

April 25, 2017

Mayor Lisa Helps and  
City of Victoria Council Members  
City of Victoria  
1 Centennial Square  
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor and Council,

**Re: 700 Douglas Street** **Project No. 15-811**  
**Rezoning and Development Application**

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On behalf of the Owners of the Empress Hotel, we are applying for permission to remove the existing Bus Depot and its related black top areas in order to replace it with a new residential rental building with retail at grade and extend the existing landscaped Empress grounds to Douglas Street. As part of this rezoning application, we seek to improve the existing rose garden and the pedestrian paths in this immediate area at the same time.

This is part of the ongoing process that the Owners have started since they have purchased the Empress Hotel in 2014. The Phase One improvements and maintenance to the exterior and interior of the original portion of the Empress Hotel of is now complete. The surrounding grounds has been completely enhanced and refurbished. All the public spaces and every room have been improved. We are now well into the Second Phase, which is the complete refurbishment of the Humboldt wing and the arrival lobby. This phase is anticipated to be completed by this summer. This rezoning will enable Phase Three to commence towards completing the Master Plan of the Empress grounds.

The existing bus depot has always been an anomaly on the Empress grounds. It is completely isolated from the rest of the park like setting by chain link fences and unsympathetic landscaping. The architecture of the depot is not complementary to the existing heritage Empress complex nor does it address the street particularly well.



This rezoning seeks to remove this building, improve its grounds, but most important, to reconnect the Empress grounds to Douglas Street, completing the full block park like setting as it was intended. A major beneficiary of this move is the heritage Crystal Garden building. For years, this building has been hidden and isolate by the Bus Depot and its landscaping when seen from the harbor. By removing this building and its unsympathetic landscaping, we will be able to give the Crystal Garden a new prominence that it certainly deserves. Furthermore, its architecture is well related to the Empress Hotel, it will now be a part of the valued family of heritage buildings in this area.

Another major benefit of this proposed building is that it will complete the pedestrian experience of this end of Douglas Street. With the pending expansion of the Royal BC Museum and the Concert development diagonally across the street, plus the new prominence of the Crystal Garden, it will finally complete this important corner, thus serving as a proper gateway into downtown Victoria from the James Bay area and as a terminus to the commercial portion of Douglas Street before transitioning into James Bay.

It will add to the much needed pool of rental capacity in the downtown by adding larger family sized units. This building will be managed by the Empress Hotel, thus creating additional employment opportunities as well as complementing the existing convention facilities.

The design of this building has gone through a thorough public consultation process. The proposal had been revised to mitigate view impacts to the Humboldt Valley residents while maintaining the benefits to the Empress grounds and the urban design integrity of the inner harbor. A detailed description of the compliance of the planning policies is presented in the following chapters.

We hope Council will agree with the merits of this proposal and support the proposed improvements and addition to the Empress Hotel complex thus permit completion of the final phase of the ongoing Empress refurbishments and upgrades.

### **Location and Neighbourhood**

The proposed project is located at the South East corner (Belleville & Douglas) of the Empress block, which currently is an abandoned bus depot. The subject site is located in the Downtown neighbourhood with James Bay immediately adjacent to the West.



### **Land Use**

The current land use is designated as IHE (Inner Harbour Empress) zoning.

### **Project Description**

The proposed project is a mixed-use building with 8 storeys above grade and 2 storeys of underground parking below. Total floor area is 87,307 sf consisting of 72 residential rental units, and 7,944 sf of retail/commercial at grade on Douglas. The 72 dwelling units consist of 37 one bedroom + den; 33 two bedrooms + den and 2 three bedrooms + den units.

### **Impact**

As mentioned in the opening summary, the proposal will significantly improve the Empress ground and its park like setting and provide visual prominence to the Crystal building. By rotating it 90 degree to Douglas Street, it will also provide a view corridor for the Humboldt Valley residents located beyond the Crystal Garden. By reducing the proposed height from 10 storeys to 8, it will maintain the prominence of the Empress Hotel when seen from Harbour and other inner harbour vantage points as well as improving the views of the residents to the East.

### **Safety and Security**

By removing existing fences and hedges that currently isolated the site from the remainder of the Empress ground, the proposed project basically eliminated all the hidden areas and added substantial amount of "eyes on the street" by introducing full time residents on site and eliminating loitering and transients that were the nature of bus depot. Hence, safety and security is greatly improved.

### **Heritage**

The proposed project will fully integrate with the existing Empress grounds, thus improving the permeability of the ground and facilitate much freer pedestrian cross site movements. Additional benefit is the increased exposure of the Crystal Garden structure to the Harbour.

### **Transportation**

Please refer to the transportation report prepared by our transportation consultant, Bunt & Associate. With the bus depot gone, much of its related bus, taxi and drop off/pick up traffic is removed. A rental residential building also has much fewer trips generation. Bicycle storage and parking is provided.





**Green Building Feature**

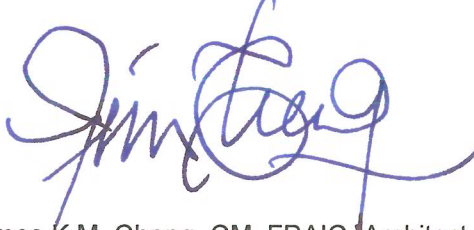
The proposed building will meet LEED v4 Equivalency, Certified Level. In addition, the exterior wall is consisting of “cavity” type of masonry construction thus offering superior insulation. In addition, the top floor has substantial roof overhangs to reduce direct thermal gain.

**Infrastructure**

There is no substantial impact to existing infrastructure.

Yours truly,

**JAMES K.M. CHENG ARCHITECTS INC.**



James K.M. Cheng, CM, FRAIC, Architect AIBC  
Principal

