

May 8th, 2019

The City of Victoria
Attention: Mayor and Council
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

RE: 1139 Burdett Avenue, Rezoning and Heritage Alteration Permit Application

The ‘Arthur Scroggs House’ at 1139 Burdett Avenue, designed by John Gerhard Tiarks and constructed in 1892, represents a rare example of the Gothic-revival style architecture in Victoria. It is particularly noteworthy for its elaborately carved bargeboards, Tudor arches and Gothic design motifs. In the intervening years, it has been used as a boarding house, and a prior building permit for a Southern extension was initiated in or around 1995 but not completed.

The house currently suffers from significant deferred maintenance, but through the restoration of this heritage building, we intend to reverse this trend and revitalize both the property and the neighbourhood. The renovation project proposes a conversion into market rental apartments, to provide seven much needed housing units in the City through a gentle density form of development. With this transition, we are committed to investing in the property for the long term, as the conversion to rental stock will restore and sustain its condition in perpetuity.

Description of Proposal

The proposal seeks to retain and restore the existing heritage house, add an addition to the rear, and change the use from a single family dwelling to market rental apartments. The residence is listed on the City of Victoria’s Heritage Registry as a Designated Heritage building and as such the proposed conversion will be in keeping with those character defining elements defined by Heritage Consultant, Stuart Stark of Stuart Stark & Associates, in the attached Statement of Significance. An addition is proposed on the South side of the house, separated at the upper levels by a new exterior stair to provide safe exiting for all. The proposed addition will comply with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada. The proposal will rezone the existing R1-B “Single Family” zoned site to a site specific zone to support the proposed uses. A concurrent Heritage Alteration Permit will also be required.

Government Policies

The proposed conversion of the 1139 Burdett Avenue residence is consistent with the goals of Placemaking – Urban Design and Heritage in the City of Victoria’s Official Community Plan, specifically:

- “conservation of cultural and heritage resources with value for present and future generations”;
- “conserve and enhance the heritage value, character and special features of...individual properties” [8.6];
- “support new infill and building additions that correspond to context through sensitive and innovative design” [8.44], and;
- “continue to support new additions that conserve and enhance heritage property, as consistent with the National Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada” [8.49].

With respect to the Neighbourhood Directions for Fairfield, Section 21 of the OCP, the proposal is consistent with the strategic directions which seek to “maintain and enhance established character areas”, and “maintain neighbourhood population to ensure to support the viability of community and commercial services and schools.” The addition of 7 residential units within the walkable Fairfield community will also support the goals outlined in Figure 3 of the OCP, specifically, to accommodate an additional 2000 people in Victoria by 2041, in areas outside of the urban core, town centers and large urban villages.

As the project is situated in general Development Permit Area #16, the design incorporates the strategies in “Advisory Design Guidelines for Buildings, Signs and Awnings” (1981), “Design Guidelines for Multi-Unit Residential, Commercial and Industrial Development” (2012), and “Guidelines for Fences, Gates and Shutters” (2010), as outlined below:

- Existing architectural features of the heritage structure shall be retained and restored [1981, A.1]
- Addition complements and defers to the existing heritage house, with a clear delineation between new and old [1981, A.2]
- Scale of addition provides a transition in massing that is mindful of privacy of adjacent dwellings [2012, 1.6], and its overall form is broken into human-scaled proportions [2012, 3.1 & 3.3]
- Landscaping complements the building, is suited to local climate, and includes deciduous trees for light penetration in winter [2012, 5.1 & 5.6]
- Private open space in form of balconies provided wherever possible [2012, 5.8]
- Required parking located at rear, with much paving of permeable materials [2012, 8.1.3 & 8.3]
- All proposed fencing is based on existing style to integrate into surroundings, and made of materials that will weather gracefully [2010]

Project Benefits and Amenities

The key benefits of the project – restoring an outstanding heritage building and the contextual addition of six new dwellings – are interlinked and foundational to the proposal. Its sensitive conversion will deepen the neighbourhood’s rich collection of heritage structures and help to cement the residential character of its transitional urban/residential zone.

Need and Demand

The proposal responds directly to a current shortage of rental market housing, where extremely low vacancy rates have contributed to rising housing costs. While existing zoning permits only one detached residence, the proposed rezoning would permit a total of seven (7) households on the property, so that more citizens can comfortably live, work and shop within blocks of downtown Victoria. This ‘gentle density’ form of development offers more housing without impacting the residential character of the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood

The original house was built at a time when the surrounding land was undeveloped and predominantly agricultural, such that views from the Southwest windows of the upper storey would have extended across open fields to the Olympic Mountains. In the present day, the context is typical of transitional urban-residential zones, with a mix of renovated heritage homes, house conversions and multi-storey apartment buildings of various ages. As noted above, this proposal will help cement this character with infill housing while restoring heritage value for the long term.

Impacts

The configuration of the proposed addition was designed specifically to avoid visually impacting the view from Burdett Avenue, by being wholly situated to the rear of the site, and through keeping the addition significantly lower than the existing heritage portion. While the result of the proposal will be more people living on the property, care has been taken to ensure all parking is discreetly incorporated within the property, such that the availability of street parking is unaffected. The change to apartment use should not have an adverse noise impact and is complementary to the surrounding uses and buildings.

Design and Development Permit Guidelines

The site is located within General Development Permit Area #16, there are no specific design guidelines applicable in this instance. It is however notable that a Heritage Alteration Permit is required and that the Statement of Significance is the foundation for considering specific form and character, so design input from the Heritage Consultant has been sought and incorporated.

Safety and Security

The proposal acknowledges and integrates key CPTED principles to maintain and enhance safety and security. Entrances have been located for maximum visibility and directness from the street, and proposed living spaces facing all directions provide and promote passive surveillance. Short term bicycle parking will be visible from the sidewalk, thus discouraging opportunities for crime. Exterior lighting will be provided at exits for safety, but will also make them more secure. Along the street, the careful restoration of the heritage building will communicate an image of maintenance and care, further deterring negative activity such as graffiti.

Transportation

An explicit objective of the project design has been to ensure all required off-street parking requirements are met on site, so as to minimize impacts to the surrounding neighbourhood. Bicycle facilities shall also be provided in accordance with the requirements of Schedule C, and are anticipated to be well used given the property's proximity to downtown and to the signed bike routes along Vancouver Street and Richardson Street, both two blocks away. The site is also within blocks of major bus routes on Cook, Richardson and Fort Streets with connections to the entire CRD region. These transportation advantages, coupled with the walkable nature of the location, all serve to reduce the demand for single occupancy vehicle traffic.

Heritage

The existing residence, as noted above, is a designated property on the City of Victoria's Heritage Registry, which has been the principal consideration for all design decisions. Changes to the North, West and East elevations have been deliberately avoided in order to preserve and enhance its heritage features and presence. A Heritage Consultant has been engaged and regularly consulted, and as part of this proposal a Heritage Alteration Permit is being sought.

Green Building Features

There is a formidable arbutus tree at the Southwest corner of the property, and the site plan was developed to ensure its continued health. While the project is not seeking a third-party green building certification, it achieves several sustainable objectives intrinsic to infill housing, namely walkable density and opportunities for comfortable compact living. No excess vehicular parking is proposed, and additional short-term bicycle parking can be readily added in future. The landscape features will maximize planting areas, increase the urban forest via new numerous new trees, and incorporate permeable pavers in much of the hard surfaces required to meet the Schedule C parking requirements. I am specifically interested in the possibility of providing infrastructure to support future added green features such as electric vehicle charging stations and on site renewable energy sources, to allow planning for their inclusion when they are financially or technically viable.

Summary

The proposed renovation and addition to 1139 Burdett Avenue represents a sensitive and contextually appropriate project for the Fairfield neighbourhood. Support of the proposal will serve the restoration of a unique heritage structure and provide a 'gentle density' form of housing infill, which shall help sustain not only the existing structure, but the community at large.

Sincerely,

Tim Stemp, Owner
Harbinger Properties Inc.