

By email to councillors@victoria.ca

4 October 2016

Dear Mayor and Council

Re: 2835-2855 Quadra Street and 2780-2782 Fifth Street

On 7 September 2016 the Hillside Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee (NAC) hosted a community meeting related to a proposed development at the above address. Eric Barker, the architect for the project, made the presentation on behalf of the property owner Primex Investment. Twenty-five community members attended the meeting. This letter summarizes the comments and concerns of these meeting participants regarding the proposed development.

Over the past several years Primex Investment as well as previous owners have made other proposals related to development of the parking lot at the south end of this property. Additional comments relevant to the current development proposal are summarized in a letter to Mayor and Council from NAC dated 30 May 2016. Key community concerns and recommendations brought forward at the May meeting – in particular the recommendations to retain the existing driveway on Quadra Street, to relocate the garbage bins, and to maintain natural light for residents of the adjacent condo building – have been incorporated into the current proposal. The May NAC letter also describes measures that Primex Investments has proposed to address local concern about impacts of the proposed development on parking, which was also the main concern at the September meeting.

The current proposal incorporates a substantive change to the May proposal, as Primex Investment recently purchased the lot at 2780/2782 Fifth Street and proposes to make it part of the application to redevelop the adjacent parking property at 2835-2855 Quadra Street. The lot is currently zoned for duplex and would need to be rezoned for multifamily use.

The site at 2835-2855 Quadra currently provides 64 units of low-rise rental housing. The proposed development would provide 33 additional units of rental housing in three new buildings, bringing the total number of rental units on the site to 97. New rental units would range in size from 400 to 650 square feet and would include 15 one-bedroom units, and 18 two-bedroom units. The new buildings would be three storeys high. Ground level apartments would open to the exterior and those on floors two and three would be accessed from exterior stairwells. The portion of the site facing Fifth Street – currently an unused driveway – would be landscaped.

The proposed development would require a parking variance. Current rules would require 126 parking spaces for 97 units. The proponent is proposing to provide only 80 parking spots – including 64 in the main parking lot, and 16 additional spaces in three parking 'pods' built on what is currently greenspace at the perimeter of the property. The

proponent also proposes: bike storage on each floor of the three new buildings as well as a locked bike storage building for the use of all residents; and two car-share cars as well as car-share membership for all the residents of the complex—of both old and new buildings. We understand from the May meeting that these cars would be available to the wider community. Our May letter discusses other proposed parking mitigation measures.

Design

Meeting participants expressed generally favourable comments about the design of the proposed development, including the proposed diversity of building sizes and shapes. They were also positive about using the existing 'sea of asphalt' for housing. One participant expressed concern about shading of existing homes on the east side of Fifth Street, and Mr. Barker agreed to carry out a shading study. Another suggested that the design incorporate measures to discourage seagull nesting.

Social Impact

Many meeting participants expressed support for the proposed increase in the number of rental units in the neighbourhood. They expressed concerns, however, about the type of tenant the proposed development might attract. The lack of elevators in the design may discriminate in favour of young tenants who can 'carry the couch up three flights of stairs'. The size of the units (one and two bedroom) discriminates against families, and smaller units may attract transients and students – portrayed by some as out of place in the family oriented neighbourhood. Several meeting participants suggested that 'the units are too small and there are too many of them'. Other asked if the building owner would be willing to add a rental covenant to the new development, and make a commitment to include low income rental units. Mr. Barker promised to discuss this with the owner.

Rezoning of 2780-2782 Fifth Street

Several meeting participants expressed concern about the proposed rezoning of 2780-2782 Fifth Street from duplex to multi-family and encroachment on the residential nature of the neighbourhood. One meeting participant suggested 'we need to dream bigger' and identified the new duplex PassivHaus being built nearby as an example of such a bigger dream.

Parking

Many meeting participants expressed the concern that the proposed development would exacerbate the existing parking problems on Topaz Avenue and Fifth Street. Several meeting participants recommended that the proponent provide underground parking, noting that nearby condominium buildings all provide such parking. Mr. Barker indicated, however, that the cost of underground parking makes it prohibitive for a rental development of this size; marshy soil beneath the parking lot would add to the cost. One current building resident expressed concern about the proposal to convert existing green space in front of her unit to parking pods. Another meeting participant expressed concern about taking green space away from alleged 'low income people' living in the building.

CALUC process

Meeting participants complained that some of the tenants of the 2835-2855 apartment complex did not receive notices about the community meeting. This may be something the City could look into.

Thank you for considering community input in reviewing any formal proposal related to the above address.

Jenny Fraser
CALUC Chair,
Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee

c.c. Eric Barker

By email to the City of Victoria at caluc@victoria.ca

And to Leanne Taylor ltaylor@victoria.ca

2 March 2016

To Whom it May Concern:

Re : Proposed Rezoning for 2835-2855 Quadra Street

The Hillside Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee (NAC) hosted two Community Meetings related to the proposed redevelopment of this property, on January 20th and February 10th, 2016.

Primex Investments has owned the property since 2014. Andrew Rennison, Principal of Primex, described the company as a family-run rental apartment business with 1400 units in its portfolio. He indicated that Primex invests for the long term and manages its own properties.

The 2.6 acre property currently supports 32 two-bedroom and 32 three-bedroom units – a total of 64 units. Primex is seeking to rezone the south end of the property from R3G (currently a parking lot) to a site-specific zone that would enable the construction of 24 additional rental units in two new buildings, for a total of 88 units.

Eric Barker, architect, described:

- The location of the two new buildings and the unit mix and sizes; 12 of the new units would be bachelors and the other 12 would be two-bedrooms.
- landscaping details and the pedestrian link between Fifth and Quadra; and
- parking and circulation plans, including bicycle storage.

Primex is seeking a parking variance – from the required 1.3 parking spaces per unit (for a total of 110) to 0.74 spaces per unit. The proposal would maintain 65 parking spaces on the site: 55 in the main parking lot and 10 in two smaller lots accessed from Topaz Avenue and Fifth Street. Mr. Rennison indicated that it is Primex's goal to reduce the number of cars on site to 64. He provided a handout describing proposed parking mitigation efforts including:

- Purchasing a car-share membership for each of the 88 rental units, and purchasing one car-share vehicle which would be parked on site and would also be available to other neighbourhood members of the car-share coop. The proponent indicated that car share participation would begin after Primex is assured the rezoning will be approved;
- Providing enhanced bicycle storage – exceeding City standards – on each level of the proposed new buildings; and
- Screening for tenants who do not have cars, providing incentives to tenants, and requesting tenants to sign a pledge to remain car-free. The owners indicate they have, though this approach, already reduced the number of vehicles on the property from 79 to 74 since October, 2015.

General Comments

Community members expressed no concerns about the design and location of the proposed apartment units. Several commented that the project 'improves the look of the neighbourhood'. Others mentioned that the neighbourhood needs rental units. One resident of 2757 Quadra expressed appreciation for the new design which positions the new apartment units well away from his building, preserving his light and view.

Parking

The majority of the concerns expressed by participants at both community meetings related to parking. Meeting participants expressed support for the addition of a car-share component to the property, which they identified as a neighbourhood asset. They also supported the proposal to construct small parking 'pods' accessed from Fifth Street and Topaz Avenue.

They also indicated some concerns:

- The streets surrounding the proposed development are already full of parked vehicles; many of these vehicles belong to residents of the 2835-2855 Quadra Street apartments, who park on the street as it is more convenient to their units than is the parking lot at the south end of the property. While the proposed parking 'pods' would help address this problem, the addition of more units on the site might exacerbate it. Meeting participants discussed the potential expansion of the resident parking only restrictions.
- Parking on Fifth Street – particularly the on the 2700-block – is an issue with the Fifth Street Bar and Grill.
- The proposed parking plan does not address visitor parking; no visitor parking is provided.
- Some meeting participants expressed scepticism about the ability of Primex – even with screening, a no-car pledge, and car-share memberships—to 'keep people from owning cars' and to maintain the stated goal of 64 vehicles on-site.
- NAC notes that there would be no guarantee, should the property be sold in future, that the next owner would maintain the proposed parking alleviation measures.

Access to the Parking Lot

Many meeting participants asked why the plan proposes moving the entrance to the parking lot from Quadra Street to Fifth Street. They indicated that Fifth Street is already congested, in particular during the evening when patrons are arriving at and leaving from the Fifth Street Bar and Grill, and that the addition of traffic from the 2835-2855 Quadra Street apartments would create additional congestion on an already busy street. NAC notes, in addition, that Fifth Street is a signed bike route and is identified as part of the Biketoria network.

Meeting participants also identified positive reasons for maintaining the Quadra Street entrance – including the desire to calm traffic on this block of Quadra Street. Residents of 2757 Quadra – the building to the south of 2835-2855 Quadra Street – noted that the entrance to their underground parking lot is directly off Quadra, and that the presence of the adjacent driveway of 2835-2855 Quadra Street gives them space in which to merge from their driveway safely onto Quadra Street. They suggested that if the Quadra entrance to 2835-2855 Quadra Street is closed, the City should restrict parking to the immediate north and south of the underground parkade entrance for 2757 Quadra.

The Hillside Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee (NAC) therefore urges Council to apply the Highway Access Bylaw Amendment and maintain the existing access to the site from Quadra Street, should this proposal proceed.

Landscaping

Residents of 2757 Quadra – the condo building to the south of the property – expressed their desire that landscaping along the southern property line not block the light for ground floor units. They also expressed their preference for smaller trees in this location – as tree roots have the potential to damage the (new) underground parking garage membrane and retaining wall at 2757 Quadra.

Location of the Waste Facilities

The site plan indicated that the garbage cans and recycling facilities would be located along the southern fence line of the property. Residents of 2757 Quadra expressed concern that this would result in noise and smells for those living on the north side of their building. The proponents indicated they would look into options for these facilities.

Thank you for considering the views of the Hillside Quadra community in reviewing this rezoning and development proposal.

Sincerely,

Jenny Fraser
Co-Chair, Hillside-Quadra CALUC

cc. Eric Barker
Hillside-Quadra Neighbourhood Action Committee