

Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee
c/o 901 Kings Road
Victoria, BC V8T 1W5

18 October 2021

To Mayor and Council
City of Victoria
#1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

By email to: Hillside Quadra Area Planner, Michael Angrove,
mangrove@victoria.ca, CALUC@victoria.ca

Re: Proposed Development of 1212 Vista Heights

I am writing on behalf of the Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee (NAC) to provide neighbourhood input regarding the above proposed development.

Community Consultation Process

The proponent attended the NAC meeting on 13 September 2021 for a preliminary discussion of his conceptual ideas for the above property.

The formal Community Meeting under the CALUC process was held 28 September 2021 after the usual mail notification and was attended by four members of the NAC executive and 11 community members.

The proponent, Charles Chang, attended with his architect, Tim Kindrat of Christine Lintott Architects Inc. (CLA). Mr. Kindrat presented the plans on behalf of Mr. Chang.

The Proposal

Mr. Chang is proposing to remove an existing early 20th century house on the property and to build two new semi-detached residences. His intent is that each of the new residences could be separately owned (strata title). He is therefore seeking rezoning of the site from R1-B (single family) to R-2 (two family [duplex]). While each residence could be separately owned the two owners would have an agreement related to shared common property such as the driveway and walkways.

Despite the proposed rezoning, Mr. Kindrat noted that most of the design features are consistent with R1-B zoning. For example, more than 60 percent of the site is proposed to remain as open space.

In order to maintain the look of the streetscape which is mainly single family homes, and to avoid a long common wall and a fence between the two new strata properties, one of these residences would be closer to the street and the other would be set back from the street. As the site slopes, the dwelling at the back would be slightly higher than the front dwelling. Each residence would have its own private outdoor garden space. A degree of privacy between the residences would be provided through this offset design and through screening around the front doors, which would also be defined with a flat roof. In addition, the residence at the back has been designed so that windows do not look into the adjacent home to the east.

The design would be traditional, with each dwelling in a different exterior finish – siding in the front and shingle for the rear residence. Each home would have three bedrooms. The front (south) unit would be approximately 125.6 m² in area and is designed to be an adaptable house to accommodate persons living with disabilities and/or aging in place. Doors and other features would be built to accessible requirements and clearances. The back (north) unit would be approximately 154 m² and would have three bathrooms.

Construction of these residences will require the removal of a small tree in the rear of the lot and may also affect the roots of two cherry trees on a neighbouring property. The proponent is prepared to compensate for removal of the latter if necessary and to provide four (4) replacement trees.

In order to avoid construction of a long driveway, and maximize outdoor green space the site plan, two parking spots near the front of the property are proposed. Vehicles parked in these spaces would be behind the front line of the front (south) residence.

Widening of the existing driveway to current standards may require the removal and replacement of a Hawthorne tree on the boulevard. The City has also asked the proponent to install a sidewalk along the front of the property.

Discussion:

Community members asked for and were provided with more information about the following topics:

Rezoning

Details of the proposed rezoning: R-2 zoning would allow two dwellings similar in size and enable each residence to have a different (strata) owner--a strata duplex. Ownership enables housing independence and more flexibility for each owner. Although R-2 allows additional built area, the proposed plan meets the requirements for R1-B as well as R-2 in terms of site coverage, maximum height, and yard size.

Parking

One community member asked about the distance between the proposed parking area and the adjacent property to the west of 1212 Vista Heights. The parking area would butt up against the property line and would be close to existing trees. The plan is to use permeable pavers to help with water infiltration and enable more water to reach tree roots. The plan meets minimum parking requirements of one spot per unit. The residences share a common driveway. Each parking spot would have an electric car charger. The parking area could accommodate up to four vehicles if the residents were willing to park end-to end (tandem) in paved access space.

Neighbours expressed concern about the possibility of more cars using on-street parking due to a second residence on the site. One neighbour expressed concern about potential impacts of more vehicles on children. Another noted that on-street parking is already congested because they and several other neighbours each own three vehicles. This has caused some local tension with respect to where residents park. Duplex rezoning and construction of two family dwellings on the site could result in up to four additional vehicles parking on the street and add to existing tensions. This neighbour stated that for this reason they oppose the rezoning.

Vegetation

Meeting participants asked for more information about the landscape plan — and in particular about where on the site any replacement trees would be planted.

Mr. Chang explained that the updated tree protection bylaw specifies that for each tree removed two new trees must be provided. It also specifies the minimum amount of land required for new trees. If there is not enough room on the site developers may provide a cash payment to the City in lieu of a tree. Mr. Chang stated that he doesn't want the site to be dark or tree roots to infringe on buildings. He anticipates that new trees in the front would be smaller, and likely a flowering ornamental, and new trees in the back would be larger. He plans to make minimal changes to the back yard of the property. In order to ensure that all these conditions are met he intends to prepare a full landscape plan.

Several neighbours asked that the existing blackberry bushes on the property be removed. Mr. Chang stated that he expects to remove them.

Visual Impacts

Several neighbours expressed concern about the potential visual impact of the proposed new residences and asked how high the new buildings would be.

Mr. Kindrat stated that the taller of the two new residences would be four feet higher than the existing house at 1212 Vista Heights and would be within the allowable height for R1-B as well as R2 zoning.

The new design has setbacks that differ from those of the existing house. On the east side, the new setback would be 2 metres from the property line (72 cm narrower than the existing house). On the west side, the distance to the property line would be 3 metres (1.5 metres narrower than the existing houses). A garage at the back of the existing house and close to the property line on the west side would be removed; this would open up the space in the back visually.

One neighbour commented that a two story building — replacing the existing bungalow — would be too imposing and would not fit well in the established neighbourhood. This person was concerned in addition that the adjacent neighbours would lose their existing privacy.

One neighbour commented that the construction of a sidewalk — as requested by City staff — would result in the loss of grass in the front yard of the property.

Fencing

The owners of several adjacent properties indicated that they would like to see a new six-foot fence constructed between 1212 Vista Heights and their properties.

They asked about plans for the existing retaining walls on the property, portions of which are 5 feet (~1.5m) high. Mr. Chang indicated that the condition of these walls will be assessed when he applies for a building permit; he would like to retain the walls if it is deemed safe to do so. One neighbour expressed interest in replacing his portion of the wall and Mr. Chang suggested they follow up on this.

Construction Impacts

Several community members stated that they agree with the design concept and they have questions about the impacts of the design on adjacent neighbours. The owner of an adjacent property has chickens that are currently housed close to the property line. This neighbour indicated that due to the impacts of construction these chickens would need to be rehoused during construction or destroyed. Mr. Chang indicated that while the timing of construction is difficult to predict at this time, he would provide neighbours with two or three months advance notice.

Fate of existing house

Neighbours commented that the existing house contains some nice heritage features including original flooring and a built in sideboard. The proponent stated that he does not yet have a plan regarding the fate of the house and invited neighbours to contact him if they are interested in some of the older materials. There was a brief discussion about demolition vs material reuse.

General Comments

Overall community members were cautiously positive about the proposed rezoning.

Several adjacent neighbours commented that the proposed development — including a new fence — would be an improvement on the existing state of the property. One thanked the proponent for ‘a plan that respects neighbours.’ Another liked that the design ‘sits close to the land.’

One person, however, stated that they were opposed to the construction of two residences on the site because of visual impacts and the potential increase in on-street parking; this person would, however, accept construction of one new house with a legal suite.

Sincerely,

Jon Munn
Chair, Community Association Land Use Committee
Hillside Quadra