



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: March 28, 2017
Contact: Kent Munro
Contact No.: 604.873.7135
RTS No.: 12007
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: April 11, 2017

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability
SUBJECT: Amendments to Design Guidelines for RT Zones in the Mount Pleasant Community

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve amendments to the design guidelines for RT-5, RT-5A and RT-6 zones, as proposed in Appendix A, to allow more lots in Mount Pleasant with an existing character house to qualify for rear yard infill development.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report recommends amendments to the design guidelines that apply to the RT-5, RT-5A and RT-6 (two-family) zones as a key first step to implement the Mount Pleasant Community Plan objective to allow infill housing to be built on most 33 ft. wide lots. This change will significantly reduce the side yard requirement to allow most lots with a character house in the Mount Pleasant area to be eligible for rear yard infill development. This change would represent a "quick win", following Council's recent approval of the Emerging Directions and Early Actions embodied in the Housing Reset/Housing Vancouver Strategy. The report also discusses a second step to explore further changes to the guidelines and zoning that could create additional housing opportunities.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- RT-4, RT-4A, RT-4N, RT-5, RT-5N, RT-5AN & RT-6 Guidelines (adopted 1984, last amended 1998)
- Mount Pleasant Community Plan (2010)
- Making Legalizing Secondary Suites Easier in RT/RM Zones (Council Motion, March 7 2017)
- Vancouver Housing and Homelessness Strategy: Emerging Directions (March 2017)

REPORT

Background/Context

In 2010, the Mount Pleasant Community Plan was approved by Council to provide direction for change and growth in Mount Pleasant. On the topic of housing, the plan identifies a number of new opportunities for housing and includes the following specific reference to laneway and infill housing (p.15):

“Encourage housing on lanes in Mount Pleasant - both infill and “Laneway Housing” - to increase the number of units, to increase laneway animation, to provide mortgage helpers, and to improve housing affordability (with a smaller dwelling unit); fix the existing infill housing policy to enable infill housing to be built on most lots (e.g. 33 foot lots).”

When city-wide zoning changes were made in 2009 to extend the opportunity for laneway houses to all RS zones (single-family), RT zones (two-family) were not included. The decision on whether to extend laneway housing to RT zones was to be implemented on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis as part of an outcome of a community planning process.

Many of the original RT-2 zoned areas (residential two-family) were in original inner city neighbourhoods and contained a significant number of buildings from the turn of the century, many of which are now considered to be character homes. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the City and residents became concerned with the loss of older homes. In response, the City revised the RT-2 zoning in certain areas, such as Mount Pleasant and Grandview-Woodland, to encourage the retention of houses with “character” merit and to permit additions for multiple conversion dwellings (MCD) and infill units as alternatives to demolition. Robust design guidelines were developed to augment the RT District schedules and achieve a high degree of contextual sensitivity in these character areas. The guidelines introduced many constraints on infill development the most significant being the requirement for a minimum side yard width of 4.9m (16 ft.) to allow an infill building at the rear of the lot to be visible from the street. This requirement means that most lots cannot qualify for infill.

Over time, those seeking infill developments in the RT zones began to pursue development through the city's Heritage Conservation Program which requires heritage designation and allows up to 10% additional FSR. Staff became concerned that the heritage process was becoming a common approach to circumvent the zoning and design guidelines and achieve density beyond the floor area incentives already included in the zoning to encourage character home retention. To address the issue, the Planning Department issued an administrative bulletin in the spring of 2016 to encourage applicants to comply with the current RT zoning regulations and to reinforce the current FSR limits and design guidelines noting that heritage processes would still be available to sites with high heritage merit. This action highlighted the need to address the infill problem comprehensively through changes to the RT guidelines.

Strategic Analysis

Planning Programs

The zoning regulations and guidelines that apply to many of these older RT (two-family) zones have not been updated over time. Meanwhile, significant changes have been made to RS (single-family) zones throughout the city to increase FSR to encourage basement suites and allow for laneway houses. Laneway houses are not permitted in RT zones except for Kingsway and Knight (RT-10) and Norquay (RT-11), both developed as implementation of neighbourhood centre plans. Overtime, changes to RS zoning have created an imbalance whereby RS zones are now allowed a combined FSR (0.86 for the house and laneway house) which exceeds the maximum FSR permitted in most RT zones (typically 0.75).

Changes to the RT-4 and RT-5 zones in Grandview-Woodland and the expansion of the RT zoning are being explored as part of the implementation of the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan to provide more infill housing opportunities. This work will also include an exploration of the possibility of legalizing multiple suites which is a topic identified by Council at the time the Grandview-Woodland Community was approved in July 2016 and again in the recent motion of March 7, 2017 (Making Legalizing Secondary Suites Easier in RT/RM Zones). Council instructed that options around multiple suites in RT and RM zones be further explored and included in the Housing and Homelessness Implementation Strategy to be reported to Council in July 2017.

Through the Character Homes Zoning Review and the ongoing efforts to expand housing options across the city, the RT zones have been identified as a model for infill housing which may be applicable to other character neighbourhoods. The current RT regulations and design guidelines are focused on building character, and to a lesser extent on delivering housing. Staff recognize that changes to the RT zones -- the original infill zones -- are needed to rebalance character retention with the delivery of new housing opportunities, especially family housing, and to demonstrate successful infill on individual lots.

Proposed Amendments

The Mount Pleasant Community Plan identified the need to create additional housing opportunities. In order to implement the policy from the Mount Pleasant Community Plan to encourage infill and laneway housing, staff are recommending a two-step approach. Step 1 proposes an immediate guideline amendment to allow more properties to qualify for infill opportunities. Step 2 involves a broader scope for change that will be developed following consultation with the community. It is noted that staff are including RT-5 and RT-5A zoned properties (Kensington-Cedar Cottage) and RT-5 zoned lots on the south side of 16th Avenue (Riley Park) for both Step 1 and Step 2 changes. Although these areas are outside of the boundaries of the Mount Pleasant Community Plan, they are contiguous to Mount Pleasant and similar in character.

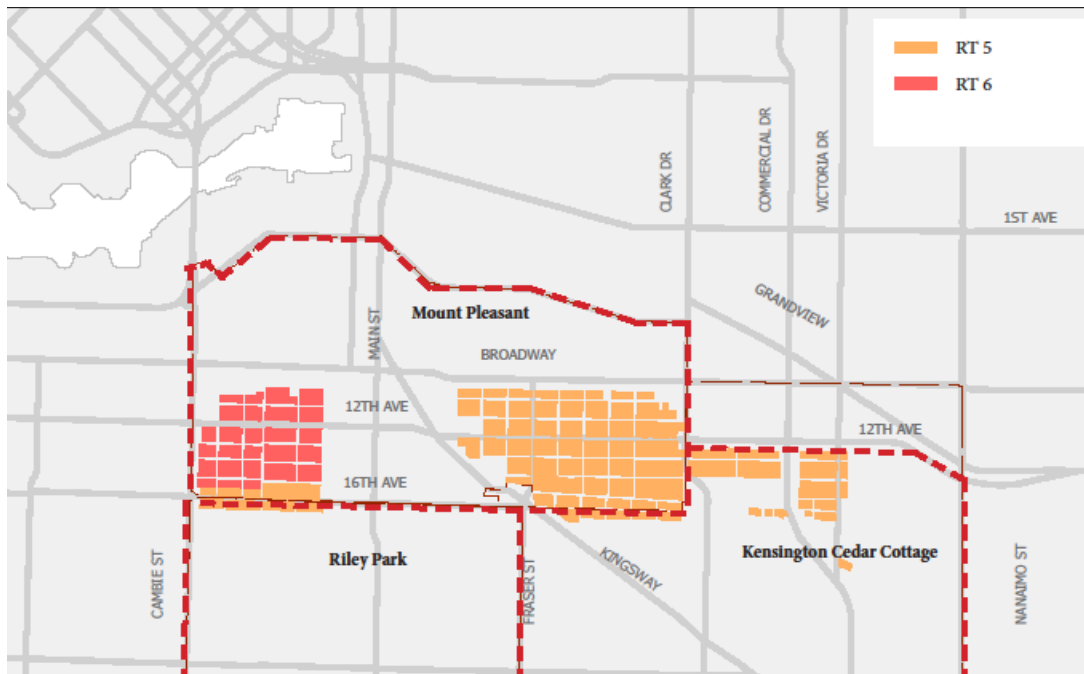


Figure 1: map showing RT zoned areas proposed for guideline amendment

Step 1: Immediate Design Guideline Amendments

As proposed in this report, this step involves amendments to the RT-5, RT-5A and RT-6 design guidelines applicable only to Mount Pleasant and the adjacent areas identified on the map above. The amendments will reduce the side yard from 4.9 m (16 ft.) to the minimum required under the Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) which currently varies between 0.9 and 2.0 metres depending on the number of dwelling units served by this access route (for life safety and firefighting access). Should this change be implemented, more than 600 additional properties with pre-1940's houses will be eligible for consideration of infill development in the Mount Pleasant community.

Step 2: Further Changes to Zoning and Design Guidelines

In the coming months, staff will consult with area residents on further changes that could be made to the RT-5, RT-5A and RT-6 District Schedules and design guidelines to create additional housing opportunities and report back to Council with recommendations. Topics of discussion with the community will include:

- Laneway housing
- Multiple secondary suites in a house
- Other creative solutions to encourage additional family housing opportunities

CONCLUSION

The proposed amendments to the Design Guidelines for RT zones in the Mount Pleasant area will eliminate a major regulatory barrier that is constraining the delivery of infill housing. In the coming months, staff will launch an engagement process with area residents to explore additional housing opportunities.

* * * * *

**Amendments to “RT-4, RT-4A, RT-4N, RT-4AN,
RT-5, RT-5A, RT-5N, RT-5AN & RT-6 GUIDELINES”**
(Adopted by City Council on April 10, 1984 and amended June 21 & November 27, 1984,
October 20 & December 15, 1987, April 12 & October 25, 1988, July 25, 1989, July 24, 1990,
February 4, 1992, May 17, 1994, May 6, 1997 and January 20, 1998)

Note: All additions are shown in bold italics and all deletions are struck-out. Only the sections with changes are shown.

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Note: The guidelines in this report are organized under standardized headings which are being used for all guideline reports. As a consequence, there are gaps in the numbering sequence where no guidelines apply under a standardized heading.

3.1 Infill

3.1.1 Objectives

Infill is permitted as an incentive to retain existing buildings by allowing the construction of a second residential building on appropriate sites. The process of infilling existing yard spaces with additional buildings requires sensitive and creative design. Infill is only one of several development options and is often not the most feasible or practical. ~~In fact, the majority of lots in these districts do not meet the criteria set out in this section of the guidelines.~~ Due to the many constraints imposed on infill development, the maximum allowable floor space ratio and site coverage may not be achievable.

Infill is **encouraged** where the existing building on the lot is of architectural or heritage merit, particularly when the lot is in a Special Character Merit Area (see Figure 10), and therefore warrants restoration and preservation. The design of the infill building should be in character with the existing house and the neighbourhood context.

The **existing house** should be retained with minimal additions. Infill development should include restoration of the existing house in keeping with the positive aspects of neighbourhood character or the unique architecture of the existing building. All development permits for infill will be subject to the condition that the existing house cannot be demolished without the approval of the Director of Planning. The relocation of an existing house to create an infill site is discouraged except where the house has special architectural or heritage merit and would be retained and renovated through relocation and infill development. Any relocation should have regard for the established line of buildings.

The infill building should not have significant adverse affects upon the amenity of **neighbouring properties**. Overshadowing and overlooking of adjacent active yard space should be minimized; sun penetration to existing and newly created open space should occur daily for significant periods of time throughout the year. There should be minimal shading of existing decks or patios. Existing views should be retained where they are an amenity for neighbouring residents.

The infill should not seriously impact the **livability** of the existing or neighbouring houses. Privacy from all new and existing windows should be respected and useable open spaces at grade should be created for both the new and existing dwellings on the site.

Surface **parking areas** in infill situations should receive special treatment. Use of brick, concrete pavers and textured concrete is encouraged. Garages, where provided, should be integrated into the massing of the building.

Adequate **landscaping** is critical to ensure that infill buildings unobtrusively blend into the neighbourhood. Existing mature trees should be retained together with existing shrubs, stone

walls and other important landscape features. In neighbourhoods currently lacking these features, an upgrading of existing landscape quality should be a feature of the proposal.

In addition to the objectives described above, the following also apply to each specific kind of infill as listed below.

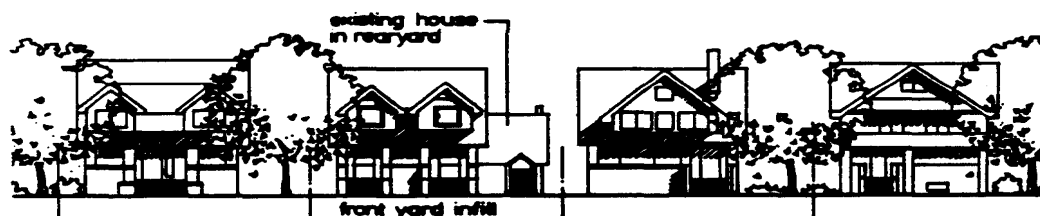
Mid-Block Rear Yard Infill

The location of rear yard infill housing makes it extremely important that the proposal respect and respond to the context of neighbouring properties. The infill building should be secondary in scale to the existing house. Careful attention should be paid to privacy, overlook, view blockage and solar access to yards with regard to the development site and neighbouring sites. ~~Infill buildings should be visible from the street and sidewalk to enable identification. Access from the street should be separate from the existing house and clearly identifiable from the street.~~ Basements are strongly discouraged for mid-block, rear yard infill.

Mid-Block Front Yard Infill

Front yard infill buildings should have particular regard for the guidelines in this document concerning Street Character (2.2), Front Yard (4.4) and Architectural Components (5). In addition, they should be sited and designed so that, when considered along with the existing building, the project meets the guidelines established for rear yard infill.

Figure 26. Example of Mid-Block Front Yard Infill Streetscape



Corner Lot Infill

Corner lot infill projects should respond to and enhance the streetscape of both the front and flanking street without adversely affecting adjoining properties. For rear yard corner lot infill, there may be some greater flexibility in the guidelines which assist in the identification of potential sites and which guide the height and site coverage limits.

Side Yard Infill

The infill building should have particular regard for the guidelines in this document concerning Street Character (2.2), Front Yard (4.4) and Architectural Components (5).

3.1.2 Identification of Potential Infill Sites

Rear Yard Infill Sites

The rear yard area should be a minimum of 195 m². In cases where the lot is in mid-block, there should also be a side yard adjacent to the existing building with a minimum width of 4.9 m for pedestrian access only and a minimum width of 5.5 m for pedestrian and vehicular access (in the case of sites with no lane access) *except that for sites located within areas identified on the maps included as Appendix B to these guidelines, the minimum side yard with for pedestrian access can be reduced to the minimum side yard acceptable for pedestrian access under the Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL).*

APPENDIX B

The map below identifies the RT-5, RT-6 and RT-5A sites eligible for reduced side yard for rear yard infill.

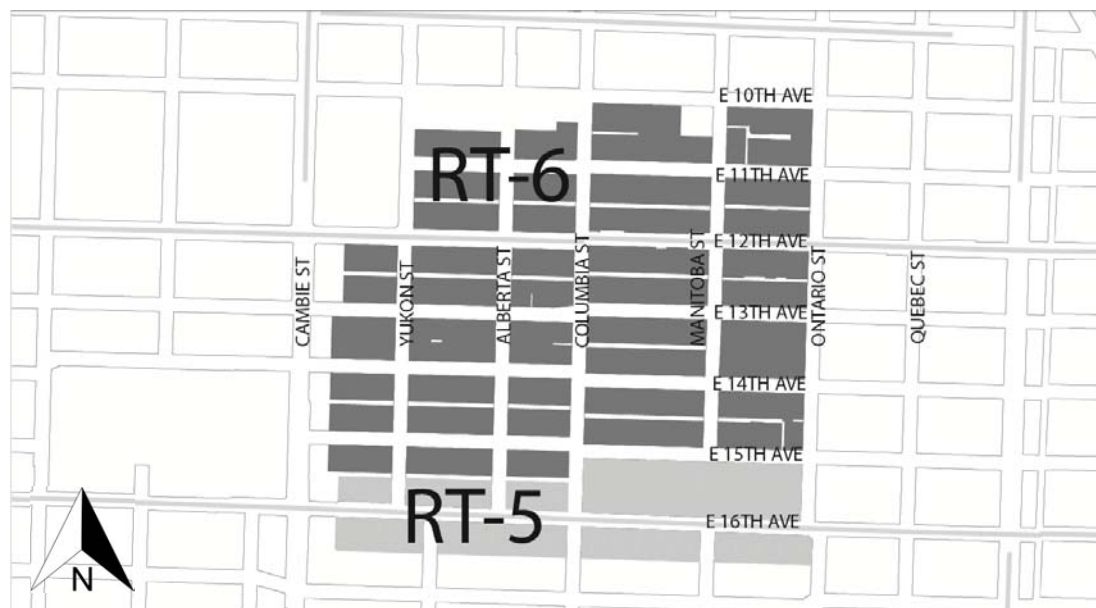


FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2