin detailing over the east and west entrances.
- Original stained glass and leaded windows in the lightwell stairs and auditorium
- Stone and granite exterior stairs with exterior lighting
- Carved stone signage over the entrances
- Assembly Hall (auditorium) with many original furnishings and finishes
- Some of the original wood flooring is still remaining in some rooms.
- Marble and wood finishes in lobby vestibules and washrooms
- Plaster detailing in vestibules, lobby coffered ceilings, main corridor, and stairs.
- Vault doors and frame
- Steam engine and other historic machinery and artifacts
- Some original finishes throughout, such as ceramic tile, marble paneling, wood paneling, wood doors with and without transoms
- Slate Chalkboards and wood chalk trays.
- Many original built-in millwork pieces, work benches, furniture and display cases

Building Condition Assessments were completed by a variety of consultants over the years, and as part of the Project Definition Report (PDR) to secure funding for this project. The School needs significant deferred maintenance work to address its age and wear, in addition to the seismic, life safety upgrade, renovation and addition. The following is part of the scope of work:

- Areas of brick require significant repointing
- Terra cotta panels are crazed, cracked and broken, and require repair and replacement.
- The majority of its original wood windows are still intact however, they are over one hundred years old and in need of restoration and replacement to address failure, energy efficiency and user comfort.
- Hazardous materials have been identified throughout and will need to be removed.

- Underground services within the building for sanitary and stormwater are failing and require replacement

Other items within the building need to be addressed as part of the planned work for this project:

- Address significant shortfalls in the building's design to withstand a major seismic event
- Provide a fire suppression system (i.e. sprinklers) to most of the school (not including Fairey Tech wing which is already sprinklered).
- As the school is located over five floors, inclusivity and accessibility issues will be addressed, including a new elevator and inclusive washrooms on every level.
- The Fernwood neighbourhood is growing and the school will be expanded from its current 800 students to 1000.

New Addition Location Justification and Response to Heritage Character

Through public consultation, School District 61 explored both options to either upgrade the school or demolish, with full replacement. Community members and the PDR supported upgrade and retention of the existing school. A priority was to keep as much of the original exterior of the 1914 building intact while increasing the capacity of the school. It was determined the best way to do this was to provide a new addition with a library and multipurpose space to create more room within the existing building to be used as teaching spaces. The location which would provide the least intervention on the original building would be to expand where additions have already been made. At the north end of the school, starting with the 1950 addition, then the 2011 addition, the location of the new addition not only preserves the east, south and west elevations of the original school, which over the years has been unaltered, the majority of the new addition is located along the east elevation of the Fairey Tech building and low to the ground. This strategy adheres to the *Standard and Guidelines of Historic Places, recommendation to intervene in the gentlest way so as the essential form and integrity of the historic place kept intact.*

The neighborhood learning centre (NLC) and multipurpose rooms are the main school components comprising the addition and are roughly 2.3m lower than the existing ground level of the heritage school. In addition, a new entrance is provided off Fernwood Road under the learning commons and in between the heritage school and multipurpose spaces. The intent is to provide a more inclusive student and community entrance and relief from the traditional entry.

The materials chosen for the addition follow General Standard 11, of the *Standards and Guidelines of Historic Places, in that the new work is physically and visually compatible with, yet subordinate to, and distinguishable from the historic place.* The NLC will be clad in a fibre cement panel that uses a pattern inspired from the historic stained glass in the school. The colour selection for the fibre-cement paneling, is inspired by the traditional terra cotta paneling on the 1914 school. The multipurpose room will be clad in brick to complement, but not be identical to, the original school building. This is done to blend the mass of the new building with the heritage school and to counterbalance the learning commons above.

At the traditional main level (or technically the second level), of the original building, a new Learning Commons (Library) will be built that is orientated in line, but proud of, the original school. It's massing,

materials and fenestration patterns are muted to complement and not overpower the heritage building. The learning commons is designed to act as a lantern for the school and provide a soft glow in the evenings with its use of translucent and insulated glass. Using energy modeling and the best combination of glazing types (insulated, double pane and high-performance curtain wall system) was explored to ensure the expansive room remains energy efficient.

One aspect of the character-defining elements of the site is its prominent location in the neighborhood, therefore view lines of the heritage school have been preserved as much as possible and with only a few exceptions along Fernwood Road. The traditional south entrance of the school remains fully intact and the new addition will have little to no view impacts on the traditional entrance. In addition, there has been little to no impacts to views from the original building out towards the neighborhood.

New Stair Towers and Justification for Height

A significant portion of the required upgrades to Vic High relate to seismically upgrading it in the event of an earthquake. Throughout the interior of the school new concrete foundations with rock anchors, shear walls and drag struts will be installed at every level. A large element of the seismic shear system is the two new stair towers, located at the north west and north east ends of the school. This approach also allows four inefficient stairway networks to be demolished to accommodate for two new more efficient stair towers. The height of the new stair towers is necessary to allow the new drag struts at the attic level to be tied into it and secured as part of the overall seismic work. While these towers require a variance for height and number of storeys, they are lower than the heritage school and the overall height of the building does not change. Unfortunately, the height does encroach on the existing intact frieze element of the building; however, care has been taken to lessen this as much as possible.

Required Variances

We will now outline the variances requested for this building as the project is complicated by the existing school and addition being built on multiple residential lots. While initially it had been planned for these lots to be legally consolidated, this was not possible due to the current pandemic and its effects on the court system. Therefore, to ensure we can deliver this project on time, we have persevered by requesting the first four variances. They are:

1. General Regulation 14(2)(b) - Relaxation to all the related lots for setbacks, site coverage, height and open site space requirements
2. General Regulation 19 - Relaxation to permit building over property line and onto closed street
3. Schedule C Section 2.2.1 - Relaxation to permit parking spaces on separate lots

The first variance addresses the multiple lot situation of the project and deals with variances related to setbacks, site coverage, height and open site space. This variance request includes all required variances for the multiple single lots and the conditions in one application, so that specific numbers are no longer required.

The second variance deals with construction over property lines and onto the old Vining Street right-of-way which runs through the centre of the building site.

The third variance request addresses parking for the school and the multiple lots contained within the site. As the parking for the project cannot be provided on each of the small individual lots, it is being consolidated into several areas, keeping existing sports fields and green space intact. Parking spaces proposed will comply with minimal dimensional requirements set out in Schedule C, and that some of the existing spaces will be used for landscaping.

All the above variances are due to the separate lots. The only exception to this is building height and/or number of stories as it relates to the two new stair towers, which will be built to create better circulation in the school while forming major structural shear elements for the building.

The other variances required relates to the number of off-street parking stalls and proposed outdoor classroom on the roof of the new Learning Commons/Library. They are:

4. Schedule C Section 1.2.1 - Relaxation of required parking from 283 spaces to 149 Spaces
5. R-2 Zone 2.1.4.C – Roof deck not permitted.

The fourth variance addresses the current parking Schedule C, where school parking is calculated based on area vs. occupant load. With a full basement of primarily storage and service rooms, two full size gymnasiums, one large auditorium with balcony seating, a comprehensive technical education building and the planned addition of multipurpose rooms, learning commons/library, neighborhood learning centre, and a future daycare, the total area of the school requires far more parking than shown required through our attached parking study. It should be noted, had the current school been entirely replaced with a new building, its overall area would be roughly 2/3 the size and no parking variance needed to accommodate the same number of students. Fortunately, the community and school district have planned to keep the heritage building and its oversized area.

The school district, at the request of the city, also completed a parking study, which is attached as part of this application. It found that based on current and anticipated future use, the parking could be reduced to roughly 151 stalls. To support the further reduction of parking to the proposed 149, the school district will provide well over the required bicycle parking and shower facilities for staff and students. The school is also located with walking distance of several bus routes.

The final variance addresses the proposed outdoor classroom located off the third floor over the new learning commons. During consultation with staff and indigenous educators, we found the need to provide a safe and secure outdoor learning space to help facilitate the school curriculum. The incorporation of outdoor learning spaces is becoming more important in meeting the demands of teaching, particularly under the 21st century learning model adopted by BC Ministry of Education. One such program is indigenous education, which will have its classroom near the outdoor classroom, to be used for smudging, drumming and other activities. Another is the astronomy course that would appreciate a dark space to use in the evenings that is also safe and secure.

While learning about these programmatic requirements, an exciting opportunity presented itself to the design team for an outdoor classroom with the new addition being lower than the rest of the existing school and easy, accessible access off the third floor. The outdoor classroom will be a controlled space, booked and accessed only by teachers who will supervise students when occupying the rooftop. Due to building code requirements and staffing, the occupancy of the outdoor classroom will be limited to less than 60 people. It is situated well away from the property lines and any other building, especially residential buildings.

In Closing

We believe this letter should provide you with all information required to understand the project being undertaken at the school and plans for its future use. Included in the variance application are simplified floor plans, elevations, landscape and civil plans as well as the application form, drawing identifying internal lots, title certificates, site profile, the parking study which supports the revised parking count and arborist reports.

We hope, after reviewing our application and justifications for these variances, you will be as excited as we are to complete the addition to Vic High.

Sincerely,
HDR Architecture, Inc.

James (Jim) Mann *Architect AIBC*
Project Architect