



LOW
HAMMOND
ROWE
ARCHITECTS

10 April 2017

Mayor and Council
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC

re Unity Commons, 1303 Fairfield Road
Resubmission for rezoning and development permit

Following review and discussions with City staff, Low Hammond Rowe Architects have made a number of design revisions to our submission to address the suggestions and recommendations made.

The revisions are divided into three broad categories: miscellaneous corrections to dimensions and layout to meet zoning criteria, revisions to the interface of semi-public space and public realm to address City intent for the Statutory Right-of-Way (SRW), and significant revisions to the massing, materials, and elevations to address staff comments on aesthetics and urban design.

Massing and Elevations

Discussions with staff indicated that their desire for the massing of the existing church bell tower to be echoed in the new building. This is understood as an intention to maintain a strong landmark corner to the site, as well as provide a memory of the old church building.

LHRA developed a number of design options using the identical dimensions and location of the church tower. These were reviewed with staff, who we understood to support the new massing direction, with some reservations about the execution of the design. Following this review, LHRA have developed a new iteration which uses the tower massing, but integrates it into the overall massing, and adds a different use of materials.

In addition to the new tower mass, the building is now stepped back from Moss Street on the top (4th) floor. Exterior balconies (designed to Passive House design principles to minimize thermal bridging) have been lightened in structure and appearance and are now proposed to be constructed of painted structural steel with aluminum railings and stained wood guards and privacy screens. We believe this will further reduce the impression of the building's size..

The exterior cladding has been changed from an exposed insulation finish system (EIFS) to a combination of rainscreen stucco and stained wood siding (over a 190mm exterior insulation layer. This cladding approach has been extended over all three upper floors. This new approach unifies the upper floors and through its patterning of windows and cladding, breaks up the visual bulk of the massing. The Passive

House construction details will provide for approximately 200mm (8") deep window reveals, which will emphasize a sense of solidity of the building.

The ground level walls adjacent to the public realm remain as brick masonry – although the proposed brick colour has been changed to a warm grey with matching flush-struck mortar.

Public Realm Interface

Staff indicated support for expanding the usefulness of both the semi-public open space and public right-of-way, providing that the entirety of the SRW was devoted to public access. In response to this, the level space to the north and west of the retail/café space has been expanded for potential café seating and a variety of public seating areas.

The complex sloping geometry of the public space around the site presents a challenging design problem to preserve safe public access on sloping streets adjacent to desired level space. This has been resolved by splitting the travelled area of the sidewalk as it descends Fairfield Road to the corner into an outer sloping sidewalk and an inner set of steps and seating risers. The difference between the sloping sidewalk and level area is handled with a curved retaining wall with public benches and railings along its top. New street trees around the corner will provide a leafy context for both the public seating and sidewalk café space.

As the site continues to slope down Moss Street in front of the church entrance, the semi-public and public paths are split into sloped sidewalk and two small sets of steps. Low retaining walls and railings ensure pedestrian safety, while maximizing useful space at the church entrance.

The site also slopes steeply from the property line along Moss Street down to the curb line. This is resolved with a paved lay-by area, accessible for vehicle drop-off over a roll curb, and a set of long steps up to the sidewalk/church entry level.

Semi-public and parts of the public pedestrian realm are proposed to be paved with brick, including brick salvaged from the existing church (subject to quality evaluation of the brick after deconstruction). Memorial bricks from the existing church plaza will be reinstalled. The public sidewalk along the perimeter of the property line is proposed to be paved in concrete to clearly delineate the boundary between public and semi-public areas.

The line of the ground floor walls of the retail/café space and church have been adjusted to move them further back from the SRW, increasing publicly accessible space, and coordinating them with the new columns for the new tower massing.

Conditions to be met prior to Committee of the Whole

“While staff note the mix of uses is positive and understand the challenges associated with providing an assembly use at grade, the current four storey proposal does not meet the goals and objectives of the Official Community Plan and cannot be supported by staff in its current form.”

Response: The fourth storey allows for an additional four rental units that provide the revenue needed to sustain both the below-market sale or lease of the church space to the Fairfield United Church, and the additional costs involved in constructing the building to Certified Passive House standards. Elimination of the fourth floor would entail the deletion of the church sanctuary from the program and/or the elimination of the Passive House level of energy performance..

“Please consider the possibility of retaining and heritage designating the church. Alternatively, we would encourage exploring the adaptive reuse of the existing church structure or incorporating elements of the existing church’s design and/or materials into the proposal.”

Response: As previously noted, the cost of bringing the existing church up to even a fraction of current life safety requirements is prohibitive. The limitations of the existing buildings would also preclude both the continued participation of the Fairfield United Church in the project and the provision of Passive House sustainability.

“The ground floor plane will need to be refined to ensure that it responds positively to the street. Blank walls will not be supported. The use and placement of retaining walls should also be reconsidered to ensure connectivity to the sidewalk and pedestrian permeability.”

Response: The design of the building edge and the semi-public and public realm have been redesigned in consultation with staff.

“The overall massing will need to be reduced to ensure that there is significant stepping back to provide a transition to the neighbouring low density residential uses along Moss Street and Fairfield.”

Response: The top floor has been stepped back from Moss Street. The upper floor design already stepped back from the neighbouring single-family properties; the massing of the balconies has been made lighter and less obtrusive. Balconies are still screened to block views from them to the neighbouring rear gardens.

“Please consider the local context both in terms of massing and in terms of materials particularly along Moss Street.”

Response: As noted above, the massing has been redesigned to retain an 'echo' of the church bell tower and mark the corner. We have tried numerous options of colour and material to attempt to respond to the context and have received a wide range of mixed responses from the community, FGCA CALUC, and staff. We consider the context to lack a coherent expression or materiality and have therefore proceeded with a design which we feel appropriate in massing, with its own complementary materiality, and expressive of the era in which it is being built.

"Please ensure that entrance features are prominent and at grade."

Response: As with the original submission, the entrances to the church sanctuary, retail/café space, and apartment entry remain at grade; all have a unique expression and a suitable semi-public forecourt area.

"Increased use of patios and/or outdoor spaces along Moss and Fairfield will help animate and enliven the buildings relationship with the street."

Response: As noted previously, the Moss Street and Fairfield Road frontages have been redesigned according to discussions with staff.

"Increased detail on the street elevations (adding details on the adjacent properties) will be useful."

Response: The resubmission includes new street elevations with photographic representation of the neighbouring properties.

"A third party land lift analysis may be required to justify the additional density above that envisioned in the Official Community Plan."

Response: Our client is prepared to consider this. A land-lift analysis is not currently available.

"A housing agreement is required to ensure the residential units remain rental in perpetuity."

Response: Our client re-confirms her desire to enter into an agreement that covenants the apartments as rental in perpetuity.

"A design covenant may be required to ensure the residential storeys are designed to a Passive House standard."

Response: Our client is prepared to consider this.

"The Plan Check for the proposal has significant outstanding issues/ missing/ or incorrect information. Please ensure that your resubmission addresses these items."

If you need clarification on any of the items contained in the Plan Check, please contact the Zoning Administration staff as noted on the Plan Check."

Response: Miscellaneous revisions are noted on the drawings and above in this letter to address these items.

"Updated letter to Mayor and Council providing more details on the proposal."

Response: We believe this letter addresses all the issues that have been raised by staff in correspondence and meetings. We would be pleased to provide further clarification on any details that are requested by staff or Council.

Conclusion

We hope that our revised submission has dealt with staff's concerns in a supportable manner. We remain committed to continuing our collaborative work with staff, committees, and Council to develop a project that provides true environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

This project delivers sixteen desirable rental homes and a lively corner café, and preserves an important cultural and spiritual sanctuary for its congregation in the Fairfield neighbourhood.

Sincerely,

Low Hammond Rowe Architects Inc

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "chris. Rowe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Rowe
Architect AIBC, LEED AP
principal



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ARCHITECTS

10 January 2017

Mayor and Council
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC

re 1303 Fairfield Road – application for rezoning

Low Hammond Rowe Architects, on behalf of Unity Urban Properties Ltd, is pleased to submit this application for a new development on the property at 1303 Fairfield Road. The proposal will require an amendment to the Official Community Plan (for number of storeys), rezoning to a new zone and a Development Permit. A parking variance is also requested.

This proposal will replace the aging Fairfield United Church at the corner of Fairfield Road and Moss Street – which is otherwise in urgent need of expensive repairs and code upgrades unaffordable by the congregation – with a new mixed-use building including 16 covenanted rental apartments, a corner-focused retail space, and most importantly, a new home for the Fairfield United Church.

The project fulfills the aims of true triple-bottom-line sustainability:

Environmental Sustainability

- very low energy footprint and very low GHG emissions
- low energy costs for renters
- Built to last: Passive House construction means a solid, high-quality building

The main floor church sanctuary and commercial space will be built to the most stringent current energy codes, but the residential part of the building will be built to Certified Passive House standards. This will give the building an extremely low energy footprint - with energy use at least 65% below conventional modern construction. This is achieved through the use of high performance triple-glazed windows, almost 12" of insulation, complete air tightness, and a sophisticated heat-recovery ventilation system providing exceptional air quality. Solar gain and building envelope performance allow an entire apartment to be heated in the winter by a small electric baseboard in the bathroom.

Economic Sustainability

- viable long-term neighbourhood-focussed business plan
- locally-owned and operated
- quality durable building with low life cycle costs
- profits support important social and environmental goals

Market rents for both apartments and the commercial space will provide the return needed to pay for the Passive House building upgrades and to support lower than market rent or purchase of the church sanctuary.

Social Sustainability

- 16 units of rental housing
- compatible neighbourhood commercial
- Fairfield United Church and their partner organizations remain in community in their historic location

The Unity will provide a unique mix of desirable uses entirely compatible with the 5 Corners village and the Fairfield community. First of all, it provides 16 units of generously-sized one- and two-bedroom apartments (which will be permanently preserved as rental through covenant). Secondly, it can support a lively neighbourhood cafe or restaurant in a busy village location. Thirdly, and most exceptionally, it will sustain the congregation of the Fairfield United Church in its traditional location and its own community. The new sanctuary will also support a wider community of other faiths and continue to serve as a valuable venue for community arts and performances in a properly serviced and purpose-built facility.

The project has been designed with close consideration of the relevant objectives of the Official Community Plan and with extensive consultation with immediate neighbours. This proposal represents a special opportunity to maintain an important spiritual and cultural institution in its historic community while responding to the demand for rental apartments and adding to the vitality of street life at the Five Corners village. We look forward to presenting this proposal to Council and committees and demonstrating its many positive features.

Sincerely,
Low Hammond Rowe Architects Inc

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Rowe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Rowe
Architect AIBC LEED AP
principal

1 Description of Proposal

1.1 Project components

- a concrete (non-combustible) ground floor with a 2,400 SF church sanctuary space, a 1,500 SF commercial unit with outdoor patio space, and apartment lobby and common storage and bicycle parking;
- upper storeys of wood-frame construction with 16 one- and two-bedroom rental apartments;
- a 16-space underground parking garage.

The upper three floors of apartments will be constructed to achieve Certified Passive House status, with an Energy Use Intensity of approximately 15 kWh/m²/year.

1.2 Massing

The new building mass is somewhat larger than the existing church and church hall buildings, but it is no higher, and has significantly increased south and east side yard setbacks from the two adjacent single-family homes. Because of its location north and west of the adjoining properties, there is minimal shadowing impact (and minimal change) on the sun access to neighbours.

The top penthouse floor steps back from the south elevation in order to reduce the apparent height of the building and to move the apartments and their decks away from direct overlook on neighbouring single-family lots.

Overall, the chosen design approach keeps the main massing of the building simple and rectilinear, and providing detail and scale through the exterior balconies and manipulation of the ground floor massing. The balconies take their form and structure from the needs of Passive House design – minimizing cantilevers which act as thermal bridges. The main level retail space angles up at the street corner to establish its presence and commercial scale. The entry to the church sanctuary shelters under the overhang of the building above, with its importance stressed with a colonnaded trellis facing Moss Street defining a new church *temenos* or porch.

1.3 Neighbourliness

Through direct consultation with the neighbours, the design of the building has been tweaked to minimize overlook and maintain privacy in both the houses and their rear gardens. Landscaping and fence design has been developed in close consultation with the neighbours.

1.4 Exterior Materials

The building exterior includes a brick masonry main floor (using a pale off-white brick and matching mortar) with deep window and entrance reveals. The upper residential floors are clad in an Exterior Insulation Finish system (EIFS). This includes approximately 150mm (6") of exterior insulation which creates deep reveals around the windows and enhances a feeling of mass and solidity.

1.5 Colours

Colours have been selected to maintain a visual reference to the original materials and colours of the Church, with an off-white base, a rich deep brick red for the middle floors, and a white penthouse level intended to blend into the sky to minimize the apparent height. The intent is to maintain the scale-giving proportions of the original Church building and continue to fit within the material and colour palette of the Five Corners village context.

1.6 Landscaping

Plantings, new trees, fences, and balcony screening have been selected and arranged to preserve the privacy of the single-family neighbours to the south and east. The street edge spaces have been designed as forecourts for the apartment entrance and the church sanctuary, and as potential patio seating area for the commercial space. Existing commemorative pavers used in the church forecourt will be reused in the hard landscape areas adjacent to the new sanctuary entrance.

The building's footprint and parking garage have been designed to minimize impacts on mature trees on the adjoining properties. A arborist has reviewed the trees in question and prepared a tree protection protocol for them. There are no mature trees on the subject property.

The location recommended by City staff for the parking ramp will require the removal of an existing cherry tree on the City boulevard on Moss Street. The consulting arborist has noted that the remaining street tree on Moss Street is diseased and recommends its replacement. Following submission of this application City staff will be consulted as to the best approach for the redevelopment of the street edge spaces.

The projecting main level retail space will have an extensive green roof. Along with detention and filtration of stormwater, this will enhance views from the upper level apartments and be visible from along Fairfield Road due to the height and character of planting.

2 Government Policies

2.1 Official Community Plan and Neighbourhood Plan

We believe that this proposal meets most of the policy objectives of the Official Community Plan with the exception of the number of storeys. This proposal is for a four-storey building, whereas the OCP policy for Small Urban Villages indicates a three-storey limit for streets other than arterial or secondary arterial roads. (Fairfield Road is neither.)

PLACE-BASED LAND USE MANAGEMENT

6.1 Urban place designations are established and identified on Map 2, including built form, place character, land use and density characteristics, to represent present and proposed conditions and to support the development of a diversity of places across the city defined generally as follows:

6.1.7 Small Urban Village consists of a mix of commercial and community services primarily serving the surrounding residential area, in low-rise, ground-oriented multi-unit residential and mixed-use buildings generally up to four storeys in height along arterial and secondary arterial roads and three storeys in height in other locations, serving as a local transit service hub.

3 Project Benefits and Amenities

- Preserves the traditional meeting place of the Fairfield United Church's congregation on its original site and within its original community;
- Allows for expanded use of the church sanctuary for other faith groups and arts events in a safe and modern facility;
- Provides for the enhancement of neighbourhood vitality in the form of a potential new café or restaurant;
- Creates 16 new rental apartments, which will be protected by covenant on the property;

4 Need and Demand

The primary driver for this project is the desire of the congregation of the Fairfield United Church to remain in their traditional community. The congregation has not been able to afford the on-going maintenance of the building over many years and were not able to raise the \$1 million to \$2 million needed to reverse decades of deferred maintenance and bring the building up to even a portion of current safety codes. They accordingly sold the property to a local developer who would commit to making a new church sanctuary a key component of a new mixed-use development on the site.

There is a demonstrable demand for quality rental housing in desirable neighbourhoods such as Fairfield. The type of housing proposed not only accommodates small young families but also older residents wishing to down-size yet remain in their familiar neighbourhood.

Given its location as a one of the “Five Corners” in this small urban village, the provision of active commercial street life – in addition to that of the church sanctuary – is an obvious choice to round out the mix of uses proposed.

5 Impacts

The two adjoining single-family homes were built well after the original Church. With near-zero setbacks and virtually blank walls of the Church and hall as their property edges, both houses have been designed with relatively blank walls facing the subject site. Nevertheless the primary impact on these homes is that of overlook from the new apartment neighbours. Extensive consultation was undertaken with each of these neighbours to review and help us understand the potential impacts of the proposed design. Following this consultation, the location of windows, exterior balconies, and landscaping and screening was revised to minimize overlooks on rear gardens and decks, or on the few windows facing the site. Other windows and balconies are located to face only blank side walls of the neighbouring houses or are directed towards the street.

A thorough sun access study was completed. This demonstrates that the new building has little impact on sun access for neighbours due to its northerly location.

6 Design and Development Permit Guidelines

The project has been designed to meet or exceed the relevant guidelines, including:

- Advisory Design Guidelines for Buildings, Signs and Awnings (1981)
- Guidelines for Fences, Gates and Shutters (2010)
- Buildings are encouraged to have shop windows and building entrances that are oriented towards the street.

7 Safety and Security

The design follows best practices for CPTED including:

- all entrances located adjacent to the street with high visibility from the street;
- 24/7 occupation;
- good overlook of site landscape area and parking ramp from adjacent apartments;
- obvious distinction of semi-public from public areas;
- lighting and windows in entrance areas, common areas and parking garage to maximize visibility and surveillance;
- security gate for parking garage.

8 Transportation

The site is served by BC Transit’s number 7 bus line, connecting the site with downtown Victoria and UVic, with a stop nearby to the site across Moss Street, and weekday buses every 15 minutes.

Class 1 Bicycle parking for apartment residents is provided in accordance with Schedule C requirements on the main apartment entry level directly off the street and connected to the apartment lobby. Additional Class 2 bicycle parking will be provided with racks adjacent to the commercial space and church sanctuary. Additional parking space for mobility scooters is provided adjacent to the apartment lobby.

The project's location on a rocky site makes the construction of underground parking challenging and expensive, nonetheless 16 parking spaces are provided – a ratio of one space per apartment. The underground garage is accessed from Moss Street via a ramp down the south edge of the property – as recommended by City of Victoria Engineering staff. (Apartment garbage and recycling will be stored in the garage. Commercial and church garbage and recycling will be stored in an enclosure at the foot of the parking ramp.) Parking in the garage will be available on a shared-use basis to church and commercial customers during the day. The garage will be secured after business hours with an overhead gate.

A transportation study was conducted by Watt Consulting Group and forms part of the application package. The purpose of this study was to determine if the proposed parking supply will accommodate the expected parking demand by considering parking demand at representative sites and identify appropriate parking management and transportation demand management (TDM) approaches.

The study notes that the 16 supplied parking spaces fall short of the current Schedule C requirement by either 36 or 47 parking spaces, depending on the method of calculation.

The Watt report concludes that *“resident parking demand will be 8 vehicles, residential visitor parking demand will be 1 vehicle, café parking demand will be 10 vehicles, retail parking demand will be 3 vehicles and non-event church parking demand will be 1 vehicle. Parking demand during an event at the church varies depending on size.”*

Eight parking spaces will be reserved for residents at all times. Residential visitor, commercial, and typical weekday church parking demand will be in a shared pool of 8 spaces. All larger church- or event-related parking demand is expected to be accommodated off site, as has always been the case historically.

Clearly a mixed-use project of this type and size would be unrealizable if the Schedule C requirements were to be met without variance. The provably decreasing demand for car ownership and the project's convenient location in a highly walkable neighbourhood supports serious consideration of this parking variance.

9 Heritage

The church building is not on the City of Victoria heritage registry and there is no statement of significance to suggest it should be. The design and construction both inside and out is pleasant but relatively conventional for its time and unremarkable. The church was inexpensively built in 1926 using residential-grade methods and materials and has not endured well.

Refer to the attached letter from RJC (29 June 2016) for a detailed summary of building structural conditions and issues affecting rehabilitation of the existing structure.

The extent and complexity of the structural upgrades required to prepare the building for conversion to residential use makes this form of conversion financially unviable. This type of conversion has been undertaken elsewhere in Victoria without commercial success. Furthermore, as corroborated in RJC's letter, significant exterior alterations would be required to support new floor assemblies, windows, and entrances.

Most importantly, the congregation of the Fairfield United Church are passionate about being able to stay in their historic community. The high cost of stabilization and restoration of the existing building has proved unaffordable by the congregation. Economically-viable preservation of the building for some other use would result in the displacement of the congregation from the Fairfield community.

10 Green Building Features

10.1 GHG reduction through Passive House design and construction

The primary green building feature of this proposal is to make a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. It will achieve this through design, construction, and certification as a Passive House building. Passive House standards will be applied to the three apartment floors. Because of ventilation requirements and the type and routine of occupation, a certified Passive House approach is not considered ideal or financially feasible at this time for the commercial space and the church sanctuary. These spaces will nevertheless employ best practice or better for insulation, equipment efficiency, and power and water consumption.

Passive House design and construction will include the following features:

- triple-glazed windows, certified by the German PassivHaus Institut;
- high level of air-tightness through a continuous liquid-applied air/vapour barrier;
- an additional 150mm (6") of EPS foam insulation on walls, and 200mm (8") of EPS under the floor slab and over the roof;
- air-to-air heat recovery ventilation units in each apartment and common areas, recycling heat from exhaust air to pre-heat incoming continuous ventilation air (resulting in very high indoor air quality levels), also certified by the PassivHaus Institut;
- condensing clothes dryers;
- LED lighting
- air tightness testing of the entire building prior to installation of cladding;
- verification of the design energy model by an accredited Passive House reviewer.

Each unit will be provided with additional make-up heat with a single 500W baseboard heater in the bathroom. No other heat sources will be needed. Total energy use for the apartments is expected to be at or below 15kW/m²/year, and will be provided by electricity, 93% of which is from renewable hydroelectric production.

(Note that the City of Vancouver is about to implement a new green building rezoning policy which will can be met at its highest level through Passive House certification.)

10.2 Other green building best practices to be employed

- low VOC emissions in materials and coatings;
- individual electric metering;
- water-conserving plumbing fixtures.

10.3 Stormwater management

The small site is located on rock and does not provide ideal conditions for return of stormwater to the ground. On-site stormwater detention will be provided in subgrade facilities prior to discharge to municipal mains. Further detention and pre-treatment will be provided by the intensive green roof over the main level retail space.

11 Infrastructure

Existing public services appear adequate to support the new development. Further consultation with City of Victoria Engineering staff will be undertaken during the formal review process and any required upgrades included in the proposal.

12 Consultation and Design Refinement Process to date

- 29 Jun 2016: Review with City of Victoria Planning staff;
- 18 Jul 2016: Presentation and discussion of initial program and design concept (by invitation to surrounding neighbours);
- Jul/Aug 2016: Individual meetings with each of the immediate neighbours in single-family homes;

- 29 Aug 2016: Follow-up presentation and discussion of developed design concept (by invitation to surrounding neighbours);
- 01 Sep 2016: Review with City of Victoria Planning staff;
- 19 Sep 2016: Preliminary presentation to Fairfield Gonzales Community Association CALUC;
- 29 Oct 2016: Open House presentation to wider neighbourhood.
- 21 Nov 2016: Preliminary presentation to Fairfield Gonzales Community Association CALUC;
- 19 Dec 2016: Formal public presentation to Fairfield Gonzales Community Association CALUC.

A number of major revisions were made to the design in response to consultation with the project's immediate neighbours, prior to submission to the FGCA CALUC. These were focused on improving setbacks from the neighbouring rear gardens and eliminating or screening possible overlook of the neighbours' gardens from the new building. These revisions were subsequently presented to the neighbours at individual meetings.

We have yet to receive formal notes from the 19 December CALUC meeting but our understanding is that they would note some concerns expressed about the modernity of the design, the height, and the amount of parking being provided. We are not aware of any specific recommendations that would lead to design revisions at this time.