

## **854 – 880 Pandora Avenue: Letter to Mayor & Council**

September 13, 2023

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

### **RE: 854-880 Pandora Avenue, Development Permit & Rezoning Application: 3<sup>rd</sup> Submission**

Dear Mayor Alto, Council, and Staff,

Please accept this letter as a summary of our proposal for 854–880 Pandora Avenue. Following productive discussion with staff and the community, Townline has developed a thoughtfully designed concept for this prominent corner of downtown Victoria. This proposal aims to provide much-needed rental housing and creatively positioned commercial space to the neighbourhood, while respecting the existing built environment and encouraging active, car-lite lifestyles. Demonstrating Townline's commitment to complete communities, this is the third project on Pandora Avenue on which we've worked. Together, these buildings will provide homes for people at all sections of the housing continuum.

Our project seeks to redevelop the site as a mixed-use development in the form of a 20-storey building with 197 rental homes and approximately 7,160 sq. ft. (665 m<sup>2</sup>) of commercial space on the ground floor. The building is proposed as 100% purpose-built rental, including 5 below-market rental units. As a part of the redevelopment process, we are requesting to amend the property from the current CA-1 designation to a new site-specific zoning.

### **Project Status**

0822754 BC Ltd. is submitting this project for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, having made the initial rezoning submission on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and resubmitting on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Throughout this process, we have carried out many discussions with staff to refine the building and landscape design, while also meeting with utility providers to compose an efficient servicing plan.

On August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023, we held a second community meeting, with invitations sent to all neighbours in accordance with City policy, in partnership with the North Park CALUC. The North Park Neighbourhood Association (NPNA) also distributed the meeting information to their network, and 12 people were in attendance both in-person and virtually. This was in addition to an earlier meeting held in February 2023.

These and other conversations with the local community have helped to inform design choices and programming decisions.

We are hopeful that this submission accomplishes the intent of staff comments and allows the project to go before Council, as our goal to provide new purpose-built rental housing coincides with the mission of the city to facilitate the supply of quality homes in the urban core.

## **Present Proposal**

Through detailed consultation with City of Victoria staff, analysis of the site context, and input from the community, we have revised the design of the building with a variety of beneficial alterations to the original proposal.

Foremost among the revisions has been the increase in height of the building from 14 storeys to 20 and from 137 units to 197. This was driven by continued consideration of the OCP and DCAP, as well as ongoing collaboration with City staff. A conclusion was reached through conversation with City staff that due to the overarching OCP designation of Core Residential calling for 20 storeys, the project should provide the corresponding height in order to maximize new residential rental units. Therefore, Townline has worked with our consultant team to adjust the design of the building not only to match OCP-prescribed height, but to ensure the rest of the building design is complimentary, and that the building systems can support this increase of 60 homes.

Additionally, as a part of the increase to the rental offering, Townline intends to provide 5 below-market affordable rental units. This below-market component, envisioned as a contribution to the local community, was determined by taking a calculation of 10% of the additional space over and above our previous 16-storey proposal. These units will comprise a selection of sizes and types on various floors, and the actual level of discount from market rates is to be determined based on ongoing discussions with the City of Victoria.

## **Landscape**

In addition to the creation of 60 more rental units, the current submission comprises improvements made to the offsite and onsite landscape design as well as the aforementioned servicing proposal.

With regards to landscape design, DKL landscape architects has continually responded to staff comments and site-specific considerations to add planting and street furniture that conforms to Victoria's Downtown Public Realm Streetscape Standards for the New Town. This includes new street trees on two frontages (replacing aged trees on Quadra and introducing new trees on Mason where there are currently none)

and retaining mature maple and ash trees on the Pandora side. The overall intention and effect of these design directions will be to increase shade, tree canopy, and places for people to rest and socialize.

## Rental Housing

As demonstrated by many studies and research, including the Capital Regional District (CRD) Housing Needs Report, Victoria is urgently undersupplied with rental housing, and especially newer purpose-built-rental (PBR). Victoria is a city of renters, with nearly two-thirds of local residents (61%) renting their home. When it comes to the inventory, there are only enough primary market rental units for 59% of these residents. Looking at recent trends paints an even bleaker picture: from 2006-2016, the number of renter households increased by 12% - but the number of rental homes over a slightly longer period, 2005-2019, grew only half as quickly. Record low vacancy rates sitting at near or under 1% for over decade have put a major strain on the Greater Victoria market. CMHC defines a “balanced” market as maintaining a roughly 3% vacancy rate, which Victoria has not reached since 1999.

Townline seeks to respond to the need for rental housing by providing a high-quality group of homes of varying sizes to cater to a diverse population of renters. The form of the building is a 3-storey podium with commercial space on the ground floor wrapping from Quadra Street to the west along Pandora, a residential lobby entrance at the quieter northeast corner at Mason and Quadra, and ground-oriented townhouses along Mason Street, topped by 16 storeys of apartments and indoor/outdoor amenity space on the rooftop.

Currently, the residential unit mix includes a diverse mix of rental housing units, from studios to 3-bedroom units, including over 33% family-sized units with 2 or more bedrooms.

## Planning Context

As a part of the Core Residential designation in the OCP, this land is intended to play host to “multi-unit residential, commercial, and mixed-use buildings up to approximately 20 storeys”. The broader Urban Core as a whole, of which the site is a part, “consists of the highest density and greatest mix of uses in the city” according the OCP. In addition to being the traditional population, economic, and cultural hub of the region, this area is cited as being served by ample transportation infrastructure, making it an especially ideal location for this kind of density.

Within the Downtown Core Area Plan, the site is included in the Residential Mixed Use District (RMD). The RMD includes most of the residential land base in the Plan, and is envisioned as absorbing the majority of downtown’s population growth. Key objectives for the RMD include encouraging multi-residential development and complete communities, while providing active street-level businesses to increase pedestrian activity.

## Area Context & Design Guidelines

854 and 880 Pandora are surrounded by typical urban conditions found throughout the southern extents of North Park. In this area the city transitions from primarily residential land use to Victoria's downtown core with a diverse mixture of building uses, heights, and ages. Commercial and institutional uses line Pandora Avenue with a scale that increases to the west approach to downtown. North Park's varied character is exemplified on Mason Street side to the north, with a mix of uses residing within older character homes along Amelia Street. This built form supports North Park's neighbourhood identity as a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive community that is proximate to but distinct from downtown Victoria.

The Downtown Core Area (DCAP) Design Guidelines and the Design and Built Form Intent from the North Park Neighbourhood Plan have all been taken into account in the planning process for the building. The podium level step-back has been designed to conform to relate to the street and present a human-scaled building face while preserving sunlight and creating a sense of enclosure, as intended by Section 2 of the DCAP Design Guidelines. Sidewalk width, streetscape, weather protection in the pedestrian realm, CPTED, and animation are other principles from the DCAP given high priority within the design. Key priorities of the North Park Neighbourhood Plan which have been included in the project framework are:

- Making room for housing
- Supporting green, leafy streets
- Recognizing Quadra as Cultural Corridor
- Creating lively public spaces
- Recognizing North Park as a unique area that is distinct from downtown

The lot size of the proposed development coupled with the proposed building massing allows for the redevelopment of the neighbouring lot to the west with accepted tower spacing. Tower massing and placement has been carefully planned to consider the surrounding heritage buildings in the neighbourhood.

## Building Design

### Site and Massing Design

The building's massing and site design is informed by unique context and adherence to DCAP guidelines. A 20-storey tower form is set back from a 3-storey podium with varied programming in response to street frontage. The podium form provides streetwall enclosure and an intimate public realm on all three sides of the site. At ground level, retail units form a continuous frontage facing Pandora and Quadra. Above, residential units on levels two and three provide eyes on the street and visual continuity with neighbours. Facing Mason Street, two storey townhomes provide a use that is appropriate for the existing scale and character. Building access for parking and service is off the north west corner fronting Mason Street. The

podium roof contains active amenities such as urban agriculture, kids play, and a dog run that will receive afternoon sun. Tower height, placement, and podium massing all follow DCAP “Tall Buildings” guidelines.

CPTED principles were considered as part of the building design. Care was taken so that all frontages of the building are activated to provide more “eyes on the street”, and flush building faces are included to minimise concealed spaces. Additional maintained landscaping and increased lighting will be introduced to all frontages to guide the public as well as increase the security of the area.

### **Building Expression and Identity**

Victoria is rich with cultural and architectural history dating back to the mid 1800s when it was British Columbia’s main trading hub, and the surrounding context of the site mirrors this rich architectural history. Within one block along Quadra there are three historic neo-gothic churches; just north of the site on Mason is a Georgian Revivalist building; and the modernist Richard Blanchard BC Health building stands at the corner of Pandora and Blanshard. This eclectic historical tapestry is reinforced by North Park’s diverse and vibrant character supported by the Quadra Street Cultural Corridor. The concept for the building design is to reflect these contextual conditions through the building’s program, materiality, and façade expression.

Arched and circular windows found on adjacent buildings inspired the use of arched forms on the building both at grade on the podium and on the rooftop. This expression creates a historical reference that is also unexpected and playful, as a nod to the cultural vibrant and open character of the North Park neighbourhood. The building is respectful and considerate, but not boring.

Many surrounding buildings have facades that have vertically organizing features, so this too was a principle that informed the vertical brick “frame” of the podium. Brick has been chosen for the podium cladding as this is the prevailing contextual material. The lighter, warm toned brick has been enlivened with subtle contemporary detailing throughout the base.

The tower is clad in glazing and a darker coloured metal panel with a simplified expression to place more importance on the ground plane and podium of the building. Small variations in colour and depths of metal panel create subtle variation within the tower façade. From the street, the white-painted balcony undersides will serve to lighten the overall impression of the colour palette and provide visual contrast.

Overall, the building’s goals are to respect the historic character of the neighbourhood and bring with it a contemporary and inviting design.

### **Transportation**

The project is located at a key node within the City of Victoria’s road network, with Quadra Street connecting from BC Highway 17 to the north and Beacon Hill Park to the south, and Pandora Avenue

connecting the downtown core to Oak Bay in the east. Pandora also features a two-way separated All Ages and Abilities (AAA) bicycle lane on the north side of the street directly adjacent to the site, connecting to all of Victoria's active transportation network as well as on to the E&N Rail Trail via Johnson Street Bridge. This direct access to these networks will facilitate a car-free or car-lite lifestyle and extensive use of active transportation for residents. Most day-to-day needs can be met on foot: according to Walk Score, the site scores a 96 out of 100, classifying as a "Walker's Paradise".

Additionally, the many BC Transit bus stops within a short walk of the site provide service on 8 bus lines allowing for rapid access to downtown, key regional shopping destinations, and higher education institutions. Specifically, the site is less than 400m away from the Douglas Street Rapid Transit Corridor and directly situated along route 6, which runs north-south along Quadra, and the 2, 5, and 28 routes running east-west along Pandora. Buses along these routes are designed to accommodate wheelchairs, strollers, and mobility aides, further broadening their accessibility and appeal.

In addition to the aforementioned built-in qualities that will reduce car dependency and justify this variance, we are proposing a number of TDM measures focusing on encouraging active transportation: we plan to provide 225 long-term bicycle parking stalls for residents and on-site workers housed in secure bike rooms with amenities such as a bike wash and repair station, including spaces for 8 cargo bikes. All bicycle rooms will provide access to e-bike charging.

Overall, this site offers a compelling opportunity for new rental housing that facilitates the type of urban, sustainable transportation habits envisioned by the City of Victoria.

## **Sustainability**

The policies guiding this project, including the City of Victoria's own OCP, Neighbourhood Plans, active transportation network, in addition to Townline's goals of producing sustainable and enduring rental homes in a central location, are all key to building a greener city.

Increased density, particularly in existing urban centres, is a crucial component of our path towards development patterns that blunt many impacts of climate change and habitat loss. In addition to more efficient use of land – reducing urban sprawl - this type of mixed-use development along active transportation and transit corridors contributes greatly to the reduction of personal vehicles on our roads, with a corresponding decrease in greenhouse gasses.

The building itself is being designed to meet Step 2 of the BC Building Code as City of Victoria Step Code Adoption Schedule, defined as a 20% increase in total building efficiency compared to the baseline BC Building Code. Low-carbon building systems proposed include LED lights in all common areas connected to motion-activated switches, induction cooktops for suite kitchens, low-flow faucets, and green waste disposal for urban agriculture. Each suite will also feature in-suite packaged terminal heat pumps (PTHP's) which will provide active heating and cooling. The simplified building design is planned to minimize heat

loss, with lower window to wall ratio to increase insulated area, and prioritizes the use of durable building materials, such as masonry, to reduce waste. An energy modeller will be engaged throughout the project to ensure we are achieving the energy efficiency targets for Step 2 classification.

## Summary of Project Benefits and Amenities

This project will address an urgent need for rental housing in Victoria and further the goals of the city as laid out in the Housing Strategy Phase 1 and 2, Go Victoria Mobility Plan, and dozens of action items on the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan. Townline strives to make lasting positive contributions to every community in which we work. We see this project as adding to the sense of genuine community in the hic North Park and adjacent neighbourhoods by introducing new neighbours and businesses, and architectural and landscape design that prioritizes the public realm and the pedestrian experience. The project benefits can be summed up as:

- 197 Secure rental homes, including 2- and 3- bedroom homes suitable for families
- 5 Secured below-market rental units
- Rental housing secured for the life of the building
- Ample private and shared amenity space, both outdoor and indoor – elevating the rental experience and fostering social connections
- Vastly improved public realm, with planting along Mason Street, new street trees along Quadra Street, and new planting and tree retention along Pandora Avenue. We are also proposing street furniture and enhanced hardscape to provide opportunities for socializing and to give pedestrians a place to rest
- Architectural design sympathetic to the local context, with nods to surrounding forms and materials from all eras of the evolution of the area
- Ground-oriented townhomes along Mason Street contribute to the residential character and transition gracefully to low-rise area to west
- Generous bike parking and facilities, to encourage tenants to take advantage of the excellent infrastructure out their front door
- Contributing to the goals of a more sustainable city by adding homes in a place that makes it easy to use active or public transportation, and thereby reducing the need to own or use a private vehicle
- Adding destination retail space to a street that has seen a loss of active commercial space in recent years
- Increased employment opportunities in North Park

## Summary

The development as proposed will provide urgently-needed rental homes in a high-quality and sustainably designed building without displacing any residential tenants. With a vacancy rate that has remained at

less than 1% as per the CMHC's Rental Market Report, Victoria needs more housing in all neighbourhoods to ensure the continued viability of local institutions and businesses, as well as to maintain the vibrant cultural life that makes it special. Moreover, Townline believes North Park is as integral to the future of Victoria as it has been to its past.

854-880 Pandora Avenue will help to further the City's sustainability and climate change goals while offering the kind of flexible, comfortable living desired by modern urban dwellers who wish to achieve most of their mobility needs by walking, rolling, and taking the bus. Situated as it is, this development will increase the viability of transit and future investments in active transportation, while also ensuring economic and social vitality for the next generation.

This redevelopment will contribute to helping people stay in Victoria while reinforcing an undersupplied part of the housing continuum. We appreciate the efforts of staff to find solutions to maximize the amount of new rental housing, and we look forward to further collaboration with city staff, Council and the community in order to make this a successful project. Thank you for considering our application.

Sincerely,



Devin Spence  
Development Manager, Townline