



Quadra Cedar Hill Community Association

August 25, 2020

Planning Department
District of Saanich

RE: Rezoning and development permit application for 3977 Rainbow Street & 812 Sevenoaks Road (DPR00789; REZ00662)

Dear Saanich Planning,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Abstract Development's proposal to rezone three RS-6 zoned single-family lots into a townhouse development with twenty-five, three-storey, two- and three-bedroom units at the above address.

Consultation:

Abstract hosted an open house on November 28, 2019, which was attended by QCHCA's Representatives for the Rainbow area, along with another member of our executive. To its credit, Abstract sent invitations to all residents on Sevenoaks and Canterbury Roads between Rainbow and Nelthorpe Streets, and the open house was very well attended. QCHCA asked to co-host the meeting and for the format to be a presentation followed by a question and answer period as is our preferred process for all development applications. This enables all attendees to hear the same information; to pose, or hear posed, questions and concerns they or their neighbours may have; and to hear the questions and concerns answered for all to hear. Unfortunately, Abstract was not willing to provide a presentation followed by Q&A and proceeded with an open house format where attendees speak individually or in small groups with the proponent's team. Major concerns were raised by nearly all who attended, with the top four objections being pedestrian safety; project density; traffic and parking impacts on Sevenoaks Road, Rainbow Street and Rainbow Park; as well overall neighbourhood access and egress. Further concerns have been expressed re site building.

At and following the meeting, many neighbours expressed deep opposition to the project while others indicated that they could be open to an amended version that addressed the concerns above. However, the revised submission did not include any changes that would reduce the proposed level of density and its effects.

We have also heard from neighbours who weren't notified of the meeting that they feel there should be a further community engagement so that all residents of the Rainbow area can attend and share their thoughts and concerns, as all will be affected by the proposed increase in densification and its effects due to the neighbourhood's limited points of access.

Neighbourhood context:

The Rainbow area where the proposed development is to be built is bounded by McKenzie Avenue on the north, Saanich Road on the east, Highway 17 on the west and the Swan Lake Nature Reserve on the west. It is currently comprised of about 200 homes, mostly single-family dwellings with a few two-family and two multi-family complexes. Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary and Rainbow Park provide welcome green and natural environments that are enjoyed by residents and the wider community. Access and egress into and out of the area are via Nelthorpe and Rainbow. There is no commercial space in the area.

Site and building design:

With respect to project density, the Rainbow neighbourhood consists of about 200 residences, and this proposed development would densify the area by a significant percent. Turning three single-family lots on a neighbourhood street into 25 high-end townhouses was felt by the majority to be much too dense and not consistent with the Rainbow/Swan Lake neighbourhood and OCP. Also, the site coverage seems excessive. A reduction in the number of units would help assuage some of these concerns. Given the proponent is requesting site-specific zoning, what are Saanich guidelines with respect to permitted site coverage and does 60% coverage fit within those guidelines?

One neighbour suggested more cladding material contrast and alternative roof lines to add more interest to the exterior elevations. The overall building height according to the elevations is 44', or equivalent to a four-storey building, and not sympathetic to the architectural character of the neighbourhood.

Traffic and safety:

With respect to pedestrian safety, Sevenoaks Road is narrow, has a large number of vehicles parking on the street, does not have sidewalks for most of its length, and has become a busy through-traffic route, especially for vehicles going to St. Andrew's from anywhere west of the school. It is also a primary neighbourhood pedestrian route to Rainbow Park, and a primary conduit for kids walking to Rogers Elementary School. Residents are understandably worried about the possibility of another 25 families (and up to another 50 vehicles) compounding the pedestrian safety issue. Abstract has proposed to build sidewalks in front of its development. This would be a modest improvement but would primarily benefit new townhouse residents and do little to address the pedestrian safety issues noted. The rest of the street would remain unsafe and would be made more so by the significant increase in traffic.

With respect to traffic and parking impacts, concern was also raised that visitor parking was insufficient and, with the likelihood of secondary suites, would compound existing parking issues on Sevenoaks and in the small Rainbow Park parking area.

With respect to overall access and egress, access into the Rainbow neighbourhood is limited to two points of entry (at McKenzie at Rainbow and McKenzie at Nelthorpe Streets) and is already a significant issue for residents. Both of these access/egress points are used not only by residents, but Rainbow Park and Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary users and also parents dropping off and picking up children at St. Andrews School. Rainbow Street is a safe route to school with pedestrians accessing the elevated walkway at McKenzie.

The traffic light at Nelthorpe is the sole option for westbound traffic and has become a choke point. This is further compounded by St. Andrew's School traffic, which crosses McKenzie at Nelthorpe, especially for pick up and drop off of students. Adding a further 25 families with potentially 50 additional vehicles will directly and negatively impact all current residents of the Rainbow area whose access is limited to Rainbow and Nelthorpe. Although we recognize this is a Saanich engineering problem, the proposed increase in density with this application will further exacerbate an already-existing significant issue and requires further consultation.

Environmental:

The landscape drawings indicate a total of 55 inventoried trees of which only nine are designated to be retained or "potentially retained". Some of the mature existing trees are Garry Oaks and others around the perimeter of the site are of a significant size or nature and should be retained. It was also noted by some neighbours that a reduction in the number of units could enable preservation of more trees and creation of some green space.

Community contribution:

We believe a more significant CAC should be required given the increase in density proposed. In Planning's report to Council with respect to the proposed University Heights development, per unit breakdowns of total amenity contributions were given for a number of multi-unit developments. We are not aware of the total value of amenity contributions being offered by the proponent but would hope that it is reflective of projects of similar scale and make a reasonable contribution to the health and wellbeing of the immediate community.

When we wrote in January 2020 re this proposal, we said we looked forward to hearing how Saanich and the proponent proposed to address the noted concerns. Reviewing Abstract's resubmission against the original one, the only change we were able to discern was the indication of space for parallel parking for nine cars along Rainbow.

We do not see this as an improvement to the submission as the current street parking allows for more cars. Additionally, it is believed that this will only add to congestion and further reduce pedestrian safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Susan Haddon
President, QCHCA