



Mayor Helps and Council
City of Victoria
No.1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

September 21st, 2020

Re: 1244 Wharf Street, Yates Block – Rezoning Application

Dear Mayor Helps and Council,

Since May 2020, the DRA LUC has been in discussions with the Applicant, Mr. Robert Fung, and the City planning department regarding the proposed Rezoning at 1244 Wharf Street to “allow for hotel use and for residential uses to be permitted below the ground floor”.

Comments and concerns regarding the application at 1244 Wharf Street by the DRA LUC are as follows:

- Members appreciate the applicant’s recognition that the Yates Block is a valued historic building (erected in three stages between 1882 and 1896) and makes a significant contribution to the heritage character of Victoria's Inner Harbour Precinct.
- Members are satisfied that the applicant is not seeking additional storeys to the existing building.
- The applicant made verbal assurances that the Yates Block would undergo heritage restoration as part of this application, but the application does not make any firm commitments within this Rezoning Application.
- In the letter to the City, the applicant alludes to heritage restoration work on the building and states that the “intent” for future works will be to work within the existing footprint of the building. Since there has been no commitment made as part of this application for heritage restoration, the community has no assurances that future applications will uphold the stated intent.
- The applicant outlines in their letter of intent general descriptions of future work on the building as: “...preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of its exterior” and “extensive renovation of its interior”. The applicant has supplied no commitment or details of the work proposed on this designated heritage building. It is common practice, when considering a rezoning, to have these details provided or, in some cases, actually tied to the rezoning. There is substantial concern that a future Heritage Development Permit may result in another façadism project and Council will lack the necessary discretionary

- power to obtain the commitments for an appropriate rehabilitation of the building if that opportunity is missed during the Rezoning Application process.
- Members discussed the condition of the distinctive mural “Whaling Walls” by Robert Wyland on the northern façade and expressed concerns regarding its future and whether it will be restored or protected.
 - The applicant has provided assurances that the hotel use requested does not include short-term vacation rentals and the City has confirmed the use for STVRs is not permitted.

As a result of the new restrictions outlined by the City, no CALUC meeting took place for this proposal, so there has been no opportunity for the community to participate in any information sharing related to this project. Therefore, the community must rely on the relevant documents posted on the City’s Development Tracker. As per the interim process, the community is notified by mail that they have a 30-day period from the date the plans are submitted to the City. In this case, the Application Date is listed as 14 August. However, the DRA only received the notification on 26 August with a deadline of 14 September. It is presumed that members of the public received their notices on the same date; effectively providing only 19 days (10 working days) to read the information on the website, contact staff and/or the DRA LUC with questions, formulate a response and submit it to the City. We strongly suggest that this is insufficient time, particularly when the information on the Development Tracker is vague and unhelpful.

For this proposal, the information provided on the Development Tracker consists of two old site plans, some photos of the existing building and the applicant’s letter to the City. As such, the current process has not served the public interest when the City solicits community feedback, as the general public cannot provide an informed opinion when insufficient meaningful information has been supplied. We request that for all applications going forward, that a staff review report is posted on the Development Tracker before the 30-day period begins, as it provides greater clarity of information, context and background. To further inform the public it would also be appropriate to post any Staff Reports to Council, ADP and Heritage Advisory Panel to the Development Tracker as they become available.

Sincerely,



Ian Sutherland
Chair Land Use Committee Downtown Residents Association