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Dear Fairfield Gonzales Community Association Land Use Committee,

We are thrilled to present you with our proposal to build car-free townhomes at 933-935 Convent Place. People who choose to live car-free now make-up 25% of all City of Victoria households (up from 20% in 2017)[1]. Our proposal is designed for this growing but underserved demographic, while advancing our collective climate, housing affordability, and community livability goals.

Car-free homes are fundamentally different from traditional car-orientated development. By providing a compelling alternative to private car ownership (and thereby removing car garages and drive aisles), our proposal can provide more of the things we want (family housing, green space, social resilience, etc.) while reducing more of the things we don't want (traffic, air pollution, road injuries and fatalities, etc.). Our proposal includes:

- 18 townhomes, including 7 three-bedroom (39%), 6 two-bedroom (33%), and 5 one-bedroom (28%).
- 3 buildings clustered around a community courtyard, developed with the help of experts from *Happy Cities* to foster connection and belonging for residents of all ages.
- Robust sustainable transportation alternatives, including a best-in-class bike garage, 52 bike stalls, and an on-street electric car-share vehicle.
- Fossil fuel free heating and cooling systems (the highest step, EL4, of the Zero Carbon Step Code).
- 19 trees and more than 780 plants in landscape plan.

We believe this proposal will serve as a powerful example across our region and beyond of sustainable, community-enriching development. This letter outlines the details of our proposal.

[1] *2022 Origin Destination Household Travel Survey*, "City of Victoria, Districts 5-7," Capital Regional District, page 167: https://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-transportation/origin-destination-household-travel-survey

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Homes	18	**Car Parking Stalls**	0
Unit Make-Up	7x three-bedroom 6x two-bedroom 5x one-bedroom, including 1 adaptable design unit	**Long-Term Bicycle Parking Stalls**	12 cargo 40 standard
Height	3 storeys 11.48 m	**Short-Term Bicycle Parking Stalls**	6 standard
Site Coverage	63.7%	**Modo Cars**	1
FSR	1.41	**Zoning**	Site Specific
Typology	Townhomes	**Type of Tenure**	Ownership

POLICY & GOAL ALIGNMENT

Our proposal meets and exceeds a multitude of the City's policy objectives and exemplifies the OCP's vision that "*Victoria is an urban sustainability leader inspiring innovation, pride and progress towards greater ecological integrity, livability, economic vitality, and community resiliency confronting the changes facing society and the planet today and for generations to come.*"

Our proposal also strikes a careful balance between concrete climate action, providing attainable housing, and meeting Victoria's urban planning goals - an ideal reflection of Council's overarching strategic plan goal: "*By 2026, Victoria will be a dynamic, inclusive, more affordable, safer, intentionally transformed city where people can imagine a future for themselves and seven generations to come. We will be known for decisive leadership and innovation in climate action, housing, transportation and meaningful reconciliation with the Lək*ʷ*əŋən-ʼspeaking Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on whose lands the city exists*."

When looking at Victoria's most recent and ambitious planning documents, our proposal represents a big step forward toward becoming the kind of city Victoria aims to be. 933/935 Convent Place shows extraordinary alignment and would serve as a strong example to the goals outlined in: *Go Victoria – Sustainable Mobility Strategy*, *Climate Leadership Plan*, *The Victoria Housing Strategy*, *Fairfield Neighbourhood Plan,* and *Council's Strategic Plan*.

NEIGHBOURHOOD & MOBILITY CONTEXT

The subject site is located mid-block on Convent Place, just off Quadra Street. The properties were carefully selected to suit the car-free lifestyle with close proximity to downtown, community amenities, and sustainable transportation options.

Boasting a Walk Score of 93 – a "walker's paradise" [2] – Convent Place has some of the best access to parks, community centres, schools, urban villages, and local businesses in the entire region. With direct access to the City of Victoria's AAA cycling network, regional trails, and quiet residential streets - the entire region is accessible by bike from this location. Furthermore, active transportation plans in Victoria, Saanich and Esquimalt will only continue to expand access and opportunities by bike over time.

Combined with advancements in e-bike technology and a rapidly expanding industry and culture around family-orientated cargo bikes, a growing number of families are choosing cycling as a practical, convenient, and healthy form of transportation. Our proposal is designed to serve this rapidly growing demographic.

Our proposal includes what will be the largest and most feature-rich bike garage in the region, providing 44 long-term bike stalls including 12 dedicated cargo and 32 standard stalls (in addition for 8 long-term weather protected exterior stalls). The garage is equipped with electric charging, accessory shelves, repair station, and wash station and is conveniently located at the front of the site with an at-grade bay door. The garage is also designed to be an adaptable space as household needs change. The middle aisle has extra width to accommodate longer format bikes and make bike stalls interchangeable – any 2 standard stalls can be converted into 1 additional cargo stall, and any cargo stall can be converted into 2 additional standard stalls. Also, stalls can be adapted to accommodate mobility scooters or bike trailers.

These homes are also extremely well served by bus, with frequent transit routes (4, 6, 14, 27, 28) and the new Blink Rapid Trans Route (95) within a few minutes' walk, providing convenient and reliable access to key destinations such as UVIC, Royal Jubilee Hospital, Victoria General Hospital, Gordon Head, Royal Oak, Esquimalt, and Downtown Langford.

Recognizing some areas are not practically accessible by bike or transit and, at times, the additional carrying capacity of a vehicle is needed, we will provide 1 on-street electric Modo car within a short walking distance of 933/935 Convent Place (we recommend the corner of Quadra and Convent Place but the exact location will be determined in partnership with City Staff and Modo Co-op). This will include an on-street dual-head level 2 EV charger (one head for the car-share vehicle and one for neighbourhood use) which will be designated as "time-limited EV charging". Six additional Modo cars already exist within a 6-minute walk from the property (including sedan, hatchback, and SUV options), providing an exceptional level of access to car-share (3 vehicles within a 6-minute walk is the standard for reliable access). Each home will receive a lifetime membership, which stays with the home, and a $100 Modo credit. The premise of the car-free lifestyle is that 95% of trips are by foot, bicycle or transit – Modo fills the final 5% of trips where a vehicle is most practical.

[2] 933 Convent, *Walk Score*, www.walkscore.com. Accessed March 14, 2024.

COMMUNITY BENEFIT

The benefits of supporting gentle densification and sustainable mobility over urban sprawl and private car ownership are significant and wide-ranging. These benefits work at the homeowner, community, and broader societal level. Below are just a few of the more topical local benefits:

- Family and Intergenerational Housing -

Our proposal provides a well-balanced mix of housing types, including 7 family-sized three-bedroom (39%), 6 two-bedroom (33%), and 5 one-bedroom (28%) homes, in a ground-orientated format where every home has direct access to the shared community courtyard. Additionally, 1 home will be built to adaptable design standards for people with mobility impairments and to meet their changing needs over time. Our proposal will provide a new benchmark for intergenerational and inclusive housing.

These homes directly contribute to Victoria's goal to have more families living and raising children in the municipality. With the average price of single-family homes above $1.2 million[3], Victoria will need more missing middle homes to keep families and children in the community.

Our mission is to provide a convenient and realistic alternative to urban sprawl. Far too many families are pushed out to the western communities because they cannot find attainable, suitable, family housing. This proposal is designed to provide housing that's within reach of local incomes and allow families to live close to where they work and play.

- Sustainability -

Personal vehicles are, by far, the single largest contributor of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the Capital Regional District (CRD), making up 40% of region's total community-level emissions – more than double any other source[4]. If we are to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and keep global warming "well below" 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, we simply have to address our dependency on private car ownership. No step is more important than this. By bringing together the necessary amenities (walkable/bikeable location, best-in-class bike garage, electric Modo car-share, access to frequent transit), being car-free is not only feasible but practical, convenient and fun.

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[3] February 2024 benchmark price for a typical single-family home in Victoria: $1,205,300. *February 2024 Statistical Package*, Victoria Real Estate Board. https://www.vreb.org/media/attachments/view/doc/stats_release_2024_02/pdf/stats_release_2024_02.pdf.

[4] All "on road transportation" emissions excluding "heavy duty vehicles". Includes: electric vehicles, passenger vehicles, light trucks, vans, SUVs, motorcycles. "2007 and 2018 Energy & GHG Emissions Inventories," Capital Regional District, 2020. Page 18: https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/climate-action-pdf/reports/crd-ghgmembermunicipality200727.pdf?sfvrsn=28161ecc_2

The second largest source of GHG emissions in the CRD is residential fossil fuel heating (heating oil, natural gas, etc.) at 17%[5]. Our homes will use heat pumps, meet (and likely exceed) Step Code 3 energy efficiency requirements, and be entirely fossil fuel free (the highest step, EL4, of the Zero Carbon Step Code). Additionally, we will prioritize building materials with low embodied carbon (like wood instead of synthetic alternatives) using a "best conventional" approach to material selection (readily available, cost-effective, lower-carbon products) and design the building to be solar-ready for future photovoltaic panels.

Together, our proposal offers a radically more sustainable, low-carbon lifestyle compared to conventional housing.

- Affordability -

Removing private car ownership directly leads to two significant cost savings.

First, without the need to accommodate car parking, we can fit more homes on the property and spread-out costs between each unit. If 1 parking stall was provided for each home (18), approximately 50% of the development site (5,400 sq ft) would be covered with surface parking… To provide 1 parking stall for each home, the number of homes would have to decrease or a much larger building would be required. When compared to the previous rezoning submission for the subject site, which included underground parking, our revised proposal has 1 less home (18 vs 19) but 1 more bedroom (38 vs 37) and has removed 2 storeys (40% decrease, 3 vs 5) and decreased total floor area by 516.8m2 (27% decrease, 1390.85m2 vs 1907.6m2). This translates into significant cost savings which allows us to provide these homes at much more competitive prices compared to similar ground-orientated homes with parking.

Secondly, for most households, the largest expense after housing is transportation. The CRD's recent *Housing and Transportation Cost Estimate Study* shows that the average Langford household (which is where many families are being pushed to live) spends $17,556 per year on transportation, primarily due to the high cost of car ownership (including capital, operation, and maintenance costs)[6]. To put this in perspective, these costs are equivalent to financing a $252,000 mortgage[7]; 21% of median household income[8]; or an equal amount of lost investment to the local economy (if spent as disposable income).

As reflected in the CRD study, many experts are now defining affordability as households spending 45% or less of their income on housing and transportation combined (as opposed to 30% or less on just housing). By enabling families to live car-free in a well-connected

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[5] Includes: natural gas, fuel oil, propane, and diesel residential heating. "2007 and 2018 Energy & GHG Emissions Inventories," Capital Regional District, 2020. Page 17: https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/climate-action-pdf/reports/crd-ghgmembermunicipality200727.pdf?sfvrsn=28161ecc_2

[6] *2020 Housing and Transportation Cost Estimate Study*, Capital Regional District: https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/housing-pdf/housing-planning-and-programs/housing-and-transportation-cost-estimate-study_july-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=4b751ccc_2

[7] At 5.0% interest, 25-year amortization.

[8] Median after-tax income of Langford households: $82,000. *2016 Census*, Statistics Canada.

neighbourhood that they love, we help them to dramatically reduce their transportation costs and improve total household affordability.

- Livability -

Our concept offers to completely transform both building design and lifestyle, leading to an overall better quality of life and contribution to the neighbourhood.

By designing without the need to accommodate drive aisles, car garages and surface parking like conventional housing, we can dramatically reduce paved surfaces and provide more green space, permeable surface, and trees – providing a lush, natural context. Our landscape plan includes 19 new trees and more than 780 plants.

Residents of all ages will benefit from the broad range of mental and physical benefits associated with active transportation, including lower rates of obesity and chronic disease,[9] as well as improved social connectivity, mental health and longevity[10]. Additionally, residents will avoid the negative health effects of a sedentary lifestyle and long commutes. For instance, long-distance commuters are much more likely to suffer from psychosomatic disorders, which can lead to body aches, digestive problems, high blood pressure, sleep disturbances, fatigue and concentration problems[11].

Perhaps most importantly, the car-free lifestyle helps people to strengthen their connection to community, as discussed below.

- Community Building -

A 2019 study found 23% of Canadians suffer from social isolation and loneliness[12], leading to wide range of health impacts, including a 29% increase in risk of coronary heart disease and a 32% increase in stroke risk[13]. Conversely, social integration (the extent in which people participate in social relationships in their community) is the strongest predictor of longevity[14] and provides a wide range of other positive health effects.

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[9] Frank and Engelke, Schmid, Killingsworth, "How Land Use and Transportation Systems Influence Health," *Working paper for Active Community Environments Initiative*.
[10] "Why is active transportation important for health and wellbeing," *PlanH*: https://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-environments/built-environments/page/active-transportation
[11] Dr Annette Schaefer, "Commuting Takes Its Toll," *Scientific American*: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/commuting-takes-its-toll/
[12] "A Portrait of social isolation and loneliness in Canada Today," *Angus Reid Institute*, 2019: https://cnpea.ca/images/2019.06.14_loneliness-and-social-isolation-in_canada_angusreid.pdf
[13] Dr Clifford Singer, "Health Effects of Social Isolation," Aging Life Care Association, 2018: https://www.aginglifecarejournal.org/health-effects-of-social-isolation-and-loneliness/
[14] Julianne Holt-Lunstad et al, "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review," PLOS Medicine Journal, 2010: https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

How we build homes and communities directly impacts our social relationships and how we connect with each other. We expect that this project (and similar future projects) will be a catalyst for creating more connected, engaging and resilient communities in Victoria.
We aim to increase social integration in 5 key ways:

1. **Small-Scale Density:** missing middle scale homes are naturally more conducive to building community – big enough to provide diversity, energy and a sense of liveliness but small enough for neighbours to know each other by name and build bonds.
2. **Design:** The courtyard design provides a focal point for community and connection, creating casual opportunities for neighbours to cross paths and get to know each other. All homes have direct access to the courtyard while incorporating thoughtful transitions between private and communal spaces.
3. **Sharing:** Shared amenities like the courtyard, bike garage, and car-share vehicle provide organic opportunities to bring people together.
4. **Localization:** Car-free families naturally spend much more time within comfortable walking and cycling distance, creating more engagement and connection at local shops, parks and public spaces.
5. **Placemaking:** With direct outside access for each home, human-scale massing, beautiful landscaping, and a people-centered courtyard, our proposal will distinguish itself by providing a powerful sense of place and gathering point for the neighbourhood.

DENSITY

Our proposal is well within the building size and density limits of the OCP and Fairfield Neighbourhood Plan which allow up to 2.0 FSR, 6 storeys, and 20 meters in height. Our proposal is only 1.41 FSR, 3 storeys, and 11.48m (30%, 50%, and 43% below the maximums, respectively).

The area is primarily characterized by townhouses and apartment buildings between 3 and 6 storeys in height. By all measures, our proposal is modest and consistent with the scale of the neighbourhood, while delivering exceptional value to residents and the community.

CAR FREE

There is a passionate and growing community of car-free families seeking to live a happier, healthier, more sustainable lifestyle. They are an important but unserved demographic which now make-up 25% of all City of Victoria Households (up from 20% in 2017)[15].

We now have more than 140 families waitlisted to live in one of our homes (as of March 14, 2024). This proposal is for these families.

[15] *2022 Origin Destination Household Travel Survey*, "City of Victoria, Districts 5-7," Capital Regional District, page 167: https://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-transportation/origin-destination-household-travel-survey

The demographic we are marketing to simply does not want to own a vehicle and will be attracted to it for the culture, community and lifestyle it represents. Our proposal makes sustainable transportation options accessible and convenient (including an electric on-street Modo car when a vehicle is needed), creating little reason for a household to take-on the significant additional expense of owning a personal vehicle. Strata bylaws will further reinforce and signal to future buyers these are car-free homes.

Additionally, this project should reduce the total number of cars that are currently being parked on the street. Research out of University of California, Berkeley, indicates that each Modo car replaces approximately 9-13 privately owned cars, as individuals choose to shed excess vehicles and forgo buying new ones[16].

FINAL REMARKS

We strongly believe car-free homes are a necessary and transformative housing option. It breaks our dependency on our largest source of GHG emissions, allows for seamless gentle densification and creates amazing places for people (not cars) to live. We aim to showcase what's possible with car-free housing and we hope to partner with you to make it possible.

We look forward to our upcoming Community Meeting to showcase our proposal address questions from the community. Thank you for your time and commitment to community engagement.

Sincerely,

Julian West
Urban Thrive - Founder

Ryan Jabs
Lapis Homes – President

[16] Elliot Martin and Susan Shaseen, "The Impact of Carsharing on Household Vehicle Ownership," *Berkeley University of California*, 2008: http://reconnectingamerica.org/assets/Uploads/access38carsharingownership.pdf