

May 29, 2026

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

Re: **Heritage Alteration Permit at 780 Blanshard Street R1**

Dear Mayor and Council:

The office of mcfarlane biggar architects + designers (**omb**), on behalf of Reliance Properties, is pleased to present this letter and enclosed documents to describe the heritage alteration concept for 780 Blanshard Street, legally described as lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 28, and 29 of section 88 and of lot 1627, Christ Church Trust Estate, Victoria, Plan 35B.

Description of Proposal

The goal of this project is to rehabilitate, and ultimately designate, the existing heritage structure, and construct a new addition to the heritage building. The proposal includes a 126-room hotel with a public food and beverage facility in the renovated heritage building and a one-storey rooftop addition. The proposal incorporates a rooftop terrace for hotel guests, as well as the extension and re-cladding of the existing non-original stair adjacent to Blanshard Street, designed to provide greater architectural distinction and clear visual differentiation from the original heritage fabric. The proposed development has a Floor Space Ratio (FSR) of 1.9 and a maximum building height of 18.77m.

Site Context

The 2,272 m² site is unique in the city. It is a steeply sloping triangular 'island' lot at the southeast corner of downtown. The site is bordered by Blanshard Street, Burdett Avenue, and Fairfield Road. Immediately adjacent to the west is a small municipal park, Penwill Green, which is contiguous with the landscape of the site. The most prominent feature of the site is the British Columbia Power Commission Building, a heritage-registered late Art Deco-styled cast-in-place concrete structure (completed in 1950).

Project Vision

The intention for this project is to revitalize an important heritage building within downtown Victoria through a comprehensive rehabilitation and proposed change of use. The proposal seeks to maximize the building's opportunities while thoughtfully addressing its inherent challenges through a responsible, sensitive, and economically viable approach. The team envisions a new development that: restores an important heritage building, strengthens its front address, and introduces a public facing program that will help create a more vibrant and welcoming streetscape.

Project Benefits and Amenities

The development proposal aspires to benefit the economic, social, and cultural life of Victoria. Several aspects will be of benefit to the broader community:

- Additional employment and tourist infrastructure supported by the hotel
- Contribution to the demand for an additional 1200-2000 hotel rooms over the next decade as identified by Destination Greater Victoria
- The rehabilitation of this significant historic building, together with the introduction of enhanced semi-public access, will allow a broader range of users to experience and appreciate the presence, character, and heritage features of the building

The completed development will also create a new publicly accessible food and beverage facility on the main floor level with access from Blanshard Street. The project leverages the latent potential of the heritage building through adaptive re-use to bring new life to an under-utilized site. The proposed hotel and restaurant will invigorate the site with 24/7 activity and provide a destination for locals and visitors alike.

Heritage

The existing building is listed on Victoria's Heritage Register but is not designated. The project is seeking designation through a concurrent application. The project is also pursuing heritage incentives, such as the Tax Incentive Program, Design Assistance Grants, and Building Incentive Grants in collaboration with the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust and the City of Victoria that are critical for project viability. The heritage consultant, Community Design Strategies (CDS) has produced a number of pertinent documents that are included in the submission package. Please refer to the accompanying documents, together with the sections outlined below, for additional information regarding the scope of the heritage considerations associated with this proposal.

Design + Guidelines

The point of departure for the architectural design is the guidance on the rehabilitation of historic buildings offered in the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. The rehabilitation of the BC Power Commission building is detailed in a Conservation Plan prepared by Community Design Strategies (CDS), which is included in the submission package. A Heritage Impact Assessment has also been produced by CDS and is further supplemented by a Structural Seismic Upgrade and Heritage Impact Assessment produced by Kor Structural Engineers.

The principal heritage rehabilitations to the building will include:

- Replacement of all windows and doors with high-performance units that are similar in form and materiality to the originals
- Restoration of the original paint colour based on the heritage consultant's investigation
- Retention of significant character-defining elements, including metal window screens, corrugated glass, and facade relief patterns
- Preservation of the west stairwell
- Rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of the Historic Chairman's Office
- Extension and re-cladding of the existing non-original exit stair, originally added to the building in the 1970's, to provide a more distinguishable architectural character and clearer differentiation from the historic heritage fabric, aligning it with Standard 11 of The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada
- Removal of the secondary entrance on Fairfield road and replacement with a Juliet balcony complete with a guardrail that references the heritage metal window screens

For additional information on the architectural design and heritage approach see:

- **Heritage Conservation Plan** by CDS.
- **Heritage Impact Assessment** by CDS.
- **Summary of Research and Revised Statement of Significance** by CDS.
- **Inventory of Interior Art Deco Features** by CDS.
- **Paint Sample Analysis Report** by CDS.
- **Seismic Assessment of Structure, Assessment of Roof Structure and Proposed Upgrading** by Kor Structural.
- **Building Code Report** by TCCP

Additional building upgrades include:

- New one-storey rooftop addition
- New shearwalls to improve the structural capacity of the existing building
- Upgrading the seismic resistance of the existing structure in the North/South direction to be at least equal to the existing East/West direction, which is 55% of current Code requirements for new buildings (refer to structural seismic report)
- Removal of combustible wood roof structure and concealed attic (refer to code report)
- New elevator core and exit stair
- New fire alarm system (refer to code report)
- New sprinkler system (refer to code report)
- Improved accessibility throughout

As articulated in detail in the submission materials, the addition to the historic BC Power Commission building takes the form of a single-storey bar with a direct formal relationship to the building below. The floor plate of the addition respects the heritage building's footprint and maintains the offset symmetry of the north and south facades. The addition is set back from the existing parapets to preserve the visual integrity of the heritage structure. The result is a horizontal base building whose historic character remains distinct, and a new addition that minimizes the impact on the heritage structure.

The proposal includes the extension, re-cladding, and glazing of the unoriginal stair to create a 'lantern' that marks a focal point to the terminated vista facing south on Blanshard Street. The existing unoriginal stair is currently treated to match the heritage facade, which is inconsistent with the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. The proposed configuration will bring it into alignment with Standard 11.

The cladding deployed on the addition and the stair 'lantern' takes cues from the existing building's form, detailing, and materiality and reinterprets them with a contemporary expression. The fenestration of the addition uses the same proportions and dimensions as the existing windows with a simplified, contemporary mullion pattern.

On the interior, character defining elements like the historic Chairman's Office and west exit stairwell are being preserved. Heritage fittings and finishes are also proposed to be reused where practical.

Neighbourhood

In addition to the existing nearby high-density housing, employment base, and network of schools and services, there is significant new development near the site, including Telus Ocean (749 Douglas Street, 2-minute walk) and the proposed Capital VI office building (1221 Blanshard Street, 5-minute walk).

The site benefits from its connectivity, central location, and proximity to the inner harbour, which provides easy access for guests and a convenient base camp to explore Victoria's downtown. The proposed hotel use will help create more foot traffic in and around the site, activating the street and enhancing the site's safety, security, and vitality.

The rooftop addition is low and set back from the facade, which minimizes shadow impacts on the surrounding context, including the adjacent residential buildings.

Landscape Architecture + Public Realm

The project proposes an improved entry plaza at the intersection of Burdett and Blanshard Street, providing a fully accessible at-grade entrance that improves on the existing entrance ramp. Seven (7) trees will be removed (4 of which are damaged or dead and 3 are due to construction conflicts associated with the building upgrades). Eleven (11) new trees are proposed to replace the removed trees and to enhance the urban forest. Refer to the Arborist Report and Tree Management Plan for more information.

New sidewalk and curb realignment is proposed at the Fairfield and Burdett intersection to improve pedestrian mobility. The upgraded sidewalk will connect the existing sidewalk at the bus layby to the existing pathway through Penwill Green. Due to the challenging grades on Burdett, the sidewalk will stop at the Penwill Green pathway. A new sidewalk bump-out at the intersection is proposed to improve pedestrian mobility to the North side of Burdett where the grades and existing sidewalk width are more favourable for pedestrian movement.

The widened sidewalk and curb realignment provides an expanded passenger zone for the existing bus stop while maintaining the desired BC Transit layby area. The removal of the existing planted strip and stair along Fairfield will enable the sidewalk to be widened, improving pedestrian mobility and comfort. In addition, a statutory right-of-way is proposed to facilitate potential future sidewalk widening in coordination with BC Transit initiatives.

Transportation

The immediate adjacency of the BC Transit bus terminus along Fairfield Road provides convenient transportation options for hotel staff and visitors. However, the site configuration and position of the existing heritage building do not allow for significant off-street vehicle parking. In response to these site constraints, a suite of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures has been developed in collaboration with WATT Consulting group to reduce parking demand. When combined with the proposed 2 on-site and 25 off-site parking stalls, the result is a 2 space shortfall.

Transportation Demand Management

A suite of transportation demand management measures (TDM) are proposed to reduce the overall demand for parking by 8 stalls. A TDM memo is included in the application package that provides more detail on the proposal. These measures include:

- Pedestrian and accessibility improvements that include a new at-grade entrance replacing the existing stairs and ramp, two accessible parking spaces with EV charging (one of which is van accessible), new sidewalk connection on the southwest end of Burdett Avenue and an expanded sidewalk on the northwest side of Fairfield Road at Burdett Avenue.
- At-grade bicycle parking entrance off Fairfield Road to facilitate easy access to the secure bike storage facilities. (reduction of 1 parking stall)
- Additional short-term and long-term bike parking, including an additional 12 long-term spaces (200% above requirement) using advanced ground-mounted lift assisted horizontal racks, plus 1 additional short-term space (20% above requirement). (reduction of 4 parking stalls)
- Non-standard bike parking, including provision of energy sources to all proposed long-term spaces, plus the configuration of two long-term spaces and one short-term space for non-standard cargo bikes. (reduction of 2 parking stalls)
- Bicycle end-of-trip facilities, including staff changeroom facilities and bicycle maintenance station in proximity to the secure bike storage room. (reduction of 1 parking stall)
- Public bikeshare space is designated along the Fairfield Road frontage, with roughed-in electrical supply to accommodate the potential future installation of a 10-bike or e-bike bikeshare docking station. The dedicated space will be provided on private property for use and operation by the City. The bikeshare program type, as well as whether the system is docked or dockless, would be determined and managed by the City.
- Transit zone curb reconfiguration and space for improved passenger amenities that (in keeping with City and BC Transit feedback) includes extension of the northwest curb of Fairfield Road at Burdett Avenue to create a “bus bulge” to provide easier passenger boarding, drop off and expanded space for passenger amenities.

For additional information on the transportation and traffic demand management approach see:

- **TDM Memo** by WATT Consulting Group.

Vehicle Parking

Two electrified on-site accessible parking stalls, including 1 van accessible stall, as well as 25 off-site stalls are proposed. The table below notes the current vehicle parking, the Zoning Bylaw 2018 parking requirement for the proposed land use, the proposed, and the difference between the proposed and Zoning requirements. Required and proposed accessible parking per Zoning Bylaw 2018 is included in the total required/proposed but also shown as a separate column for information. The project is proposed with a minor parking shortfall, which is intended to be addressed through a variance application. Reliance Properties owns and manages nearby commercial properties and could readily accommodate valet parking or other off-site, shared, or overlapping parking solutions should they be required for hotel operations. However, the site’s central location and intended guest demographic are more closely aligned with the objectives of walkability, cycling, and public transportation, which the proposal actively supports. It should also be noted that under the City’s draft proposed revised approach to Off-Street Parking Regulations, the site falls within the “Downtown” zone that would have no minimum parking requirements. The new regulations are anticipated to be adopted in the summer of 2026.

Existing On-Site Vehicle Parking	Total Required Vehicle Parking per Zoning Bylaw 2018	Total Proposed Vehicle Parking	Required Accessible Parking per Zoning Bylaw 2018 (incl. in total)	Proposed Accessible Parking (incl. in total)	Reduction through Demand Management	Shortfall
6 stalls	37 stalls	27 stalls (25 off-site)	2 stalls (1 van accessible)	2 stalls (1 van accessible)	-8 stalls	2 stalls

Bicycle Parking

Eighteen (18) long-term bicycle parking stalls (200% above the minimum requirements) are proposed. All long-term bicycle parking stalls are provided with power for e-bike charging and two (2) stalls are allocated to oversized bicycles such as cargo bikes. Horizontal stalls are equipped with stacking racks that slide and pivot for ease of access, taking advantage of the generous existing floor-to-floor heights. Six (6) short-term bicycle parking stalls are provided in accordance with Zoning Bylaw 2018 and are located at the new entry court. One short-term stall is sized to accommodate oversized bicycles such as cargo bikes.

Loading

Loading will be managed on-site at the southeast corner of the site at the existing service entrance off Fairfield Road.

Parcel delivery vehicles and passenger pick-up and drop-off can be managed on-site at the front plaza at the corner of Blanshard Street and Burdett Avenue.

Green Building Features

The design team has a shared commitment to environmental responsibility and includes LEED-accredited professionals and Certified Passive House Designers. Although the project is not required to meet the requirements of the BC Energy Step Code nor the BC Zero Carbon Step Code, the team will consider the global warming potential of building materials, up- and down-stream waste potential of materials, and the durability and suitability of materials, systems, and equipment, while deploying strategies to minimize operational energy demand and implementing high performance systems and materials.

As an example of adaptive re-use, the project proposes an array of environmentally responsible features:

- New high-performance, thermally broken, double-glazed fenestration
- Re-use of the existing concrete structure of the BC Power Commission building, resulting in significantly reduced construction material use, less energy and waste expended in demolition and disposal, preservation of embodied carbon, and the extension of life for a 70+ year old structure
- A landscaped roof terrace and preservation of existing green space to enhance on-site storm water management
- An architectural design which considers passive design principles, limiting window-to-wall ratios
- End-of-trip facilities for hotel staff, including showers, lockers, and secure, electrified bicycle storage to encourage alternate forms of transportation
- Provision for future public bike share along Fairfield Road
- Low-use water fixtures and high efficiency LED lighting throughout

Archaeological Site Clearance

A review of the site undertaken by Stantec determined that there are no archaeological concerns. There are no registered archaeological sites on the property or any nearby properties, and modeling suggests low archaeological potential for the presence of unregistered sites on the property. This determination is being summarized in a formal letter that can be provided during the application review process.

Site Disclosure Statement

A Site Disclosure Statement (SDS) was completed by Keystone Environmental and is based on a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment previously completed by PGL Environmental Consultants. The SDS and Phase 1 are included in the application documents.

Conclusion

The overall aim for this heritage alteration permit proposal is to enhance the building, the site, the neighbourhood, and the downtown. The adaptive re-use and introduction of a hotel and food and beverage facility provides an opportunity to animate the site with 24/7 activity and welcome the public into an important heritage building that has been sensitively updated to revitalize the architectural expression, enhance user comfort and experience, and significantly prolong the life of the structure. The team hopes that this project will contribute to Victoria's growth and evolution by way of meaningful engagement with all stakeholders in the shared project of city making. We look forward to working with staff and Council through the approvals process.

Please do not hesitate to contact the team for any additional information or clarifications.

office of mcfarlane biggar architects + designers



Steve McFarlane Architect AIBC FRAIC LEED® AP
principal

See also **Phase 1
Environmental Site
Assessment** from PGL
Environmental Consultants.