



City of Victoria
Sustainable Planning and Community Development
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC

Attention: Alec Johnston, Senior Planner – Development Services
Email: ajohnston@victoria.ca

RE: Development Permit with Application No. 00158 for 1042 Richardson Street

In response to our attendance at Advisory Design Panel on September 22, 2021, please accept our revised application for Rezoning and Development Permit for the above noted address. Our resubmission includes a digital drawing file plus hard copies as required. Specifically, we note the following refinements in response to key areas of concern articulated in the Panel's motion as noted in italics:

The architectural expression, particularly the stair tower has a more institutional than a residential expression as outlined in the guidelines.

The street facing stair tower has been revised to reduce the amount of glazing from a curtainwall to a punched window consistent with a residential expression in traditional architecture, while retaining visibility and the “irresistible stair” character that encourages tenant use. The height of the stair along the frontage has been reduced, sloped to follow the stair run below and resulting in an overall reduction in the prominence of this element at the street. Additional vertical green-screening has been added to the Richardson frontage to further break down the street massing and softening the stair tower.

Re-examination of the materiality particularly regarding the exterior cladding

Exterior cladding products proposed have been clarified, reflecting a layup consistent with the material reference included in the original submission, and breaking the mass wall into a more textured and scaled down expression.

More broadly, we were disappointed by the outcome and the specific lack of inclusion in the Panel's formal motion, the merits of the application's progressive and innovative approach to infill housing in our community; arguably, the most critical role of such an advisory body. It is notable that during the discussion there was an expressed general acceptance of the building's height (noted in staff's report as a concern), and that the design intent (rental, family oriented, higher density) and overarching philosophical approach to infill housing (alternative transportation amplified) was recognized and appreciated. The Panel elected to attribute their unanimous decline of approval to policy attributes, a safe stance that reinforces Planning Staff's own assessment, and fails to frame the application in the broader context of this site and systemic social, environmental, and financial considerations as they emerge in form and the evolution of the City.

Their motion reinforces that density sought through the City's own policy initiatives is only obtainable through property consolidation and biases form to consistent cookie cutter extrusions balancing open space and site coverage through allowance of height, while simultaneously seeking to mitigate increases in mass through guidelines that necessitate breaking down massing for better fit. The application as presented, and modified to address design considerations, realizes density as an incremental infill development, expressing a form that manifests objectives beyond managing mass.

We submit that the sensitive and collaborative design process on this project transformed what could have been a typical multi-unit infill, into a rental dwelling that responds to biodiversity, climate adaptation, and social/cultural equity. It provides an opportunity for those who do not want or cannot afford low density accommodation, and it does so without relegating those individuals (often marginalized) to less desirable locations, suburbia, or neighbourhoods where transportation and accessibility become problematic. The project's density and walking proximity to amenities such as shopping, schools, health clinics, and restaurants, creates desirable living opportunities where vehicles are not required (in fact they are discouraged) and supports investment in much needed, good quality and affordable rentals instead of parking spaces. The landscape design works hand in hand with the architecture, and provides stormwater management, habitat, biodiversity, climate comfort, and on-site proximity to nature without being excessively expensive to install or maintain (costly maintenance being a failure of some initially beautiful projects). The architecture and landscape focus on the collective health and wellbeing of the new residents and in doing so contribute to the health and wellbeing of the neighbourhood.

Interestingly, in September 2021 Carlton University hosted a 2-day workshop on *Equitable Cities for Healthy People and Nature*, for a diverse range of academics and professionals. By the end of the workshop it was clear that density and open space are perceived differently by different cultures (open space can be terrifying, and density can be comforting and feel safe) and that understanding the synergies and trade-offs between people of different backgrounds, and urban space and dwelling, is poorly understood and rarely responded to in planning policies. A sound argument was made for considering the needs of the residents, and nature, before pre-determined 'form and function'. The need for new approaches to planning is widely discussed among researchers and scholars – the argument coming out of the workshop isn't new – but it serves as a reminder that the Victoria region is looking for new and forward-thinking solutions to wicked housing problems yet assesses creative solutions using old and unaligned criteria.

On the merits of the underlying thesis combined with response to feedback received from City Staff and Advisory Design Panel, we request that the application be forwarded to Council for their consideration. This project is not perfect in form, but courageous in aspiration.

Kind regards,



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