

854 – 880 Pandora Avenue: Application Letter

February 7th, 2023

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

RE: 854-880 Pandora Avenue, Development Permit & Rezoning Application

Please accept this letter as an introduction to our proposal for 854–880 Pandora Avenue. Townline is pleased to present our proposal as an exciting new addition to the neighbourhood, bringing much-needed rental housing, sophisticated architecture, and a vibrant pedestrian realm to one of Victoria’s busiest and most underutilized corners. As we begin Townline’s third project on Pandora Avenue, we look forward to continuing our work of developing complete communities.

Our project seeks to redevelop the site as a mixed-use development in the form of a 14-storey building with 138 rental homes and approximately 7,000 sq. ft. of commercial space on the ground floor. The building is proposed as 100% purpose-built rental. As a part of the redevelopment process, we are requesting to amend the property from the current CA-1 designation to a new site-specific zoning.

Site Location and History

The area around Quadra Street and Pandora Avenue has historical significance to the city, being halfway between the activities and commerce of the inner harbour and Victoria’s earliest residential communities. Over time, this geography evolved into modern transportation corridors, conveying residents to and from downtown first by horse and streetcar and now by busses, private vehicles, and walking and rolling routes. This tangential but inextricable relationship to city centre persists to this day, as the North Park motto “Edgy to the Core” attests.

Situated at the northwest corner of the intersection, 880 Pandora has been home to many uses over time. Photographs in the city archives show definitive evidence of a car wash and automotive dealership following an unidentifiable retail use prior to the 1950’s redevelopment of the lots. Today, the lots play host to two commercial buildings with a variety of tenants, most notably an auto repair shop on the corner lot. Through this diverse history of use, we can see that historically this intersection has been a vibrant and connection location within the city but has since devolved into a more passive and closed role.

This intersection functions as a gateway to downtown Victoria, and a place of transition between dominant uses: religious and cultural structures along Quadra, government and office buildings to the west along Blanshard, and Harris Green Park leading up Pandora to the predominantly residential Fernwood and Rockland neighbourhoods. At 854-880 Pandora, we aim to honour the bustling, mixed-use character of this area while investing in quality design and materials to elevate the streetscape and provide the rental housing that will enable North Park to thrive long into the future.

Proposed Development

The development, as conceived by Townline and our design team, is a 14-storey purpose built rental building that will provide 138 new homes for the neighbourhood. The site lies within the Core Area, as defined by the city's OCP, and is envisioned as absorbing 50% of the new residential unit in the city between now and 2041. Townline seeks to respond to the need for rental housing by providing a high-quality group of homes of varying sizes to cater to a diverse population of renters. The form of the building is a 3-storey podium with commercial space on the ground floor wrapping from Quadra Street to the west along Pandora, a residential lobby entrance at the quieter northeast corner at Mason and Quadra, and ground-oriented townhouses along Mason Street, topped by a further 10 storeys of apartments and a top floor amenity space and patio.

Currently, the residential unit mix includes a diverse mix of rental housing units, from studios to 3-bedroom units, including over 40% family units (2+bedrooms)

The site is bounded by residential use to the north and commercial or institutional uses to the west, south, and east. We aim to respond to these conditions by providing a strong and consistent street frontage that echoes the traditional forms and materials of the neighbourhood, along with a contemporary tower designed to maximize quality living space and views for the future residents.

Planning Context

The subject site is currently zoned CA-1 (Pandora Avenue Special Commercial District). This zoning allows for mixed use buildings, as does the Official Community Plan (OCP) designation of Core Residential. We aim to conform to the OCP designated maximum of 4.5 FSR, but will be seeking a rezoning to a site-specific zone to achieve the FSR and height outlined in the OCP and the North Park Neighbourhood Plan.

Within the Downtown Core Area Plan, the site is included in the Residential Mixed-Use District (RMD). The RMD includes most of the residential land base in the plan, and is envisioned as absorbing the majority of downtown's population growth. Key objectives for the RMD include encouraging multi-residential development and complete communities, while providing active street-level businesses to increase pedestrian activity.

Building Design

Victoria is rich with cultural and architectural history dating back to the mid 1800s when it was British Columbia's main trading hub and the surrounding context of the site mirrors this rich architectural history. Within one block along Quadra there are three historic gothic churches; just north of the site on Mason is a Greek revivalist building; and the modernist Richard Blanchard BC Health building stands at the corner of Pandora and Blanshard.

Given that the site is woven into the historic urban fabric we wanted to reflect the traditional materiality and forms from a contemporary perspective. We've adapted the arch form from the gothic churches and numerous rounded/arched windows in neighbouring buildings. Many surrounding buildings have facades that have vertically organizing features, so this too was a principle that informed the vertical brick "frame" of the podium. Brick has been chosen for the podium cladding as this is the prevailing contextual material. The lighter, warm toned brick has been enlivened with subtle contemporary detailing throughout the base. The tower is clad in glazing and a dark opaque coloured metal panel with a simplified expression to place more importance on the ground plane and podium of the building. Overall, the building's goals are to respect the historic character of the neighbourhood and bring with it a contemporary and inviting design.

Given the sensitive nature of the neighbourhood context, CPTED principles are a key driver in the ground plane. Care was taken so that all frontages of the building are activated to provide more "eyes on the street" as well as flush building faces to minimise concealed spaces. Additional maintained landscaping and increased lighting will be introduced to all frontages to guide the public as well as increase the security of the area.

Transportation

The project is located at a key node within the City of Victoria's road network, with Quadra Street connecting from BC Highway 17 to the north and Beacon Hill Park to the South, and Pandora Avenue connecting the downtown core to Oak Bay in the east. Pandora also features a two-way separated All Ages and Abilities (AAA) bicycle lane on the north side of the street directly adjacent to the site, connecting to all of Victoria's active transportation network as well as on to the E&N Rail Trail via Johnson Street Bridge. This direct access to these networks will facilitate car-free or car-lite lifestyle and extensive use of active transportation for residents.

We plan to provide 164 bicycle parking stalls housed in secure bike rooms with amenities such as a bike wash and repair station. 95 Vehicle parking stalls will be provided, all of which will be EV-ready.

Additionally, BC Transit bus stops within 100m of the site provide service on 5 bus lines directly to key destinations across Greater Victoria including rapid access to downtown, regional shopping destinations, and higher education institutions.

Project Benefits and Amenities

This project will address an urgent need for rental housing in Victoria and further the goals of the city as laid out in the Housing Strategy Phase 1 and 2, Go Victoria Mobility Plan, and dozens of action items on the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan. Townline strives to make lasting positive contributions to every community in which we work. We see this project as adding to the sense of genuine community in the North Park and adjacent neighbourhoods by introducing new neighbours and businesses, and architectural and landscape design that prioritizes the public realm and the pedestrian experience. The project benefits can be summed up as:

- 138 secure rental homes, including 2- and 3- bedroom homes suitable for families, as well as ground orientated townhome units along Mason Street.
- Ample private and shared amenity space, both outdoor and indoor
- Vastly improved public realm, with planting along Mason Street, new street trees along Quadra Street, and new planting and tree retention along Pandora Avenue. We are also proposing street furniture along Pandora Avenue to provide opportunities for socializing and to give pedestrians a place to rest
- Architectural design sympathetic to the local context, with nods to surrounding forms and materials from all eras of the evolution of the area
- Generous bike parking and facilities, to encourage tenants to take advantage of the excellent infrastructure at their front door
- Contributing to the goals of a more sustainable city by adding homes in a place that makes it easy to use active or public transportation, and thereby reducing the need to own or use a private vehicle

Summary

The development as proposed will provide needed rental homes in a high-quality and sustainably designed building without needing to displace any residential tenants. With a vacancy rate that has remained at less than 1% as per the CMHC's Rental Market Report, Victoria needs more housing in all neighbourhoods to ensure the continued viability of local institutions and businesses, as well as to maintain the vibrant cultural life that makes it special. Moreover, Townline believes North Park is as integral to the future of Victoria as it has been to its past. This redevelopment will contribute to helping people stay in Victoria while forming an important part of the housing continuum, and we look forward to further collaboration with city staff and the community in order to make this a successful project. Thank you for considering our application.



SUITE 1212, 450 SW MARINE DRIVE
VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA V5X 0C3

604 327 8760
TOWNLINE.CA

Sincerely,

Devin Spence
Development Manager, Townline