



October 12, 2017

Mayor and Council
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC



Mayor and Members of Council,

Re: Revised 1120, 1124 and 1128 Burdett Avenue Rezoning and Development Permit Application

Introduction

Empresa Properties Ltd. in conjunction with *Low Hammond Rowe Architects* ("the applicant") is pleased to resubmit this letter and the enclosed documents in support of the rezoning and development permit application at 1120, 1124 and 1128 Burdett Avenue ("the Site"). Located in the Fairfield neighbourhood, the Site totals 1,674 square metres fronting onto Burdett Avenue. The Site contains three deprived 1920s houses on individual parcels, none of which have heritage designation. All flanks of the Site are comprised of midrise strata and rental buildings ranging from four to five storeys in height. The unique infill proposal presents a strategic opportunity to advance the City's policies and objectives while enhancing the surrounding community.

Since the project was last before Mayor and Council, the applicant has changed the project to a purpose built rental and modified the design to improve the proposal as highlighted below. It is further detailed in our *Design Revisions* letter. Rental product is an underserved part of the housing spectrum due to the drastic increased demand and has further resulted in an improved building design for the project.

Highlighted changes include:

- 100% purpose built rental building, guaranteed for a minimum of 20 years
- Modified 36 strata homes to 44 rental homes
- Reduced density in from 1:83:1 to 1:65 FSR, closely aligned with neighbouring zoning
- Increased rear yard setback to 6.77m with the majority of the façade increased to 8.8m
- Increased the east portion of the front yard setback to 7.0m further articulated to 9.0m

Goals and Guiding Principles

Since the project's conception, the applicant design team led by *Low Hammond Rowe Architects* has set out to exceed City objectives. Our team believes that it is very important to create a set of guiding principles for each new project and below we have established guidelines for the project.

- The project should be heavily inclusive of the urban design parameters of Victoria's Official Community Plan (OCP), while responding in a sensitive and complimentary way to the adjacent neighbours and community, thereby contributing to the visual streetscape.
- The project should protect the privacy of neighbours and residential owners while putting eyes on the street through environmental design to ensure an attractive and highly livable setting.
- The Site should include generous landscaping on both the front and backsides of the project to maintain a high level of connection with nature for both the owners and the Fairfield community.

- The Site should promote alternative means of travel through walkability and extensive bike storage while placing all parking spaces underground.
- The Site should be designed, built, and operated in unison with assessing the long-term environmental impact by incorporating energy efficiencies, waste minimization, and pollution prevention.

After reviewing many design iterations, consulting with City of Victoria staff, the Fairfield Community Association, and key stakeholders, we believe that this development proposal meets the above principles.

The Proposal

The Site is currently zoned to RB-1 and R3-AM-1 situated in the center of a midrise residential area. Our team is proposing a revised 4-storey boutique purpose-built rental project with underground parking to fit with the context of the neighbourhood and to better align with the area planning. There are four to five storey buildings on all four sides of this infill project, lending the Site proposal as a natural addition to the prevailing urban fabric. The existing structures will need to be removed from the Site; however, our team, in conjunction with *Habitat for Humanity*, will work on deconstructing and reusing the homes where possible, with potential viability to move the middle home.

The proposed building has significantly been reduced in density from 1.83:1 to **1.65:1 FSR** in order to construct a mix of 44 studio, 1 bedroom and 2 bedroom homes. The development proposal reflects a slight increase in permissible density that exceeds that of current zoning density RB-1 (N/A) and R3-AM-1 (1.6:1 F.S.R.) zones. The requested increase in density advances on city and community objectives, as highlighted throughout the context of this application summarized in the *Project Benefits, Green Building Features, Governing Policies and Neighbourhood Demand* sections.

Extensive examination of the project's impact on neighbouring views as well as the sightlines and building shadows gives us confidence that the massing and density strategy accurately embodies the OCP. While reviewing the impact of this project on the community, we determined it was paramount that we continually focus on the surrounding context to ensure that our design stayed true to our core principles while achieving the best use of the Site. In addition, a significant number of units within this proposal have adaptable housing features. Our due diligence has reaffirmed the plans that have transpired to date.

Project Benefits

Economic Benefits

- Purpose built rental homes in this highly established neighbourhood would greatly benefit many people who aspire to have new rental options in this in this area. The City of Victoria predicts a growth of 20,000 residents expected to reach Victoria between 2011 and 2041, which is on tract to be surpassed. The Site lends itself to more rental homes only steps from the urban core.
- Due to the convenience of walking and biking to and from the Site, local businesses in the neighbourhood will thrive from the increase in foot traffic.
- This place-making concept establishes a sensitive transition by adding high quality architecture to the character of the neighbourhood, while increasing Victoria's tax base.

Social Benefits

- A community amenity contribution will be provided for the betterment of the neighbourhood.
- Integration of marginalized individuals for employment into the project in consultation with the *Cool Aid Society* and the City of Victoria.

- Relocation and/or reuse of the existing homes in consultation with *Habitat for Humanity* and *Nickel Bros Moving*.
- The proposal creates an enhanced streetscape including a new sidewalk and fire hydrant, which can service the west end of the block.
- For the benefit of the residents, the project incorporates a dog and bike wash, thereby allowing them to maintain an active lifestyle notwithstanding the weather.

Environmental Benefits

- Please refer to the 'Green Building Features' section.

Governing Policies

The project proposal is compliant with the City of Victoria's OCP designation. Guidance under this plan calls for an increase in density at the Site. Correspondingly, the design team took additional measures to ensure that the project fits the neighbourhood and streetscape, as if there were a local plan in place. As a result, the team strongly considered the height and setbacks as they relate to the surrounding context. In order to respect both current and future buildings bordering the Site, we are ensuring the appropriateness of the height transitions. Cook Street is a major arterial with lots bounded to the west and one to the south of the Site that lend themselves to an increase in height and density in the near future under current policy. This confirms that the Site design is compatible with both the current form and the evolution of this area.

The Urban Residential

- *Designates the Site, which invites properties to be developed up to 2.0:1 alongside advancing planning objectives.*
- *Policy 6.23 supports density at the upper end of the Urban Residential designation if the project is within 200m of the Urban Core, which this Site achieves.*

The City's *Regional Growth Strategy* speaks of building complete communities by placing 50% of the region's growth in the Urban Core and surrounding Urban Residential areas. The strategy further focuses on increasing the choice of transportation, as the strategy's land management vision and transportation policy focuses on walkable urban patterns with a strong downtown core. It details that residents should be able to meet daily needs including public transit within a 15-minute walk from home, which the Site greatly surpasses.

The *Fort Street Corridor* is a planning priority that aims for higher density located within a 400-meter distance of the corridor. These 44 rental homes will help advance the City objectives by placing 90% of all homes within 400 meters of the Urban Core. The location further helps to support the excellent transit location offering alternative modes of travel in comparison to the strict use of private vehicles. This advances the City's goal to mitigate the dependence on fossil fuels, while giving Victorians the option to move freely and safely via an integrated network of sidewalks, bike routes and public transit.

Need and Demand

The Site provides a tremendous opportunity to better serve the significant rental-housing deficit that hovers around 0.5% vacancy. This new purpose built rental housing is located in the highly sought after Fairfield neighbourhood, where new rentals are nearly non-existent. Its location in the northwest Fairfield neighbourhood is close to downtown amenities as well as other desirable settings including Dallas Road Waterfront, Beacon Hill Park and Cook Street Village.

Young urban dwellers, downsizers and families are a few of the demographics that indicate a strong necessity for this form of housing. The Site's walkability to the downtown and employment sector reduces the financial burden that comes with owning a personal vehicle. The project's wood frame structure proves far more

affordable than the concrete multi-unit structures that are near the Site. Affordable housing is vital in ensuring the growth and vibrancy of our communities and downtown core.

Neighbourhood

This is a unique opportunity to strengthen the quickly emerging upper Fort Street neighbourhood, contributing to the employment and consumer growth along Fort Street, by adding rental housing to a strategic location within close proximity of this area. Businesses within and nearby this corridor will require an increase in population to service these establishments, a feat the current zoning cannot handle.

The rare assembly of this 18,016 square feet underused residential space, centrally located in a mid-rise residential community, creates a significant opportunity to strengthen housing options near the downtown core. A redevelopment of the infill Site will compliment the area, ensuring no orphan lots remain. Keeping within the context of the surrounding buildings, the applicant is ensuring a proper transition in building forms throughout the City.

Architectural Expression and Materials

Please Refer to Appendix 2 "Development Permit Area 16 (DPA16)" for the master analysis of DPA 16.

Safety and Security Considerations

The applicant has extensively considered factors impacting safety and security by incorporating CPTED principles at every opportunity during the design stage.

- The Site incorporates lighting design that is coordinated to warmly light the front and exterior of the building suitable to the neighbourhood, eliminating dark areas.
- Main living spaces face the thoroughfare and rear yards, encouraging natural surveillance through large windows.
- The northeast underground parking exit, the rear maintenance path, and the main parking ramp entrance will be gated off to create physical separation and safe use for only the residents.
- Extensive landscaping in addition to fencing will act as a natural physical buffer separating the private and public realm.

In addition to the CPTED principles, the building will utilize fob systems to control the ingress of residents through the secured underground parking and at the front entrance.

Transportation

The Site offers 0.82:1 underground parking stalls, providing 36 parking spaces for both residents and visitors. Based on similar projects in the area and due to the walkability of the neighbourhood, we are positive that this slight shortfall in schedule C parking requirements will not impact the owners or the community at this location and is supported by the city transportation department and transportation analysts.

The excellent bike and walk score lends itself to a shift away from cars for downsizers and young adults. Additionally, the project oversupplies 47 class A stalls and 44 storage units for residents to use for both bicycles and any extra storage. Guests will have 6 class B stalls located at the front of the building in a highly visible space.

Green Building Features

The design team has incorporated techniques that will enhance the efficiency of the building. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- A minimum of a *BUILT GREEN®* certification

- Reduction in glazing from windows through the natural shading and balcony shades, creating green, private and decorative features.
- Reduction in thermal bridging from the building's doors through the wood frame design.
- The landscape design contributes to on-site storm water management by greatly increasing biomass on the site, including 16 new trees, and sloping north-facing patios to an aggregate pathway that drains beyond the underground parking slab. South-facing patios will drain to soft landscaped areas.
- The extensive proposed vegetation across the site will intercept and temporarily store rainfall before releasing it into the atmosphere through evapotranspiration. Rain not captured in biomass will be filtered through growing medium before reaching the storm system.
- Each room in the home will be equipped with fresh air ventilation. This will allow for fresh air in each room during all seasons.
- The project will reuse and recycle elements of existing structure where possible.
- The building envelope will be air tight to ensure that it is impermeable to any moisture buildup with durable cladding and quality materials.
- Amenities are within walking distance, which will reduce the need for car dependence. The Site has a 94 walk score and a 100 bike score.
- The applicant will oversupply class A bike stalls.
- Water efficient plumbing fixtures.
- Low VOC interior finishes

Infrastructure

The applicant design team has consulted with City of Victoria's staff to review existing infrastructure locations and proposed services planned for the project. Extensive improvements to the water line with thoroughfare reconstruction will be incorporated in order to service Burdett Avenue at the appropriate standard. The City has indicated that a fire hydrant will be required on the west end of the block within 45 metres of the Site which will necessitate trenching from the northwest corner of Cook and Burdett to the Site. Parking allocation should not be compromised with the new fire hydrant; *BC Hydro* is currently working on the hydro infrastructure design. Upon reviewing our post development sewage flow rate, the City has indicated that sewer attenuation will not be required at the Site.

The applicant will be enhancing the boulevard streetscape with more trees and an improved sidewalk with more grass, creating a welcoming presence for pedestrians. Nearby the Site there is: an abundant amount of community and recreation services, parks, the ocean and downtown amenities. These features will help contribute to an active lifestyle for the building's residents.

Conclusion

The applicant and the design team believe that this opportunity presents as a key infill proposal to an underutilized site, which is steps from the Urban Core. Additionally, the purpose built rental building serves the lower end of the housing spectrum that is in high demand for this neighbourhood. The team has proceeded thoughtfully throughout each stage of the design and development in order to achieve the City's policies and objectives, and more generally, the community's vision for the Site. Consultations to date have included numerous community stakeholders, which have affirmed our conviction in the direction that we have taken with the development proposal. We sincerely appreciate the time put forth by the City staff up to this point and we look forward to continuing to work with them as this application proceeds forward. We are available to answer any questions and provide additional details as required moving forward.

Sincerely,

Empresa Properties Ltd.

Per: Karl Robertson
Karl Robertson

Appendix 1 City Planning:

Based on application review summaries, ADP recommendations and ongoing correspondence the following provides high level key revisions made in collaboration with the planning department and neighbourhood input to enhance the design. Revisions specific to our latest submission dated August 10th, 2017 are outlined in our separate Design Revisions letter.

Our team has lessened the building footprint by reducing the depth of the rear and front units' main floor plan thus incorporating additional landscaping in the surrounding open space. The amount of open space and sunlight penetration has increased with our revised proposal. In collaboration with planning, the west and north façade roof line was modified by disengaging the balcony roofs from the main building roof edge, thus modulating the roof line, lowering the perceived building height from eye level and making a closer relationship to the modulation of the main south façade.

Based on further community input, the north building edge has been further recessed with the latest iteration, compliant with neighbouring zoning, 6.77 meters from the property line, approximately 14 meters from the building to the north. The majority of the north façade is further recessed 8.0 meters. Since the completion of ADP our team has extended architectural soft wood screening and glazed balcony glass along the northern balconies to help further enhance privacy and simplify the design expression. Additionally, at the request of planning and neighbours, our design team was able to find the soil depth to add Galaxy Magnolias that stand between 30' to 35' in height to further enhance landscaping and privacy. On the east and west façades our team has increased the sill height to reduce the size of the windows. Further, we included a privacy analysis on the east façade to detail how the offset windows in addition to the extensive tree foliage will maximize privacy.

Appendix 2 Design Rationale & Community Engagement Process:

Development Permit Area 16 (DPA 16)

Early in the design process the applicant acknowledged the importance of including ground oriented walk-up units along Burdett Avenue in order to compliment the character of the neighbourhood. The use of bay windows, recessed and projecting decks, low profile roofs, pop-up windows, changes in colour, material and form, have been integrated to respectfully interface with the distinguished character homes on the street as well as to enhance the *place making* of the neighbourhood. The Site creates high quality aesthetic features by displaying an inspiring façade and landscape at both the front and rear of the project, softening the transition and reflecting a sense of place within the development.

The integration of the Site with neighbouring buildings and nearby traditional housing stock was critical in determining the appropriate height and setback from the street. In reducing the scale from 5 living storeys to 4, the applicant team assured that the massing respects the neighbours and traditional homes in the area. The articulated parapets and two-storey framed porches provide a human scale to the project and allude to a 'townhouse' feel, while enhancing the neighbourhood's housing character with finely articulated detailing and materials. These peaks along Burdett exemplify the personality of high ridges of the tall character homes down the avenue, while the prominence of walkout townhouse units on the bottom floor with a recessed facade makes for a stronger connection with the streetscape. Open space allowing for lush planting around the project will advance the Site's core principles. As a result of these advancements, the project has achieved 46.58% open space around the Site.

DPA 16 policies have guided the applicant team's core principles, which instilled the following design elements:

- A formal double height porch is incorporated into each of the four street accessed units which serves to visually reduce the massing of the façade, articulate the private entrances to these unique homes, and develop a familiar rhythm along the street.

- The building mass is broken down into smaller formal sections through the use of recessed and projecting forms that are distinguished at corners and transitions, but that are cohesive and unifying, reminiscent of the character defining devices used throughout the neighbourhood.
- The main entrance is distinctly articulated with a strong horizontal canopy projecting out toward the sidewalk, contrasting with the vertical porch elements defining the walk-up units. The entrance is further enhanced with the vertical panel of warm wood separating the building into two parts.
- As no two sides of a building experience the same exact conditions, we have expressed each façade slightly differently to address the unique conditions of sunlight, views, and privacy, while maintaining an overall balanced palette. The west façade has full-height wood screens that act as vertical sunshades as well as privacy screens from the rental building to the west. The north façade integrates glazed balconies and vertical privacy screen to reduce direct views with units to the north, while the screens are reduced in height to allow the limited northern facing natural light to filter through. While the building has shifted south to ease the transition to the north and maximize the potential sunlight for existing homes. All suite decks are oriented to the north, south, or west, thus reducing exposure to the open decks of the adjacent building to the east. The natural trees located along east side and addition of trees to the north further create a buffer.
- The underground parkade entrance is located on the west side, furthest from the single-family residences down the road and at the lowest point in grade on the property. The underground parking was shifted to the west to maximize undisturbed soil at the existing tree locations to the east.
- Each ground floor unit enjoys an ample amount of open space articulated with a fence and gate, pathway and patio area, as well as tree plantings, a bench and raised planters. The south façade along Burdett integrates a metal picket fence, reminiscent of other character homes in the neighbourhood, which provides a boundary for privacy while still being welcoming to the neighbours.
- Just as the two level porches provide human scale along the street, they are aligned with a recess in the façade that terminates at the pop-up windows at the upper units, which results from a soft sloping roof that can be seen in profile from the street. This cornice detail helps blend the building form into the character of the neighbourhood.
- The overall building height is comparable to the immediate neighbours not to dominate or overpower the street. The finer articulations of roof undulations and recesses help blur the top edge of the building, and as demonstrated in the perspective views, when seen from street level the building is not out of place on the street.
- The projecting decks and roof planes are clad with warm red cedar, which adds to the visual interest in the façade.

Early Stage Community Dialogue

The applicant has held the highest regard for the neighbouring community's questions and comments. In addition to the CALUC meeting, phone calls, e-mails and in-person group meetings, the applicant has carried out the following preliminary design dialogues with the community to integrate the Site potential with neighbouring buildings.

- November 23 2015 – The applicant met with the Fairfield Gonzales Community Association Committee to attain feedback on what would enhance the neighbourhood and how to best proceed. It was noted that the density of this infill project would be justifiable in the neighbourhood, yet the committee suggested that the applicant contact the adjoining buildings to help guide the build.
- January 4 2016 – Presented plans to 1149 Rockland Avenue residents regarding concepts for different planning options, following up with questions. There was general appreciation for including the residents in our initial design plans (*recognition of this meeting is included in the correspondence*). As a result of this meeting and further discussion, our team reduced the building to 4 storeys, modified the windows to integrate privacy between neighbours, eliminated the wrap around balconies for privacy and reduced the depth of the east portion of the Burdett elevation to maximize sunlight and views, while stepping back the south eastern edge. More recently we have shifted the building forward, which will enhance late afternoon sunlight to the rear homes in the neighbouring building.

- January 5 2016 – Presented plans to 1115 Rockland Avenue residents regarding concepts for different planning options, following up with questions. There was general content with proposed options during the meeting and following the meeting (*recognition of this meeting is included in the correspondence*). As a result of future discussions, the applicant design team maximized sunlight by eliminating the 5th floor and reducing building setbacks three times, added privacy glazing/ screening on our projections, all while warming the façade features and design to create an integrated sense of place. More recently we have integrated five large magnolias to enhance privacy and green design.
- January 8 2016 – Met with various western-facing owners of 1149 Rockland Avenue in their personal units to discuss plans and work on the best solution for each of the owners. As a result, we have minimized our windows and adjusted the interior floor plans to maximize privacy.