

## Letter to Mayor and Council

November 8, 2017

**City of Victoria**

1 Centennial Square  
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

Mayor Lisa Helps  
Members of City Council  
City of Victoria  
Dear Mayor and Council,

**Re: Proposed Redevelopment at 819-827 Fort Street ("825 Fort")  
Rezoning & Development Application**

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On behalf of the owner, 825 Fort Holdings Ltd., The Salient Group is submitting a rezoning and development application for redevelopment of 819-827 Fort Street ("825 Fort"), including:

- 109 purpose built rental homes,
- A mix of 1, 2, and 3 bedroom homes,
- Retention and rehabilitation of the historic Edwardian building façade at 825 Fort St,
- Historically scaled retail storefronts designed and curated to support the local community and add to the vibrancy of the neighbourhood
- Urban design and form that reduces overlook of current and future neighbours, and that is historically respectful.
- Coordination with the Fort Street Bikeway and public realm plan, incorporating sidewalk widening, a mid-block crosswalk, and a new public parklet.

The proposed 825 Fort Street mixed-use redevelopment application has been submitted to the City in conjunction with Architectural and Landscape drawings dated November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

The goal of the proposed redevelopment is to support Victoria's burgeoning hi-tech and commercial downtown district with high quality "purpose-built rental" urban homes and character driven "high-street" retail space. Contributing to the strength and composition of this evolving mixed-use district is consistent with The Salient Group's focus on the creation and restoration of compact, walkable and vibrant communities in urban environments.

From the initial concept stage, Salient has consulted with the City of Victoria and the neighbouring community as well as local stakeholder groups. This consultation has significantly influenced the design and composition of the project.

### **Project Description & Neighbourhood Context**

The project site is comprised of 2 legal lots with civic addresses of 819-821 Fort Street, and 825-827 Fort Street. The “825-Fort Street” site is located mid-block on the south side of Fort Street between a large property to the east currently slated of a significant future development. To the west is the lower scaled “Fort Common” properties, a collection of neighbourhood scaled commercial and retail buildings that together comprise another significant site of future growth.

The 825 Fort Street redevelopment proposes to provide 109 purpose-built, market rental apartments in a diverse mix of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom homes ranging in size from 400sf - 915sf. At the street, historically scaled street level retail spaces will continue the rhythm of the Fort Street high street that the community values so highly. We expect a diversity of backgrounds to prospective residents, with a concentration among the technology and service sectors in the area.

Fort street is well known for its lower scale, historic character, and interesting shops. A public open house held to present the project was attended by over 40-people, including members of the community, the neighbouring “Escher” development on Broughton Street, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Residents’ Association, the Heritage Trust, City Council, the Fairfield Gonzales CALUC, as well as other attendees who did not identify themselves or an affiliation. We have met directly with members of the “Escher” development strata corporation and residents of the building and the Fairfield Gonzales CALUC in advance of the preliminary and final CALUC meetings in order to understand the needs and concerns of the community. We have also consulted with executives at VIATEC to understand the housing needs and dynamic of the high-tech workforce. This collective feedback all contributed to the design and composition of the project.

The project is inspired by urban rejuvenation projects that build on the existing character of an area, creating a community within the building, and taking an active role in adding to the community as a whole. Over 10-percent of the project homes contain 3-bedrooms, and over 36-percent of the homes contain 2-bedrooms. The homes are inspired by urban lofts, and have a diversity of plans allowing options for family growth or contraction.

The built form of the 825 Fort Street redevelopment is rooted in the retained and rehabilitated facade of the historically designated “BC Hardware Building” at 825 Fort Street. The insertion of an historically scaled and inspired street wall on either side of the retained façade will continue the character and rhythm at the street. Set back above the fourth and fifth levels, the building continues in the modules, reflecting the city in its historical growth pattern of 10 and 20 metre wide frontages.

Tenants of the new Fort Street commercial spaces will be curated and coordinated to complement the character of the existing properties to the west. The retail character and mix is critical to the vitality of the area and the success of the mixed use neighbourhood.

The public realm for the proposed redevelopment has been comprehensively integrated with the City’s Fort Street Bikeway and public beautification planning. This includes the coordination of a new mid-block crosswalk with the building design, and a new enriched street environment that includes sidewalk widening, a new parklet, and street trees to strengthen the grade level experience. Public transit is immediately accessible on Fort Street.

### **Development Permit & Policy Guidelines**

The project site is currently zoned as a Central Area Zone (CA-2-Fort Street Special Commercial, and CA-HG Harris Green Commercial District). It is located within the Fort Street Heritage Corridor in the Fairfield-Gonzales neighbourhood and bounded by Harris Green to the north and east, and Downtown to the north and west.

There are two guiding policy documents that are applicable: The City of Victoria's Downtown Core Area Plan (DCAP), and the City of Victoria's Official Community Plan (OCP). As per guidance from Staff, the project is designed within the DCAP design guidelines, with few exceptions.

The permitted height under DCAP guidelines is 30 m, or approximately 10 storeys, while the proposed height of 825 Fort Street is 35.5 m. The four storey street-wall podium is scaled based on the existing floor-to-ceiling heights of the retained heritage façade. The eleventh floor, is comprised of a mix of larger 1, 2, and 3 bedroom homes, designed in response to feedback we have received in consultation with the community.

In addition, the DCAP outlines density up to 5.0 FSR, while the proposed density is 7.0 FSR. The increased density is a result of the building's form and layout as an 'urban infill form' that orients residential units to face north and south of the site, versus a 'point tower form' that orients units in all directions. The urban infill form reduces overlook conflicts between sites, given the mid-block site location and the recently completed residential development to the southeast and anticipated future development sites to the east, south and west.

The third exception is a variance in the number of required parking stalls, which is discussed in further in the Transportation section below.

### **Design Rationale**

The architectural expression will be a balance of highlighting the historic elements and while introducing contemporary design, taking into consideration the neighbourhood context. The three-storey Edwardian façade of the designated heritage building at 825 Fort Street will be preserved and restored. The historic scale and rhythm of the street wall and retail storefront characteristics of Fort Street's past will inform the design of the new street-level retail and build on the continued vibrancy of this urban retail precinct.

New structures on either side of the historic facade will be complementary to its articulation and character, before stepping back and transitioning into a modern addition above. This approach has led the design of the building parti to consist of 3 smaller aggregate parts, to reduce the visual scale of the development and give the impression of separate urban infill additions built over time. This approach maintains the character & sensitivity of the designated heritage component.

As noted above, the massing and orientation of the building lends itself to greater diversity in size and type of unit. An "urban infill" redevelopment rooted in the restored façade of the historic 825 Fort Street, and built on the fabric and rhythm of the existing Fort Street streetscape. This design choice has been made with consideration of the diversity and vibrancy of the community over the long term.

The **large setback above fourth floor maintains a human scale street wall, that is historically scaled to activate retail services at the ground level.** The building will be partially stepped down and set back to the west. These steps and staggers are designed to expose the west face of the building when travelling from west to east, again highlighting the existing designated heritage component.

The material selection is based on the concept of smaller developments and additions to evoke both scale and texture of existing structures along Fort Street and the surrounds.

City Spaces on behalf of 825 Fort Holdings Ltd. helped guide the project's community outreach and engagement process. Through several meetings with local stakeholders, the project has been consistently revised based on feedback received from each meeting. This consultation includes a voluntary public open house, informal meetings with neighbouring property owners and businesses, residents including those from the adjacent Escher project, representatives from neighbourhood community associations, a formal meeting with the Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association, City staff, and members of Council, who have all provided us with feedback and input on the project's use, design, massing, and public realm design.

### **Heritage**

The existing building at 825 Fort Street is a municipally designated heritage building on the Victoria Heritage Register. This handsome 3-story building was originally constructed in 1911-1912 for B.C. Hardware Company, however the building and structure has since been renovated and altered many times. The building was renovated by the Cunliffe family in the late 1980's to restore the historic façade to its original appearance, however none of the building's original elements remain in the building's interior.

The proposed redevelopment proposes will retain and rehabilitate the existing façade and redevelop the site to the highest and best use for the area – mixed use residential with ground level retail space. The redevelopment is designed from the historic rhythm of the heritage façade, with residential units on the first four floors that follow existing modules - these units are designed with large floor to ceiling heights and take advantage of the opportunity to maximize natural illumination.

In keeping with the existing streetscape, there will be no setback from the pedestrian level at Fort Street utilizing as much of the site as possible. The tall ground-floor retail level with an inset front entrance and large glazed shop windows is also retained from the historic facade, and carried through the entire retail plane on the ground level to maintain the historic rhythm of Fort Street. The intention is to create a strong podium at the base of the building with more modern, stepped-back storeys above in order prioritize and highlight the heritage façade component below.

A Conservation Plan to retain and restore the existing 825 Fort Street façade has been prepared by Donald Luxton & Associates and is included as part of this application. As the project progresses, Don Luxton will be carrying out further testing and analysis as part of the conservation plan. A materials consultant will also be engaged to assess existing building materials, and re-use materials where practical, appropriate, or significant due to the heritage and character of the building. Materials that are



used will be carefully selected, with thought carefully given to the textures and colours of materials to ensure they are sensitive and consistent with the neighbourhood character.

### **Public Realm, Green Building Features, Infrastructure**

Greenery is incorporated into 825 Fort to provide buffers between public and private spaces. At the second floor, private patios are defined with linear planters and box hedging, intending to provide natural privacy that does not exclude genuine social interaction. The same condition exists on the fourth, fifth, and tenth floors. Larger terrace spaces will be provided with hose bib locations to encourage residents to grow herbs and vegetables, and also to provide a means of maintenance for the common terraced landscaping areas.

At the ground floor level, the public realm is designed to coordinate with the City's plans to upgrade the existing cycling infrastructure on Fort Street. This includes sidewalk and streetscape improvements, and the future mid-block crossing as part of the City's plans that this redevelopment proposes to relocate to the west, in order to line up with the historical façade.

This application also proposes to construct a demountable public parklet in front of the property. The parklet is conceived as a timber platform including inbuilt bench seating, standing and sitting tables, arm rests to prevent overnight sleeping and an overhead glazed canopy to protect users from inclement weather. To delineate either end of the parklet, there are two generously sized galvanized steel planters offering a sense of protection and enclosure for users. Long bench seats, standing and sitting tables are incorporated into the parklet to encourage social interaction in this public realm.

The landscape design takes its cues from the history of the 825 Fort Street building. Drawing on the initial use of the building as a hardware store, materials are chosen to reflect those typically used in standardized timber frame construction. A simple palette is developed utilizing hardwearing and robust cross-sectional timber sizing, galvanized steel and glass. Detailing is intended to be simple, robust and clear of purpose.

The parklet is a vertical extrusion of the streetscape pattern developed as part of the streetscape design guidelines and is intended to be visually cohesive with the continuing streetscape design along Fort street. The project team is working with the Engineering department to coordinate all works in public spaces with the scope to be confirmed through further development and discussions with the Engineering department.

In addition to the public parklet, the project will have a common collegium and outdoor common space on the tenth floor. This space is designed to foster connections within the community of the building, and to be as flexible as possible for various uses and multiple groups as an amenity relevant to the needs of the residents and through the life of the building. Additional facilities tailored to urban living include plenty of bike parking, storage facilities, dog wash, and a bike wash station. All of these features are intended to reduce the parking and vehicle footprint in order to encourage alternative modes of transportation. Situated across from the Fort Street bike lane improvements, and our project will

provide associated bicycle amenities including additional bicycle parking and also start/end of trip facilities.

825 Fort will not be targeting a green certification, but is being designed with thoughtful, practical design for efficient systems in conjunction with the proposed use of purpose-built market rental units.

### **Transportation**

825 Fort Street will be requesting a variance in parking supply, which is lower than the minimum parking requirements outlined in the City of Victoria's current Zoning By-Law, as well as the proposed parking requirements in the City's Draft Off-Street Parking Regulations for Downtown.

The project is proposing to provide 55 parking spaces. The requirement as per the City's Zoning Bylaw requires a parking supply of 98 parking spaces. The City's proposed changes to Schedule C would require 77 parking spaces.

The site is strategically located and highly accessible given its central location within the downtown core. It has excellent walkability and access to transit, and is located on the new Fort Street Bike Path. In addition, the project's use as a purpose-built market rental apartment is intended to service those who are within walking distance to their place of work. It is expected that vehicle ownership rates will be significantly lower than typical condominium projects. We believe the level of parking provided for the project is appropriate given the location and proposed uses.

As part of this application, a Traffic Study has been prepared by Bunt Traffic Consultants to provide guidance on the amount of parking required to meet the needs of 825 Fort. Bunt's analysis includes information from surveys of similar rental properties in close proximity, and also to advise on the appropriate level of parking taking into consideration the project's use and location. The number of parking stalls that are being proposed as part of this development was decided in consultation with Bunt, and also consistent with their analysis and recommendation.

Further, we will be providing a variety of Traffic Demand Measures to support a decrease in number of parking spaces, including a start and end-of-trip amenity for cyclists (including a bike wash and a bike repair station), ample secured bicycle parking above the minimum required amount, provision of a car share program for residents in the building, and an information package for new residents to advise on the alternative methods of transportation that are easily accessible and available.

### **Project Design Team & Credentials**

We are pleased to be working with such a talented project team with extensive experience working in Victoria:

- **The Salient Group, Developer**
- **Musson Cattell Mackey Partnership, Architect, Building Code**
- **Considered Design, Landscape Architect**
- **Don Luxton, Heritage Consultant**

- **JEA, Civil Engineer**
- **AES, Electrical Engineer**
- **Rocky Point, Mechanical Engineer**
- **RJC, Structural Engineer**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal to redevelop the existing properties at 819-827 Fort Street. We look forward to working with City staff to progress this application.

Sincerely

**825 FORT HOLDINGS LTD.** *c/o The Salient Group*



Robert Fung  
President

cc: MCM Partnership - Renante Solivar, Sydney Schwartz