

City of Victoria Planning and Development Department

1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

10 March 2026

Re: REZ00894, DPV00293, HAP00271
930-934 Balmoral Rd and 1701 Quadra St

Dear Mayor Alto, Council and Staff,

We are pleased to present this letter outlining the core components of this important proposal, and summarizing actions taken towards resolving staff recommendations and panel feedback since the initial submission in Summer 2024.

This proposal stems from an exciting partnership between Aryze and the United Church of Canada—an opportunity to reimagine and reinvigorate this historic site in the North Park neighbourhood. Working in close collaboration with a value-aligned architecture team and expert heritage consultant, we are deeply committed to creating a thoughtful, inclusive and inspiring project that honours the legacy of the First Metropolitan Church while breathing new life into the area.

This proposal includes a 6-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental building combined with the adaptive reuse of the existing United Commons building (formerly First Metropolitan Church). The project delivers housing, arts, culture, and community within a cohesive, mixed-use campus environment, activating the Quadra Cultural Corridor.

Housing

This application delivers 129 new rental homes, providing a wide spectrum of options from studios to three-bedroom apartments. To further support a diverse resident profile and street-level vibrancy, the project includes ground-oriented lofts and live-work residences that frame the south-facing central courtyard. Small public facing commercial spaces will support the ground oriented homes as an onsite amenity and will further support in driving activation and foot traffic throughout the day. These homes are secured as purpose-built rentals, providing long-term housing choice just blocks from the downtown core.

Adaptive Reuse

The proposed revitalization of the "United Commons" building will provide rehearsal, performance, and gathering spaces for community groups, congregations, and the arts & culture sector, supporting the North Park neighborhood as a creative district and ensuring the building remains a functional community serving asset. The adaptive reuse strategy unlocks the necessary user-base to fund the necessary building improvements that will extend the life and utility of a cherished heritage asset - such improvements include a new accessible entry, modernized building systems, added washrooms, all deployed across a series of multifunctional high quality spaces. Integral to the success of this adaptive reuse, the conservation strategy preserves the historic sanctuary space and character defining elements, while introducing a contrasting and contemporary, single-story north addition and new secondary entrance to the east elevation. By providing flexible, purpose-built rehearsal and performance spaces within the Quadra Cultural Corridor, this proposal stands to deliver a long-term, stable solution to the ongoing loss of arts and cultural space in the City.

Engagement

The site's programming and physical layout have been informed by a consistent engagement process. Following our meeting with the Community Association Land Use Committee (CALUC), we have maintained a direct dialogue with the North Park Neighborhood Association to better understand local priorities. Community feedback has been instrumental in refining the project's permeability and public realm, specifically the development of the mews-like connection between Balmoral and Quadra.

To ensure the site remains active and serves a clear regional need, we conducted targeted outreach with existing congregations and over a dozen organizations within the arts and culture sector. This process validated the functional design of the "United Commons" and resulted in a tremendously positive reception from the creative community. In an environment where accessible cultural space is in steady decline across Victoria, this project serves as a critical intervention.

Design Evolution and Policy Alignment

This proposal has strengthened through the City's formal review process, earning a unanimous recommendation for approval from the Advisory Design Panel (ADP). In response to the panel's review, we have since focused on enhancing the "news-like" connection and utility of the space between the buildings, and creating a more porous and inviting pedestrian experience. We also further refined the architectural expression of the concrete plinth and the building frontage along Balmoral Rd, ensuring the new residential building maintains a respectful relationship with the public realm and a positive user experience.

The Heritage Advisory Panel (HAPL) provided positive feedback and a recommendation for approval on the adaptive re-use proposal, and guided our approach towards materiality and sensitively resolving transitions between old and new. The final design utilizes colored glass elements that intentionally mirror the stained-glass tones of the historic sanctuary while conveying them through contrasting and contemporary expression. This approach ensures that the new development does not mimic the historic fabric, but rather acts as a modern backdrop that highlights the prominence of the church building, creating a visually cohesive building program that honors its architectural legacy.

Following these panel successes, we have worked extensively with City Planning and Heritage staff to resolve the technical recommendations provided through three rounds of technical review group comments. This collaborative effort extended to Parks, Transportation, Engineering, Stormwater, and the Fire Department, ensuring the design scheme aligns with all current municipal policy and safety directions.

Sustainability and Energy Performance

We are committed to the City's climate goals, targeting high energy efficiency standards through a Step Code 4 design for the new mixed-use residential building. To support the City's vision for a walkable, transit-oriented community, the project incorporates a robust mobility strategy. This includes significant investments in bicycle infrastructure, car-share integration, and transit support programs for both residents and commercial employees. These measures, combined with a "rewilding" landscape framework, ensure the project contributes to a healthy, low-carbon urban environment.

Conclusion

We believe this project stands as a catalyst for community connection and urban vibrancy. Having diligently addressed the feedback of staff and expert panels, we are confident this proposal represents a balanced, transformative outcome that honors the site's past while building a sustainable future. We look forward to your consideration.



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