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To City of Victoria Mayor, Council, Staff, Community Association & Neighbours

Re: 970 Walker Street, Victoria BC
Rezoning and Development Permit with Variances
Revised Letter

The proposed development, 970 Walker Street, is located in the Victoria West neighbourhood, and is currently a vacant, irregular shaped lot. It is currently zoned under R1-S2, Restricted Small Lot (Two Storey) District. The Owners, are looking to maintain the R1-S2 zoning and add a secondary suite, as a permitted use, to a new single-family dwelling. The inclusion of a secondary suite along with some development permit variances would allow the Owners to house: One small extended family, acting as a 'single real estate entity'. The family is made up of a local physician, who lives and works in Victoria and travels to provide healthcare in remote parts of Canada and abroad, her sister and spouse (both Architects), their daughter and family dog. They hope to build this home to have a very low environmental footprint, targeting high performance building standards (Passive House) with an integrated landscape that encourages innovative food production given site and exposure constraints.

The Owners ask that the following variances are permitted:

1) Secondary Suite:

While secondary suites have not been officially adopted under the R1-S2 Zone as a permitted use, they have been included in the Victoria West Neighborhood Plan for the Northwest Sub-Area for Small Lot Houses. The Owners ask that the City permit a secondary suite, as a means of encouraging a more diverse housing stock.

2) Front Yard Setback: Maintain 3.6m front yard setback previously approved

Reducing front yard setback from 6.0m to 3.6m was established in previous rezoning. It allows for more liveable interior spaces, improved street engagement and better access to southern exposure for daylighting and energy efficiency.

The City requested further justification for change to front setback. We are requesting a reduction to front setback to gain more building area and in turn a more functional living space. If the 6 meter setback were maintained as per zoning, the depth of house would be 4.5 meters (~15ft). By allowing a 3.6 meter setback, the house depth would be 7 meters (~22 ft), allowing for a much more functional living arrangement.

3) Side Yard Setbacks: Allowing small number of windows on habitable spaces with 1.5-meter side yard

Proposed window on east and west elevations are minimal but permit the passage of natural light improving the quality of spaces. While still complying with building code regulations, proposed window size and placement is sensitive to views and privacy of neighbouring properties.

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The City requested further justification for 1.5 meter side yard setback variance with windows on habitable spaces. The 2 proposed clerestory windows on east and west elevations are modest in size (0.6m x 1.8m) and are strategically located high on the wall (sill height: 2.1 meters from the floor) to protect privacy and with the sole intent to bring in more natural light. The inclusion of these windows would add to comfort and quality of space.

4) Roof deck:

Permitting a roof deck would allow for vegetable gardening and maintenance of solar panels on a site that has limited, at-grade southern yard exposure. In addition, it would decrease storm water runoff alleviating pressure on already overburdened infrastructure, help the Owners offset food and energy costs, all while decreasing the heat island effect.

In the preliminary zoning review, the City requested that the roof deck be removed from this proposal. The Owner/Architect has provided further rationale to support the roof deck in a response letter for the Technical Review Group (TRG) application review (Oct. 12, 2022). It highlighted existing significant topography changes and provided drone photos. Drone photos revealed that views from roof would minimally impact neighbours. The roof plan was revised for the November 2022 submission. Further comments were provided by City in December 2022 in which they could support the roof deck with some revisions. Revisions were discussed with Area Planner and Deputy Director of Planning again in January of 2023 for clarification. The most recent revision includes a 42" high perimeter frosted glass guardrail with 6 foot wide perimeter roof planters. These elements work together to offset views, control overlook and protect privacy, all while permitting a food productive biodiverse rooftop.

Government Policies

This proposal is in sync with the City of Victoria's Official Community Plan and the Victoria West Neighborhood Plan. The City and neighbourhoods have long been planning and strategizing around population growth, climate change, and more recently rising food and housing costs amidst a global pandemic. The proposed design takes its cue from several of the policy directions present in the City and Neighbourhood community plans related to housing diversity, green buildings, storm water management, climate change, renewal energy and food systems to name a few.

Project Benefits

Affordable housing, let alone vacant land is very difficult to come by in the City of Victoria, and as a first-time home buyer, this house will allow this extended family to enter the housing market after years of renting. Its construction will increase neighbourhood density, help revitalize the area and add value to neighbouring properties. For safety and security, its presence on the block will replace the overgrown vacant lot with more opportunities for appropriate design elements that improve surveillance and lighting on site. It is also in walking distance to the families recently acquired daycare and cuts down cycling commute times in how well connected it is to the downtown, Galloping Goose and E & N Rail trails.

Need & Demand

This lot is already zoned as a small lot, R1-S2. The inclusion of small lot zoning is making it more possible for families to have access to land, previously underutilized by adjacent lots. Allowing for such development is offering a family housing stability in a market that is not meeting the needs of its housing demands. While other such properties have similar zoning, land costs are often not making new construction plausible.

Services and Neighbourhood

Victoria West is a vibrant community/neighbourhood leaving much to yet discover. The proximity to local playgrounds, Banfield Park, Esquimalt, the downtown, the waterfront and other amenities were what made this property most attractive. It is well supported by the City's public infrastructure and community/recreation services and as confirmed by the Engineering department has adequate servicing to the site with regards to sewer and water etc. The Owner/Architect worked closely with a Landscape Architect to establish a front yard that extends and engages with the street edge while still allowing for access, if required.

The Owner/Architect has revised the front yard as requested by the City. This revision included the addition of a 1.8m sidewalk. While we understand the need for sidewalks for accessibility and safety, there is presently no sidewalk on this side of this side of the street. The sidewalk that does exist across the street is not well connected and in poor condition. Continuity of surfaces and connectivity should be considered not just for this property but for the street in entirety. It also raises the question of why one new property owner would have to finance a new sidewalk if other existing property owners do not.

Impacts

The Owners recognize that construction would impact existing neighbours for a period with noise but intend to proceed respectfully, to manage site work and be mindful of generated traffic during construction. Noise or activity level on the block will not be significantly altered once the house is complete. The addition of an off-street parking space, should mean that there is no significant difference to available parking in the neighbourhood. Further this offers the Owners an opportunity to plug in an electric vehicle, transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

Design

The proposed single-family dwelling and its architecture will complement and improve the existing neighbourhood as illustrated in its sensitive scale, visual character and material palette. The landscape design will further enhance the streetscape as it draws plantings closer to the curbside whilst combining food production, multi-season interest and considerations for maintenance and water use (non-potable water). Exterior ground treatments/paving will be permeable. Trees in poor condition will be replaced to meet City of Victoria Tree Preservation Bylaw. Urban agriculture is planned for strategic areas across the site and on the roof deck.

The design also intends to target a high-performance building standard (Passive House) with a super insulated, airtight envelope and high-performance glazing. The Owners intend to provide structural support and pre-plumb for solar PV to help offset energy usage and costs. Plumbing fixtures will all be low flow/water saving and lighting and appliances will be energy efficient. Interior materials will be salvaged and sourced locally as much as possible.

The City provided comments related to exterior finishes, windows, roofline and entryway. The Owner/Architect has again provided rationale to support the proposal in a response letter to the Technical Review Group (TRG) application review (Oct. 12, 2022). Photographs taken in close proximity to the lot illustrate how the proposed house relates and takes cues from neighbouring properties. After further discussion with Area and the Deputy Director of Planning in January 2023, the exterior cladding has been revised to wood shingles and the round window has been changed to match other second floor bedroom windows.

In closing, the approval of this rezoning and development permit with variances would allow one small extended family to live in close proximity, be supported and share in the experiences and spaces of a

home designed to meet their needs, in an environmentally responsible and sustainable way that contributes to its neighbourhood.

We thank you in advance for consideration of this proposal. Please let me know if you have any questions or require further clarification. I can be reached at robyn@ettaarchitecture.ca or directly at 778.587.4049

Sincerely,



Robyn Robertson, Architect/Owner

ETTA Architecture Inc.