

# **REPORT**

## ***Climate Action, Planning and Development***

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** May 29, 2023

**From:** Jackie Teed, Acting Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development  
**File:** REZ00230

**Item #:** 2023-336

**Subject:** Rezoning and Special Development Permit: 808 Royal Avenue (Douglas College) – Preliminary Report

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** Council direct staff to work with the applicant to prepare a plan of development for the subject property suitable for consideration of First and Second Readings, as outlined in the “Application Review Process” section of this report.

**THAT** Council endorse in principle that no Public Hearing be held for this application in accordance with the Local Government Act.

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### **PURPOSE**

To seek Council’s approval to process the rezoning application for an academic and student housing building at 808 Royal Avenue as outlined within this report.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Douglas College has submitted Rezoning and Special Development Permit applications to develop a 20-storey academic and student housing building at 808 Royal Avenue. A total of 244 student housing units are proposed. The development would provide 53 off-street parking stalls and 105 long-term and 18 short-term bicycle parking spaces. The project is proposed to meet Step 4 of the BC Energy Step Code, and achieve LEED Gold certification and Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Gold.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Pre-Application Review**

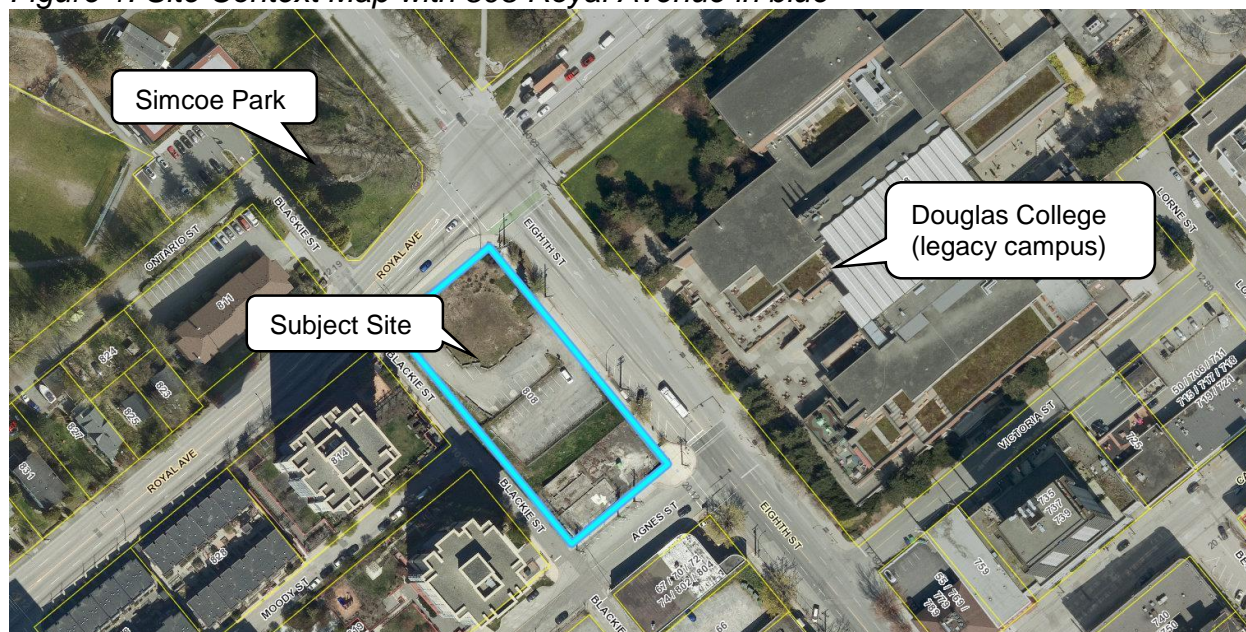
A Preliminary Application Review (PAR) was presented to the Land Use Planning Committee (LUPC) on March 29, 2021. Discussion and comments at that meeting related to the perceived building mass, street activation, maintenance of privacy between the development and adjacent residential buildings, and the building's visual impact on key view corridors. The March 29, 2021 LUPC meeting minutes can be accessed via the City's website:

[https://www.newwestcity.ca/database/files/library/LUPC\\_2021\\_Mar\\_29\\_Minutes.pdf](https://www.newwestcity.ca/database/files/library/LUPC_2021_Mar_29_Minutes.pdf)

### **Site Characteristics and Context**

The subject site is located in the Downtown neighbourhood and bounded by Eighth Street, Agnes Street, Royal Avenue and Blackie Street. North of the site are Simcoe Park and Toronto Place Park; west of the site are existing high-density residential developments; and south of the site are low-rise commercial buildings, designated Mixed Use High Density by the Official Community Plan (OCP). East of the site is the existing (legacy) Douglas College campus. The New West SkyTrain Station is approximately 175 m. (574.1 ft.) from the site. Additional site context information is provided in Attachment 1.

*Figure 1: Site Context Map with 808 Royal Avenue in blue*



## **POLICY AND REGULATIONS**

The proposed project is consistent with the OCP, which designates the subject site as School/Institution. The site is located within the Downtown Development Permit Area (DPA) and Tower Precinct, within the Downtown Community Plan (DCP). The

application is generally consistent with the DCP, Economic Development Plan (EDP), Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines and Master Plan, and the Downtown Transportation Plan. It is not consistent with the property's existing zoning, and thus a rezoning is required. A summary of these and other related City policies and regulations are included in Attachment 2.

## **PROJECT PROPOSAL**

The proposed development would include a mix of academic space and student housing for Douglas College. The proposed building is 20 storeys and includes approximately 22,422.2 sq. m. (241,350.6 sq. ft.) of academic space (11 storeys), and 244 student housing units (12,615.2 sq. m. / 135,788.9 sq. ft.) (13 storeys). Preliminary drawings indicate an overall proposed density of 9.6 FSR. Academic spaces would be located on the building's lower levels, and residential space concentrated on the eighth storey and above. A total of 53 off-street parking stalls, 2 loading spaces, and 105 long-term bicycle parking spaces and end-of-trip facilities are proposed in an underground parkade, with access from Blackie Street. Short-term bicycle stalls (18) would be provided at key building entrances and exits.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Overall Evaluation**

Douglas College is a significant employer in the post-secondary education sector, with more than 1,350 New Westminster campus employees. The College anticipates the new academic space would initially have 350 employees, with some employees transferring from the existing leased space in the Anvil Centre (11 Eighth Street). The College anticipates an approximate, annual growth rate of 2% over the next 10 years, adding potentially 250 new employees to the New Westminster campus to support program expansion.

The Douglas College expansion would further solidify the institution's status as a key employer in the city, and education as a key sector in New Westminster's local economy. Providing additional space for academic and student housing uses is consistent with the EDP and supports the City's objective of increasing employment-related floor space, particularly within the Tower and SkyTrain Precincts identified in the DCP.

### **Student Housing**

The proposed student housing would provide units in alignment with the Provincial Government's Homes for People Action Plan, which commits to the delivery of 4,000 on-campus rooms for post-secondary students. The application is also consistent with the OCP, which seeks to "foster a rental housing stock in which tenants have adequate opportunities to live in healthy, safe, and secure housing."

Per the applicant's proposal, single- and double-bed units would be provided on an L-shaped floorplate with shared kitchen and lounge/study space on each residential floor. Additional larger common spaces, outdoor amenities, and the four-bed typology would be located on separate floors. Access to the residential lobby would be from Eighth Street. The proposed student housing unit mix is below.

*Table 1: Proposed Student Housing Mix*

Unit Type	Number of Units	Percentage of Unit Mix
Single Room	Standard: 126 Accessible: 11	56%
Double Room	Standard: 89 Accessible: 9	40%
Quad Room	Standard: 6 Accessible: 3	4%
Total Units	244	100%

With regard to assignment of units, the applicant has indicated that priority consideration would be provided to Indigenous students, and first year students new to Douglas College. Units would be rented at rates that are less than market rents, with final rates determined through further market study. These units would be secured through a Housing Agreement. While units would be limited to students attending Douglas College, additional student housing would take pressure off other units in the market, freeing them for more general occupancy.

### **Building Height, Density and Massing**

The site's existing zoning permits an overall base density of 5.2 FSR, and a maximum height of 12.19 m. (40 ft.). The project proposes an increase of 4.4 FSR and 60.2 m. (197.5 ft.) above existing entitlements. The proposed density and height are consistent with the scale of development anticipated for the Tower Precinct.

The proposed massing is considered typical of institutional buildings, and would differ from adjacent high density, "point tower and podium" developments. As a result, taller than typical streetwalls and larger floorplates are proposed. However, efforts have been made to reduce the perceived building scale by:

- Delineating a 3 to 4 storey podium-type ground level expression, through the building's cladding approach;
- Breaking the massing through use of a key hole element and glazing on Eighth Street, Agnes Street, and Blackie Street; and,
- Providing minor variations in height between the portions of the building fronting Eighth Street and Royal Avenue.

Evolution and refinement of the building massing and exterior expression would continue through the application review process.

## **Public Realm and Street Frontage Activation**

The application is generally consistent with the Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines and Master Plan, which identifies a corner plaza at the north side of Eighth Street at Agnes Street. Primary building access would be provided through this privately-owned plaza. The proposed plaza design would be refined throughout the application review process.

Active academic and common spaces, such as the cafeteria, marketplace, and event spaces, are concentrated at the building's lowest levels and positioned closest to Eighth Street and Agnes Street, to maximize engagement with key frontages.

## **Transportation Considerations**

### *Complete Streets*

Eighth Street is designated as a complete street in the Downtown Transportation Plan (DTP), which envisions allocating right-of-way space to priority modes of transportation (walking, cycling, and transit). Eighth Street between Columbia Street and Royal Avenue, and Agnes Street between Tenth Street and Eighth Street, have also been identified for future protected mobility lanes in the Active Transportation Network Plan (ATNP). The proposed development would provide opportunities for streetscape improvements on both of these streets and implementation of other DTP and ATNP priorities. Public realm design would be refined through the application review process.

### *Off-Street Parking*

In addition to the proposed on-site parking, students and staff would have access to off-site parking facilities at 720 Carnarvon Street and 700 Royal Street, designated for use by Douglas College. The applicant's Transportation Study indicates that anticipated demand from the campus expansion would be satisfied by use of these combined, private parking structures; proposed long- and short-term bicycle infrastructure; and, proximity to rapid transit. Full- and part-time students are currently provided transit passes at a significantly discounted rate, which is incorporated into the College's fee structure, to encourage transit use. Further review of the off-street parking and loading proposal would be completed through the application review process.

## **Trees**

The applicant has provided an arborist report in support of this application, which states that there are 3 on-site and 6 off-site (City-owned) trees relevant to the development. The applicant has proposed to remove all trees, and would be required to provide 18 replacement trees. The applicant has proposed a total of 71 new tree plantings. Further review by the City arborist would be completed as the application progresses.

## **Building Construction Materials**

The PAR application for this site indicated the building was planned to be concrete construction at the lower levels, and encapsulated mass timber construction (EMTC) for the student housing component. The current proposal is entirely concrete and steel construction. The applicant has indicated that this change is reflective of the potential risk and cost implications related to developing a BC Building Code (BCBC) alternative solution, given that the BCBC does not contemplate EMTC over 12 storeys from the lowest building floor.

The proposal indicates that in-lieu of EMTC, the project has developed an alternative strategy to achieve their climate action goals, which includes meeting Step 4 of the BC Energy Step Code, (exceeding the City's minimum requirements), and targeting LEED Gold.

## **APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS**

Below is an overall outline of the development review process for this project:

1. Preliminary Report to Council (May 29, 2023) **(WE ARE HERE)**;
2. Interdepartmental staff review towards a suitable plan of development (ongoing);
3. Applicant-led public consultation, including dissemination of information through the Downtown Residents Association;
4. Presentation to the New Westminster Design Panel;
5. Creation of a Be Heard New West webpage;
6. Comprehensive Report to Council;
7. Council consideration of First, Second and Third Readings of the Rezoning Bylaw following issuance of Notice of Public Hearing Not Held;
8. Completion of adoption requirements;
9. Council consideration of adoption of Zoning Amendment Bylaw;
10. Issuance of the Special Development Permit by the Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development.

As indicated in the review process noted above, public consultation will be held prior to advancing the application for further Council consideration, and staff do not anticipate that a Public Hearing will be required. While staff recommend that Council endorse in principle that no Public Hearing be held, the results of public consultation will be provided to Council in the comprehensive report, at which time Council would have an opportunity to revisit this decision prior to advancing the bylaw for readings.

## **INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

The City has a project-based team approach for reviewing development applications, which facilitates interdepartmental review, providing comments to the applicant throughout the development review process. This project-based team includes staff from Engineering; Climate Action, Planning and Development; Parks and Recreation, Electrical and Fire Departments.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial considerations will be evaluated as part of the application review process and any relevant details will be included in the comprehensive report.

**OPTIONS**

The following options are available for Council's consideration:

1. That Council direct staff to work with the applicant to prepare a plan of development for the subject property suitable for consideration of First and Second Readings, as outlined in the "Application Review Process" section of this report.
2. That Council endorse in principle that no Public Hearing be held for this application in accordance with the Local Government Act.
3. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommend Options 1 and 2.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Site Characteristics and Context

Attachment 2: Policy and Regulation Summary

Attachment 3: Preliminary Project Renderings

**APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:

Wendee Lang, Development Planner

This report was reviewed by:

Mike Watson, Acting Manager of Development Planning

Demian Reuter, Acting Senior Manager of Climate Action, Planning and Development

This report was approved by:

Jackie Teed, Acting Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development

Lisa Leblanc, Acting Chief Administrative Officer