



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of September 29, 2022

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** September 15, 2022
From: Karen Hoes, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development
Subject: Heritage Designation Application No. 000201 for 579 Johnson Street

RECOMMENDATION

That Council, subject to approval of Heritage Alteration Permit No. 00248:

1. Approves the designation of the property located at 579 Johnson Street, specifically the original 1888 exterior of the historic building described in the attached Statement of Significance, pursuant to Section 611 of the *Local Government Act*, as a Municipal Heritage Site, and that first and second reading of the Heritage Designation Bylaw be considered by Council.
2. Direct staff to amend the City of Victoria's Heritage Registry, to remove the Shotbolt Building at 585-587 Johnson Street from the list.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

In accordance with Section 611 of the *Local Government Act*, Council may designate real property, in whole or in part, as protected property.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with information, analysis, and recommendations regarding an owner request to designate the 1888 exterior of the property located at 579 Johnson Street, also known as the W.G. Cameron building. The commercial building was built in 1888 and contributes to the historic character of Lower Johnson Street.

The designation of this building is generally consistent with Section 8: "Placemaking: Urban Design and Heritage" of the *Official Community Plan, 2012* (OCP), with Section 8, "Heritage" of the *Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan* (2017) and with the *Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework*.

The application was reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Panel at its July 12th, 2022, meeting and it recommended that Council consider approving the Heritage Designation Application No. 000201 for the property located at 579 Johnson Street.

In addition to the heritage designation of 579 Johnson, the adjacent property at 585-587 Johnson Street, which is currently on the heritage register, is proposed to be demolished pending the approval of the concurrent Heritage Alteration Permit No. 00248. This proposal was

reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Panel in a pre-application meeting on December 8th, 2020, and the proposal to replace the Shotbolt building with new development, instead of restoring the building, was noted as reasonable given the loss of the heritage fabric from previous interventions. Therefore, this report recommends that Council direct staff to remove the property at 585-587 Johnson Street from the heritage register.

BACKGROUND

Description of Proposal

The property located at 579 Johnson Street, also referred to as the W.G. Cameron Building, was built in 1888. It is a commercial building with retail on both the first and second storeys. The exterior façade of 579 Johnson Street has maintained much of its original appearance.

The building's character-defining elements include:

- modest scale and two-storey form
- sense of cohesiveness with other historic buildings along the south side of Johnson Street
- relatively intact storefront, featuring such elements as cast-iron columns and detailing
- large windows with transoms, which allow for a well-lit interior
- intact and decorative façade detailing, including incised scrolled ornamentation and the "W.G. Cameron" name plate, the prominent cornice, and the arch above the two central windows
- upper storey double-hung wooden-sash windows
- integrity of the building envelope, which identifies it as a nineteenth-century commercial building
- location on an alleyway, which allows for windows on the east façade
- contribution of the exterior brick walls to the Klondike-era courtyard at the rear.

The applicant has voluntarily offered heritage designation of the W. G. Cameron buildings and has waived any right to compensation in relation to the designation of this property.

The Shotbolt Chemist Building is located on the adjacent lot at 585-587 Johnson Street and was built in 1876. Over the years it has been significantly modified, with the upper storey completely removed and the wood storefront assembly replaced. Due to the many changes most of the original character of the building has vanished, a restoration is not realistic given the minimal surviving historic material and development potential that would be sacrificed to achieve it. Therefore, it is proposed that the Shotbolt building will be demolished as part of the overall redevelopment. It should be noted however, that the owner plans to salvage existing bricks to be reused in the alley and the original columns are to be reused in their original location in the front façade of the new development. The Klondike courtyard at the rear will be retained and the new development will incorporate this character-defining element into the design of the infill project.

Description of the Historic Place

The W.G. Cameron Building

The following is a description of the W.G. Cameron Building from the statement of significance:

“Constructed in 1888 by architects Fisher and Wilson, this commercial building is valued for its retention of elements which made it one of the most modern and functional buildings in the city at the time of its construction: an attractive street presence, and well-lit interior spaces. Situated next to an alleyway and with a Klondike-era courtyard at rear, it is of value to the commercial core of Victoria’s downtown because it helps to retain and define the infrastructure that supported the period of significant development and growth which occurred during the latter years of the nineteenth century as the City became the economic hub of British Columbia. The practical and appealing design of this building is a valuable reflection on the enterprising success of its first owner, Californian W. G. Cameron, who operated his “Mechanic’s Cash Clothing Store” here until 1911, and went on to become a City alderman, Land Commissioner, and a local MP.”



Front elevation of W.G. Cameron building facing Johnson Street and rear of building facing the courtyard.

The Shotbolt Chemist Building

The one-storey remnant of the formerly two-storey Shotbolt Chemist building does not have a statement of significance. It was designed by architect John Teague and constructed in 1876. It is named after Thomas Shotbolt, Victoria’s first dispensing chemist. The building housed his pharmacy from 1876 until its closure in 1957. The façade was extensively remodeled in 1887/1889 and in the decades after 1957 when the pharmacy closed, the upper storey was completely removed, and the wood storefront assembly replaced. Portions of the masonry sidewall survive, but most of the original character of the building has vanished. At the rear of the building is a two-storey fireproof warehouse with cast iron rolling shutters. The warehouse was used for storing pharmaceutical supplies.



Front elevation on the left and rear drug warehouse on the right. BC Archives - Item C-07345 - T. Shotbolt, Chemist, Druggist; Johnson Street, Victoria. Item M01292 - 500 block Johnson Street. Rear of Thomas Shotbolt's drug warehouse on the south side



Current state of the Shotbolt Building

The City added the property to the heritage register in 1990 based on the findings of a 1989 study called the *City of Victoria Downtown Heritage Management Plan*. The study inventoried unrecognized heritage properties in the downtown and categorized them into a high-value A-list and lower-value B-list. The Shotbolt Chemist building was on the B-list, which the report described as consisting of buildings “that have heritage significance but have suffered alterations”. These properties were not recommended for inclusion on the registry, but the report noted that restoration was a remote possibility, subject to a case-by-case negotiation with the owner, based on structural condition and extent of surviving material. Therefore, as the City does not have any other mechanism for recognizing heritage significance, the B-list properties were added to the register.

If the Shotbolt building were nominated for heritage designation in its current condition, it would not have sufficient character to justify conservation and designation would not be recommended. In the opinion of staff, a restoration is also not realistic given the minimal surviving historic material and development potential that would be sacrificed to achieve it.

Lower Johnson Street

The subject properties are part of Lower Johnson Street, one of the most intact historic streetscapes in the City. Every building located between Store Street and Government Street has heritage status and 13 buildings survive from the late 1800s. In contrast to the plainly designed historic warehouses of Wharf Street, buildings on Lower Johnson Street have extravagant detailing. Five were originally built as hotels. They form a continuous pattern of architectural detail, including a rich variety of punched windows embellished with hood moulds, arches, keystones, and other accents. On the south side of the street, 589 Johnson Street is the only gap in the pattern.



South elevation of Johnson Street, Shotbolt Chemist building on the left and W.G. Cameron building on the right.

Regulatory Considerations

The proposed heritage designation is consistent with surrounding land uses.

Condition/Economic Viability

The building at 579 Johnson is in good physical condition according to the applicant's consultants Metro Testing Engineers, who assessed the masonry and exterior of the building, in their Masonry Assessment Report, June 2021. The structural assessment by Skyline Engineering, reports their seismic evaluation and determined the building's structural capacity to resist earthquake induced forces and have suggested seismic upgrading solutions based on this review, dated August 2021.

The building at 585-587 Johnson Street has been extensively altered, including its façade, the removal of the entire second storey and most of its original character-defining elements are gone.

ANALYSIS

The following sections provide a summary of this heritage designation application's consistency with the relevant City policies and guidelines.

Official Community Plan

The designation of this building is consistent with the *Official Community Plan, 2012* (OCP), which in the section entitled, "Placemaking: Urban Design and Heritage", states:

Goals

8 (B) *Victoria's cultural and natural heritage resources are protected and celebrated.*

Broad Objectives

8 (j) *That heritage property is conserved as resources with value for present and future generations.*

8 (l) *That heritage and cultural values are identified, celebrated, and retained through community engagement.*

City Form

8.6 *Conserve and enhance the heritage value, character and special features of areas, districts, streetscapes, cultural landscapes, and individual properties throughout the city.*

8.11 *Determine the heritage value of areas, districts, streetscapes, cultural landscape, and individual properties using the Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework as identified in Figure 12.*

Buildings and Sites

8.51 *Continue to give consideration to tools available under legislation to protect or conserve heritage property including, but not limited to: heritage designation bylaws; listing on the heritage register; temporary protection; heritage alteration permits; heritage revitalization agreements; design guidelines; and the protection of views of heritage landmark buildings from public vantage points as identified in Map 8, and to be determined in future local area plans.*

8.54 *Continue to work with senior government, community, and business partners to identify, protect and conserve property of heritage value.*

Downtown Core Area Plan

The designation of the building is consistent with Section 7: "Heritage" of the Downtown Core Area Plan (2011) which states:

Heritage - Objectives

1. *Retain, protect, and improve real property with aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social, or spiritual value and heritage character as a benefit to the public.*

Areas and Districts - Policies and Actions

- 7.3. *Conserve heritage values of the Downtown Core Area and its character-defining elements, such as individual buildings, collections of buildings, streetscapes, structures and features.*

Buildings and Sites - Policies and Actions

- 7.20. *Continue to work with the private sector to identify, protect and conserve property and areas with heritage value in the Downtown Core Area.*
- 7.28. *Produce and update, as required, Statements of Significance for properties listed on the Heritage Register in the Downtown Core Area.*

Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework

A key policy of the OCP includes the determination of heritage value using a values-based approach. In this regard, a City-wide thematic framework (OCP Fig. 12) was developed and incorporated into the OCP to identify the key civic historic themes. The *Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework* functions as a means to organize and define historical events, to identify representative historic places, and to place sites, persons, and events in an overall context. The thematic framework recognizes a broad range of values under which City-wide themes can be articulated. A Heritage Value Assessment with consideration of the *Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework* is incorporated into the Statement of Significance.

Resource Impacts

Heritage designation of 579 Johnson Street will enable the property owner to apply for heritage grants from the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust and for a tax incentive from the City of Victoria to assist with the cost of seismic upgrading.

Heritage Advisory Panel

The application was reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Panel at its July 12th, 2022, meeting and recommended approving the Heritage Designation Application No. 000201 for the property located at 579 Johnson Street.

The discussion to replace the Shotbolt building with new development was reviewed, in a pre-application meeting with members of the Heritage Advisory Panel and the applicant on December 8, 2020. Through this discussion with the Panel, it was agreed that the building's original character had been lost due to numerous alterations and removals and that it would not be considered worthy of both restoration or designation.

Statement of Significance

A Statement of Significance for 579 Johnson, describing the historic place, its attributes, and history is attached to this report.

There is no Statement of Significance recorded for 585-587 Johnson Street.

CONCLUSIONS

This application for the heritage designation of the 579 Johnson Street as a Municipal Heritage Site is for a building that is an excellent example of Victoria's commercial development from the 19th century. This building's exterior is intact and in good condition and staff therefore

recommend that Council consider approving the Heritage Designation Application No. 000201 for the building located at 579 Johnson Street.

In addition to this heritage designation, staff recommend that Council consider approving the removal of the B-listed property at 585-587 Johnson Street, from the heritage registry, due to the lack of remaining original character-defining elements.

ALTERNATE MOTION

That Council:

1. Decline Heritage Designation Application No. 000201 for the property located at 579 Johnson Street.
2. Decline the removal of 585-587 Johnson Street from the heritage registry.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristal Stevenot
Senior Heritage Planner
Development Services Division

Karen Hoes, Director
Sustainable Planning and Community
Development Department

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

- Attachment A: Subject Map
- Attachment B: Aerial Map
- Attachment C: Photographs
- Attachment D: Statement of Significance
- Attachment E: Letter from the applicant, dated June 24, 2022
- Attachment F: Heritage Advisory Panel minutes, dated July 12, 2022