



02 June 2023

City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Alto and Members of Council,

Re: Kings & Ross, 2615 - 2629 Douglas Street, Rezoning/ Development Permit Application

We are pleased to present this combined Rezoning and Development Permit application for the continued development of the property located at 2615 – 2629 Douglas Street. The project introduces a new purpose-built rental residential building with ground-floor commercial and a public-accessed courtyard at the eastern side of the property, on the corner of Kings Road and Ross Lane. The western part of the subject property is occupied by the heritage-designated and recently renovated Victoria Press Building.

Background and Development Context

This application is the final step in realizing a comprehensive vision to redevelop the entire property, which began with the revitalization of the original Victoria Press Building. This phase involves transforming the onsite surface parking lot into a residential complex that adds 160 rental apartments to the mixed-use development that features Live/ Work/ Recreation amenities. Merchant House Capital is the steward of the Victoria Press Building and has crafted a vision for its revitalization and reuse to bring a sense of place and diversity to 'Midtown' Victoria. It is envisioned as a destination for commerce, culture, and innovation adjacent to both Downtown and the emerging Rock Bay Arts & Innovation District.

The site-wide redevelopment began with the Architectural Heritage Designation of the Victoria Press Building, and its metamorphosis into a commercial hub that supports entrepreneurship and small businesses. It is now proposed to round out this 'Midtown' site with rental housing that encourages demographic and land-use diversity for the health and vitality of the community. The development is a beacon to sustainability as it has revitalized an existing heritage structure, as well as its compact form which features a vibrant mix of uses in a new urban village.

An additional feature of the new development is the absence of parking for the residential component. Two levels of underground parking are provided, but these are intended to support the adjacent commercial building as a replacement for the lost surface parking lot. Included in this parking are sixteen (16) parking spaces for the new commercial space at grade-level of the new residential building, as well as shared visitor parking. Extensive Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures are also proposed to support a car-free lifestyle with mode-shift to active transportation.

Planning Policy Compliance

The **Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan** (2017) provides a guide for the future growth of this neighbourhood. The Victoria Press site is part of the Douglas Corridor sub-area of the plan, which is envisioned as a mixed-employment area. The sub-area is designated as a Large Urban Village, part of Humber Green Special Planning Area.

Large Urban Villages have a mix of commercial and residential uses. The Humber Green area, bounded by Douglas Street, Hillside Avenue, Bay Street and Blanshard Street, is also identified as a gateway to downtown. The area is envisioned as “a denser, centrally-located hub for employment and mixed-use residential buildings, focused around a future rapid transit station. Redevelopment will enhance amenities, improve walkability and add greenery. Humber Green is envisioned as an evolving employment and mixed-use area at the northern edge of downtown.

The proposed residential use supports the Large Urban Village concept by introducing purpose-built rental housing to complement the commercial, business and employment uses at the adjacent Victoria Press Building, and completes the envisioned concept of the site.

The **Official Community Plan** (OCP 2012), directs growth to the city’s urban core, and the surrounding network of neighbourhood centres and urban villages. These are expected to accommodate 40% of the city’s population growth. The Humber Green Large Urban Village is adjacent to the urban core and is connected to both downtown and regional destinations by the Douglas Street rapid bus corridor (Blink RapidBus).

The **Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan** and the **OCP** identify buildings up to 6-storeys and densities up to 2.5 FSR in Large Urban Villages when public benefit and Neighbourhood plan objectives are met. The **OCP** supports guideline interpretations of building height and density to achieve heritage conservation objectives. The designation and preservation of the Vic Press Building demonstrates the project’s commitment to retaining and repurposing the building.

The special planning area for this site specifically considers the on-site public benefits of courtyard-style buildings with green space for use by residents and employees, as well as public space at the corner of Kings Road and Ross Lane. These guidelines have influenced the proposed design, by shaping the ground plane as a courtyard and a corner plaza.

Housing Needs

The addition of residential use at this location addresses the important need for housing in Victoria, and helps realize the City’s Housing-first strategies. The **Victoria’s Housing Needs Assessment** (2020) projects a need for an additional 2,900 homes in Victoria between 2020-2025, with priority placed on rentals. The **Housing Strategy** report (updated July 2021) estimated a need for 6,000 homes by 2025 to keep up with population growth and housing shortages. **Victoria’s Housing Future** report (2021) acknowledges these shortfalls and growing demand. It is estimated that over 6,000 units are needed to meet latent demand, before considering future

growth and needs beyond 2025. These studies point to the need for more housing, and this proposal will deliver innovative rental housing in a uniquely positioned Midtown location with connections to downtown Victoria and regional employment destinations along the Douglas Street rapid bus corridor. By all measures, *this proposal represents implementation of planned growth in the right location.*

The Idea

The concepts underlying this proposal have been developed since the property was purchased in 2017, when the decision to retain and repurpose the existing Victoria Press Building was made. The then-newly-adopted Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan envisioned redevelopment of the entire site, but so from the outset the approach to this project was to instead retain the existing building and steward its phased transformation into a campus of commercial and residential uses centred on reusing the existing building. Through an iterative design process and sequenced series of development permit applications, our team members have worked collaboratively with City staff and stakeholders toward this shared vision for the future of this neighbourhood. The vision for the site has been consistent through the planned sequence of development applications: starting with the first development permit and heritage designation applications for the adaptive reuse of the building, to the rezoning application for the commissary kitchen and distillery/brewery uses. *This proposal is the culmination of years of planning for a transformation of the site through sensitive, adaptive reuse, and infill neighbourhood development.*

Design Description and Rationale

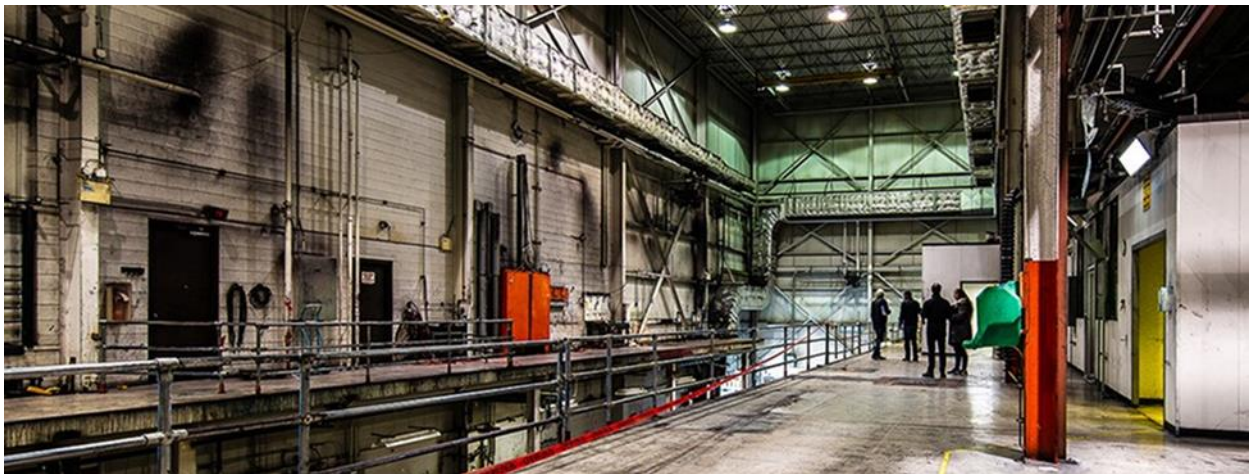
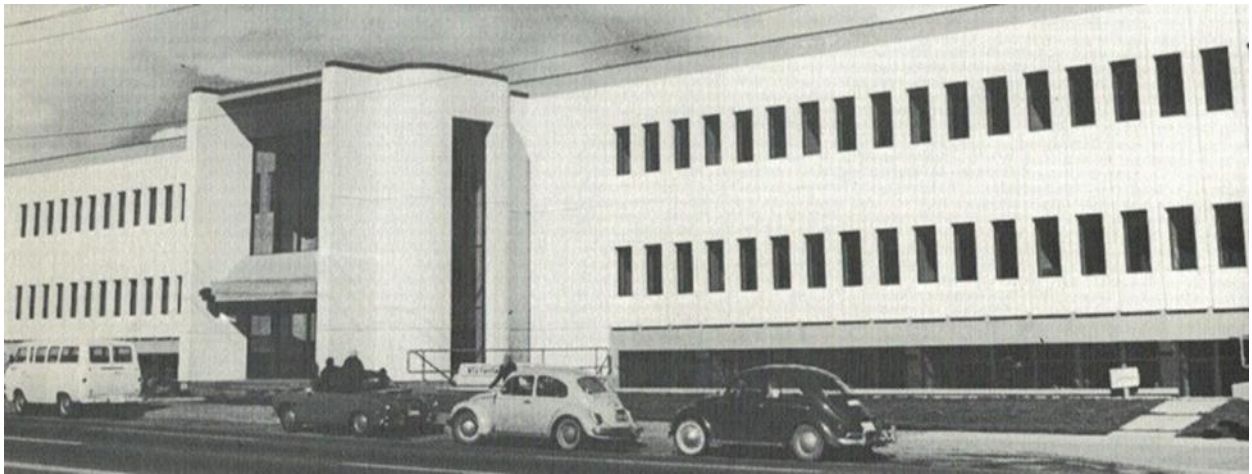
Late Modern Heritage

The point of departure for the design of the proposed residential building was the heritage-designated Victoria Press Building¹. Understanding and appreciating its inherent architectural qualities and functional characteristics was a precursor to the design of the new residential building, whose massing articulation, proportions, colour, texture and fenestration patterns were all influenced by those of the Press building.

¹ The elements that define the heritage character of the *Victoria Press Building* are its: continuous use by Victoria Press Ltd. since 1971; commercial form, scale and massing as expressed by its symmetrical rectilinear form, two-storey height, with full-basement level, and prominent central entryway; characteristics of the Late Modern style including its precast concrete panels, exposed aggregate stucco cladding at the entry, roof and foundation lines, and its full-height central entryway with rounded precast concrete walls. Featured in the building's interior; original smoked-glass recessed fixed-pane window assemblies were designed to fit one per precast panel across all elevations; carvings by prominent West Coast artist Godfrey Rupert Cripps Stephens (b. Duncan, BC 1939-) were erected in 1973 in the lobby. (Victoria Heritage Foundation Website February 2023)

Form, Place and Function

The architectural composition begins with the block-wide horizontality of the Late-Modern (1970's) Victoria Press commercial building, and adds a new residential building as a vertical counterpoint, framing an interstitial open space. The courtyard place created serves multiple functions: a recreational space for people in the area, a publicly-accessible place shared by a restaurant patio, a pedestrian connection between Kings Road and the new through-block laneway linking Douglas Street and Ross Lane; an entrance portal for the underground parking that forms a multi-level terrace for seating and viewing of a large outdoor screen; a spill-out patio for a new multi-purpose event space; and the residential entrance breezeway that provides an accessible link from the courtyard to Ross Lane.



Urban Design Response

The subject property is nominally a part of the municipally-designated 'neighbourhood' of Burnside-Gorge. However, it can be understood to be located at an emerging 'Midtown' that is adjacent to downtown Victoria. Traffic patterns in this area are dominated by the heavily trafficked Douglas Street corridor leading to Highway 1, and two nearby arterial intersections. Adjacencies include an East-West cross-town cycling route (Kings Road) and a north-south local street (Ross Lane). The site features a major rapid bus station on Douglas Street, and the area attracts and serves significant pedestrian and cyclist traffic throughout the day and evening.

Accordingly, the new building's street-frontages have been designed to serve multi-modal means of transportation, as well as to facilitate better pedestrian interconnection between streets. Wide sidewalks, rainwater-treating boulevard gardens, street trees, public seating and special materials have been designed to integrate the building entrances and frontages with the surrounding public realm.

The Architecture of the Residential Apartments

Beyond the aesthetic influence of the existing historic Victoria Press Building, the architecture of the proposed Victoria Press Apartments building is based on a classic rectangular, double-loaded-corridor floor plan type with optimal solar orientation that brings direct morning and/or afternoon sunlight to each apartment. This elongated, compact plan form maximizes the open space on the site, and allows for ample spacing from both the neighbouring Victoria Press Building to the west and Ross Place to the north, as well as the adjacent public rights-of-way. The rhythm of the projecting bays on the east and west sides of the building (quintet on the west facing the courtyard, and sextet on the east facing Ross Lane), recalls the rhythm of the vertical precast concrete panels of the Victoria Press Building, and pays homage to the form of the giant press machinery that once occupied its former 'Printing Press Room'.

The building height is mandated by the amount of floor area and number of purpose-built rentable apartments that will make the project viable. In addition to conventional apartments of a variety of sizes, the complex includes shared-living apartments for co-housing and other forms of cooperative living and tenure. These critical parameters have been composed into a building form that is a proportionate counterpoint to the site and the existing Victoria Press Building. The new building's brick-clad lower floors echo the materials of the nearby historic Armoury at Ross and Bay Street, while the off-white and dark grey colours of the upper storeys refer to the Press-building's historic, and newly refreshed, colour palette.

Urban Ecology

Beyond the fundamental environmental benefit of locating high-density, purpose-built, residential apartments within a '15-minute-neighbourhood' framework, the project exemplifies an effective and sustainable approach to urban growth through the adaptive re-use of existing structures, and the optimization of land use in the City (i.e. prioritizing housing vs parking). Reduced parking provisions and parking stall electrification are strategies that will improve the ecological fit of the

project into the future urban context. We will design the building to meet the upcoming low carbon requirements that the City of Victoria will require starting in July 2024. In addition, the design will satisfy high standards for operational energy efficiency, durability, and functional performance. Maximization of daylighting, ample apartment layouts, and generous tenant amenity spaces/services will be important features in the new building (also please refer to the appended summary of sustainable design considerations).

Multi-modal transportation choices are achieved by the location of the residences (transit stops/routes, cycling infrastructure, proximity to goods and services), and further supported by ample bike end-of-trip facilities, car-share programs, on-site business and workspace, as well as social and cultural amenities.

Landscape Approach

The proposed landscape has been divided into streetscape and interior plaza space designs. In addition to landscape design, strategies to manage stormwater and to integrate urban tree canopy will be addressed. These strategies support key values found in the OCP and neighbourhood plans, including providing much needed shade in the public realm, supporting downstream aquatic habitat by cleaning and managing runoff, and encouraging people to walk or bike by providing safe and aesthetically pleasing streetscapes.

The streetscape design along Kings and Ross focuses on providing a safe and equitable public realm, enhanced urban forest, and integrated rainwater management system. Public walkways are separated from the road by a generous boulevard. The boulevard will be planted with a mix of native and non-native species adapted to the site conditions. The planting areas will be designed to achieve soil volumes to meet City requirements to support medium sized street trees. Rain gardens integrated in the boulevard will manage road runoff and slow and treat stormwater before it is conveyed to the municipal storm drain. Seating and a small plaza space at the corner of Kings and Ross, provides elderly residents places to rest in the shade of street trees and for people to meet their neighbours. Additional rain planters will be developed adjacent to the building to manage some of the building roof runoff. The laneway that runs along the northern property line will have a similar treatment, but with the addition of planter bulges and strategic lane narrowing to slow traffic and create a pedestrianized laneway or woonerf.

The courtyard landscape between the existing Victoria Press building and the proposed building will be developed into an large urban plaza space that is accessible from both buildings, Kings Road, and the new laneway. The space will provide an unprogrammed space for large gatherings, access to a large outdoor video screen for projects of movies and public art, and ample seating for visitors to the space. The parking ramp area has been developed into a cascading rainwater planter and seating feature that animates the southern end of the plaza that provides seating, shade and access to the site. A series of trees will be incorporated into the plaza. The plaza will be graded to direct runoff towards these trees where it will ultimately infiltrate through permeable pavers to the soils below thereby managing plaza runoff.

A large amenity space is located on the second floor at the north end of the building. This space will have an unprogrammed central space for residential gatherings, seating, more intimate and private spaces, and planting that screens/ frames views.

Plants will be selected that are adapted to a changing climate and support habitat enhancement values such as pollination and biodiversity. A minimum of 30% of the required common landscaped areas will include a diverse combination of plants and vegetation that are native to southern Vancouver Island, food-bearing, or that provide pollinator habitats.

TDM & Parking

The proposed development will not include any off-street parking for the rental residential units. The rationale for zero parking is five-fold:

1. Transit Access

The subject site has access to a multitude of transit options, with 20 transit routes servicing six bus stops within a 250-metre (3-minute walk) radius. Further, the Victoria Blink RapidBus has been implemented along the Douglas Street corridor, offering improved overall transit service to the site.

2. Cycling Network

The site is located on the Kings-Haultain cycling corridor, which is part of the City of Victoria's all ages and abilities (AAA) cycling network. The Kings-Haultain cycling corridor integrates the subject site into Victoria's larger AAA network and provides connectivity to downtown and other key destinations in the City. In addition, the site is close to Gorge Road / Hillside Avenue. The City is planning to start construction on the Gorge Road AAA cycling corridor in 2023, which will provide a safe and direct connection from Victoria to Saanich. This future project, in addition to the existing AAA cycling infrastructure, is anticipated to increase the appeal of cycling for future residents.

3. Housing Tenure

The project is for a new purpose-built rental residential building. Parking demand research has reported that housing tenure can be a significant factor influencing parking demand. For example, a study of 103 Multi-family Residential sites (5,600 units) in the City of Victoria concluded that vehicle ownership among condominium units is approximately 1.5-times higher than in rental apartment units. This has been confirmed in other jurisdictions too, including Vancouver and Toronto.

4. Precedent for Zero Off-Street Parking in other Multi-Family buildings

There are at least five other multi-family residential buildings that have been constructed in Canada without any off-street parking.

These buildings include:

- a. 133 East 4th Street (133 East 4th) in North Vancouver
- b. 8222 Gateway Boulevard (Crawford Block) in Edmonton
- c. 456 Pandora Avenue (The Janion) in Victoria
- d. 431 8th Avenue SE (The N3) in Calgary
- e. 436 University Avenue (The Residences at RCMI) in Toronto

The rationale for no parking in these buildings include [a] proximity to high-quality and frequent transit service, [b] proximity to active transportation facilities, [c] the building included a significant amount of parking for bicycles and [d] the availability of carsharing either at the building or in proximity to it. There are also more local examples in Greater Victoria with the District of Saanich recently approving a nine-unit townhouse development with no parking and the City of Victoria considering a zero parking development in Victoria West. We also have direct experience with our Dominion Rocket project, which saw the conversion of a former hotel into rental housing with only a small number of existing parking spaces to serve the commercial component of the project.

5. Transportation Demand Management

In addition to the factors above, the proposed development is exploring several transportation demand management (TDM) measures to support a car-free lifestyle for future residents. The TDM measures under consideration include:

- a. BC Transit EcoPASS (valued at \$1,000 per pass) for each studio unit and co-living unit for a period of 5-years.
- b. The provision of 307 long-term bicycle parking spaces (1.91 spaces / unit), which is above the City of Victoria's off-street parking requirements and intended to support cycling for future residents.
- c. Non-standard bicycle parking and end-of-trip facilities including parking for larger bikes such as e-bikes and bikes with trailers along with bike repair tools and a cleaning station.
- d. A covered shelter for short-term bicycle parking.
- e. Two car-share vehicles and ModoPlus memberships for each unit.
- f. A TDM welcome package available to all residents that provides information about the TDM programs and sustainable transportation options available.

Community Engagement

The project designs have been shared with the Burnside Gorge Community Association members and have received their support for this application. Engagement with the Community dates back to November of 2017 when the Victoria Press building property was purchased. Over the past 5 years, collaboration has continued with the Burnside Gorge Community Association as each City development application process occurred, receiving their support and encouragement at every step. A CALUC Community Meeting was held on March 20th prior to the submission. The BGCA's

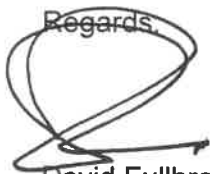
subsequent letter to the City recommended the application proceed to public hearing, noting “The Burnside Gorge LUC finds this proposal fits within the BG Local area plan for the Humber Green Village. The question of parking relaxation has appeared to have been mitigated by offsetting methods and this proposals location on the Douglas Transit corridor.” Comments and questions arising from the Development Tracker posting, including 12 contributors/responses, related to the proposed parking strategy, the building form, and potential noise and dust impacts during construction.

Supporting Revitalization and Economic Investment in Rental Housing

We are proud of the multi-phased revitalization of this former light industrial site. Over the ensuing years, we are confident it will become a thriving urban village that acts as a hub for the Burnside Gorge community and a node for the city-at-large. We ask for your support of our application to add the final element, a residential rental-housing component, that will allow the envisioned urban village to come to life. The final development form and its vibrant mix of uses is a testament to a thoughtful, considered approach to both save existing building stock and introduce complementary new building forms to the community.

The project will contribute to Victoria’s vision as a more resilient and equitable city, centred around a healthy and viable downtown core supported by mixed-use urban villages. The addition of purpose-built rental housing in this Midtown location adds much-needed housing diversity. The site is directly linked to regional destinations by active transportation infrastructure, helping to mitigate the climate crisis by promoting and encouraging mode-shift to cycling, walking and transit use. The plan encompasses community-gathering and amenity spaces, including the corner plaza, a multi-purpose indoor space and a centre courtyard with a large outdoor projection screen to welcome the performing arts and to spark social connections. These ideas and elements combine with the campus of commercial uses taking shape at the revitalized Victoria Press Building to create a dynamic setting reflective of aspirations of the 15-minute city model. This application is the final step in the complete and comprehensive transformation of the site.

We have appreciated the support and collaboration with City of Victoria staff to advance our application for your consideration.

Regards,


David Fullbrook
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c/o Merchant House Capital