



STRONGITHARM CONSULTING LTD.

December 2, 2021

Mayor and Council
#1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC.

225 Russell Street - Rezoning Application, OCP Amendment, Development Permit with Variance Application

Dear Mayor and Council;

Introduction

The purpose of the application is to renovate and convert the existing warehouse and annex building located at 225 Russell Street into 40 self-contained permanent supportive residential homes.

This application is being made on behalf of BC Housing requesting:

1. An amendment to the OCP designation of the subject property from "Employment Residential" to "Urban Residential";
2. Rezoning the subject property from M-1 Limited Light Industrial to a site specific zone to accommodate the proposed use and building; and,
3. Development Permit with Variance for reduced vehicle parking from 8 to 6 stalls.

BC Housing and Our Place Society are currently operating the site as a temporary shelter with 50 beds for people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. A commitment was made at the outset that after approximately 18 to 24 months, the building would be renovated and converted into 40-units of supportive housing for people experiencing, or who are at risk of homelessness.

This application for rezoning is the first implementation phase of the above mentioned commitment and will set the stage to allow the buildings to be sensitively renovated into permanent housing for community members in need.

All units will have a bathroom, kitchen and provide housing with a "person-centered" approach to help people experiencing homelessness thrive. The proposed permanent housing will have staff on-site 24/7 to provide essential support, such as life skills training, wellness checks and other health and skill development programs.

The Supportive Housing Model

At least 1,500 people in the Capital Region experience homelessness based on a March 2020 homeless count. Since March of 2020, much progress has been made in addressing the issue of homelessness, but much more still needs to be done. Supportive Housing is a proven strategy to reduce the cycle of homelessness by providing 24/7 access to staffing and support services on site. In addition, it provides the platform for members of our community who currently are or have previously experienced difficult times to access health and life skill training so that in the future they can live independently and re-engage fully with the community.

Land-Use

The site is located a half block from Esquimalt Road and is conveniently 1.5 km from Downtown Victoria. Historically, the neighbourhood has been an eclectic mix of residential and light industrial uses. Immediately across the street from the subject property is land designated in the Official Community Plan as "Urban Residential". Lands on the same side of the street and to the south of the subject property are designated "Traditional Residential". 225 Russell Street and properties to the north and east are currently designated as "Employment Residential", recognizing the historic uses in the neighbourhood for light industrial along side a residential community.

The "Employment Residential" land use designation supports residential uses above the first floor. Due to the circumstances of the proposed renovations to the building, it is not realistic nor feasible to accomplish this. We have taken the approach of adapting and reusing the existing two-storey building to architecturally maintain the scale and its light-industrial legacy. It is further noted that immediately across the street are multiple residential buildings consisting of residential units on the all floors and adjacent to the south of the proposed site are detached residential homes with residential uses also occupying all floors. The proposed use and occupancy of the proposed building is a natural transition and fit into the neighbourhood.

Building Design and Architecture

We are very excited and pleased with the proposed design solution. As noted above, the property is located in the Victoria West Neighbourhood which has a long history of change and transition that can be seen in the mix of light industrial, multi-family residential, and single family housing in the surrounding community. We propose to renovate the current two-storey warehouse building as well as the three-storey front annex building for staff to offer programming and two floors of residential units through the adaptive reuse of the existing structures.

The existing structures consist of a pre-engineered warehouse that reflects the light industrial history of the area and a more contemporary three-storey annex building for commercial use. Both existing structures are at the end of their current useful life, but retain "good bones" and offer flexibility for future development through efficient and sustainable reuse.

The proposed development will maintain the existing form and structure of both the warehouse and the annex building, preserving the current relationships of height and massing with the neighbouring buildings. The roof will be removed from the warehouse leaving the supporting steel structure and large spanning trusses intact and expressed as a visible open framework.

The existing exterior walls will also be preserved as an enclosure, functioning similarly to a garden wall along the perimeter of the site. Portions of the west wall, facing Russell Street, will be stripped back, similar to the roof, exposing the underlying steel structure and allowing additional light and air into the inner courtyard. A two-storey residential building will be constructed within this courtyard enclosure with the new roofline matching closely to the original building. The current annex building will be fully refurbished and renovated to meet the administrative and amenity requirements of the resident population.

The parking lot of the existing warehouse building is currently dominated by hard-scape surfaces. We propose to reduce the amount of hard-scape surfaces with extensive landscaping which include a planted buffer running almost the full length of the Russell Street property line. The landscaping, which includes trees, shrubs and climbing vines will preserve privacy into and out of the site and provide meaningful noise mitigation for all community members. The landscaping will continue into the internal courtyard area with trees and native plants introduced into the outdoor space surrounding the residential building, enhancing the relationship with nature and providing further privacy and noise mitigation screening for the residents and neighbourhood.

The table below provides overall information on the proposed building renovation, which can also be found on the submitted plans.

	Existing Zoning	Proposed
Zoning	M-1 Limited Light Industrial	Site Specific Zone
Site Area	1,337 m ²	1,337m ²
Site Coverage	N/A	57.5%
Open Space	N/A	11.0%
Principal Building Height	15m	9.5m
Number of Storeys	2 (warehouse) and 3 (annex)	3
Floor Space Ratio (FSR)	3.0	0.75:1
Number of Dwellings	N/A	40
Unit Type Breakdown	N/A	40 Studio Units

	Existing Zoning	Proposed
Minimum Floor Area	N/A	14m ²
Total Residential Floor Area	N/A	733m ²
Vehicle Parking Stalls	N/A	6 onsite parking stalls
Bicycle Parking Stalls	N/A	10 long-term stalls, 6 short term stalls

Parking Variance

A parking variance is requested to reduce the required number of parking stalls from 8 stalls to 6 stalls. While full parking requirements can be accommodated on site, an analysis of similar facilities indicates that 6 stalls will more than serve the needs of the proposed use of the building. By reducing the required number of stalls, it allows for the installation of more robust landscaping and will create spaces within the site that will better serve the residents. A parking assessment by consulting traffic engineers was also conducted to verify the applicant’s assessments.

Community Engagement

BC Housing has engaged the community at various points throughout the development process. Initially, BC Housing reached out to neighbourhood associations, local businesses, neighbourhood partners and residents of the community. An information session was held in April 2021 where the public had an opportunity to learn more about the project and Our Place Society who operate the shelter in the short term.

Ahead of this submission, a Community Information Session was held on July 8, 2021. During this presentation, community members had the opportunity to view renderings, design elements, and ask questions related to the design of the building. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this session took place virtually. That session helped inform the design and changes that have been made, in particular to the landscaping.

A further neighbourhood meeting was held with the Neighbourhood Association Land-Use Committee on Thursday August 19. We again heard very favourable comments about the design but were met with concerns regarding providing mitigation measure to reduce and limit noise.

The CALUC process produced approximately twenty responses. Specific concerns and questions raised have been individually responded to. A common concern has been the potential for noise coming from the site. In response, a great deal of attention has been paid to the site planning and robust landscaping to address and mitigate noise concerns.

A website for the proposal has been set up and information as received is uploaded to the site. A commitment has been made to continue to reach out and receive feedback from the neighbourhood.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to describe this much needed project to you. An earnest and innovative attempt has been made to arrive at a design solution that is functionally well-suited for the residents, is sympathetic architecturally to its surrounding, provides significant landscaping and amenity areas and making every effort to address comments received from the neighbours. The proposed supportive housing project is an important development that will help work towards solutions for housing our community members who are most in need.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deane Strongitharm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Deane Strongitharm, MCIP, RPP

cc. BC Housing, Jose Wong
Lintott and Associates, Justin Gammon
Department of Sustainable Planning and Community Development, Karen Hoese

Attch. Architectural Plans
Landscape Plans
Civil Engineering Plans
Rezoning Application Form
Letter of Authorization from BC Housing
Land Title for 225 Russell St.
Development Permit with Variance Application
Hazmat Report 225 Russell Street
HazMat Lab Results
WATT Proposal 225 Russell Street
ESA Stage 1 PSI & Stage 2 PSI