

# **REPORT**

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

**To:** New Westminster Design Panel  
**From:** Wendee Lang, Development Planner  
**Date:** June 27, 2023  
**File:** REZ00230  
SDP00233  
**Item #:** 2023-441  
**Subject:** **808 Royal Avenue – Rezoning Application and Special Development Permit for 20-storey Academic and Student Housing Development**

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

***THAT*** the New Westminster Design Panel review the design submission and provide comments for applicant and staff consideration; and

***THAT*** the New Westminster Design Panel consider a motion of support or a motion requesting revisions to the project and re-presentation to the Panel.

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### **PURPOSE**

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.

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the New Westminster Design Panel (NWDP) in regards to the overall project design, and to receive comments from the Panel, with special consideration given to items noted in the Design Considerations section of this report.

### **POLICY AND REGULATIONS**

#### *Downtown Community Plan Land Use Designation*

The subject site is located within the Tower Precinct in the Downtown Community Plan (DCP), which is intended to continue its development as a high-density employment and

housing area. Building on its current employment base and on the presence of the SkyTrain, this precinct is well positioned to capture region-serving office employers seeking to locate in New Westminster. The DCP envisions and encourages the expansion of existing anchor institutions in the downtown, such as Douglas College, and expects these institutions to continue to play a role in the downtown being a regional destination.

The subject site is designated “School / Institutional” in the DCP. This designation allows for:

- Public, private and post-secondary schools;
- Public institutional uses, such as libraries, law courts and civic facilities; and
- Parks.

As the site is designated for “School / Institutional” it is not included in the Density Bonus Phase 2 Policy.

The form of the proposed development is generally consistent with the “School / Institutional” land use designation in the DCP.

#### *Development Permit Area*

The site is within the D1 Downtown Development and Special Development Permit Area (DPA). The DPA seeks to support Downtown’s Regional Town Centre designation in the Regional Growth Strategy. This DPA outlines objectives and guidelines for:

- The form and character of commercial, multifamily, institutional and intensive residential development.
- Protection of the natural environment, its ecosystems and biological diversity.
- Revitalization of an area in which a commercial use is permitted.
- Objectives to promote energy and water conservation and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

A Special Development Permit (SDP) is required before doing any work that would result in development or alteration to the lands or exterior of buildings on the lands within this portion of the Downtown. SDPs function similar to a regular Development Permit, but under the New Westminster Redevelopment Act, the City was given special authority to regulate urban redevelopment within this area. SDPs can be issued by the Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development.

#### *Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines and Master Plan*

The Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines and Master Plan provides guidance in achieving a high quality, cohesive Downtown that honours the historical and cultural context of New Westminster. This document serves as a toolkit to inform public realm improvements both on- and off-site within the Downtown area.

The subject site is located within the Tower Precinct in the Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines. The guidelines describe this area as follows:

*The Tower Precinct will continue to develop as a highly urbanized component of New Westminster's Downtown with the SkyTrain Station at its core. Serving as a regional destination, it is anchored by existing and developing education and commercial destinations, including Douglas College, Plaza 88 and the retail mall at the foot of Royal Ave. It is anticipated that the area will accommodate a significant share of Downtown's residential and commercial growth.*

### *Zoning*

The site is currently zoned Downtown Mixed Use Districts (C-4) which permits a mixed use building with a height of 40 feet (12.2 metres) and a total density of 5.2 Floor Space Ratio (FSR). A rezoning to a site-specific, Comprehensive Development (CD) zone would be required to facilitate the proposed form of development.

### *Downtown Transportation Plan*

Eighth Street carries a high volume of pedestrians, is part of the frequent transit network, and is a key connector to the Downtown and historic Columbia Street. It also serves as a front door to New Westminster SkyTrain Station, Shops at New West, and is the main pedestrian connection to the newly constructed Anvil Centre and Tower, and Douglas College's two existing campuses.

The Downtown Transportation Plan (DTP) identifies Eighth Street as a Complete Street with enhanced pedestrian amenities, dedicated cycling facilities, road diet and reallocation of road space, greening and activation, and transit priority opportunities. The Eighth Street and Royal Avenue intersection is a gateway to Downtown, and Royal Avenue is part of the Major Road Network with connections to the Pattullo Bridge.

The Royal Avenue corridor experiences peak period congestion and delays, and as a designated truck route carries a significant amount of regional traffic. Considerations within the DTP prioritize access and crossings for the most vulnerable road users by exploring measures to improve comfort and safety at the intersections.

### **PAST APPLICATIONS**

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)

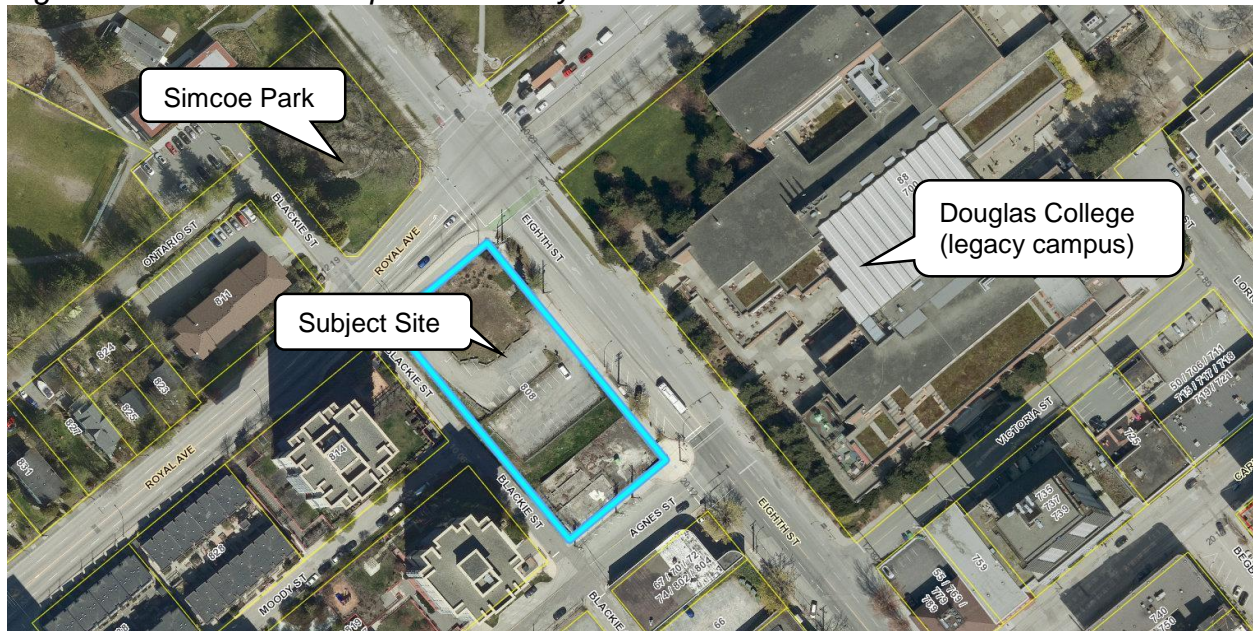
## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Site Characteristics and Context**

The subject site is 3,641.2 sq. m. (39,193.6 sq. ft.) and is located in the Downtown neighbourhood, approximately 175 m. (574 ft.) from New Westminster SkyTrain Station. It is bounded by Royal Avenue, Eighth Street, Agnes Street and Blackie Street. In addition to being a Complete Street, Eighth Street is a Frequent Transit Network route, and is designated a Great Street by the Master Transportation Plan. The site is approximately 130 m. (426.5 ft.) from Phase 2 of the Agnes Street Greenway on Carnarvon Street, with future links to the BC Parkway and Central Valley Greenway on Columbia Street and Quayside Drive.

The lot is steeply sloped, with an approximate grade change of 15 m. (49.2 ft.) from the northeast corner to the southwest corner, and largely vacant. North of the site, across Royal Avenue are two City-owned parks: Simcoe Park and Toronto Place Park. West of the site are several 15 to 16 storey multiple-unit residential towers. Development applications for two sites southwest of the subject site, across Agnes Street, have been submitted and propose multiple-unit residential buildings of between 33 to 44 storeys. A site context map is provided below.

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



### **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. While the project was initially proposed as concrete and encapsulated mass timber construction, the current proposal is entirely concrete and steel construction.

The building's main entrance would be through a privately-owned, publicly accessible plaza at Eighth Street at Agnes Street, while primary access to the residential units would be from Eighth Street. Academic and office spaces would be located on the building's lower levels, and residential space concentrated on the eighth storey and above. Common outdoor amenity space is proposed in the form of two roof decks.

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. The applicant's design rationale, architectural drawings, and landscape drawings are attached as Attachment 1.

### Project Statistics

|                    | Permitted / Required Under C-4 Zoning | Proposed                             |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Lot Area           | -                                     | 3,641.2 sq. m. (39,193.6 sq. ft.)    |
| Site Frontage      | -                                     | 40.2 m. (132.0 ft.)                  |
| Average Lot Depth  | -                                     | 90.5 m. (296.9 ft.)                  |
| Total FSR          | 5.2 FSR                               | 9.6 FSR                              |
| Building Height    | 12.19 m. (40.0 ft.)                   | 72.36 m. (237.4 ft.)                 |
| Residential Units  | -                                     | 244 student housing units (369 beds) |
| Off-Street Parking |                                       |                                      |
| Residential        | 81 <sup>1</sup>                       | 18                                   |
| Institutional      | 35 <sup>1</sup>                       | 35                                   |
| Loading            | 1                                     | 2                                    |
| Total              | 117                                   | 55                                   |
| Bicycle Parking    |                                       |                                      |
| Long-term          | 75                                    | 105                                  |
| Short-term         | 63                                    | 18                                   |

<sup>1</sup> Reflects reductions for transit proximity, bicycle storage, and end-of-trip facilities

### Student Housing

Per the applicant's proposal, 369 beds are proposed across 244 single-, double-, and four-bed units. Single and double units would be provided on an L-shaped floorplate with shared kitchen and lounge/study space on each residential floor. Additional large common spaces, the student housing roof deck, and the four-bed typology would be

located on separate floors. With regard to assignment of units, the applicant has indicated that priority consideration would be provided to first year students and those new to Douglas College (family units are not proposed).

### **Vehicle Access and Parking**

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.

### **DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

The applicant's design rationale is included in Attachment 1. Staff would appreciate comments from the NWDP on the proposed development, including how it responds to the Downtown Community Plan DPA Design Guidelines and the Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines and Masterplan (DBPRDGM). Some items identified by staff for consideration by the Panel are detailed below. Staff ask that consideration be given to the visibility of the project from both near and far distances, given the visual prominence of the site.

### **Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines**

Comments from the panel on how the proposal meets the Downtown Community Plan DPA Design Guidelines and the DBPRDGM would be appreciated, with a focus on the following items.

#### *Overall Scale, Massing, and Tower Floorplate*

The proposed density (9.6 FSR) and height (72.4 m. / 237.5 ft.) are consistent with the scale of development anticipated for the Tower Precinct. While the proposed massing is considered typical of institutional buildings, it would differ from adjacent high density, "point tower and podium" developments. Taller than typical streetwalls are proposed, as is an L-shaped tower floorplate (1,241 sq. m. / 13,358.0 sq. ft. gross floor area), which is significantly larger than adjacent tower floorplates.

Efforts have been made to reduce the perceived massing 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;
- Stepping back Levels 10 to 20 from Agnes Street; and,
- Providing minor variations in height between portions of the building fronting Eighth Street and Royal Avenue.

Comments from the Panel regarding the overall scale and massing of the building, as well as its integration into the surrounding context, would be appreciated.

### Exterior Expression, Building Materials, and Colour Palette

The DBPRDGM direct projects to use building materials and architectural elements that reinforce or celebrate the overall character of the precinct in which the building is located.

The proposed project delineates a podium-type ground level expression through use of textured stone, glazing, and material bands. Upper building levels are articulated through the use of dark and light panels of varied depths and use of horizontal bands intended to delineate breaks in the overall massing. Colour is applied to levels 5 to 10 on portions of the Eighth Street and Agnes Street elevations, to differentiate offices from academic and student housing uses. The fenestration pattern is shifted between these uses to provide further differentiation.

Both the Downtown Community Plan DPA Design Guidelines and the DBPRDGM call for high quality building materials, such as stone, brick and concrete, particularly at street level. The applicant has provided a material and colour palette that includes glass (vision and spandrel); charcoal grey stone; wood; and, aluminum composite panels in white, charcoal, dark grey, and rust/ochre.

### *Building Conclusion*

The DCPDG call for consideration of the building conclusion (the top several floors, roof and mechanical systems) through special consideration of the form, massing, and detail for the top several floors and rooftop. Per the guidelines, rooftop mechanical and service equipment should be screened in a way that incorporates it as an integral part of the building's architectural design.

The applicant has proposed a material change at the north building corner to emphasize the verticality of the tower and conclude the Royal Avenue portion of the building. Rooftop mechanical elements visible from Eighth Street and Agnes Street are proposed to be screened using dark, perforated metal panels.

### *Streetscape Design and Public Realm*

The subject site has frontages on Royal Avenue, Eighth Street, Agnes Street and Blackie Street. The DBPRDGM directs projects to create a strong relationship between ground level uses and the street by siting buildings in close proximity to the property line; maximizing building transparency, as well as entrances and exits; and avoiding at-grade uses with low levels of visual interest.

Comments from the Panel on how the project addresses each of these frontages is requested. Additional detail regarding the proposed approach to Eighth Street and Agnes Street, the primary pedestrian frontages, is provided below.



### Eighth Street

The proposed building includes a primary entrance to the college at Agnes Street and Eighth Street, and a primary residential entrance near Royal Avenue at Eighth Street. To help activate the street, the project proposes to locate more active uses at grade, including the cafeteria/student lounge, marketplace, and breakout and other study spaces. A podium-type ground level expression is delineated through use of glazing and textured stone.

Consistent with the DTP, Eighth Street would be improved with a 3.0 m. (9.8 ft.) sidewalk, 2.0 m. (6.6 ft.) bike lane, and street trees and lighting. Additional landscaping is proposed between the building face and sidewalk to help soften the building edge.

### Agnes Street

The DBPRDGM identifies a corner plaza at the north side of Agnes Street at Eighth Street, intended as a resting and meeting place. The proposed plaza, which would be privately owned and publicly accessible, would include seating areas, low plantings, and stairs and ramps to help moderate the grade and provide primary access to the campus.

A passenger pick-up/drop-off zone is proposed on Agnes Street in front of the plaza, where grades are at their most moderate. An accessible ramp is provided through the plaza from the property line to the building entrance. A 3.0 m. (9.8 ft.) sidewalk is proposed along Agnes Street.

### **Rooftop Amenity Areas**

The project proposes a student housing roof deck accessed from Level 8 (378.6 sq. m. / 4,075.2 sq. ft.), and an academic roof deck accessible from Level 12 (1,066.4 sq. m. / 11,478.6 sq. ft.). Use of the former would be limited to students in residence, while the latter would be accessible to all students and staff. Both are proposed to include large and small gathering areas, and would be surfaced in wood composite decking and pavers, with planted areas.

### **Questions for the Design Panel's Consideration**

In addition to seeking general comments from the NWDP in regard to the overall design of the proposed development and the above-mentioned design considerations, staff seeks input from the NWDP in regard to:

1. The overall scale and massing of the proposed building, including the proposed tower floorplate;
2. Integration of the proposed building into the surrounding context;
3. Exterior expression, building materials and colour palette;
4. Building conclusion and how it is tied into the overall building design;



5. Streetscape and public realm design, including the Agnes Street plaza design; and,
6. The quality, functionality and overall program of the proposed outdoor common roof decks and landscaping features.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Applicant's Architectural and Landscape Submission Package

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:  
Wendee Lang, Development Planner

This report was approved by:  
Mike Watson, Acting Manager of Development Planning