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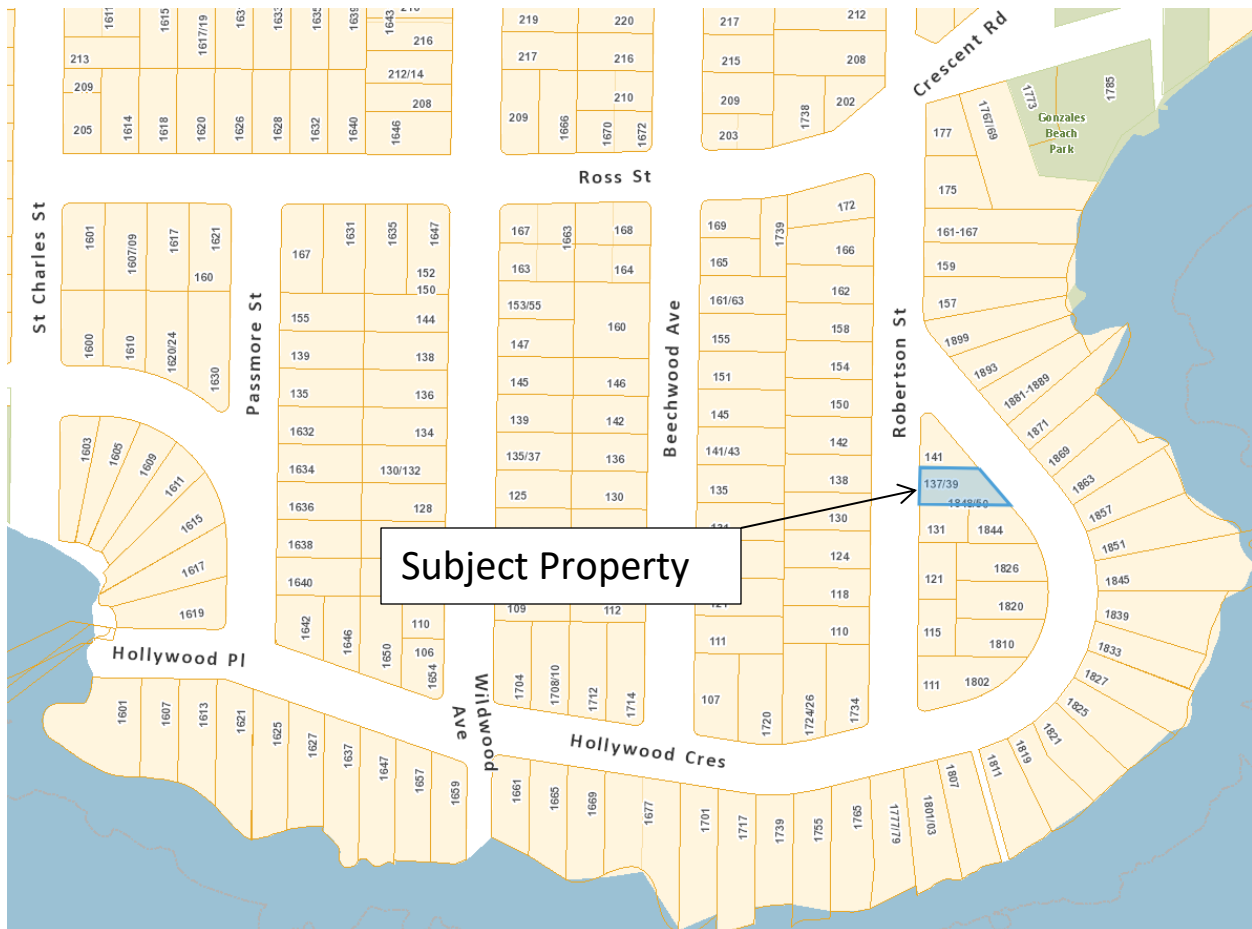
Planning and Zoning Department
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, B.C. V8W 1P6

2021 May 18

Re: Rezoning and Development Proposal Letter to Mayor and Council
137/139 Robertson Street and 1848/1850 Hollywood Crescent

Mayor and Council Members, City of Victoria:

I am pleased to submit this revised application to rezone the subject property, located in the Fairfield-Gonzales neighbourhood, just south of where Hollywood Crescent merges into Robertson Street, in the region of Gonzales Beach.



Subject Property location at 137/139 Robertson Street and 1848/1850 Hollywood Crescent

Project Overview

The subject property today is zoned R1-G with a lot area of approximately 447sqm. City records indicate this property has been a legal, non-conforming 4-plex since 1968. Prior to that, it had been a legal non-conforming 3-plex since the 1930's. The current owner purchased the property in May of 2015, and since then it is been operated continuously as a 4-plex under City of Victoria Business License Account Number 1031929.

The intention in rezoning this property is to retain the current 4-unit use in the form of a Front/Back Duplex, with each half-duplex unit including a suite with separate entrance. The proposed strata agreement will specifically allow long-term rentals of any of the units so as to promote rental options consistent with the Landlord-Tenant Act. Short-term vacation rentals will be prohibited in the strata agreement. The intent is to secure at least two (and up to four) units of rental housing in perpetuity.

This proposal requires the demolition of the existing building. The new structure will have improved siting, better streetscape harmony, conformance to modern building codes, reduced environmental footprint, and parking that conforms to current traffic regulations while maintaining similar site coverage, total floor area, floor space ratio, and open site space to what exists today.

Although very similar in site coverage, the proposed design provides different suite configurations that allow more options for family and occupancy configurations.

The configuration changes are summarized in the table below:

Unit Number / Address	Existing Configuration	Proposed Configuration
1 / 1848 Hollywood Crescent	1 bedroom, 1 bathroom	1 bedroom, 1 bathroom, secondary suite
2 / 139 Robertson Street	1 bedroom, 1 bathroom	2 bedroom, 1 bathroom, secondary suite
3 / 1850 Hollywood Crescent	1 bedroom, 1 bathroom	2 bedroom, 2-1/2 bathroom, primary residence
4 / 137 Robertson Street	1 bedroom, 1 bathroom	2 bedroom, 2-1/2 bathroom, primary residence

Background

The existing building is a two-storey structure with living space of about 130 sqm per floor. The units on the lower floor are slightly below grade, while the units on the upper floor are accessed by way of three exterior stair cases. The building is approximately 100 years old and is in fair to poor condition. None of the addresses appear in the City's Heritage Registry.

The applicant purchased the property in 2015 with the intention of renovating each of its apartments in turn to bring them into compliance with current building codes, and to continue renting its four suites indefinitely. However, discussions with staff at the City of Victoria Planning Department, experienced contractors, and designers led to the conclusion that renovations in-situ would be unviable, owing in part to the building's location very near the South property line, and to the challenges bringing this failing century-old structure into compliance with current building, fire, plumbing, and electrical codes.

Zebra Group was retained in late 2015 to assist with design and re-development of the property. Several configurations have been considered since that time. Community feedback from neighbours has been solicited through numerous visits and three formal CALUC meetings. The proposed design accompanying this submission incorporates feedback received from those sessions and from the City of Victoria Planning Department. The over-arching intention is to retain the existing approved use of the site as a 4-plex, and to provide additional options for different family configurations while minimizing adverse influences on adjoining properties and preserving neighbourhood form and character. This proposed design provides four separate well-designed living spaces in a traditional Italianate design.

Tenancies

There are four tenancies at present, summarized in the table below:

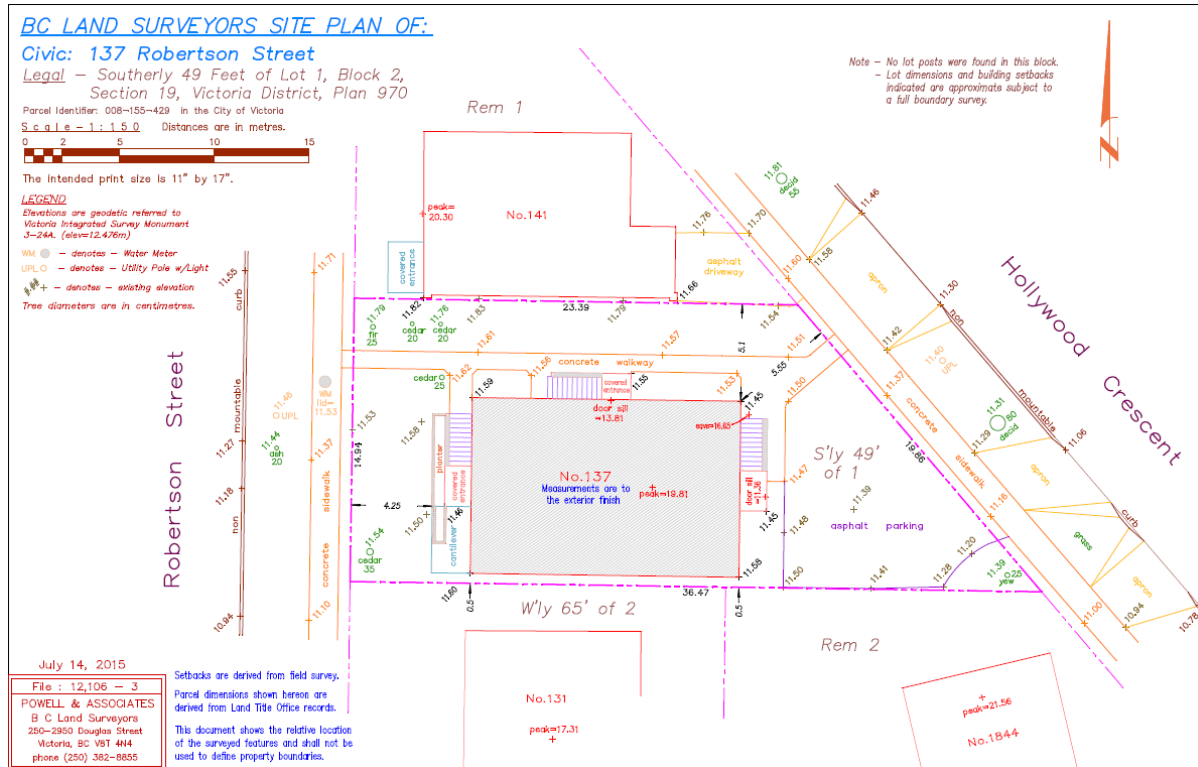
Unit Number / Address	Tenancy Details
1 / 1848 Hollywood Crescent	Tenancy of approximately 20 yrs
2 / 139 Robertson Street	Tenancy of approximately 10 yrs
3 / 1850 Hollywood Crescent	Tenancy of approximately 23 yrs
4 / 137 Robertson Street	Tenancy began May 1 2021, re-development plans disclosed fully

Three of the tenants have lived at this address for more than ten years, two for more than 20 years. Rents for these suites are at approximately half of current market rates and have not been raised since 2016. The unit at 137 Robertson was re-rented in May 2021 with the understanding that the tenancy may be short term due to the owner's intention to re-develop the property.

All of the tenants have been kept informed of the progress of this application and have either made arrangements for other accommodations already or will be finding other accommodations in due course. This rezoning application includes a Tenant Assistance Plan that meets or exceeds the minimum standards set forth by the City of Victoria.

Project Benefits

This property is particularly appropriate for re-development and well-suited to opportunities for gentle densification in several unusual and interesting ways. These are best understood with reference to the current site survey plan, shown below.



Site Survey Plan – Existing

The salient features of the property which led to the proposed design include the following:

It has frontages on two primary streets

The frontages are 14.94m on Robertson Street and 19.86m on Hollywood Crescent, with Hollywood deemed the front of the lot for development purposes. This unusual dual-frontage feature offers the opportunity to remediate current parking and access non-conformances by providing options for parking aprons on both streets, rather than via two aprons on one street, as is the case today. In addition to meeting Traffic Bylaw requirements, the proposed design minimizes driveway site coverage on the property and reduces the number of vehicles accessing the property from the busier Hollywood Crescent side, with no net decrease in the number of street parking spaces available. There are very few sites in Victoria - and none in the local area South of Ross Street - which provide this dual-street frontage.

The existing structure is improperly sited

The current building is situated well within the south side-yard setback and appears unbalanced with respect to the lot from both street frontages. This non-conformance makes it practically impossible to renovate in accordance with current fire code standards due to requirements for non-combustible surfaces and unprotected openings in proximity to adjacent lot lines.

The lot offers interesting design opportunities

The proposed building takes advantage of the trapezoidal lot shape by providing articulated elevations towards both streets, lending a sense of visual relief to passers-by and off-street side-yard parking locations that are less obtrusive than the current front-yard lot on Hollywood Crescent. The structure's footprint and street-facing elevations harmonize both streetscapes by connecting the frontages and massing to each of the three neighbouring houses. Judicious design of entrances, verandahs, and fenestration establishes a better sense of connection between the building and the sidewalks, boulevards, and streets it faces.

Both frontages feature a single primary entrance. Entrances to the two lower suites are hidden so as to create the appearance from both frontages that the building is a single-family home, consistent with the other homes nearby. Each suite is configured with fenestration on three sides, all with south-facing exposure. Excavated patios on the East and West frontages provide personal space for ground-floor occupants and improves privacy for all residents of the property and for the two neighbouring properties at the South lot line. Five of the seven bedrooms are located on the North side of the building to maximize interior darkness and minimize noise to the house on the North property line, the building nearest to and most affected by the proposed construction.

The existing structure is at end-of-life

Several renovations and re-configurations of the existing building took place over the decades, but very little maintenance has been performed on the house in the last 50 years: the most recent plumbing and electrical permits in City files are dated May and July of 1968, when the 4-plex use was permitted. There is evidence of chronic neglect over the decades since, with the antiquated plumbing, heating, and electrical systems failing and in frequent need of repair. These systems cannot be brought into compliance with modern building, electrical, or plumbing codes; complete replacement would be required. Further, the lower-level suites have uneven floors and ceilings, some of which do not meet current minimum height requirements for living spaces.

The 4-plex use is legal and long-standing

City records show that the site's present use as a 4-plex has been in effect for over half a century, with each of the four existing 1-bedroom suites serviced by a separate hydro meter. There is no additional density being requested in this proposal; rather, the proposed re-zoning will maintain the same number of units while ensuring that at least two units remain in the long-term rental pool. The primary units feature additional bedrooms and bathrooms to accommodate more diverse family and living arrangements than can be supported at present.

Siting Considerations

The design, massing, and footprint were chosen and developed carefully to improve harmony and flow in the two streetscapes, minimize adverse impacts on adjoining properties, preserve the legal 4-unit use in a duplex configuration, all while retaining similar site coverage and open site space to the existing structure.

Front Setback (Hollywood Crescent)

The trapezoidal shape of the lot inspired the articulation of the front elevations, resulting in a distance of nearly 4m to the building/verandah frontage, a setback of 3.22m to the front-most landing extension, significantly greater than either of the two neighbouring buildings (0.83m and 1.74m to the building faces at 141 Robertson 1844 Hollywood respectively).

Rear Setback (Robertson Street)

The articulation of the front elevation is echoed at the rear elevation facing Robertson Street, such that the building setbacks of 3.68m at the North side and 6.12m at the South side are nearly identical to the neighbouring buildings (3.7m and 6.1m to 141 and 131 Robertson Street respectively). The proposed setback of 3.22m allows for a small projection to the verandah that adds weather protection for the bedroom windows below.

Side Yard Setbacks

The current side yard setbacks are 0.5m on the South and 3.76m on the North. The proposed design provides setbacks of 2.63m on the South side and 3.01m on the North side, meaning the proposed individual and combined side yard setbacks conform to R1-G bylaw requirements.

Number of Storeys and OCP Amendment

The proposed design has three storeys. The most recent CALUC meeting contemplated the wider notification area as required in an OCP amendment application, and the three-storey configuration was presented and discussed. It should be noted that neither of the two neighbouring houses facing Hollywood Crescent conform to the two-storey limit: 1844 Hollywood Crescent is a three-storey structure, and 141 Robertson Street is a 2.5-storey structure. Both have higher peak and mean elevations than the building proposed in this application, and both are built on lots that are considerably smaller than that of the subject property.

Building Height

The proposed structure is lower in height than the mid-slope heights of both neighbours facing Hollywood Crescent (2-1/2 storey at 141 Robertson Street and 3-storey at 1844 Hollywood Crescent). The height at the North-East corner of the building in particular was minimized by design to preserve maximum sunlight and views for the neighbours to the North. The building height at this corner would be lower than the 7.6m R1-G requirement if the patios on the two street frontages were removed. With the patios, it is at 8.03m above finished grade.

Site Coverage and Open Site Space

The proposed site coverage of 38.5%, is only slightly greater than the 36% of the existing building. The Open Site Space, however, is much greater in the proposed design (50.6% as opposed to 44.6%) due in large part to the reconfiguration of parking and judicious use of verandahs. The open site space proposed meets both R1-G and R-2 zoning requirements, and the site coverage meets R-2 requirements.

Total Floor Area and Floor Space Ratio

The Total Floor Area is calculated as the area of the upper two floors in the proposed design, and at 267sqm it is less than 2.5% greater than the 260.7sqm of the existing building. Similarly, the proposed FSR of 59.7% is slightly higher than the existing 58%. Although neither meets R1-G zoning requirements, both meet those of the R-2 zone.

Fenestration

Window size, type, and location were chosen carefully to maximize interior light and minimize privacy concerns with neighbouring houses. Primary fenestration in each suite is street-facing, designed in concert with verandahs and entrances to promote connection to the streetscapes. North- and South-facing windows are sized and located to ensure there are no direct sight lines into any of the windows extant in the adjoining houses on either side of the property. A window overlay schematic has been prepared and submitted with this application for reference.

Trees and Landscaping

Two bylaw-protected trees will need to be removed to accommodate the proposed development. The most significant of these is a fir tree located near the North-West corner of the property. This tree is not well-located at present, being approximately 1.2m from the North property line and adjoining house, and less than 1m from the West property line, encroaching severely on the Robertson Street sidewalk and the entrance walkway. The other protected tree is more of a shrub, a lone-standing pyramidal cedar normally used for hedging, located approximately 3m from both the West and North property lines. This cedar is only slightly over the bylaw-protected size.

The most significant tree on the property is the large Yellow Cedar near the South-West corner. The existing house covers a large portion of the East side of the tree's critical root zone, and most of that area will be covered with permeable pavers under this proposal, with minimal intrusion into the outer critical root zone for the new patio area. The Robertson-side suite entrance was located on the South side of the building to minimize excavation near the critical root zone of this tree.

The existing yew tree at the South East corner of the property will be retained. All proposed construction in proximity to the Mountain Ash tree located on the neighbour's side of the South property line is further away from the tree than the existing building is.

One new tree will be planted near the centre line of the property on the Robertson side, and three new trees will be planted on the Hollywood frontage to promote privacy, resulting in a net gain of two trees on the property. Details of these new trees and a full list of shrubs and landscape design is provided in the Arborist Report and the Landscape Plan included in this submission.

Summary

The Proposal is to rezone the subject property from its existing legal, non-conforming 4-plex use in the R1-G zone to a site-specific zone that supports a duplex. Each half of the duplex consists of a primary residence and a secondary ground-floor suite with separate access. A classic Italianate design was selected with particular attention paid to the harmony of the building with the adjoining properties on the two streetscapes, in terms of height, massing, and setbacks. The proposed site coverage, total floor area, floor space ratio, and open space ratios are all within a few percent of those extant on the property today.

The proposal calls for the replacement of an improperly-sited building (with outdated electrical and plumbing systems, foundations, and structural features that cannot be brought into conformance with current building codes), with a new building and configuration. The design is sensitive to neighbourhood character and it retains the same number of residential suites with more family living and long-term rental options. The design includes new siting and parking locations that conform to traffic regulations and are more in keeping with the neighbourhood.

There is no additional density being sought from what is permitted currently according to City records. Rather, the proposed duplex-with-suites design will ensure at least two suites remain in the long-term rental pool and will remediate the current parking configuration which does not meet traffic regulations. The proposed building will necessarily be in compliance with current building and environmental standards.

Over the past five years we have worked hard to revise and refine our application to incorporate feedback from neighbours and City staff, and to maintain a harmonious and consistent presence on both street frontages. We respectfully submit the enclosed design package for consideration.

If additional information or comparisons regarding the previous applications are desired, please let us know as we would be happy to provide that.

Sincerely,

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