

1693 Fort Street  
Rezoning and Development  
Permit Application

Mayor and Council  
City of Victoria  
25 February 2021

# 1693–1699 Fort Street

ARYZE



## Dear Mayor and Council,

Please accept this letter as part of our Rezoning and Development Permit Application for 1693 Fort Street, a proposed twenty-three unit, purpose-built, student rental apartment. We are requesting to amend the property from the current R3-2 zoning to a new site-specific zoning.

## History and Site Context

This is the land of the Lekwungen People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. As you travel through the city, you will find seven carvings that mark places of cultural significance. To seek out these markers is to learn about the land, its original culture, and the spirit of its people.

Within this traditional territory, in what is now called the South Jubilee neighbourhood, sits the subject site at the junction of Fort Street and Belcher Avenue. Like other parts of the city, the South Jubilee neighbourhood has passed from agricultural land use stages, to suburbanization, and now to its current form, a mixed-use vibrant urban neighborhood on the edge of the Victoria and Oak Bay border. Made up of mostly low density, single-family housing from the 1920's to the 1950's, the 1960's and 1970's saw the first series of apartment buildings built under the Federal multi-unit residential building (MURB) program that incentivized many of the rental apartments built in the neighborhood and represents the majority of homes in the area today.

## Policy Context

The subject property is located on the western border of the Jubilee Large Urban Village and near the Stadacona Large Urban Village, in an urban residential area. Housing forms characterizing Urban residential areas are comprised of low-rise and mid-rise multi-unit buildings up to six storeys, including townhouses, apartments, and mixed-use buildings along arterial and secondary arterial roads. Character features include variable yard setbacks with primary doorways facing the street, variable front yard landscaping, and boulevard and street tree planting.

At 2.78 FSR, our proposal does exceed the 2.0 FSR allowance outlined in the Official Community Plan. However, also outlined within the Official Community Plan are conditions that which, if met, allow 'bonus density' to be awarded to developments that advance certain plan objectives. Two relevant plan objectives apply to this proposal: purpose-built student rental housing and public art.

This proposed development is supported by not only the current Official Community Plan but also by the Housing Strategy Phase 1 and 2, Go Victoria Mobility Plan, Climate Leadership Plan, upcoming Missing Middle Housing Study, and dozens of action items in the 2019–2022 Strategic Plan.

## Neighbourhood Grain

This area of the South Jubilee neighbourhood includes a heterogeneous mix of commercial and residential uses, from single-family character homes to multi-family apartment and condominium buildings, and long-term care homes. Neighbouring the subject site is a mix of multi-family residential buildings. These buildings are characterized by an informal relationship to Fort Street and include a range of building styles, composed mainly of stucco and painted wood cladding, with some brick accents.

The building grain peaks along Fort Street and tapers as you move north and south off this main road which is a typical land use pattern for the city. The footprint of the existing building is symptomatic of its era, with larger setbacks from the street and underutilized density, resulting in a fragmented urban design program. Modern design narratives seek to bring more intimacy to the street with tighter urban setbacks, with the balance of the design program being driven by the student rental utility.

The subject site is less than 750 metres from the Royal Jubilee Hospital and within walking distance to the Jubilee Village which offers a wide range of retail, commercial businesses, and services.

## Site Layout and Building Form

This proposal seeks to provide a more urban, street-oriented building that is compatible with the evolving neighbourhood. The building will be positioned where several streets come together: Fort Street, Belcher Avenue, Fern Street, and Leighton Road. The building is shaped as a five storey building with a setback at the sixth floor level, a form and height supported by the Official Community Plan. The building will be a modest marker at this node along the Fort Street arterial. The massing is shaped to reconcile the oblique orientation of Belcher Avenue and Fort Street, with a ground floor of shared amenity spaces that will connect with and provide oversight to its sidewalk frontages and access to the ground level bicycle parking.

## Design Inspiration

The building expression is both contemporary and dignified. The main palette of the building is light toned and neutral, comprised of light and medium grey metal and textured cementitious panels, charcoal window frames, and architectural concrete. Artwork is to be integrated with the architecture, and will be visible at the building entrance, through the bike room glazing, and at the sixth floor roof overhang. With the curated artwork as an accent, the building materials will compliment rather than compete with the surrounding mix of building styles.

While the materials palette is restrained, the expression of the building has a subtle playfulness, which took inspiration from a student's bookcase. The façades at levels two through five are designed so that each storey reads as a horizontal 'shelf'. Vertically proportioned bedroom windows are arrayed on these 'shelves' in a randomized pattern; these elements are set within a field of textured profiled metal panels conceived as the paper edges of a book, turned backwards on the shelf. These patterned lengths are bracketed by the living room window bays, which project out from the main façade and tie the storeys visually together. One feature bay extends out at an angle, marking the main building entrance below on Fort Street.

The proposed development is designed using Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CTPED) principles to engage and promote safety and security for tenants and visitors. To minimize opportunities for concealment, the building footprint is uncomplicated, with minimal alcoves and recesses. Landscaping is similarly articulated with a combination of low ground cover and high crown plant species that provide clear sight lines into front, rear, and side yards eliminating blind spots. Appropriate levels of shielded lighting provide safe, well-lit pathways and garden areas around the building, specifically at entry and exit doors.

# Building Layout

## Ground Floor Plan

Ground floor uses are oriented towards Fort Street and include the main building entrance, secure bike storage, and a common amenity space with patio. The proposed development includes a new sidewalk at the building face and an expanded street frontage with trees, coordinated with City of Victoria for the future expansion of the Fort Street right-of-way. Vehicle parking and building services are tucked under the rear of the building and will be accessed by a driveway off of Belcher Avenue.

## Levels 2 and 3

The typical upper floor level is comprised of five residential units. Each unit is made up of individual bedrooms and a kitchen, living room, and dining room for shared use by the unit occupants. The shared unit spaces project out from the building walls as glazed window bays, designed to optimize natural daylight for these larger rooms. On each floor there are: one 2-bedroom unit, one 3-bedroom unit, and three 4-bedroom units.

## Levels 4 and 5

The upper floor plans are consistent in terms of interior layout, distinguished by only the varying position of the randomized bedroom windows.

## Level 6

The top floor level is set back from the main building façades on all four sides, reducing the perceived height of the building to five storeys. At this level there are three 2-bedroom units, a common laundry room with attached sitting area, and an accessible rooftop amenity space thoughtfully placed on the eastern portion of the rooftop to minimize the overlook on neighbouring properties.

# Landscape Design

The landscape design creates a pedestrian friendly and engaging planted interface that compliments the expression of the contemporary architecture. The plant material selection includes a strong native focus, as well as attractive flowering perennials to encourage pollination; all plants are drought tolerant. The landscape design strives to envision an outdoor space that engages its users, compliments the architecture, and maximizes outdoor amenity space to encourage and foster community interaction. The plant palette is sensitive to the local ecosystem and to the population that is engaging with it.

# Why Student Rental?

Each year, more than 52,000 students attend a post-secondary institution within the Capital Region, approximately 7,000 of which are international students. Two of the three major post-secondary institutions do not have any provisions for on-campus housing and the University of Victoria only has the capacity to house about ten percent of their total student population. With the insufficient availability of on-campus housing, the vast majority of university students are independent renters. The unregulated, off-campus housing that is scattered throughout the region does not necessarily provide an environment conducive to a successful education and has little to no control on housing conditions or rental rates. Students will also often fall prey to

scams while looking for off-campus housing online. A rental building dedicated to students will not only help mitigate these issues faced by students but also set a benchmark for future off-campus housing options within the region.

## Mobility Context

### Multi-Model Network

From the subject property's doorstep there are diverse cycle routes, bus routes, and walking options. The City of Victoria's twenty-five year transportation masterplan places even more focus and investment in alternative transportation options with additional transit service and bike lanes planned for the area.

### Street Network

Fort Street is a two-way street extending west and east and is classified by the City of Victoria as an arterial road. Belcher Avenue is classified as a local road.

## Active Transportation

### Walking and Cycling

The site is well connected to both walking and cycling networks. Fort Street is part of the City of Victoria's regional cycling network and downtown can be accessed in ten minutes via bike lanes on Fort Street or the cycle track on nearby Pandora Avenue. Continuous bike lanes on Foul Bay Road and Henderson Road provide students with a direct cycling route to the Camosun College Lansdowne Campus and the University of Victoria.

All streets surrounding the development site have sidewalks as well as controlled pedestrian crossings at major intersections.

The City of Victoria is rapidly upgrading its network of All Ages and Abilities (AAA) cycling infrastructure. Plans call for the existing cycling lanes on Fort Street and Pandora Avenue to be upgraded to protected cycling lanes, creating a continuous AAA cycling route that connects the site to the City of Victoria's downtown core. In addition, new AAA cycling routes will be created on Leighton Road and Stanley Avenue. These cycling upgrades are scheduled to be under construction in 2021 and completed in 2022. Students are often interested in cycling but concerned for their safety when riding adjacent to heavy traffic, so it is anticipated that these protected AAA cycling facilities will increase the rates of cycling to and from the development. With its large volume of bike parking, the proposed development at 1693 Fort Street is well-positioned to support the anticipated cycling demand.

The location is within a walking distance of most everyday amenities and services, and all daily errands can be accomplished either on foot or on a bike. Walk Score is an online tool that assesses the walkability and bikeability of a location based on distances to a wide variety of amenities and services. The site scores a 75 for walkability which it defines as 'very walkable'.

The location receives a Bike Score of 93 out of 100, placing it in Walk Score's 'biker's paradise' category. This already high score is expected to improve with the cycling upgrades performed over the next few years.

### **Car Share**

Modo is currently the only car share provider in the Capital Region with a fleet of over eighty-five vehicles. Across BC, Modo has over eight hundred vehicles with car drops at BC Ferry terminals and other transit hubs, allowing for a true car-lite lifestyle. A study completed for the City of Toronto found that on average 21% of car share members were able to shed a vehicle while 45% were able to postpone the purchase of a vehicle. A University of California study found that on average each Modo vehicle removed up to eleven private vehicles due to users selling their vehicles or foregoing the purchase of a vehicle. The site has five Modo vehicles within a ten minute walk which is commonly regarded as walkable. The closest Modo vehicle is located 200 m away on Jubilee Avenue near Oak Bay Avenue. Approximately twenty other Modo vehicles are located in downtown Victoria, which is easily accessible by bike or transit.

### **Transit**

The site is well served by transit. The proposed development site is surrounded by seven major transit corridors, all within 400 metres—a five minute walk. The transit table presents nearby transit routes and approximate distances from the development site to bus stops. Buses along these routes are designed to accommodate wheelchairs, strollers, and mobility aids.

Students at the University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads University have unlimited, discounted access to public transit through the U-PASS, which is paid for automatically in their student fees. With high service frequency, short travel times, and a low cost, public transit is expected to be a popular option for most student residents.

### **Vehicle Parking Demand Analysis**

Parking data obtained from the University of Victoria indicate that there is a substantial demographic of post-secondary students who do not own a vehicle and would like to live in a dormitory-like setting. The University of Victoria parking demand rates for students living off-campus in 2019 was approximately 0.15 vehicles per student, while on-campus residing students had parking rates of just 0.08 spaces per student. These rates indicate post-secondary students have lower than average vehicle ownership rates. The University of Victoria, through its on-campus residence applications, estimates significant latent demand for on-campus student housing that will not be satisfied with planned supply increases. Currently at the University of Victoria, only first year students are guaranteed on-campus housing while many second plus year students are forced to move off campus due to a shortage of on-campus housing.

### **Transportation Demand Management (TDM)**

- The best TDM strategy is the location efficiency provided by building denser housing forms in compact, walkable neighbourhoods such as the South Jubilee.
- We are also providing significant bicycle parking accessible directly adjacent to the front entrance.
- Each tenant will also have a Modo car membership for the length of their tenancy.

## Contributing to a Sustainable City

According to researchers, densification holds the key for cities fight against climate change as reducing automobile trips is the most significant component of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As outlined above, the central location of the subject site in relation multiple local amenities encourages a pedestrian and bicycle oriented lifestyle. The proposed development has been designed assuming walking, cycling and transit as primary transportation options for future residents.

The building will be designed and constructed to BC Step Code 3, in accordance with the City of Victoria's phased Step Code guidelines which were updated as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Step Code 3 represents a 20% increase in efficiency. This includes designing the building systems in a way that will reach high levels of performance in Thermal Energy Demand Intensity (TEDI), Total Energy Use Intensity (TEUI), and airtightness.

This proposed development is intended to create the kind of sustainable middle density development, carefully positioned in relation to alternate modes of transit, that contributes to a vital, low carbon, sustainable future envisioned for the City of Victoria.

## Community Consultation

Aryze Developments is committed to being good neighbours and having honest, open dialogues within the communities we do our work. We are available to discuss project details with stakeholders through a variety of channels to build trust and shared vision for the project all while maintaining a respectful and open conversation. Our goal is to create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable to share their ideas, hopes, and aspirations for the community and for them to ultimately see these values reflected in the end project.

Aryze Developments held a Community Information Session via Zoom on the evening of January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, wherein we welcomed members of the neighbourhood and community to learn more about the proposed development and to provide comments and feedback. We thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



**Carly Abrahams**  
Development Manager  
Aryze Development