

VIA EMAIL: zoning@victoria.ca

January 20, 2025

1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

RE: 1703-1705 Fernwood Drive & 1312 Balmoral Drive – Proposal for Missing Middle Townhomes

Dear Ms. Janota-Bzowska;

Following extensive consultation with City Staff, we are pleased to re-submit a Development Permit Application for this Missing Middle proposal. The proposal involves consolidating three aging single-family homes to allow for the development of 19 townhomes. This application is guided by the Official Community Plan (OCP), the Missing Middle Housing Initiative (MMHI), the Fernwood Neighbourhood Plan, as well as the established development patterns within the Fernwood Neighbourhood. The proposal focuses on addressing housing attainability under the guidelines of the MMHI through a contextually appropriate form of development.

This project responds to the following objectives as set out in the MMHI:

1. Improve options for families to stay in the City: by providing a diversity of housing we aim to make it feasible for families to remain within the City of Victoria.
2. Increase the supply and variety of housing: expanding the range of available housing types to meet the varied needs of our growing population.
3. Support a ‘car-light’ lifestyle, public transit use, and walkable neighbourhood centres: promoting sustainable transportation options and creating pedestrian-friendly areas.
4. Ensure that the look and feel of new Missing Middle housing suits the character of the neighbourhood: enhancing social interaction and fostering a strong sense of place within communities.

The project has been designed to make a positive contribution to the existing neighbourhood fabric, adapting to the evolving needs of the community. It focuses on timeless design and neighbourly buildings oriented toward social activity, ensuring a harmonious integration of old and new structures. Every detail has been considered to facilitate livability for residents.

This letter builds on the previous application and comments our applicant team received from Planning, Engineering, Transportation and Parks. Through our open dialogue and working sessions with Planning, we can confirm:

- The new site plan includes the requested dedicated area along Fernwood Rd and Balmoral Rd as requested by Staff, satisfying the amenity requirement under the Missing Middle initiative. The dedicated area being provided to the City of Victoria, at the cost of the applicant, represents close to 15% of the total site area.
- The required tree replacement has been met;
- The architectural expression has been refined in response to TRG and ADP comments, with detailing and elements that pick up on the eclectic built environment in Fernwood;
- Our team is providing a compensation package to tenants that is above and beyond the requirements under the TAP for Missing Middle projects.

HOUSING BENEFITS

The Fernwood Neighbourhood has the city's highest total number of families with children at home, and one of the highest shares of young adults aged 15-34. Most of the housing in the neighbourhood is single family (approximately 24% of all dwelling units) and apartments (approximately 63%). Between 2012 – 2020, a total of 56 new housing units were approved

within the Fernwood Neighbourhood. This application would represent a 34% increase to the total number of housing units approved over this 9-year period.

Generally, the creation of Missing Middle Housing has been challenging when compared to condominiums and single-family dwellings. From 2012 to 2019, fewer than 250 Missing Middle homes were approved. Rising housing costs have left fewer opportunities for families to purchase their first home in Fernwood and Greater Victoria. These insights have shaped the proposal and are a direct response to what's most important in every project: future homeowners and the community.

CLIMATE-FORWARD BUILDING

As part of the City's 2025 vision for a healthy and vibrant community, this proposal has included the following to align with the Climate Leadership Plan:

- Near Zero Emissions – this proposal has been designed with electrical mechanical systems with EV charging infrastructure;
- Emissions levels are targeted to achieve Level 4 (EL 4 - Zero Carbon) of the BC Energy Step Code;
- Low Carbon – Priority will be given to local suppliers with locally sourced products of low embodied carbon;
- Transportation – multi-modal design and connectivity is being embraced and encouraged through the inclusion of car-free homes and secured bike storage;
- Rainwater management – on-site infiltration to manage rainwater control;
- Landscaping – native planting is being proposed throughout the site;
- On site areas for resident gardening are being provided to facilitate community building.

SITE CONTEXT

The three existing single-family homes in this proposal are located at the northeast corner of Fernwood Road and Balmoral Road. This proposal sits within the heart of the Fernwood neighbourhood, one block from Victoria High School and two blocks from Fernwood Square. The surrounding built form is comprised primarily of single-family structures, with higher density apartments one block south along Pandora.

The neighbourhood of Fernwood contains an increasingly diversified housing stock, ranging from heritage homes and bungalows, to low-rise multi-family buildings. The neighbourhood is home to close to 10,000 residents in over 5,000 households. While it has the highest total number of family households and household types, the age of residents is quite diverse – with a mix of families, seniors, youth, couples, and singles. This application could result in a +5% increase to Fernwood's townhome stock.

As discussed further below, Heritage character is a top priority for residents in the neighbourhood. It's clear from walking Fernwood Road, new housing stock must respect and complement the character of this area. This proposal strives to offer a ground-oriented form of housing that integrates into this heritage character.

POLICY CONTEXT

Through conversations with City Staff and early engagement of the Fernwood CALUC our team has focused on the guidelines and objectives of several policies to shape the proposal. These guiding documents and policies are noted below with key summaries provided.

- The Official Community Plan;
- Fernwood Neighbourhood Plan (2022);
- Advisory Design Guidelines for Buildings, Signs and Awnings (1981);
- The Missing Middle Design Guidelines (2022);
- Tenant Assistance Policy

Official Community Plan

The site is currently zoned R1-B, Single Family Dwelling, and holds an Urban Place designation of Traditional Residential. This designation envisions multi-unit buildings up to three-storeys, including attached residential and apartments, at approximately 1.0 FSR. This proposal contemplates a consolidation of the three properties under the MMHI to permit three-storey, ground-oriented townhomes with a density of 1.1 FSR, consistent with the objectives and guidelines in the OCP.

As this is a Missing Middle proposal, the application is subject to DPA 15F – Missing Middle Housing. This designation includes several guidelines our team has addressed, specifically:

1. Section 1.7.11 and 3.1.7 – Integration of landscaping to soften hardscape areas: the re-submission includes larger planters to soften the edges of the drive aisles. The ends of the drive aisles are programmed with seating/communal gathering to the north, with softscape and planting to the east. Throughout the drive aisles, a series of planters delineate the entries to the townhomes creating unique entries to each home and soften the edge between building and drive aisle. Further, the combination of planting and patterned surfaces create visual interest within the site, improving vehicular and pedestrian circulation.
2. Section 2 – accessible design – the applicant team is exploring adaptability provisions within the townhomes to help create a future community that is responding to the changing needs of the population through accessibility and adaptability. **Further to the exploration, the applicant team is working with the Safer Homes Society on a detailed review of plans and best practices to incorporate accessibility and future proofing for aging-in-place.**
3. Sections 4.3 / 4.4 – North building – the entry from Fernwood Rd to the north building has been re-designed as noted above to create a clear path from the street to the front doors of these homes – refinement includes an entry arbour into the site including addressing and way-finding signage, a pathway straddled by softscape, opening up to a zen-like garden with seating, and entry ways to the north building that are visible and of the same character as the other homes. The pathway and entry have been re-configured to remove areas that do not align with CPTED principles, creating a safe and welcoming area for residents and guests.

The proposed building forms and character have been designed with respect to addressing the objectives relating to form and character. A steep grade across the site results in many of the street-facing homes to appear as two storey forms, specifically along Fernwood Road. This massing is purposeful in keeping a low profile along Fernwood Road while presenting opportunities for a slightly varied scale and expression from the other proposed townhomes on site – furthering the eclectic mix of typologies and styles within Fernwood.

During initial discussions with Transportation and Engineering, the applicant team was asked to provide significant road dedications along Fernwood Road and Balmoral Road. For context, Fernwood Road between Bay and Yates contains 19 heritage properties, while Balmoral Road, close to the project site, has 2 heritage properties. These dedications, which account for approximately 15% of the site's buildable area, impose a significant hardship, given the challenges of securing a street dedication in an area with so many heritage properties that are unlikely to be demolished. This limits the ability to provide additional three-bedroom homes on-site. Despite this challenge, the current proposal reflects the revised dedication requests to advance the application under the Missing Middle initiative. We appreciate the efforts of staff on this project and look forward to continued collaboration.

Fernwood Neighbourhood Plan (2022)

As noted in the Committee of the Whole report for Local Area Plan amendments, “*capacity for more housing choice was a top concern among residents... Beyond clear community desire, the need for more housing that meets a diversity of lifestyles, preferences, and incomes is illustrated in latent demand indicators, growth projections, and the gaps in existing Official Community Plan (OCP) Urban Place Designation capacity.*”

Of the ‘big moves’ outlined in the Fernwood Neighbourhood Plan, the support of diverse, mixed housing is most relevant to this proposal. The intent of designing 19 townhomes on this site creates 3-bedroom homes with an average total liveable area of ~1,250 sq. ft. These highly liveable, functional homes are inherently more attainable than comparable single-family dwellings. Additionally, these homes include secured interior parking, ample storage for bikes and strollers, private outdoor space and flexibility at grade for a bedroom to accommodate a growing family. This proposal targets families that wish to stay or move to Fernwood in an amenity rich community supporting a car-light lifestyle.

The MMHI (2022)

At a time when housing is a pressing issue in Victoria, we have addressed this need by proposing ground-oriented townhomes for Victorians to call home. This project is largely about unlocking the potential for multi-family housing to meet the needs of those within a traditionally single-family neighbourhood. The proposal responds to the grading and spatial limitations of the site and context within the Fernwood Village, while considering key issues such as walkability, transit, housing diversity and accessibility.

The specific objectives of the MMHI that have been addressed in this proposal include:

- Improve options for families to stay in the city; a mix of housing typologies are being proposed to offer a range of options for families to stay and grow within Fernwood. Through the city's financial analysis for Missing Middle Housing, it's evident that 'smaller unit sizes will keep the total unit price more affordable than larger units allowing the new units to appeal to a broader range of buyers'. This proposal includes ground-oriented housing with ~1,250 sq.ft. homes.
- Increase the supply and variety of housing; this proposal, across from Victoria High School and within a short walk to Fernwood Square, provides 19 new townhomes for Victorians.
- Ensure the look and feel suit the character of the neighbourhood, support social interaction and foster a sense of place; the architectural expression builds on the traditional and eclectic architecture of Fernwood, and is anchored by a 2,200 sq.ft. semi-private outdoor space that is proposed to be programmed for family-friendly use for all residents.

Tenant Assistance Policy

Frame is committed to working closely with each tenant individually to address specific needs throughout the duration of the project. Our plan has been developed in alignment with the Tenant Assistance Policy and shaped through ongoing communication with staff and tenants. The final version will include a compensation package that exceeds the City's minimum requirements.

A revised TAP was resubmitted to the City in January 2025 and is anticipated to be approved in the coming weeks based on correspondence from staff. Following the re-submission, Frame received the following response from the Tenant Assistance Planner:

"I want to recognize and thank Frame and the property owners for your commitment to the tenants and for the respectful tenant support and compensation you are providing."

DESIGN RATIONALE

This proposal builds on early consultation with the Planning Department and the CALUC, and adheres to the Missing Middle Design Guidelines.

A total of nineteen ground-oriented townhomes are proposed in three separate buildings on a consolidated corner lot in the amenity-rich Fernwood neighbourhood. The townhomes have been sited to create street-facing front porches and entries along Fernwood Road and Balmoral Road, while the third building is oriented towards a common outdoor amenity area in the rear of the property. Vehicular access is provided off Balmoral Road with two drive aisles bisecting the site, creating a welcoming and functional plan that respects the Guidelines.

The primary facades along Fernwood and Balmoral are created, and result from, the steep grading of the site, offering two distinct elevations. Along Fernwood, the massing illustrates a two-storey form with distinct materials and tones used to differentiate each of the townhomes and entries. Raised porches provide direct access to the main living areas in each of the homes. The scale and expression take cues from many of the smaller bungalows in the neighbourhood in an urban form that facilitates more community and neighbour engagement. Gables, dentils and traditional detailing form the architectural expression of these townhomes.

The facade along Balmoral is designed in response to the grading and slope from Fernwood. The massing has been divided into three groups with a stepped roofline that create stronger vertical expressions. Front entries are provided at grade, and slightly below, aligning to the natural grades.

A revised proposal was presented to the City's Advisory Design Panel on December 11th 2024. The panel recommended Option 1 from the ADP report to *approve the application as presented*. Through the presentation, general comments were made including the consideration to add balconies, refine hard and softscape areas and incorporate stormwater management strategies. The current re-submission of the DP incorporates revisions based on ADP's commentary.

RESPONSE TO STAFF COMMENTS

Further to our discussions on this proposal, we have included the below summary outlining the rationale behind the revisions and relaxations being proposed. This summary is intended to address the more significant changes discussed with staff. Additionally, a letter from dHK Architects has been provided, responding to each of the TRG comments.

1. Improved Entry and Site Plan

We appreciate the feedback on creating a more prominent and welcoming entry for pedestrians, and have made the following improvements across the site:

- a. Along Fernwood Road, we have flipped the PMT and main pedestrian entry, creating a more cohesive entry condition that aligns with a continuous pathway leading to the north building entryways.
- b. A zen garden and seating area has been added near the main entry. This serves as a gathering space for residents and guests, provides a focal point at the end of the main drive aisle, and clearly delineates vehicular access from a pedestrian walkway connecting Fernwood Road to the rear amenity space.

2. Variance on a Single Accessible Stall

To accommodate the dedicated site area for future road widening, the proposed townhomes have been shifted north and east, as requested by staff. As a result, less site area is available to meet the minimum tree replacement requirements. Since Parks has indicated that cash-in-lieu is not an option under the Missing Middle pathway, the applicant team, through working sessions with staff, proposes the removal of an accessible parking stall to meet the required tree replacement. This variance is requested with the following considerations:

- A total of 15 parking spaces are required under Schedule P. The proposal provides 16 spaces after the reduction of the accessible stall.
- The required number of short-term and long-term bicycle spaces are being met, with short-term bike parking conveniently distributed throughout the site for residents and guests.
- The dedicated area for future road widening, an amenity under the Missing Middle initiative, significantly reduces the buildable area on site, impacting the ability to meet requirements for replacement trees, amenity space, and additional parking.
- The area previously designated for the accessible stall has been converted into a zen garden to ensure the design is not “car-dominated.” This change increases green space, fulfills the tree replacement requirements, creates a secondary gathering area for residents, and enhances the connectivity between the main entry and the shared amenity space.

The following rationale has been provided based on the staff feedback from December 12, 2024:

1. *Please update the Letter to Development Services to include the variance requests to the Front and side (Balmoral, South) setbacks for the proposed building(s):*

The front setback on the West Building (facing Fernwood Rd) is recommended to be 2.0m per the zone standard. A variance to allow a 1.75m setback is requested. This variance is being sought:

- to ensure the setbacks along the east PL, adjacent to the neighbouring property, are met. This 0.25m variance along the Fernwood frontage permits the north and south buildings to meet the setback along the eastern property line, while maintaining a suitable distance between buildings;
- to allow the townhomes in the west building to maintain a 30' depth, ensuring the livability of the floor plans are maintained;
- due to the 3.91m dedication along Fernwood Road which the applicant is providing as an amenity to the City under the Missing Middle Policy. If this dedication and the improved boulevard and sidewalk were not provided as proposed, a larger setback from the west building may be provided.

The side yard setback on the West Building (facing Balmoral Road) is recommended to be 2.0m per the zone standard. A variance to allow a 0.765m setback is requested. This variance is being sought:

- in response to providing a 1.8m amenity dedication along Balmoral Road to the City of Victoria. The dedicated area has constrained the siting of all three buildings while maintaining the targeted setbacks to the north and east neighbouring properties;
- in response to creating a pedestrian entryway along the Fernwood frontage and provisional areas for Hydro and servicing, which has shifted the West building to the southern property line, encroaching into the setback;
- to ensure the width of the townhomes in the west building are maintained, allowing for livability and functionality of the unit plans.

2. *Please update the Letter to Development Services to include the variance request and rationale for not meeting the Entire building – distance to two streets – 36m requirement*

All of the townhomes in the north building meet the 36m distance to Fernwood, except for Unit 19 (at the NE corner of the building). This variance request is a function of the width and depth of this corner site as well as the 3.91m dedication being provided along Fernwood Road, which is a voluntary amenity contribution by the applicant; if this dedication was not provided, Unit 19 would meet the 36m distance requirement.

The distance from the South building to Fernwood Road results from the site constraints and dedication being provided. Unit 13, which is the single unit not meeting the requirement, is 2.2m from Balmoral Rd, providing easy access for residents of this home.

3. *Please update the Letter to Development Services to include the variance request and rationale for the All floor area m² maximum from 1,410 to 2,023*

The consolidation of three single-family lots to permit the development of 19 ground-oriented family-friendly homes requires a variance to permit the added floor area. The proposal, through the provision of the community amenities, is still below the overall density permitted of 1.1 FSR; the total floor area of 2,023 m² is a result of the lot size being 2,137.5 m². To achieve the proposed unit mix in a 3-storey townhome form, compliant with the OCP, the total floor area variance is required.

4. *Please update the Letter to Development Services to include the variance request and rationale for the Open site space from 45% to 37%*

A variance to the open site space is being sought based on the following:

- To meet the minimum parking requirements under Schedule P, and provide flexibility for families that require the use of a car, drive aisles are required to bi-sect the site for vehicular access. The drive aisles and distances between the three buildings have been kept to minimums, where possible, in an effort to maximize the open site space
- Of the open site space that is being provided, ~2,200 sf of the area is dedicated for an on-site amenity space programmed as a family-friendly area for residents and children. This represents a significant on-site amenity that is unique to a townhome typology within the City of Victoria.

Frame

CONCLUSION

The proposal outlined above is fully compliant with the Missing Middle Design Guidelines and Official Community Plan with respect to density and height and will provide nineteen ground-oriented homes for the Fernwood neighbourhood. We look forward to continuing to work with Staff through the approval of a delegated Development Permit.

Sincerely,



Hassan Sayed
Frame Properties Ltd.