Oeza Developments

August 2023

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

Mayor and Council:

RE: 50 Government St Application for Rezoning and Development Permit

Our application is respectfully submitted to propose an 11-unit multi-family building at 50 Government St in the James Bay neighbourhood.

The proposed site currently has a 4-unit multi-family residential building in poor repair.

Current R3-2 zoning allows for multi-family residential. However, a specific clause in the zoning prevents a multi-family building due to the lot size. While a variance was considered with input from planning staff, it became clear that a rezoning would allow a better overall proposal.

The Official Community Plan place designation for this site is Urban Residential, and the design guidelines for this designation have influenced our plans.

Earlier this year, we presented a concept for a purpose-built affordable rental at this site to the James Bay CALUC. The proposal for a 24-unit (20 net new) residential building was intended to address the housing and climate crises. The proposed building would have also included two fully accessible units. Based on feedback from the community, we have made significant changes to our proposal. Later in this letter is a detailed description of this feedback and the related design changes.

While the current proposal no longer includes affordable rental units, it better meets the community's priorities. Throughout these changes, we maintain our commitment to climate change mitigation and adaptation with our target of Passive House certification.

The following sections of this letter outline how our proposal will provide public benefit within the policy framework of the OCP and applicable design guidelines.

AFFORDABILITY:

The housing crisis is a multi-faceted and challenging problem, and no single approach is a silver bullet, let alone a single project. However, a solution can only be achieved by combining many projects and policies. Our proposal aims to contribute as much as we can with the opportunity we have. Any meaningful action toward affordability must accelerate the development of new housing units.

Our revised proposal is a modestly sized building, adding seven net new housing units to the local area, which will contribute to increasing supply. Due to the changes that were made in response to the CALUC's feedback, this project is no longer able to offer below market units.

COMMITMENT TO CLIMATE ACTION & SUSTAINABILITY:

The City has declared a Climate Emergency, and we are committed to building today in a responsible way that is compatible with the 2050 targets. To meet our climate change mitigation and adaptation goals, we are committing to the highest tier of step code, being entirely fossil fuel free, targeting the Passive House standard, and having conduits ready for future solar PV. We will also design this project to cater to car-free families, utilizing the improving bicycle infrastructure of our city and the common carshare programs. Our parking stalls will also be able to accommodate EV charging.

In many ways, climate change mitigation and adaptation are two sides of the same coin. Efficient buildings that take an envelope-first approach remain comfortable even in extreme weather events, and will maintain that comfortable indoor environment far longer in a power outage. Airtight buildings are more efficient, and airtightness is a key to maintaining good air quality when forest fire smoke is in the air. Heat recovery ventilation is key to achieving efficiency, and those systems include filters that can clean out particulates from smoke and reduce the transmission of pathogens. These synergies can be achieved by taking a whole building systems approach.

This project will replace an existing 4-unit building in poor condition; however, as much material as is practical will be reused and recycled. Our proposed building will provide seven net new homes and even with the increased occupancy will likely use less energy than the current building.

By introducing explicit support for car-free living, we have eliminated a ground level devoted almost entirely to cars in our earlier proposal. This has allowed us to eliminate a full storey of building height. Instead, the ground level facing the street will have a more generous lobby and an improved bike room. This room will allow more parking than required for each family member to have Class A bicycle parking, including provisions for e-bike charging, cargo-sized bikes, and mobility scooters. We will also maintain our commitment to host a MODO car.

PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART:

Given our project's unique position at the end of Battery Street (a Heritage Preservation Area), the East facade will feature prominently in the neighbourhood. A significant design feature on our first proposal was a large piece of public art on the facade, in collaboration with a local First Nations artist. Our current proposal moves the artwork into the lobby to simplify the facade while maintaining our support for local artists.

The exterior detailing of our project and our placemaking strategy is to take design cues from the surrounding neighbourhood, as recommended in the design guidelines. This approach creates a modern take on traditional housing forms and details and is outlined in the next section.

SUMMARY OF POLICY CONTEXT:

The site is currently zoned R3-2 “Multiple Dwelling District.” This zone allows up to 6 stories with a max height of 18.5 m (or up to 22 m in certain circumstances), an FAR of up to 1.6 to 1, and site coverage of up to 40%. However, these values are only attainable under certain conditions.

Community Plan designates the site as Urban Residential, which is characterized by “attached and detached buildings up to three storeys and low-rise and mid-rise multi- unit buildings up to approximately 6 storeys” Our proposal is shorter, at four storeys. There is a wide variety of buildings nearby, some of which are much larger than our proposal, however we have taken steps to fit our new building into the very local fabric. Because the immediate neighbours are single family homes we have reduced the size of our proposal accordingly.

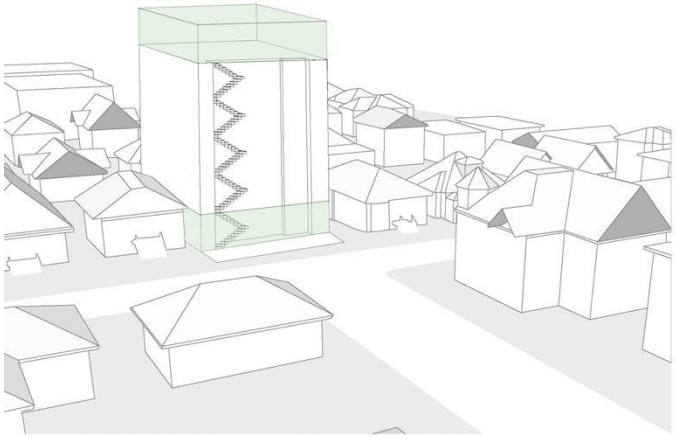
Our proposed density is an FAR of 1.9 to 1, which is within the guidelines for Urban Residential.

We have provided a detailed summary of our responses to priorities and values identified in the OCP in the last section of this letter.

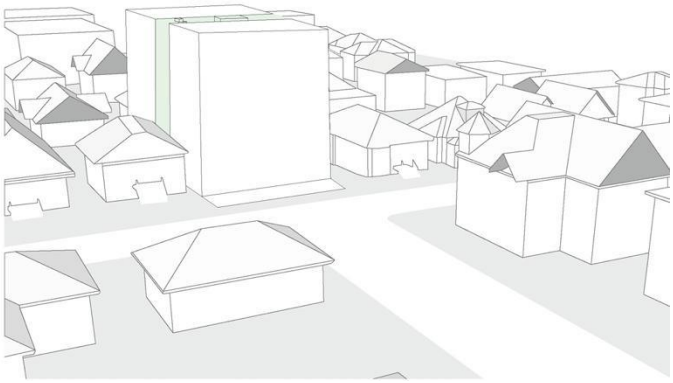
DESIGN CHANGES BASED ON STAFF AND CALUC FEEDBACK:

The most significant change is a reduction in building height and reduced overall floor area. We have eliminated the ground floor parking and taken another full storey off the building. We then changed the massing to have circulation in the middle, allowing for a more traditional relationship to the street. Rather than a single larger massing, this results in two smaller massings, each of which is closer in size and appearance to the houses nearby.

REDUCTION TO A 4-STORY BUILDING



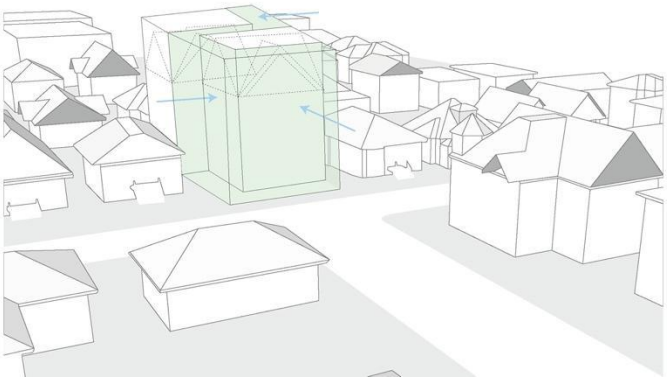
DIVIDED INTO TWO FOCUSING ON CENTRAL AXIS



The elimination of the car-oriented ground floor removes the dedicated tenant parking. Instead, a Modo carshare parking space and visitor/delivery parking space exist. Instead of tenant parking, we have emphasized a car-free lifestyle with improved bike storage facilities. The bike room has been brought up from a basement area and is now a prominent feature adjacent to the lobby at ground level and highly visible from the street. We have also significantly improved the bike parking ratio and designed the bike room to feel more welcoming and generous. It includes cargo bike parking stalls and e-bike charging infrastructure, and if needed it can be modified to accommodate mobility scooters as well.

Reducing FAR and eliminating a residential floor means that the development can no longer offer affordable rental housing. Instead, this project will provide 11 market units, including three large 3-bedroom suites for car-free families.

SHIFTED ACCORDING TO SURROUNDINGS



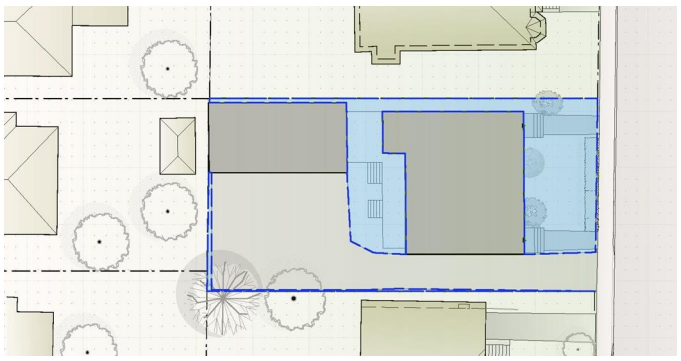
RESIDENTIAL FORM AND CHARACTER

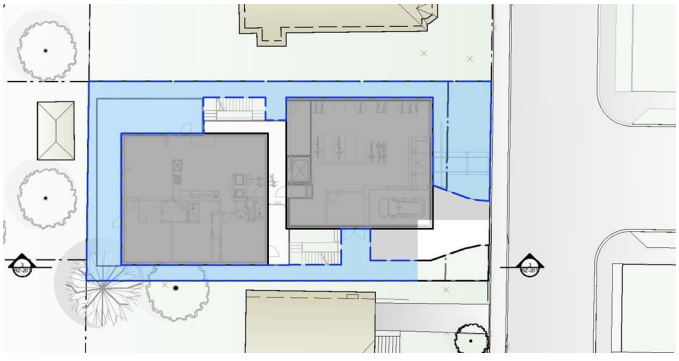
The two massings, front and rear are offset to provide additional benefits to the neighbourhood. By shifting the east (front) massing to the north and the west (back) massing south, we reduced the shadowing on our northern neighbour's backyard by moving the impact to their roof. This offset also reduces overlook into thier backyard.

The other significant massing change is changing flat roof to a familiar pitched roof. A common feature in neighbourhood houses is to use the upper floors and attic spaces for additional living space. This proposal also features two large suites on the upper level within the frame of the roof. The proposed roof pitch matches several nearby houses.

While not impacted by shadows, the concern for the neighbour to the south is overlook and privacy. To mitigate this, we placed only high windows on that side of the building, letting in light for the residents of our project and allowing them views of the sky but not of the neighbour's backyard. Privacy is similarly maintained for the residents of our project, as the neighbour can only see the ceiling of their suites.

These changes place the footprint of the front half of our project very close to the footprint of the existing building. The proposed footprint of the rear section is primarily over the existing paved area, and the proposed car access is also in a similar location on the site, albeit set back a bit further from the property line.





Existing site plan *Proposed site plan*

Due to the large amount of space currently dedicated to parking, our proposal offers an increase in Open Site Space, from the current 29.7% to 36.8%, and a similar decrease in impervious surfaces.

We have also changed the unit mix substantially. We received important feedback that the neighbourhood would like to see more housing dedicated to families. Our original proposal had a mix of bachelor and one-bedroom units. Our updated proposal has one, two, and three-bedroom units. Due to the change in unit type and massing, we have also reduced the unit count from 24 to 11.

Our current proposal also features several massing cues found in the local neighbourhood and common to single-family homes of the late 19th and early 20th century. Our proposed pitched roof is a feature shared by several nearby houses. This roof pitch will provide high ceilings and a loft bedroom in the upper floor units, creating family-sized homes. As shown in the example below, this mimics a pattern present in heritage homes around the city.

Nearby home on the 400 block of Linden Ave

Our proposal.

RECESSED PORCH

RECESSED FRONT DOOR

WINDOW AT FRONT FACE OF BUILDING

Our proposal also relates to adjacent heritage houses in the street frontage design. We have designed the carport, front entry, and bike room to follow the pattern of a traditional house's three-part front: an exterior porch, a front entry, and a living room configuration. Below are two examples of this pattern and our proposal showing our modern interpretation:

HORIZONTAL BAND

RECESSED PORCH

RECESSED FRONT DOOR

WINDOW AT FRONT FACE OF BUILDING

Nearby home on the 000 block of Government St (mirrored).

Nearby home on the 600 block of Battery St.

RECESSED CARPORT

RECESSED FRONT DOOR

WINDOW AT FRONT FACE OF BUILDING

HORIZONTAL BAND

Our proposal.

After these changes, our proposal has the following zoning related information:

PROJECT INFORMATION TABLE	
Zone (existing)	R3-1 and R3-2 ZONE, MULTIPLE DWELLING DISTRICT
Proposed zone or site specific zone If unsure, state "new zone"	New Zone
Site area (m^2)	586 m2
Total floor area (m^2)	114.3 m2
Commercial floor area (m^2)	N/A
Floor space ratio	1.9
Site coverage (%)	59 %
Open site space (%)	36.8 %
Height of building (m)	15.10 m
Number of storeys	4 Story + Loft
Parking stalls (number) on site	2
Bicycle parking number (Class 1 and Class 2)	32 Class1 & 6 Class 2
Building Setbacks (m)	
Front yard	4.79
Rear yard	2.89
Side yard (indicate which side)	1.36
Side yard (indicate which side)	1.36
Combined side yards	2.72
Residential Use Details	
Total number of units	11
Unit type, e.g., 1 bedroom	6 - one bedroom; 2 - two bedroom; 3 - three bedroom
Ground-orientated units	1
Minimum unit floor area (m^2)	57 m2
Total residential floor area (m^2)	112.6 m2

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO CALUC FEEDBACK, OCP, AND DPA GUIDELINES

Our team has responded to several key policy goals identified in the OCP, summarized in the table below.

OCP	Our Response
Strategic directions identified in the OCP for the James Bay Neighbourhood: • 21.15.1 A densely populated mixed-used neighbourhood with a Large Urban Village. • 21.16.1 Maintain a variety of housing types and tenures for a range of age groups and incomes. • 21.16.3 Maintain an interesting diversity of land uses, housing types and character areas	*Our proposal adds housing stock that increases the diversity of housing types.*
Values and goals identified in the OCP: • 3.2 One Planet Living: Become a city that lives and works within its fair share of the planet's resources. • 3.5 Life Cycle Planning: Anticipate the needs of citizens throughout their lives.	*3.2 - We propose to reflect this value by designing a building aligned with Paris Agreement goals. This includes designing and building to the Passive House standard, and choosing low embodied carbon building materials wherever practical.* *3.5 - We are proposing family-sized units, and we are also proposing to replacing units with stairs to with homes that have elevator access.*

OCP	Our Response
From Figure 4 (pages 19 to 20): ● Land Management and Development: A. Victoria has compact development patterns that use land efficiently ● Transportation and Mobility A. Transportation options reduce fossil fuel dependence, help conserve energy and produce low greenhouse gas emissions and other air contaminants. C. Services, amenities, buildings, facilities, and public space are accessible. ● Placemaking A. Victoria is vibrant and attractive with unique character and sense of place. ● Infrastructure D. Rainwater resources are carefully managed with collection, diversion, and re-use practices that moderate runoff volumes and maximize water quality. ● Climate Change and Energy A. Victoria and Victorians are more resilient to climate change and energy scarcity and costs. B. New and existing buildings are energy efficient and produce few greenhouse gase emissions C. Transportation options reduce fossil fuel dependence, help conserve energy and produce low greenhouse gas emissions and other air contaminants. ● Housing and Homelessness B. A wide range of housing types, tenures and prices gives residents choices	● *Land Management and Development:* *A. By increasing the number of homes on this parcel of land, this is supporting compact development patterns and efficient land use* ● *Transportation and Mobility:* *A. . Extensive bicycle facilities and Modo carshare* *C. Mobility scooter storage & elevator.* ● *Placemaking:* *A. We are using traditional patterns of architecture in a modern, Passive House building.* ● *Infrastructure:* *D. Our proposal increases the amount of permeable surface from what currently exists* ● *Climate Change and Energy* *A. Our project will be built to remain comfortable in extreme weather and provide clean indoor air even in smoke events.* *B. We will design and build to the world's most stringent energy efficiency standard: Passive House* *C. Our project emphasizes bicycle infrastructure and adds density to an already walkable neighbourhood* ● *Housing and Homelessness* *B. Our proposal adds to the range of housing types available in Victoria*

We have also responded to the feedback we received from the CALUC, summarized below:

CALUC Feedback	Our Response
Loss of natural light and effects of shadowing on neighbouring properties	*We have eliminated two storeys, shifted the massing, and changed the roof form.*
Loss of privacy as almost all windows overlook neighbours' lots and not over the street	*We have shifted the massing and altered the windows to orient more towards the street and to reduce overlook.*
Lack of suitable setbacks, greenspace, and landscaping for a building this tall	*Our proposal now increases the amount of Open Site Space relative to the existing condition.*
Lack of family-oriented housing – studio and one-bedroom units are not suitable for families and do not promote longer-term tenancies	*We have changed the unit mix to include family-sized units.*
Additional parking pressures, as this proposal provides fewer spaces than required in an area where parking is already scarce	*As a response to these concerns, we have decided to focus on providing housing for car-free residents. Our design emphasizes good TDM strategies, which we have developed in conversation with City staff to compensate for the lack of car parking.*
Incompatibility with the heritage character of all surrounding streets (Government, Battery, and South Turner)	*We have dramatically changed the aesthetic of the building, incorporating language and patterns common to heritage houses in the city. Their adoption into this 21st century Passive House building creates a modern take on this language.*
Lack of consultation with neighbours by the proponents	*The design changes we have made between the CALUC presentation and this proposal are the result of carefully listening to the community's concerns.*
Loss of a century-old fourplex that otherwise appears to be an ideal candidate for gentle densification under the recently-adopted Missing Middle Housing Initiative	*The existing fourplex is not in good shape, and would be technically difficult and expensive to renovate. The new proposal adds 7 more units to existing site.*

SUMMARY

This proposal meets the overall objectives of the City and the neighbourhood. It increases the diversity of the housing stock available in the James Bay area while maintaining a similar scale and character of the neighbourhood. It is a forward-thinking project dedicated to car-free families and built to the highest energy standard in the world. This project represents the very type of development that our city needs to encourage to meet our climate action goals and gently increase the density in our existing neighbourhoods.