



CITY OF VANCOUVER

OTHER REPORT

Report Date: May 24, 2006
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VanRIMS No.: 11-2200-21/08-3000-11
Meeting Date: October 19, 2006

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budget
FROM: Advisory Committee on Seniors Issues
SUBJECT: SAFERhome Standards and Certification Program

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Advisory Committee on Seniors' Issues recommends to Vancouver City Council that City of Vancouver staff be instructed to identify and report back to Council before the end of 2006 appropriate support and incentive programs to encourage developers, builders and consumers to implement the SAFERhome Standards and Certification program on all new residential building programs.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager notes for Council that there is a Provincial Adaptable Housing Work Group carrying out a detailed review of the various adaptable housing standards, including the SAFERhome Standards. Representatives on the working group include a wide range of stakeholders including staff from the City of Vancouver and other Municipal Governments, Provincial Government, the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities and the Seniors' Services Society. Therefore, the City Manager recommends that Council not approve the recommendation as put forward by the Advisory Committee on Seniors' Issues. Many of the requirements outlined in the report are currently regulated by the Building By-Law and before the SAFERhome Standards are adopted, a further review of the requirements would be required to ensure that they are consistent with current city regulations and policies. In addition, further consultation with impacted stakeholders needs to be undertaken as some of the criteria may have financial implications for the building industry and ultimately the homeowner.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform City Council and civic staff about the SAFERhome Certification Program and to encourage its adoption in Vancouver.

BACKGROUND

SAFERhome Standards include 19 easily achievable criteria for new residential design and construction. These criteria are:

1. All exterior thresholds are flush.
2. Interior thresholds meet minimal code constraints.
3. Bath and shower controls offset from centre.
4. Pressure/temperature control valves on all shower faucets.
5. 2" X 12" blocking lumber in all washroom, tub, shower and toilet locations.
6. Waste pipes brought in at 12" to the centre of the pipe from floor level.
7. Cabinets underneath sinks easily removable.
8. Doors a minimum of 34" wide, but still should ideally be 36' wide.
9. Hallways and stairways a minimum of 40" wide but should ideally be 42" wide.
10. Light switches 42" floor to the centre of the electrical box from the finished floor.
11. Receptacles 18" to the centre of the electrical box from the finished floor.
12. Electrical receptacles placed as follows:
 - Beside windows, especially where draperies may be installed;
 - Top and bottom of stairways;
 - Beside the toilet;
 - Above external doors (outside and inside);
 - On front face of kitchen counter;
 - At "node zero" (i.e. at hydro, telephone, etc. service entry location).
13. Larger grey electrical boxes utilized.
14. Fourplex receptacles in master bedroom, home office, garage and rec room.
15. Level 5 (4 pair) telephone pre-wire to all areas returning to one central area.
16. RG-6 coaxial cable runs returning to one central area.
17. All low voltage runs return to one central area.
18. Walls at the top of stairs reinforced with 2" X 12" at 36" to centre.
19. Either: allowance made for elevator in stacked closets or make the staircase 42" wide.

SAFERhome Certification Program houses are ergonomically safer, accessible and electronically pre-prepared homes, offering more environmentally responsible choices and supporting sustainability in communities. People can age-in-place and live healthier lives by preventing injuries and convalescing at home, which can lower hospitalization, rehabilitation, homecare service and lost productivity costs. Seniors, disabled persons, children, intergenerational and young families especially benefit. The houses appear normal, removing stigmas and reducing the need for developers to produce "social" housing designs in their projects. For less than \$1000 per residential unit, consumers can retain independence and create value-added real estate investments. The macro aging-in-place element provides a "soft" green benefit to government through less consumption of building supplies and less pressure on landfills.

DISCUSSION

SAFERhomes Standards for new home construction are designed to help create healthier, sustainable, and integrated communities. SAFERhome Standards can:

1. Create thousands of affordable, sustainable housing units annually to develop and maintain more integrated and inclusive neighbourhoods, at virtually no cost to the government.
2. Reduce the need to fund and develop purpose-built social housing.
3. Save the government substantial amounts of money annually in reduced healthcare costs by setting a target of 20 per cent reduction in accidents from falls in the home via the application of the SAFERhome Standards and Certification Program.
4. Provide the ability to track, confirm and support advancing building standards without having to hire more inspectors or implement in-house programs that are costly to the City.
5. Provide the ability to measure results accurately.
6. Move development projects through the building permit process more efficiently by removing upwards of 70 per cent of the social housing issues associated with municipal design and approval process.
7. Ensure new housing starts meet the real and growing needs of an aging population in an integrated and cost-effective way that allows seniors to age in-place, while remaining independent, active members of the community.
8. Add flexibility to both "normal" and "social" housing, which increases their value in the real estate market.
9. Improve the quality of life in multi-generational living situations, thereby supporting the diversity of neighbourhoods, cities and the province.
10. Prevent social labelling by taking a universal design approach that is beneficial and functional for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Adoption of the SAFERhomes Standards and Certification Program by the City of Vancouver will increase the inventory of housing appropriate for an aging population and improve standards for safety and sustainability within the home for all citizens.

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