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12 December 2016

City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC
V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Helps and City of Victoria Council,

Re: 1144, 1148, 1152, 1154 Johnson Street and 1406 Chambers Street per Zoning No. 00487 and Development Permit No. 00434

Thank you for taking the time to review our proposed project for the subject site encompassing 1144 - 1154 Johnson Street and 1406 Chambers Street. We are the architecture firm that has been retained by the Owner to update the project design based City Staff comments concerning the previous submission. Below is a project description that identifies the architectural design intent, the relationship to the Neighbourhood Plan and Design Guidelines, the design considerations in response to the engagement with the Fernwood Residents' Association and City Staff, and the overall benefits for the existing and evolving community within the context of the City of Victoria.

Context

The proposed project is partially a ground-level parking lot set within the Southwest quadrant of the Fernwood neighbourhood in Victoria. Bordering both Johnson and Chambers streets, the proposed project is sited on a sloped geography with 1 ½ to 2 ½ - storey houses and a 3 - storey apartment building at the higher elevation overlooking the property from the North side. The neighbouring houses and apartment building maintain generous rear yards at the interface with the subject site and front onto the Harris Green Park along Pandora Street.

Along the blocks to the East and to the South of the proposed project (across Chambers Street and Johnson Street respectively), a limited number of parking lots, ½ to 2 ½ - storey houses, and a vast number of 3 to 6 - storey multi-unit residential buildings line the streets.

To the East of the subject site is a ground level parking lot that services the neighbourhood medical-related facilities, followed by a 3 ½ - storey multi-unit residential building. At the far East-end of the block (intersection of Johnson and Cook Streets) a large parking lot servicing the historic mid-century Medical Arts Building is set to be redeveloped as "The Wade" multi-unit residential development and will encompass the entire end of the block. Across the intersection to the East of the 1100 block of Johnson Street is a relatively recently developed 10 - storey mixed-use multi-unit residential building.

The proposed project has been designed with great consideration to the existing and future context, and consultation has been undertaken with City Staff and the community to help ensure an appropriate architectural response for the subject site.

Proposed Project Massing and Scale

The proposed project is a 6 - storey multi-unit residential building. Owing to the context, both today and in years past, the proposal emphasizes the concept of a 'liveable neighbourhood'. The focus on ground-oriented neighbourhood development while fulfilling sustainable housing density is consistent with the community vision through the design of the building massing, the historic material references, the variation of unit sizes, and the design of ground level landscape that creates a warm and inviting neighbourhood feel along the evolving Johnson Street and bike lane corridor.

The proposed building is articulated with a series undulating massing elements that reduce the overall scale of the building by creating a more immediate engagement with the site at the lower level, while receding in a series of vertical steps until the top floor is not visible if one is to stand at the forefront of the building. The ground level interface of the proposed building at the sidewalks along Johnson and Chambers Streets is punctuated with a row of 2 - storey lightly coloured warm grey brick massing elements and windows that reflect the rhythm of single-family houses that stood along Johnson Street many years earlier.

The third floor the building is defined by a warm white metal frame with columns that drop to the ground level and facilitate to distinguish the rhythm on the 2 - storey townhouse-like modules below. The metal framework extends to the Southeast corner of the building where it changes orientation and forms light arch-like massing elements towards the street intersection and signals the location of the primary building entrance.

Along the South and East elevations the building steps back yet again at the fourth and fifth levels with undulating walls that form balconies and semi-private terraces, while contributing to visual interest and participating in the break up of sound waves from vehicles along Johnson Street. At the fourth and fifth levels of the South elevation, the walls form a saw-tooth pattern that facilitates to preserve privacy for the houses to the North by redirecting views out from the suites to the Northwest towards the trees in Harris Green Park. Finally at the sixth floor the building dramatically steps back in order to reduce the appearance of the building from the permitted six storeys (60 ft. height) to a more modest five storeys (50 ft. height) in order to acknowledge the varying housing scales of the neighbourhood context.

Materiality and Landscaping

In keeping with the scaled-back massing that steps to acknowledge the neighbourhood housing scales, great emphasis was placed on the interface of the building material features and landscaping to create tactile surfaces for both the inhabitant and pedestrian along the newly proposed wider green strips of the sidewalk boulevards.

High quality platinum grey coloured brick adds finer texture along the Johnson and Chambers Street frontages via the projecting 2 - storey townhouse-like massing elements, reflecting a single-family housing module and emphasizing a historic neighbourhood feel for residents. The brick is further brought to the forefront of the terraces along the planters and planting strips that create the buffer between the public sidewalk and the semi-private terrace spaces. Landscaping including tall ornamental grasses, Heather and Lavender add to the transitioning planting areas between semi-private and public zones, while at the same time adding to the overall width of the landscaped street boulevard.

The lavish West side yard and North rear yard landscape features contribute to the transitioning grades that require the retention of a retaining wall that separates the houses at the higher elevation to the North from the subject site. The retaining wall is lined with a warm wood fence, a series of trees, Yew hedges strips, tall ornamental grasses, ferns, and shade-adapted shrubs to facilitate pleasant screening solutions between properties.

Warm white preformed metal panels and warm shades of grey cementitious facade materials with a linear horizontal emphasis are incorporated at various locations to emphasize the stepping and undulations in the building facade. The scales of the panels are determined by the module of several stacked bricks in order to maintain relationships between material elements, while growing in dimension to match the scale of the overall building.

The metal panels and brick create the backdrops for two green walls of trained Ivy incorporated along the North and West building elevations in locations where windows are minimized to reduce the appearance of direct visual interface between neighbouring properties.

Further punctuation of detailed material elements is found in high quality glass and anodized aluminum coloured metal finishes. These elements are incorporated in the window wall system and main building entry, as well as the guardrails and canopy features at the numerous balcony and terrace locations.

Dwelling Units, Density, and Affordability

The proposed project is comprised of 48 accessible dwelling units and a strata amenity room with a 2:1 Floor Space Ratio. The building is composed of a healthy mix of studios, 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom suites. The units vary in sizes from approximately 43 m² to 112 m², with a ratio of about 1/3 two-bedroom units and approximately 2/3 one-bedroom and studio units. A covenant is proposed to dedicate a minimum of 20% of the units for rental dwellings.

In addition, storage spaces are also provided at the parkade mezzanine level for residential, building maintenance, and general strata uses.

Neighbourhood Plan, and although limited commercial would be consistent with the OCP, they may not be viable in this location. Consider eliminating the retail in favour of residential. Townhouse style units at grade fronting Johnson may be better suited to this frontage.

Response: No retail units are include in the proposal. Townhouse-like units have been incorproated along Johnson and Chambers Streets.

- Comment: Consider providing garage entrance closer to Chambers in order to reduce or eliminate the driveway behind the building.
Response: A garage entrance was providing per City of Victoria Engineering requirements and BC Transporattion Act regulations.
- Comment: Please reconsider the transition between the building with the lower scale residential buildings on Pandora by introducing stepbacks at the upper levels similar to the front elevation.
Response: The building is set back at multiple levels in response to the concern. Note that the 'lower scale' houses to the North of the subject site are at a higher elevation than the proposed building, which also mitigates the difference in building scales. Please refer to the building elevations for additional clarity.
- Comment: Please reconsider the transition at the corner of Chambers and Johnson by introducing a stepback at the upper levels.
Response: The proposed building is set back at the upper level to give the appearance that it is a 5 - storey building instead of 6 - storeys. In addition, each stacked floor is set back at the Southeast corner and the building is given a sense of visual lightness through the use of glass guardrails and windows wall that visually wrap the building corner.
- Comment: Please consider redesigning the entrance to the residential lobby to ensure a positive street relationship and to address potential CPTED issues.
Response: The entrance to the residential lobby has been completely redesigned for a positive street relationship and the clear line of sight mitigates any CPTED issues.
- Comment: Please consider providing additional landscaping space around the building. It is noted that currently the majority of ground level outdoor space is dedicated to circulations.
Response: The ground level outdoor space has been redesigned and the bulk of the areas is now dedicated to landscaping space.
- Comment: Please consider increasing the amount of space and bins dedicated to recycling and garbage bins to ensure the area will be functional for the size of building.
Response: The amount of space and bins dedicated to recycling and garbage bins has been redesign to provide increased area that will be functional for the building size.
- Comment: Please provide additional details regarding the treatment of the rooftop garden and the mechanical penthouse.
Response: The top floor has been redesigned with greater setbacks to reduce opportunities for undesirable overlooks to the neighbouring properties and as a result no longer includes a rooftop garden. In lieu, planter boxes have been provided along the guardrails of the two uppermost suites.
- Comment: Please provide a lighting plan.
Response: A detailed lighting plan will be provided with consideration to CPTED and the mitigation of urban light pollution.
- Comment: Please ensure that all hard and soft surface treatments are labelled on the landscape plan.
Response: Hard and soft surface treatments are indicated on the landscape plan.
- Comment: Please show the proposed Class-2 bicycle racks on the site plan. The location should be easily accessible.
Response: Six Class-2 bicycle racks are indicated on the site plan adjacent to the primary building entrance.
- Comment: Please label all materials on the elevation plans. Please confirm that the windows are clear glass.
Response: All materials are labeled on the elevation drawings. Windows are clear glass.
- Comment: Please ensure that the renderings and elevation plans are consistent with respect to building materials, windows, etc.
Response: The renderings and elevation plans are consistent with respect to building materials, windows, etc.
- Comment: A site specific zone will be created for this proposal. Please consider removing the "proposed variances" section from the letter to Mayor and Council.
Response: No "proposed variances" section is included in this letter.

Transportation Features

All parking corresponding to the proposed project is located below grade. The ratio of parking stalls to units is 1.2 parking spaces per unit and the requirement has been met in full for a total of 58 parking spaces, including 1 required accessible parking stall.

The parkade entry is situated at the Northeast corner of the subject site along Chambers Street, per Engineering requirements corresponding to regulations outlined in the BC Transportation Act that prohibits the opportunity for parking access to the parkade along Johnson Street.

Bicycle parking meets the required 1:1 ratio of spaces to units and is located at the parkade mezzanine level with direct roll-in / roll-out access to help encourage bicycle travel, particularly given the nearby benefit of the Johnson Street bike lane. In addition, 6 Class 2 bike spaces are located near the primary building entrance along Johnson Street.

Owing to the various transportation options in the area, as well as the access to amenities within a two kilometre radius, the need for individual car travel is reduced for future residents that have the ability to opt for public transportation, bicycle travel, or basic pedestrian mobility.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Design features are incorporated into the architectural and landscape design to facilitate neighbourhood and resident safety and security through environmental design. Ground-orient units with generous patios create buffers between the public and private building interface, while at the same time creating a sense of 'eyes on the street' to help minimize opportunities for unseen criminal activity. Landscaping and walkways are designed to allow for clear lines of sight, along with ground oriented lighting planning that mitigates blinding lights and dark corners. In addition, secure underground vehicle and bicycle parking is providing with radio control access.

Infrastructure

The proposed project will utilize existing service infrastructure and will contribute to the expansion of portions of the infrastructure based on municipal requirements. The improvement will be of greatest visual notice to the community via the widening and streetscape improvements along the Johnson and Chambers Street boulevards.

Sustainability

The proposed project commits to incorporating Sustainable design principles, such as minimized water usage, recyclable materials, native landscape planting, and energy efficiency, in order to achieve a minimum of Built Green Gold.

Artificial light planning on the subject site will also be restricted to mitigate urban light pollution.

Community Benefits

In the short term the proposed project offers individuals the opportunities for neighbourhood employment during the duration of construction, along with the corresponding spin off economic benefits to local businesses that provide services to construction staff. In the longer term residents in the community are provided with the opportunity for additional modestly priced market and rental housing to help service the median income bracket for the area.

In addition to the direct potential benefits through employment and housing, the proposed project benefits the community through the improvement of infrastructure, the creation of a neighbourly streetscape, and by offering Sustainable design building stock that helps to reduce the City of Victoria's environmental footprint in lieu of the existing ground level parking lot.

Response to Development Services Division Comments from Previous Application

- Comment: Please consider obtaining the property at 1039 Johnson Street to ensure that this property is not "orphaned" making future development difficult.
Response: In spite of best efforts, the property was not available for purchase.
- Comment: Retail units in this area of Fernwood, are not anticipated in the Fernwood



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Conclusion

The proposed project offers a mix of historic and modern massing elements, scales, landscaping features, traditional material references, and Sustainable design features that respond to the immediate and broader context of the subject site. With acknowledgment of existing and future contextual considerations, the project provides positive impacts for the community that will help to enhance the neighbourhood through economic growth and additional housing opportunities.

The newly designed proposed project has taken into consideration and has addressed the previous comments from City Staff, in addition to acknowledging community considerations that are in the purview of the Architect and Owner to address.

We thank you for taking the time to review and consider the details of our proposed project. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kardum".

Joseph Kardum ARCHITECT AIBC LEED AP

Principal

koka architecture + design inc.