



Mayor Helps and Council
City of Victoria
No.1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

30 November 2020

Re: Nicola Wealth/Denciti Development – Development Permit with Variances for 611 Chatham St/610 Herald St

Dear Mayor Helps and Council,

The DRA Land Use Committee met on site with the applicant's representatives to discuss this project and reviewed the drawings submitted to the City on 25 September for the proposed building. Based on the information shared by the applicant and contained in the drawings, we understand that the Development Permit proposal includes nine legal lots zoned Old Town District-1 and seeks to create a 274-unit market rental building with ground floor commercial space fronting Chatham, Government and Herald Streets. The drawings indicate the applicant is requesting a variance for height to allow for the construction of a fifth floor of residential accommodation in order to achieve the maximum permitted FSR for this site.

Comments and concerns raised by committee members are as follows:

- While the proposed density complies with the existing zoning, the building appears to require a significant height variance to accommodate the fifth storey. The rationale for the height variance is very concerning. The applicant is trying to make the case that with the implementation of Step Code 3, they are forced into requiring variances in order to accommodate mechanical infrastructure, etc. It should be pointed out that there are many ways that this requirement could be met and this is simply the approach that they have chosen. The current height allowance in Old Town is still valid while fulfilling the requirements of Step Code 3.
- The intent of the Old Town Design Guidelines is to promote buildings that are strongly contextual and respect the “densely built up, small scale, small lot character” and “not looking for monumental buildings”. The sheer size of this proposal with its extremely long, and repetitive facade is out of context with the typical rhythm of historic development in Old Town and particularly the Chinatown local area and is offside with the recently updated Old Town Design Guidelines.
- At minimum, articulation of the facade both horizontally and vertically and a change of glazing patterns and cladding materials should be noticeably distinct every 60 feet or so along the frontages to reduce the massiveness and monotony of this proposal. The horizontal frieze line between the first and second floors currently is proposed to be

ruler flat for the entire length of the façade that accentuates the building's length. Articulation of this feature by varying its elevation along the façade will de-accentuate and break up the massiveness of the proposed building.

- The colour scheme is also inappropriate for Chinatown as black (very dark gray) represents destruction, evil, cruelty, and sadness in Chinese culture (OTDG 5.58). The applicant is encouraged to explore colour alternatives that are more culturally appropriate. Variations of colour can be used to make the development read like several separate buildings on each street elevation.
- The use of solid colour brick masonry is to be commended as it is a high quality and durable cladding that respects the vernacular of Old Town. The use of large expanses of corrugated metal or any use of fibre cement board cannot be considered high quality (OTDG 5.51) and does not respect basic Old Town vernacular.
- Fully chamfered corners at Herald/Government and Chatham/Government would be more in keeping with the historic design and new construction in the immediate area and in Old Town generally.
- While the proposal feels generally well thought through, it is taking shortcuts in terms of presenting a well-articulated set of street-facing facades. There is minimal attempt to vary height using some parapets and a uniformity in wall and punched window design and dimensions. The use of corrugated metal facing, a shorthand for industrial chic, looks shabby here in these renderings.
- The DRA LUC remains concerned that amalgamation of properties into large parcels (especially in Old Town) will facilitate the construction of buildings that do not respect the neighbourhood context. These concerns were strongly expressed during an application in Chinatown of similar character and scale to this one (2017) and sparked a major update to the Old Town Design Guidelines in 2018 to address this issue (as well as others).

The DRA LUC encourages Council to fully support the City of Victoria's Old Town Design Guidelines and requests this proposal be reconfigured so that it is not at odds with the historic architectural rhythm that makes Chinatown a National Historic Site. In our opinion, it is not compliant with existing policy nor would it be in the public interest for this application to be approved in its current form.

We would like to note, that while the applicant is not required by statute to consult with the CALUC in this particular situation, the DRA LUC appreciates that the applicant made the effort to approach and consult with members of our association.

Sincerely,



Ian Sutherland
Chair Land Use Committee
Downtown Residents Association

cc COV Planning