



REPORT

To: Community Heritage Commission **Date:** December 7, 2022

From: Dilys Huang, Development Planner **File:** PAR01416

Item #: 2022-735

Subject: Pre-Application Review: 63 Merivale Street & 250 Agnes Street

PURPOSE

To elicit preliminary feedback from the Community Heritage Commission regarding the proposal's heritage elements.

SUMMARY

A Pre-Application Review (PAR) enquiry for a future Heritage Revitalization Agreement proposal has been received for 63 Merivale Street and 250 Agnes Street. The project proposes the retention and on-site relocation of the 1916 Catherine Armstrong House, and the addition of a new six storey multi-unit residential building component to the heritage house. The Community Heritage Commission is being asked to provide feedback regarding the heritage value of the house, key features of the house that should be given consideration to, and the design relationship of the new building addition with the heritage house.

GUIDING POLICY AND REGULATIONS

Heritage Review Policy for Buildings 100 Years and Older

In 2020, Council approved a revised heritage review policy, which highlights the City's interest in retaining New Westminster's oldest buildings. As such, redevelopment applications for buildings that are listed on the Heritage Resource Inventory and/or 100 years and older require a Heritage Assessment and review by the Community Heritage Commission.

Heritage Register

Though not legally protected by bylaw, the building at 63 Merivale Street is listed on the City's Heritage Register. The Register is an official list of properties with heritage value that have been identified by the City. Applications for changes to or demolition of properties listed on the Heritage Register are generally reviewed by the Planning Division and referred to the CHC. Alterations and additions are reviewed to determine the appropriateness of the proposed changes in relation to the character defining elements of the building or structure.

Heritage Revitalization Agreement

A Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) is a negotiated agreement between the City and a property owner for the purposes of heritage conservation. In exchange for long-term legal protection through a Heritage Designation Bylaw and exterior restoration, certain zoning relaxations may be considered as long as the application is consistent with the Official Community Plan. An HRA is not precedent setting, as each one is unique to a specific site. The *Policy for the Use of Heritage Revitalization Agreements* lays out the process for HRAs and the relaxations that may be considered.

Heritage Related Design Guidelines

Council endorsed the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* in 2008 as a basis for assessing heritage projects within the city. These are national guidelines for best practice in heritage conservation and design. All HRA proposals are carefully evaluated using this document to ensure conservation work on the exterior of the heritage building is in compliance. Additionally, the design of the adjacent new buildings is reviewed against the principles and guidelines in this document.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pre-Application Review

A Pre-Application Review (PAR) is a formal process that allows City staff and relevant committees to review a preliminary proposal and provide written comments to an applicant before the submission of a full application. It is intended to help identify key considerations and potential issues of a proposed development early on before significant investment is made. The attached PAR Guide includes more information about the process (Appendix A).

Site Characteristics and Context

The subject site, comprising two properties with an approximate combined area of 1,618 sq. m. (17,424 sq. ft.), is located in the Downtown at the south-east corner of Agnes and Merivale Streets.

63 Merivale Street contains a 1916 residence known as the Catherine Armstrong House that is listed on the Heritage Register. It was designed as a single detached dwelling and was converted into multiple suites during the mid 1950s. 250 Agnes Street includes a two storey rental apartment building that was transformed in 1955 from a 1910 single detached dwelling.

Nearby uses mostly include three to four storey low-rise apartment buildings from the 1950s and 1960s. To the north is Qayqayt Elementary School, to the west is a more recently built six storey rental apartment development, and to the south is another Heritage Register-listed residence. A site context map is provided in Appendix B.

Development Policy Context

Similar to other surrounding residential properties, the subject site is designated *Residential – Low Rise Apartment* in the City's Downtown Community Plan. 63 Merivale Street is currently zoned *Single Detached Residential* (RS-2), and 250 Agnes Street is zoned *Multiple Dwelling (Low Rise)* (RM-2). As the proposal would not be consistent with the current zones, a rezoning or Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) would be required. In this case, an HRA is proposed for relaxations to zoning provisions, and similar to a rezoning, to permit a different building form (e.g. multi-unit dwellings over the RS-2 zoned portion).

Project Description

Based on the Pre-Application Review submission, the building at 250 Agnes Street is proposed to be demolished, while the house at 63 Merivale Street would be retained and moved forward closer to the Merivale Street frontage. A new six storey wood frame building addition with ground-oriented units is proposed to be integrated with the relocated heritage house.

A total of approximately 66 residential units is currently proposed. Fifty percent (50%) of all units would be secured market rental units, of which at least 10% would be below-market rental units. Select preliminary project drawings are provided in Appendix C.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Proposed Demolition (250 Agnes Street)

The project includes the proposed demolition of the existing apartment building at 250 Agnes Street. Originally a 1910 dwelling, it was transformed into a two storey plus basement apartment building in 1955. Based on the attached Heritage Assessment (Appendix D), this intervention irreversibly altered the original massing, form, scale, design, finishing materials, and building orientation (except for portions of the timber floor structure and a fireplace only visible from the interior, and the location of one of the chimney stacks) of the 1910 house.

Heritage Value of the Catherine Armstrong House (63 Merivale Street)

The 1916 Catherine Armstrong House is a large two storey plus basement, shingle-clad wood frame residence. Based on the attached Statement of Significance and Condition Assessment (Appendix E), the building is valued as a surviving reflection of the early, single-family, elite residential character of the Downtown's Albert Crescent precinct. It is also a significant early residential design by architects Townley and Matheson, and reflects the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement through its design and finishes. The building has remained largely unaltered, both on the exterior and the interior, and is considered to be in good condition overall. Photographs of the building in its current condition can be found in Appendix E.

Does the Statement of Significance provide an accurate representation of the heritage values and character defining elements of the building?

Design Relationship with the New Building Component

The City's policies, including the Standards and Guidelines, strongly encourage developments that include a historic building to be respectful of the existing heritage assets. Respectful development does not necessarily mean the new building(s) must be physically smaller than the heritage building or that the site should not be developed, rather that the site or new buildings' design should consider the heritage building, and allow the heritage building to be the focus of the development. The guidelines identify that new buildings should not be overwhelming, or detracting from the historic features.

In the Downtown Community Plan, the City's heritage conservation principles speak to the protection and retention of a heritage building in its entirety including its character-defining elements. While keeping a heritage building separate offers the most direct way to achieve this and conserve its heritage value, the applicant has noted that this will create significant challenges to the project's viability (e.g. with the elimination of buildable area from building separation setbacks).

With the proposed shifting of the Catherine Armstrong house further west closer to the street, its front elevation is currently proposed to align with and connect to the facade of the new building. The six storey building form would mostly be integrated into the northern and western elevations of the heritage house and a portion of its roof. The new building component is proposed to be simple in geometric form and clad in complimentary materials. Ground-oriented units are proposed to be incorporated along the primary street frontages, including a couple that would be located to the east at the rear of the heritage house and face Dickenson Street. Preliminary concept drawings are provided in Appendix C.

Considering that the development of low rise apartments is supported under the current land use designation, are the massing and siting elements of the new building addition compatible with and respectful of the heritage house?

Alternatively, does the site plan or the design of the new building addition overwhelm the heritage house? Are there specific improvements that could be considered?

FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMISSION

The Community Heritage Commission is being asked to review this Pre-Application review enquiry and provide feedback in relation to the above questions and the following aspects:

- The heritage value of the 1910 building and the 1916 Catherine Armstrong House;
- The key elements and features of the 1916 house that should be focused on; and
- Any heritage implications related to the design of the site or the new building addition.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Pre-Application Review Guide

Appendix B: Site Context Map

Appendix C: Select Preliminary Concept Drawings

Appendix D: Heritage Assessment for 250 Agnes Street

Appendix E: Statement of Significance and Condition Assessment for 63 Merivale Street

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