CITY OF VANCOUVER

COMMUNITY SERVICES GROUP
Planning
City-wide and Regional Planning

Refers Item 6
Public Hearing of July 21, 2009

MEMORANDUM

July 9, 2009

TO: Mayor Robertson and Councillors

CC: Dr. P. Ballem, City Manager
M. Coulsen, Acting City Clerk
D. McLellan, General Manager of Community Services
K. Munro, Assistant Director of Planning, Current Planning
R. Howard, Assistant Director of Planning, City-Wide and Regional Planning
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FROM: H. Roth, Senior Planner, City-Wide and Regional Planning

SUBJECT: Laneway Housing — Revised Guidelines

This memo provides for information a revised draft of the Laneway Housing Guidelines. On June 16, 2009, when Council considered the Policy Report *"Implementing Laneway Housing in RS-1 and RS-5 Single Family Areas"*, dated June 9, 2009, Resolution L was adopted which brought forward some changes concerning relaxations. These changes alter the guidelines somewhat from how they appear in Appendix B of the policy report. The complete revised draft guidelines are provided below, with the changes indicated in bold italics, for Council's consideration under Recommendation B in the Summary and Recommendation.

Laneway House (LWH) Guidelines

Intent:

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the Section 11 regulations of the Zoning and Development by-law pertaining to LWH throughout the city. The regulations and guidelines focus on creating neighbourly relationships with adjacent properties, a positive lanescape, and enhanced environmental performance of the site overall.

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The guidelines are organized into the following topic areas:

Quality, Durability and Expression
Scale and Massing
Privacy and Overlook
Lane Frontage
Landscape

Quality Durability, and Expression

Laneway housing should be designed to be a lasting, quality addition to the neighbourhood. Buildings which are not designed to last are not environmentally sustainable, nor can they be considered affordable when the costs of maintenance and replacement of materials over time is considered.

- Material selection and detailing should ensure performance over time. Vancouver building by-law requirements cover many aspects of building performance, but in addition consideration should be given to elements such as roof overhangs and building projections that both protect surfaces and assist with passive energy performance.
- Modular construction can be used to advantage to reduce on site construction time and costs, however, LWH using modular construction must be permanent non-moveable dwellings following all the by-laws that apply to conventional site-built dwellings. Once assembled, a LWH of modular construction should be indistinguishable from a site-built dwelling.
- While LWH may have a full range of architectural expressions, a LWH should clearly express its function as a residence.

Scale and Massing Guidelines

Homeowners can choose to build a single storey laneway house, or a 1 ½ storey laneway house. The following guidelines focus on the upper level of a 1 ½ storey design as it has greater potential to affect the solar access, privacy and outdoor enjoyment of neighbours. The guidelines apply to any orientation of site, as they are intended to address both solar access and perceived scale from adjacent neighbours. In general the guidelines direct upper level massing and primary outlook toward the lane so that it becomes a safe and welcoming public space, and a neighbourly relationship is maintained with adjacent properties.

Numerical values are given to assist with quick evaluation of proposed LWH designs. Flexibility is intended, and the numbers should be seen as neither finite limits nor conversely a means to justify height unnecessary to the building design.

Pitched roofs and dormers

The eave height of a LWH with a sloping roof should be no more than:

- **3.7 m** above grade adjacent to the garden where the main ridge of the roof runs across the width of the property, or
- **3.7 m** above grade adjacent to a required side-yard where the main ridge of the roof runs perpendicular to the lane and garden.

This may be accomplished by the main roof of the building, or by a section of lower roof that extends a minimum of **1.5 m** back over the building from the garden or side-yard face. Dormers are not restricted by this setback.

On a roof where the ridge runs across the property:

- The largest dormer(s) should face the lane, and should not exceed **60%** of the building width.
- Dormers facing the garden should not exceed **30%** of the building width.

On a roof with gable ends facing the lane:

- Dormers facing a required side-yard should not exceed **50%** of the building length.

Cross-gable roof designs:

- In a cross-gable roof design, the gables may be equal in size, but the windows in each gable end should be sized to reflect the spaces they overlook – most window to the lane, less to the garden and side-yards.

Flat roofs, shed roofs, and roof pitches less than 7:12:

- A flat roof, shed roof, or shallow pitched roof LWH should have an area of lower height adjacent to the garden. The roof should not exceed a height of **3.7 m within 1.5 m** of the garden. Projections may be allowed into this area provided they do not exceed 30% of the width of the building and are located to minimize shadowing on adjacent sites.
- Tallest elements and upper level floor space should be located adjacent to the lane, and/or or centrally located on the site on larger lots.

East/West oriented sites:

- LWH should generally be located toward the south side of the site to reduce shadowing on the site to the north, except where topography or retention of existing significant trees or landscape suggests otherwise.

Area Exclusions

The by-law identifies areas that may be excluded at the discretion of the Director of Planning. To get the exclusion for volume space and/or reduced height areas under sloping roofs, the following conditions need to be met to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning:

- The exclusions do not noticeably increase the visible mass of the building, or shadowing of neighbouring properties.
- The exclusions assist in creating a simple, logical roof form.
- The excluded areas do not create the potential to 'fill-in' with additional rooms beyond the allowable floor area.

Height and Location Relaxations

The Director of Planning has the ability to relax the Height and Location provisions of the by-law. These regulations have been set to ensure a modest, neighbourly scale of building, located in the area of the site that might otherwise be occupied by garage, and any relaxation considered must be evaluated against these objectives.

The DOP may consider relaxation of location provisions where:

- There are site circumstances, such as sloping topography or existing trees to be retained.
- The existing principal house to be retained is sited unusually. – i.e., a laneway house may be allowed in the front portion of the site when the existing principal house is located at the rear of the site.
- "*the lot depth exceeds the typical lot depth of 37.2 m (122 ft.), with staff assessment to include the following:*
  - *Minimizing the extension into the rear yard. Greater flexibility on depth may be considered where the lot width enables the proposed laneway house to be sited and designed in a way that it is sufficiently distant or shielded from neighbouring properties to mitigate the effect of any relaxation.*
  - *Consideration of the effects on neighbouring properties, including shadowing and privacy.*
  - *Providing a laneway house presence on the lane. This means that a relaxation of location will only be considered where there are no more than 2 parking spaces on the lane on 33 ft. wide lots (with Director of Planning consideration of more than 2 spaces on wider lots).*
  - *The portion of the building that extends into the rear yard should not exceed a single storey.*
  - *The laneway house may be a one storey unit, or a one and half storey unit, provided the proposed laneway house design follows the section of these guidelines regarding upper floor massing, privacy and overlook.*
  - *Maintenance of all other regulations including maximum building footprint, site permeability etc."*

In all cases, a minimum distance of 4.9 m must be maintained between the LWH and the existing principal house. Sites where this distance cannot be achieved will not be considered eligible for a laneway house.

The DOP may consider minor increases in height:

- To accommodate sloping topography.
- Where the proposed LWH building and the upper floor massing are, in the opinion the Director of Planning, sufficiently distant or shielded from neighbouring properties to mitigate the effect of any increase.
- Where the increase will assist in the provision of a green roof.
- Where existing buildings immediately adjacent to the proposed laneway house exceed the by-law maximums.

Privacy and Overlook Guidelines

The following guidelines focus on access and overlook from the upper level of a 1 ½ storey LWH. The guidelines address exterior stairs, window placement, and the design and use of flat roofs at upper levels. As with scale and massing, the guidelines direct outlook and upper level roof decks toward the lane in the interests of making the lane the focus of the LWH, and maintaining a neighbourly relationship with adjacent properties.

Stairs

- Stairs to the upper level should be enclosed within the allowable footprint and building area, except that the main entry may have outside stairs and a landing/porch area within 1.2 m of grade.

Upper Level Windows

- Living rooms and bedrooms on the upper level should have their primary windows facing the lane.
- Upper level windows facing the garden and side-yards should be modestly sized. Skylights, clerestory windows, or obscured glazing should be considered as a means to enhance interior daylighting without creating overlook.
- Laneway houses should be designed with consideration given to the relationship between desired window size and placement and the scale of building faces, projections and dormers. Dormers and building faces should not be windowless.
- On a corner lot, primary windows to living rooms and bedrooms may face the lane and/or street.

Outdoor Roof Decks and Balconies

Balconies and roof decks (other than intensive green roofs) should be designed and located as follows:

- The total area should not exceed 8 m^2.
- Located facing the lane on a mid-block lot.
- Located facing the lane and/or the flanking street on a corner lot.

To ensure that other flat roof areas are not accessible for use other than as intensive green roof areas:

- Balcony railings are not allowed around intensive green roofs (except where required under VBBL) or flat or shallow pitched areas other than outdoor decks described above.
- Doors from the upper level may not open out to intensive green roofs or flat or shallow pitched areas other than outdoor decks described above.
- Flat roofs above the upper storey cannot be used as roof deck areas, and must not have stair access, or railings. Ladder and roof hatch access necessary for green roof maintenance can be provided.

Lane Frontage Guidelines

LWH should be designed to enhance the lane. In effect, the lane becomes the public space or 'street' on which the laneway house is located.

- Consideration should be given to placing entries and doors on the lane where feasible.
- Dwelling units should have an outlook to the lane on the lower level, and primary windows facing the lane on upper levels.
- The space between the lane and the dwelling unit should be permeable and landscaped.
- The LWH should be designed with lighting that enhances the pedestrian experience of the lane at night. This may include eave lighting, porch lighting, bollard, or garden lights, etc. High-wattage, motion-activated security lights are discouraged.
- Garbage and recycling needs should be considered, and provided with space at the lane, in a garage, or on-site adjacent to parking areas.

Alternative parking configurations may be considered if it can be demonstrated that the quality and function of the lanescape is not compromised. Parking configurations must provide:

- A positive relationship of dwelling unit to the lane as described above.
- A 0.6m landscaped setback.
- High quality screening between the lane and any parking parallel to the lane.
- No increase in required manoeuvring area within the 0.6m setback area adjacent to the lane, or decrease in landscape potential in this area.
- Permeable surfaces for both parking and manoeuvring.
- Demonstration of manoeuvring acceptable to the Director of Engineering Services.
- Building elements that are not vulnerable to vehicle movement on site or in the lane.
- Green roof areas to compensate for any increased on-site manoeuvring area.

Landscape Guidelines

The landscape of a laneway house should enhance the experience of the lane, improve the environmental performance of the property, and assist with the creation of privacy for the dwelling and for neighbours.

The following guidelines apply to the design and review of laneway houses:

- The Laneway House should be located and designed to preserve existing trees where possible. The Director of Planning may require the retention of a significant tree. The Director of Planning may relax the regulations regarding LWH location and massing, and the required number of parking stalls to accomplish this.
- The laneway house should be provided with access to private outdoor space as part of the backyard, an area adjacent to the lane, and/or an upper level roof deck.
- High quality screening/fencing should be provided along the property line adjacent to surface parking spaces where the Director of Planning has relaxed the landscape setback requirement, and where possible, adjacent to paths required for fire access to the dwelling and lane. Where space is constrained, a narrow area sufficient for vine growth should be provided at the base of the screening or fence, or at the foot of the laneway house structure.
- Surface parking spaces should have permeable surfaces: permeable pavers, gravel, grass-crete, or impermeable wheel paths with ground-cover planting in the centre and sides.
- The 0.6 m minimum setback between the building and the lane should be permeable and landscaped where not required for vehicle access. Landscaping in this area should not be low ground cover, but rather should be comprised of plantings that are tall enough to have greater visual impact in the lane.

The following should be considered in the landscape design of laneway houses:

- The landscape plan should be developed with consideration of Council-approved Water-wise Landscaping Guidelines.
- Provision of rain barrels.
- Where more than the minimum 0.6 m setback is provided adjacent to the lane, consideration should be given to planting trees in this area. Tree selection should take into account overhead wires and lane visibility.

- Vertical greening should be used as a means to improve both privacy and environmental performance. Vertical greening can include using building walls and/or the provision of fences and arbors as support structures for plants. Tall plantings such as some varieties of bamboo can also provide effective screening and greening in a constrained area.
- Green roofs should be considered to compensate for ground area occupied by dwelling and parking and to provide an amenable outlook from upper levels of neighbouring houses.
- Planting of deciduous trees for summertime shading of the laneway house should be considered where feasible.

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