

October 31, 2025

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

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

Dear Mayor Alto 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 124-room hotel with a public café in the renovated heritage building and a one-storey rooftop addition. The proposal also includes two rooftop terraces for hotel guests and an extension and re-cladding of the existing non-original stair adjacent to Blanshard Street. The proposed FSR is 1.78, and Height is 18m.

### **Site Context**

The 2,272 m<sup>2</sup> 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 in a way that makes the most of its opportunities and addresses its challenges with a thoughtful, responsible, sensitive, and 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 and added semi-public access to a significant historic building

The completed development will also create a new publicly accessible cafe and restaurant that includes the historic Commissioner's Room as an extension of the dining space. 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 those documents and the following sections for additional information regarding the heritage scope.

*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

## Design + Guidelines

The point of departure for the architectural design is the guidance on the rehabilitation of historic buildings (Standards 10, 11, and 12) 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
- 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

Additional building upgrades include:

- New one-storey rooftop addition
- Extension and re-cladding of the unoriginal exit stair which was added to the building in the 1970s
- 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 10.

The cladding employed 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, as well as the removal of the secondary entrance stair on Fairfield Road, which enables the widening of the sidewalk along that facade. 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). Twelve (12) 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.

### **Transportation**

The lot configuration and siting of the existing heritage building do not permit any significant off-street vehicle parking. A suite of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures has been developed with WATT Consulting group to reduce vehicle parking demand and, when combined with the proposed 25 off-site parking stalls, results in zero parking shortfall and one surplus parking space. In addition, the immediate adjacency of the BC Transit bus terminus along Fairfield Road provides convenient transportation options for hotel staff and visitors.

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

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

### Transportation Demand Management

A suite of transportation demand management measures are proposed to reduce the overall demand for parking by 5 stalls. A TDM memo is included in the application package that provides more detail on the proposal. These measures include:

- Secure bicycle parking entrance at grade (reduction of 1.2 parking stalls)
- Additional 5 (83%) long-term bicycle parking spaces (reduction of 1.9 parking stalls)
- Electrified long-term bicycle parking for all spaces for e-bike charging and 1 oversized stall for non-standard bicycles (reduction of 1.6 stalls)
- End of trip facilities for hotel staff (reduction of 0.6 parking stalls)

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	Surplus
<b>6 stalls</b>	<b>31 stalls</b>	<b>27 stalls</b> (25 off-site)	<b>2 stalls</b> (1 van accessible)	<b>2 stalls</b> (1 van accessible)	<b>-5 stalls</b>	<b>1 stall</b>

### 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.

### Bicycle Parking

Eleven long-term bicycle parking stalls (83% above the minimum requirements) are proposed. Six short-term bicycle parking stalls are provided in accordance with Zoning Bylaw 2018 and are located at the new entry court. All long-term bicycle parking stalls are provided with power for e-bike charging and one stall is allocated to 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
- Landscaped roofs and site planting enhancing 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
- 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 restaurant 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.