

# REPORT

## *Climate Action, Planning and Development*

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** September 11, 2023

**From:** Serena Trachta, Acting Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development  
**File:** REZ00230  
SDP00233

**Item #:** 2023-567

**Subject:** **Rezoning and Special Development Permit – 808 Royal Avenue: Application Consideration**

---

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the application to rezone 808 Royal Avenue be considered and no Public Hearing held, in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.

**THAT** notification be circulated in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.

---

### **PURPOSE**

This report provides Council with information on the development proposal for 808 Royal Avenue, requests that the rezoning application be considered, and that no Public Hearing be held following circulation of notice in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.

### **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, to which the Provincial Government has contributed \$202.3 million in funding. A total of 244 student housing units are proposed. The project would exceed the City's building performance requirements, and would target LEED Gold certification and Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Gold.

Applicant-led and City-led public consultation has been undertaken for the project, and the applicant has responded to community feedback. The proposal is considered to be consistent with City policy, Council Strategic Priorities and the Official Community Plan

(OCP), and the applicant has responded to public and staff feedback. As such, staff recommend that the application to rezone the subject site be considered, and no Public Hearing held, in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.

**BACKGROUND**

**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 and the Tower Precinct within the Downtown Community Plan (DCP). The application is generally consistent with the DCP, Economic Development Plan, 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.

**Douglas College**

Douglas College is a public post-secondary institution, which receives funding from the Provincial Government. The Government is responsible for setting the legislative, regulatory and public policy frameworks in which public post-secondary institutions operate, and which inform the College’s mandate as defined by the *College and Institute Act*. The College is annually provided a Mandate Letter from the Province, which details the Government and College’s respective accountabilities, roles and responsibilities.

**PROJECT PROPOSAL**

The subject site is located in the Downtown neighbourhood, approximately 175 m. (574 ft.) from the New Westminster SkyTrain Station. The development would include a mix of academic space and student housing for Douglas College, and drawings indicate a density of 10.53 Floor Space Ratio (FSR). The proposed building is 20 storeys and includes approximately 24,593.8 sq. m. (264,725.5 sq. ft.) of academic space (11 storeys), and 244 student housing units (13,448.5 sq. m. / 144,758.4 sq. ft.) (13 storeys). Academic spaces would be located on the building’s lower levels, and residential space concentrated on the eighth storey and above.

The residential component of the project would target Step 4 of the BC Energy Step Code, and all building systems would be electric (except backup generators). A total of 54 off-street parking stalls and 2 loading spaces are proposed in an underground parkade, with access from Blackie Street. A total of 105 long-term and 18 short-term bicycle parking stalls, as well as end-of-trip facilities, are also proposed. Additional site context information and project statistics are included in Attachment 2, and the applicant’s submission materials in Attachment 4.

**DISCUSSION**

This project would support a number of Council’s strategic priorities related to the local economy, housing, transit-oriented development, and climate action. Education is a key sector in New Westminster’s local economy and providing additional space for academic and student housing uses is consistent with the Economic Development Plan. The proposal also supports the City’s objective of creating employment-related floor space, particularly within the Tower and SkyTrain Precincts of the DCP. Analysis of the proposed development has been summarized below with additional detail provided in Attachment 3.

**Student Housing**

The project would be New Westminster’s first purpose-built student housing development and is aligned with the Provincial Government’s Homes for People Action Plan (HFPAP). As noted in the HFPAP, student housing is expected to create “much needed space in tight rental markets for other renters in the broader community.” The College has indicated that housing fees for the proposed units would be aligned with other public post-secondary institutions in Metro Vancouver, and finalized at time of opening. Units would be secured as rental tenure through the site’s zoning.

**Streetscape Activation**

The College has indicated that on an average day during the Fall and Winter semesters, the legacy campus at 700 Royal Avenue hosts a combined 7,000 students and employees. The College anticipates that the proposed development would host approximately 3,500 additional students and staff during these semesters, including the 368 students who would reside on-site, and that students would move regularly between the two campuses. While the campus decreases in size during the Summer semester, the College anticipates student housing to be fully occupied throughout the year.

Consideration has been given to locating active academic and common spaces at-grade, along the site’s Eighth Street and Agnes Street frontages. These uses include the primary building entrances; a contemporary and publicly-accessible cafeteria/student lounge and marketplace; and event space, intended for small conferences and workshops. Similar to the legacy campus, these spaces could be used by external organizations and community groups.

**Building Height, Density and Massing**

The site’s existing zoning permits an overall base density of 5.2 Floor Space Ratio (FSR) and a maximum height of 12.19 m. (40 ft.). The project proposes a total FSR of 10.53 and a height of 75.34 m. (247.2 ft.). This equates to an increase of 5.33 FSR and 63.15 m. (207.2 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. Massing is driven

by the site size, high performance building requirements, and the functional and operational requirements of academic and student housing uses. As a result, taller than typical streetwalls and large, L-shaped floorplates are proposed. However, the following interventions have been used to reduce the perceived building scale:

- A 3 to 4 storey podium-type ground level expression has been developed through the building’s materiality;
- Material patterns, recessed glazing and key hole elements have been used to separate building masses;
- A corner element at Royal Avenue and Eighth Street has been integrated to add verticality;
- The building steps back from Agnes Street to help develop a pedestrian scale; and,
- The tallest masses are pushed to Royal Avenue and Eighth Street to provide space between existing developments to the west.

Staff considers the project to be generally consistent with the intent of the Downtown Development Permit Area design guidelines and the Downtown Building and Public Realm Design Guidelines and Master Plan.

**Off-Street Parking**

Per Zoning Bylaw off-street parking requirements, this development is required to provide 81 resident spaces, 35 institutional spaces, and 1 loading space. The project proposes 18 resident spaces, 36 institutional spaces, and 2 loading spaces, all of which would be provided on-site. Any excess demand would be accommodated in the College’s off-site parking facilities at 700 Carnarvon Street and 700 Royal Avenue.

The applicant’s proposal is supportable considering: 1) staff review of the applicant’s comprehensive transportation study; 2) shared parking demand between the College’s on- and off-site parking facilities; 3) provision of accessible parking in accordance with Zoning Bylaw requirements; and 4) provision of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures including: discounted transit passes (U-Pass) for students, and provision of bicycle parking and end-of-trip facilities.

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**Applicant-led Consultation**

Applicant-led consultation included an online survey, two open houses (one virtual and one in-person), and a project website. Residents within 100 meters of the project were notified of opportunities to provide feedback. A total of 26 people attended the online open house, 30 people attended the in-person open house, and 70 survey responses were received. Attachment 5 includes a description of the consultation process and all received feedback.

Survey feedback indicated strong support for the project's sustainability measures (71%), new student housing units (69%), and expanded academic space (67%). Common themes among responses also included support for the improved Eighth Street streetscape; mixed feedback regarding building design, density and height; and concern regarding potential traffic impacts. Staff notes that the proposed building massing is considered typical of institutional buildings, and that density and height are consistent with the scale of development anticipated for the Tower Precinct.

### **City-led Consultation**

City-led consultation included a project website and online survey, published on Be Heard New West. Residents within 100 m. of the project were notified of the survey. In total, 20 survey responses were received. Approximately 10 respondents felt the proposed development would fit well or somewhat well into the Downtown neighbourhood, while 8 felt it would not fit well. Feedback focused on support for student housing; concern regarding potential traffic, parking and construction impacts; and, mixed feedback regarding the proposed density and height.

Staff notes that the proposed scale and location supports Council's strategic priority of locating more homes near transit. The project's close proximity to rapid transit and cycling routes, provision of TDM measures and the co-location of housing and academic uses, are anticipated to encourage sustainable travel choices. All feedback received by the City is included in Attachment 6.

### **New Westminster Design Panel**

The application was presented to the New Westminster Design Panel (NWDP) on June 27, 2023 (minutes in Attachment 7). After reviewing the proposal and providing comments, the Committee expressed its general support for the project to proceed, with comments addressed.

### **Applicant Response and Revisions**

The applicant has made the following changes to their proposal. These include:

- Adding deeper, horizontal breaks to the façade to help reduce the perceived building scale;
- Insetting the coloured panels along the façade, to help soften the building's face; and,
- Adding additional planting along Eighth Street.

Staff considers the above changes reasonable responses to community feedback. The applicant's response to feedback is included in Attachment 5.

**REVIEW PROCESS**

The development application review process for this application is as follows:

1. Preliminary report to Council (May 29, 2023);
2. Applicant-led public consultation, including dissemination of information through the Downtown Residents Association (June 2023);
3. Presentation to the New Westminster Design Panel (June 27, 2023);
4. City-led public consultation, including creation of a Be Heard New West webpage and survey (August 2023);
5. Comprehensive report to Council (**WE ARE HERE**);

Anticipated next steps:

6. Issuance of notice that no Public Hearing held;
7. Council consideration of First, Second and Third Reading (September 25, 2023);
8. Completion of adoption requirements;
9. Council consideration of adoption of the Zoning Amendment Bylaw;
10. Issuance of the Development Permit by the Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development.

Staff has recommend that Council consider waiving a Public Hearing as the proposal is consistent with the City’s principles for determining when a project does not require a Public Hearing, as follows:

- The application is largely consistent with City policy and/or Council Strategic Priorities, and/or exceeds City policy in support of Council Strategic Priorities;
- The application responds to public and staff feedback, even if significant, to the satisfaction of the Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development; and;
- The application is consistent with the Official Community Plan (OCP), per provincially legislated requirements.

**FINAL ADOPTION REQUIREMENTS**

A list of final adoption requirements is included in Attachment 9.

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The project would support the growth of New Westminster’s local economy through development of the educational sector. Consistent with the City’s approach for institutional and secured rental projects, a Voluntary Amenity Contribution would not be secured for this project.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

The City has a project-based team approach for reviewing development applications. A staff-led project team was assigned for reviewing this project consisting of staff from Engineering (Servicing and Transportation), Fire, Electrical, Parks and Recreation, and Climate Action, Planning and Development (Building, Planning, Trees, and Heritage) Departments who provided comments throughout the development review process.

**OPTIONS**

The following options are available for Council’s consideration:

- 1. That Council consider Zoning Amendment Bylaw (808 Royal Avenue) No. 8416, 2023 and no Public Hearing held, in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.
- 2. That notification be circulated in accordance with the *Local Government Act*.
- 3. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends Options 1 and 2.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment 1: Zoning Amendment Bylaw (808 Royal Avenue) No. 8416, 2023
- Attachment 2: Background Information
- Attachment 3: Additional Project Discussion and Analysis
- Attachment 4: Applicant Submission Materials
- Attachment 5: Applicant-led Consultation Summary and Response
- Attachment 6: City-led Consultation Summary
- Attachment 7: Extract of June 27, 2023 NWDP Meeting Minutes
- Attachment 8: Engineering Servicing Memo
- Attachment 9: Rezoning Adoption Requirements

**APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:  
Wendee Lang, Development Planner

This report was reviewed by:  
Michael Watson, Acting Manager, Development Planning  
Demian Rueter, Acting Senior Manager, Climate Action, Planning and Development

This report was approved by:  
Serena Trachta, Acting Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development  
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer