

REPORT

Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: October 20, 2025

From: Jackie Teed, Director
Planning and Development
File: #2700924

Item #: 2025-295

Subject: **Rezoning and Special Development Permit Applications: 801 Columbia Street**

RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT staff process the applications generally as outlined in the report titled “Rezoning and Special Development Permit Applications: 801 Columbia Street” dated October 20, 2025 from the Director of Planning and Development.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with information regarding Rezoning and Special Development Permit Applications for 801 Columbia Street and seek direction to review the applications as outlined in this report.

SUMMARY

Rezoning, and Special Development Permit applications have been received for a 42-storey mixed-use tower at 801 Columbia Street. The currently vacant site is located at the north-west corner of Columbia Street and Eighth Street. The applications propose 303 secured market rental units, two levels of retail space, and a publicly accessible elevator connecting Columbia Street to the Shops at New West and the SkyTrain Station concourse. The project also includes private rooftop amenity areas and public realm improvements.

The site is located within Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Area, Tier 1 and is approximately 60 metres (197 feet) from New Westminster SkyTrain Station. No residential vehicle parking is proposed, consistent with TOD Area legislation, though accessible and commercial parking is required. A total of 482 bicycle parking spaces are proposed, which is below bylaw standards, and staff will continue to work with the applicant to address bicycle parking supply and Transportation Demand Management measures.

The proposed development is consistent with key City policies; address projected housing needs; and is consistent with the Interim Development Review Framework. Staff recommend that the application be reviewed as outlined in the Application Review Process section of this report including further exploration of potential public benefits provided through the application given the scale of the proposed development, such as a publicly accessible washroom and enhancements to the public realm along Columbia and Eighth Streets.

Given the proximity to the SkyTrain guideway, the applicant will be required to coordinate with TransLink through the Adjacent and Integrated Development (AID) process to finalize design, construction, and operational requirements.

BACKGROUND

Preliminary Application Review

A Preliminary Application Review (PAR01440) was submitted on March 29, 2023, and was reviewed by staff through the interdepartmental development review process. The preliminary concept included a 21-storey mixed-use building with 143 residential strata units, 904 square metres of commercial space, no vehicle parking, and a public connection to the New Westminster SkyTrain Station, with a proposed Floor Space Ratio (FSR) of 14.91.

At that time, the City encouraged the applicant to explore secured market rental housing as an alternative to strata tenure, as this would better align with Council's priorities and provide access to incentives such as additional density and exemptions from amenity and inclusionary housing requirements. Staff also emphasized the importance of delivering key public benefits, including provision of a public connection to the SkyTrain and Shops at New West concourse, consideration of a publicly accessible washroom, and enhancements to the public realm along Columbia and Eighth Streets.

The current application reflects a substantial increase in both height and density compared to the preliminary concept. The initial submission was for a strata development with Density Bonus contribution, however following discussion with staff, the applicant has now elected to proceed with the project as a 100% secured market rental development.

Policy and Regulations

The subject site is designated *Columbia Historic Mixed Use* in the Official Community Plan (OCP). On non-heritage sites greater than 1,214 square metres, the OCP enables buildings up to 12 storeys. For smaller sites, such as the subject property at 809 square metres, no specific height limit applies.

The property is zoned C-4 (Downtown Mixed Use Districts – High Density), which permits a maximum Floor Space Ratio (FSR) of 5.2, of which no more than 1.2 FSR may be residential. The proposed development, at 42 storeys and 32.5 FSR,

significantly exceeds current zoning allowances and therefore requires a rezoning to a site-specific Comprehensive Development (CD) District, as well as a Special Development Permit (SDP) to address form and character, are required.

The subject site is located within 200 metres of the New Westminster SkyTrain Station and is therefore within a Tier 1 TOD Area. In TOD Areas, residential vehicle parking cannot be required, although accessible and commercial parking requirements remain subject to the Zoning Bylaw and the BC Building Code.

Interim Development Review Framework

As outlined in the Interim Development Review Framework (section 2.a.ii), and consistent with past practice, amenity charges and inclusionary housing do not apply to development proposals which are 100% secured market rental.

Further policy and regulation context is provided in **Attachment 1**.

Site Characteristics, Context and Heritage

The subject site is located at the Columbia northwest corner of Columbia Street and Eighth Street. The lot is approximately 809 square metres (8,709 square feet) in area, with a frontage of 17.6 metres along Columbia Street and 40.2 metres along Eighth Street. The site is vacant and relatively flat.

The property is immediately adjacent to the Shops at New West, which provides direct concourse access to the New Westminster SkyTrain Station. It is approximately 60 metres from the New Westminster SkyTrain Station and is served by frequent bus routes along both Columbia and Eighth Streets. Eighth Street is identified as a Great Street in the Master Transportation Plan. The site is within walking distance of major civic and institutional anchors, including Douglas College, the Provincial Law Courts, and Anvil Centre.

Although the subject site does not contain any protected heritage resources, it is situated within the Columbia Street Historic Precinct and in proximity to several designated heritage buildings. The proposed development is expected to respond to this historic context through its massing and through architectural elements that reflect the surrounding urban fabric.

The surrounding block includes a mix of heritage buildings and newer mixed-use developments. Recent and approved applications in the area include high-rise towers of up to 53 storeys.

Additional site context information, including details related to surrounding land use, transit proximity, and area character, is included in **Attachment 2**.

PROPOSAL

The applicant currently proposes a 42-storey mixed-use development with a total FSR of 32.5, of which 24.8 FSR would be secured market rental residential and 0.7 FSR would be retail space. The current proposal includes 303 market rental units with the following unit mix: one studio unit (0.3%), 210 one-bedroom units (69.6%), 62 two-bedroom units (20.5%), and 30 three-bedroom units (9.9%). This results in 92 units (30.4%) with two or three bedrooms. The proposed unit mix does not meet the new Family Friendly Housing Policy required but does meet the Family-Friendly Housing Policy for secured rental projects that were in effect at the time of the original application submission.

The building would consist of a two-storey podium with retail at grade and on the second level, including an upper level restaurant patio facing Columbia Street. Residential units would be located above the podium in a tower format, with private rooftop amenities including landscaped seating and play areas. A publicly accessible elevator is proposed, connecting Columbia Street to the New Westminster SkyTrain Station concourse. Public realm improvements along Columbia and Eighth Streets would include widened sidewalks, street trees, and integrated public art to reinforce the historic character of the Columbia Street precinct.

No residential vehicle parking is proposed, consistent with the site’s Tier 1 TOD Area designation, where residential parking is not required. A total of 482 bicycle parking spaces are proposed (16 short-term and 466 long-term), which is 65 long-term stalls below Zoning Bylaw requirements. Commercial and accessible parking remain subject to Zoning Bylaw and BC Building Code provisions. One commercial loading space is included, with compliance to be confirmed through the review process. Staff would continue to work with the applicant to address commercial parking supply, expand bicycle parking, and strengthen Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures.

Public realm improvements would include widened sidewalks, new street trees, and integrated art and design features that complement and reinforce the historic character of the Columbia Street precinct.

DISCUSSION

Overall Evaluation

As further detailed in the following sections, the proposed development is consistent with key City policies; addresses projected housing needs; and is consistent with the Interim Development Review Framework. Staff recommend that the application be further reviewed as outlined in the Application Review Section of this report.

Height and Density

The site is designated *Columbia Historic Mixed Use* in the OCP, which permits buildings up to 12 storeys on non-heritage properties greater than 1,214 square metres. As the subject site is 809 square metres, building height is not limited by the OCP. The tower exceeds both the current zoning requirements and Provincial TOD Area height and density provisions (20 storeys / 5.0 FSR).

Drawings indicate that the 42-storey tower would be approximately 137 metres (449 feet) in height, with a typical tower floorplate of 644 square metres (6,930 square feet), which is consistent with the Design Guidelines. A zero lot line condition is proposed for the podium floors, which may require closing windows on the adjacent property. The tower has a 3.0 metre (10 feet) setback from the internal property line, which will limit future development on the adjacent property which is also owned by First Capital.

The proposed development has a high FSR at 32.5 which is the result of a relatively tall building at 42-storeys, on a small lot. The podium levels have nearly 100% site coverage and the tower floorplate is approximately 80% of the site area, which combined yield a very high FSR – for both the City of New Westminster but also the region as a whole. The subject site is located within the Downtown growth area, within a context that includes recently approved towers ranging from 30 to 53 storeys. The 42-storey tower is proposed to serve as transition between the taller towers at Columbia Square and The Shops at New West, and the smaller-scale Columbia Historic District. While the proposed FSR is high, the tower must be evaluated within the overall site and density context of the Shops at New West, of which it forms a part.

Given the scale of the proposed development, and the high profile location on Columbia Street, warrant further consideration of community benefits to be evaluated through the application review process.

Housing

As per the [City of New Westminster Interim Housing Needs Report \(2024 – 2044\)](#) (“Housing Needs Report”), to meet the 5 year housing need, 3,280 market rental housing units (656 units per year) need to be delivered by 2029. This is about twice the need when compared to market ownership units (1,647 units / 330 units per year) over the same period. The proposed development would provide 303 units (9.2%) towards the projected need. Rental tenure will be secured through a Housing Agreement for the life of the building or a minimum of 60 years.

The proposed development meets the updated family friendly housing requirements in regards to number of two- and three-bedroom units with 62 two-bedroom and 30 three-bedroom units for a total of 92 family-friendly units (30.4%).

Retail Space

The application proposes 554 square metres (5,964 square feet) of active retail space at grade and a restaurant with patio space on the second level facing Columbia Street. The retail component is designed to integrate with the adjacent Shops at New Westminster, reinforcing the commercial continuity along Columbia Street and supporting the objectives of the City's Retail Strategy.

Staff and the applicant have also had exploratory conversations about the potential for community amenity space within the ground level of the project. The applicant has expressed concern about project viability given the potential loss of retail revenue when combined with the shift to secured rental tenure.

Parking and TDM

No residential vehicle parking is proposed, consistent with Tier 1 TOD Area designation. Commercial and accessible parking, which are required, have not been provided and will require a Development Variance Permit (DVP). One commercial loading space is included, meeting bylaw requirements.

The project proposes 482 bicycle parking spaces (466 long-term and 16 short-term), meeting the short-term requirement but falling 65 long-term stalls below bylaw standards.

Given the scale and density of the development, staff have emphasized the importance of strengthening TDM measures. To address this, the applicant has proposed a publicly accessible elevator providing a direct connection between Columbia Street and the SkyTrain concourse. This would create a shorter and more accessible route to the station entrance, reducing travel distance by approximately 75 metres and ensuring universal accessibility. This elevator would be owned and operated by the property owner, with a covenant for public access.

Staff and the applicant have also had exploratory conversations about the potential for addition of a public stairway to improve access to the SkyTrain concourse. The applicant has expressed concern about project viability given the anticipated impact to lower level program space if a stairway is incorporated in the place of an elevator.

SkyTrain Station Integration

The site is directly adjacent to Columbia Station, and the applicant will be required to coordinate with TransLink through the Adjacent and Integrated Development (AID) process to confirm design, construction, and operational requirements. Staff will continue to work with the applicant and TransLink to refine the proposal and ensure it delivers an improved, universally accessible connection to the SkyTrain station.

Public Benefit

The applicant has confirmed that the project is being advanced as a 100% secured market rental development. In accordance with the Secured Market Rental Housing Policy, such projects are exempt from the Inclusionary Housing Policy and the Interim Density Bonus Policy. As such, no cash or in-kind community amenity contributions are required, provided the rental tenure is secured through a Housing Agreement for the life of the building or a minimum of 60 years.

The application proposes secured rental tenure, active commercial frontages, public realm improvements, and a publicly accessible connection to the SkyTrain concourse as its primary public benefits. Further discussion of potential additional benefits is anticipated as the application continues through the review process.

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

The anticipated next steps in the application review process are identified below. These steps are general in nature and may be refined as the project advances:

1. Interdepartmental staff review toward a suitable plan of development (COMPLETED);
2. Preliminary report to Council for initial feedback on key issues and direction regarding processing of the application (October 20, 2025) **(WE ARE HERE)**;
3. Applicant revision / completion of technical studies / submission of supplemental information (as necessary);
4. Consultation phase, including Applicant-led Open House, Council Committee consultation, stakeholder engagement (as required), and City-led consultation (e.g. Be Heard New West webpage);
5. Final staff comments;
6. Applicant revisions based on Consultation Phase feedback and submission of final draft application;
7. Comprehensive report to Council;
8. Council consideration (bylaw readings));
9. Completion of adoption requirements;
10. Council consideration of adoption of the Zoning Amendment, and issuance of the Special Development Permit.

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

Consistent with the Interim Development Review Framework and Interim Density Bonus Policy, the secured market rental housing proposed in this development would be exempt from Density Bonus contributions.

The application would be exempt from any new Amenity Cost Charges as it qualifies as an in-stream application, which would be consistent with the City's current practice regarding secured rental and amenity contributions. The applicant would be required to provide approximately \$1.5M in Development Cost Charge contributions (based on current Development Cost Charge bylaw rates and prior to any non-residential credits) as rental projects are not exempted from such charges. Other external agency charges would also apply including School Site Acquisition Charges and Metro and TransLink Development Cost Charges.

OPTIONS

The following options are offered for Council consideration:

1. That staff process the application as outlined in the report titled "Rezoning and Special Development Permit Applications: 801 Columbia Street – Preliminary Report" dated October 20, 2025 from the Director of Planning and Development.
2. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Background Information

Attachment 2: Preliminary Project Statistics

APPROVALS

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