

# ATTACHMENT H HEIGHT VARIANCE RATIONALE LETTER

July 29, 2022

City of Nanaimo  
Planning Department  
455 Wallace Street  
Nanaimo, BC V9R 5J6

Attn: Mr. Caleb Horn, Planner, Current Planning

RE: DP# 1248 6985 Island Hwy N, PID 030-901-952 | Height Variance Rationale

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T 604.377.3382 200-8809 Heather Street  
Vancouver BC V6P 3T1  
districtgroup.ca

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project site is located within the area designated as the Woodgrove Urban Node of the Nanaimo Official Community Plan and is designated as a Secondary Urban Centre. The property abuts 6795 Island Highway N to the east, and is located between Island Highway N to the north and Nanaimo Parkway to the south. There are no servicing or infrastructure challenges to be expected with the development of this property. Specifically, our proposal as presented is for the development of the second phase of a purpose-built rental apartment development.

As part of the pre-application process District Group, as the applicant, worked extensively with City staff throughout the site planning stage which began in November 2020 through March 2021. During this time, the applicant and staff discussed multiple configurations. In this case, what was deemed to be the best arrangement on the site was a more compact building form. The proposed buildings are set back from Island Highway N by a landscape buffer that allows the buildings to be visually in and amongst the proposed new landscaping. As is indicated in the development guidelines, parking has been strategically placed in areas that can be shrouded by screening along both the Parkway and the North Island Highway.

## REQUESTED HEIGHT VARIANCE

The application was referred to City of Nanaimo Design Advisory Panel (DAP) on December 9, 2021. At DAP the requested height variance was not only supported by members of the panel, but we were encouraged to extend the height of our buildings above and beyond the proposed heights as this is a Gateway site to the City.

The proposed building heights are in keeping with the intent for mid-rise development in the surrounding area. The additional storey allows for a significant entrance to not only the property, but also to the north part of Nanaimo as this is a significant property and a gateway to the area. Moreover, the requested height variance does not impact the permitted density per the existing zoning. Rather, the additional storey allows for the development to have a more compact and sustainable footprint, which, in turn allows for the site to have increased permeability through the construction of an underground parkade and a decrease in overall site coverage.

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The proposed project conforms with Policy D4.3.40 "Support development forms that contribute to the function of Woodgrove Urban Centre as a mixed-use centre with an integrated mix of residential, commercial, recreational, and cultural components"; as it is a purpose built residential rental community adjacent to commercial services. The proposed development is of high-quality design that contributes to the entry point to North Nanaimo.

The proposal is further supported by OCP Policy D4.3.37 which states typical building heights in Secondary Urban Centres will be between two and 12 storeys. The proposal calls for two 5 storey buildings responds to existing built forms surrounding the property providing an appropriate transition in scale to adjacent buildings. Specifically, phase 1 of this development located at 6975 Island Hwy N, is comprised of three 4 storey buildings with surface parking.

The proposal also conforms with policy D4.3.38 as the proposal is providing 149 rental residential units on a total of 1.17 hectares, contributing to the goal of providing a target density of 200 units per hectare. The project is also supported by Policy D4.3.41 which intends to support development of forms that contribute to the function of Woodgrove Urban Centre as a mixed-use centre with an integrated mix of residential, commercial, recreational, and cultural components (pg 176).

## BENEFITS

### Reduction in Site Coverage

The additional height facilitates one additional level of purpose built rental residential housing. In order to maximize the permitted density based on site area and ensure amenities are available for resident use the proposed project utilizes a compact building form. Without the additional storey, greater site coverage would be required to achieve the same amount of rental housing, required parking, and permitted density based on the parcel area.

### *Underground Parking*

The proposed development has a FAR of 0.99, well below the permitted maximum density of 1.25 FAR. This was intentionally done, through an extensive planning process with municipal planning staff, as the site is uniquely shaped and given the escalating costs, the feasibility of providing more underground parking than what is currently proposed made the project economically unviable. The proposed development strikes a harmonious balance of surface and underground parking to facilitate the needs of the proposed development. The incorporation of an underground parkade beneath each respective building in conjunction with compact building footprints has allowed the site to have more open space which is reflected in Table 1 (below). The table summarizes the three scenarios as presented on page 7 of the enclosed booklet.

## Site Planning Options

Option 1: Maximum density 4 storey building heights	Option 2 Same density as proposed development 4 storey building height	Option 3: Proposed Development: 5 storey building height
Total FAR: 1.25	Total FAR: 1.0	Total FAR: 1.0
Building Footprint Area: 40,300 sf	Building Footprint Area: 31,000 sf	Building Footprint: 25,000 sf
Building Heights: 4 Storeys	Building Heights: 4 Storeys	Building Heights: 5 Storeys
Underground Parking: No	Underground Parking: No	Underground Parking: Yes
Lot Coverage: 31%	Lot Coverage: 24%	Lot Coverage: 19%
Green Space: 7,765 sf	Green Space: 7,765 sf	Green Space: 39,397 sf

Table 1. Development Statistics Based on Building Heights

Please refer to page 7 of the enclosed Height Variance Rationale Booklet for massing studies which clearly illustrate the negative impacts on site coverage created by two 4-storey buildings at a density equivalent to the proposed project.

To achieve density similar to the proposed DP1248 without a height variance, the building footprints would need to increase by 6,000 sf to accommodate the same amount of density. This would result in substantially less green space provided on-site as more site area would be dedicate to building footprints and associated parking (see table 1 above for calculations).

## Sustainability

As stated, increased building height allows for better site permeability which is integral for an effective and efficient Stormwater Management Plan. By achieving the additional density facilitated through the height variance, the project is able to provide the development with a total of 80 underground parking stalls. Without this variance it can be conceived that there would either be a reduction in total unit count, or a reduction in the total amount of greenspace provided on site. Further, the underground parkade facilitates an increase in open space and decrease in lot coverage as presented in table 1 above.

## Permeable Pavers

Without the height variance there would be an overall decrease in the amount of permeability. Shifting away from the use of permeable pavers would lead to a substantial increase in impervious surfaces which, in turn, would decrease the water

retention of soil and vegetation on site. It can be inferred that an increase in runoff from impervious surfaces could create issues such as erosion damage to downstream channels, diminishing the recharge of groundwater and surface run off can transport pollutants commonly found in runoff from impervious surfaces. Our proposal strikes a balance between underground parking and natural ground for surface parking uses in conjunction with the green space provided on site allows for natural permeation of ground water through the use of permeable pavers and landscape areas.

All surface parking stalls that are provided in excess of the required parking ratios are proposed to be permeable pavers. Permeable pavers provide substantial benefits in regards to quantity and quality of stormwater runoff as permeable pavement catches precipitation and surface run off and stores it in a reservoir which allows for infiltration into the soils below. The use of pavers helps to re-establish a more natural hydrological balance and reduces runoff volume by trapping and slowly releasing precipitation into the ground instead of allowing it to flow into storm drains reducing strain on municipal infrastructure while recharging groundwater.

### **Additional On-Site Amenities**

The compact building footprint allows for the programming of additional on-site amenities that are proximal to buildings located in both Phase 1 and Phase 2. By increasing building height we are able to decrease the footprint of buildings to achieve the same amount of density (see page 7 of enclosed booklet). The same level of outdoor amenity cannot be provided, neither in quantum or quality should the proposed buildings be limited to four storeys.

District has spent a tremendous amount of time and effort to find as balanced an approach as possible to having on site amenities and practical parking requirements. As discussed with City Staff, we have real time parking counts given that Phase 1 of the development is occupied (6975 Island Hwy N) and the property management company provides us with updated parking counts regularly. When driving by the subject property, many cars are currently parked as an overflow parking area as the Phase 1 parking requirements, which meet Bylaw Parking requirements do not satisfy realistic parking demands of rental housing in North Nanaimo.

### ***Connectivity***

Pathways have been designed so as to allow for the free and clear movement of pedestrians between various amenity areas located on site and connect to Phase 1 of the development. Further, the entrance of the site has a sidewalk which provides circulation to the surrounding commercial developments and essential services located throughout the Parkway.

### ***Landscape Plantings, Park Expansion, and Dog Park***

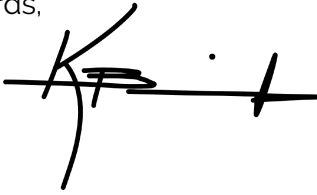
As part of Phase 1 Development, a park was constructed on the phase 2 lands to the benefit of phase 1 residents as there was no certainty in terms of timing of phase 2. Working with staff throughout the design process, we have reconfigured our surface parking in a manner that allows for the park area to be expanded upon from its current form, to accommodate and additional +/- 1500 sf of contiguous open space to benefit residents of Phase 1 and Phase 2. These spaces encourage people to interact outdoors

and escape to pockets of serene landscaping. Through the use of intentional and thoughtful planting selection and placement, a large buffer utilizing a pollinator mix provides not only a buffer between the Nanaimo Parkway and Island Highway N, but also these plantings provide soil health benefits by increasing organic matter, water infiltration, and nutrient availability; they also provide an additional forage source to honey bees and native bees. These plantings are also drought tolerant natural species which is integral to long term sustainability.

Additional to the park expansion, we have included as part of the phase 2 development, a dog park at the southwestern most point of 6985 Island Hwy N. The introduction of this dog run is to provide pet owners with an often overlooked, yet essential amenity in close proximity to their residence. Situating the dog run at this location utilizes a uniquely shaped corner of the property which would otherwise be limited in use, further, the proposed location is proximal to both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the development. The proposed dog park is an amenity that promotes interaction and relationship building and aligns with OCP policy C3.2.23 (page 77).

We trust this information and level of detail provided in our submission package reflects the tremendous amount of thought and effort we have put into the proposal. We look forward to advancing our application to Council for consideration.

Regards,



Kurtis Buick, Development Manager  
District Developments Corp.

cc: Michael Nygren, President + CEO  
Brandon Crema, Executive Vice President + COO