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GREATER VANCOUVER HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION  
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September 19, 2017

Mayor Gregor Robertson and Council  
City of Vancouver  
453 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Council:

**Re: *Heritage Density Bank Update and Zoning Amendments to Support Heritage Conservation & Character Home Retention Incentives and New Housing Choices in RS Zones***

The Urban Development Institute (UDI) and Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association (GVHBA) have been participating on the City's heritage policy review through the *Heritage Action Plan (HAP)* Public Advisory Committee. We would like to thank staff for allowing us to participate on the Committee, and for meeting with industry representatives on June 22<sup>nd</sup> and September 13<sup>th</sup> about two reports that are going to Public Hearing tonight (items 7 and 8 on the agenda) regarding the Heritage Density Bank and Character Homes. UDI and GVHBA are generally supportive of the recommendations in both reports, but we would like to provide some additional comments.

***Heritage Density Bank Update and Zoning Amendments to Support Heritage Conservation Report***

Staff rightly point out in their report that little density is available for purchase from the Heritage Density Bank. This is making it difficult for project proponents going through a development permit process to seek discretionary density increases. As such, UDI is very supportive of staff's recommendation "... to allow increases to the permitted floor area up to a maximum of 10 percent to be available through amenity shares for heritage conservation," through development permit applications.

However, what is being proposed is a temporary solution to a larger problem with the Heritage Density Bank that needs to be addressed. Heritage revitalization is an important economic development tool for the City that has added vibrancy to several Vancouver neighbourhoods such as Gastown. We need to retool the Heritage Density Bank and/or develop other incentives, so this work can continue. UDI understands from staff that a more comprehensive solution will be developed through the ongoing work on the *Heritage Action Plan*. We request that this work be done as soon as possible – ideally with a report to

Council by early 2018. We would be pleased to work with the City as this process moves forward.

***Introducing Character Home Retention Incentives and New Housing Choices in RS Zones (Single-family) – Proposed Amendments to the Zoning and Development By-law Report***

Also on September 19<sup>th</sup>, a report on new incentives to encourage the retention of pre-1940 character homes in single-family districts will be going to Public Hearing. We are generally supportive of the changes. The proposals would allow more units in single-family zones, with some steps being taken to speed up the processing of these incentives by granting the Director of Planning additional discretion.

However, there are still 15,000 pre-1940 homes in Vancouver, and staff estimate that 12,000 of them would meet the definition of a "character home". Potentially having this many homes go through a detailed discretionary process could further exacerbate already stretched staff resources. We are concerned that the already lengthy development approval delays that builders and developers face in Vancouver may get longer. Having stated this, we are pleased that there will be a monitoring program in place, and if problems arise, we encourage that staff can reengage with Council quickly.

We also suggest that the City consider, where appropriate, opportunities to increase the supply of housing units through the redevelopment of some of the 12,000 homes noted above and through future expansion of the program to include non-character homes. This could substantially increase the supply of housing throughout Vancouver and allow different forms of development in single-family zones. We continue to recommend this approach through the *Housing Vancouver Strategy*.

We would like to thank City staff again for involving us in the *HAP* process and for meeting with industry representatives. UDI and GVHBA are generally supportive of the policies in the two reports, and we look forward to working with the City as the *Heritage Action Plan* is developed.

Yours truly,

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Anne McMullin  
President & CEO  
Urban Development Institute

Bob de Wit  
CEO  
Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association

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## Public Hearing Comments - Character Home Retention Incentives 19 September 2017

My family have owned and occupied our home in Vancouver for 35 years and we are very interested in Heritage preservation and densification insofar as they may be used to provide more housing supply options.

Our property is zoned RS-5 and the existing one-family dwelling seems to meet the proposed definition of a Character Home. Our property is also a "non-conforming" lot - unlike a typical Vancouver lot in that it is approximately square at 61 x 70 ft. - something that is not uncommon with older properties.

In order to better understand the proposed incentives for retention of Character Homes and the implications for our property we have reviewed the proposal and comment as follows.

We support the various amendments proposed as incentives including:

- Infill Dwelling use,
- Multiple Conversion Dwelling (MCD) use,
- increased Floor Space Ratios (FSR),
- Strata conversion (although we have not seen where this is provided for in the proposed amendments)
- Increased scope for by-law relaxations (necessary with non-conforming conditions).

Although these incentives may encourage more retention projects, they may not be enough to overcome other market forces and achieve the intended purpose. So any additional incentives would help.

For example: as there are significant additional costs and time involved in the strata titling process and in related building up-grades the availability and advantages of the strata option need to be emphasized.

Also, as the culture of maximizing floor area drives many re-development decisions, the incentives proposed should provide for as much total FSR as the current default conditional combination of One-Family Dwelling with Secondary Suite and Laneway House:

- Existing FSR for One-Family Dwelling with Secondary Suite and Laneway House: approx. 0.90 (includes 0.70 for house with basement plus the basic 0.16 for Laneway House plus the optional exclusions for sloped ceilings and stairs and residential storage space).
- Proposed FSR for addition to a Character Home (MCD option): 0.75
- Proposed FSR for Infill Dwelling with a Character Home: 0.85

The proposed options should all qualify for at least the same total amount of FSR as the existing option. Similarly the Site Coverage for Infill with a Character Home should be increased to 45% as it currently is for a Laneway House.

In closing it needs to be said that the ever more complex CoV Zoning and Development Bylaw and the proliferation of different RS zones make public involvement in these matters more challenging and also increase the likelihood of conflicting technical provisions which work against the Intent of the By-Law. eg. Comparing the allowable possible exclusions for floor areas with sloped ceilings in different parts of the By-Law yields three different calculations which in effect benefit re-development rather than retention.

- Current RS-5 Bylaw : excludes floor area where distance from floor to ceiling is between 2.3 and 1.2 M
- Proposed Character Home revision : excludes floor area where distance from floor to ceiling is between 2.0 and 1.2 M (less floor area is excluded)...this would also apply to a related Infill Dwelling.
- Laneway House Guidelines : excludes floor area where distance from floor to ceiling is between 2.1 and 1.2 M... and so a Laneway House would benefit from this as well as the other exclusions available (i.e. stairs and storage areas) but a similar Infill Dwelling design would not!

Robert Sandilands

# DUNBAR

## RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION



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September 19, 2017

Dear Mayor Robertson and members of City Council

Re: Character Home Retention Initiatives and New Housing Choices in RS Zones

The following is the opinion of the majority of the directors of the Dunbar Residents Association.

At the September 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the directors of the Dunbar Residents' Association there was a wide-ranging discussion of the implications of the above noted report submitted by the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability.

It was concluded that the report meets the intent and the spirit of the Dunbar Vision, a document that reflects the consolidated opinion of the neighbourhood.

There was support for the use of an incentive based approach to density increases.

Options for residents today are important as we strive to create a community attractive to families, and providing housing options for residents of all ages.

We look forward to discussing options for the implementation of these policies and are aware of the impacts that we currently face. Planning for a community with engaged residents is important to Dunbar.

Sincerely,

Colleen McGuinness  
President

**Isfeld, Lori**

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**From:** Kevin MacDonald s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 19, 2017 3:16 PM  
**To:** Mayor and Council Correspondence  
**Subject:** Housing/zoning changes

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am intrigued by the zoning changes that will allow "character" homes on the west side to build laneway houses and sell them. I think it's a great idea. However, I am confused why this doesn't apply to homes on the east side (Grandview-woodlands)?

There are many heritage houses in east Vancouver and allowing the laneway houses to be built and sold would allow people to make the most of their properties and increase housing density.

Why is this benefit only being considered on the west side? Or am I mistaken in the reports I have read?

Thank you,

Kevin MacDonald

**Isfeld, Lori**

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**From:** Nick Petrie s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 6:51 PM  
**To:** Heritage Action Plan; Public Hearing  
**Subject:** Document for Council Meeting on Sept 21 at 6 PM Items 8 & 9  
**Attachments:** Character House Renovations - COV Meeting.pdf

Hi,

I could not find the right place to send this so I am hoping that you will be able to get this to the Council submission before 4pm

Please note that I am in support of both of the proposals and am suggesting minor amendments. We drafted this document after speaking with Mark Sakai of the GVHBA and we think it may be relevant to the policies being made.

Sincerely,

**Nicholas Petrie**  
CRDO Draft On Site Services Inc.  
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## Review of COV Upgrades, Their Unintended Impacts on Character Homes And Recommendations

On the advice of Mark Sakai, Director of Government Relations for the GVHBA, Shira Rosenberg and Nicholas Petrie, Principals of Draft On Site Services, to produce a document discussing a review of current City of Vancouver insulation and RSI upgrade requirements and their unintended impacts.

We have redrafted the document at the request of Brady Fought, Green Building Planning Assistant for the COV, so that it more clearly demonstrates these impacts.

For reference, Draft On Site currently designs approximately 150 projects each year, 30+ of those being renovations for houses in the City of Vancouver. Draft On Site has been a member of the GVHBA since 2015 and is active in several councils and committees.

### Unintended Impacts of Renovations on Character Homes

Draft On Site staff have noticed many impacts on Character Homes generated by upgrade requirements of the VBBL.

The upgrade requirements for renovating Character Homes, or renovations to any house that is generally more than 25 years old, result in a cascade of further upgrades to meet Building By-Law requirements and City upgrade triggers. Part of the issue with upgrade triggers is that the value of the upgrades themselves then trigger other upgrades which quickly cascade into a series of issues that can double and even triple the cost of the renovation.

Specifically, the Planning Department includes the value of the millwork, plumbing fixtures, appliances and other non-structural elements in the construction value of the project when applying for a Permit. If the cosmetic aspects of the renovation have bearing on the construction value when applying for a Permit they will quickly trigger every upgrade possible. For example, if a client removes a pony wall in a Kitchen, a \$1000 value in construction costs, and then installs new cabinets, appliances and fixtures valued at \$50,000 as a result, the project has now hit 3 or 4 triggers which quickly escalate the costs to then trigger other upgrades which result in every upgrade now being required. Commonly the dollar value of the renovation is either downplayed or just the pony wall is discussed so that the City Clerks do not enforce all of the triggers. If instead the applicant had just applied for a Pony Wall renovation and then added the cosmetic components separately (as they require no Building Permits by themselves) no Upgrades would have been triggered.

Other upgrades, like increasing insulation values, can impact wall and ceiling thicknesses requiring changes to stair and washroom placement as they are pushed away from the exterior walls by fur-outs or no longer have sufficient clear height, once again due to fur-outs. These changes to the stairs and washrooms then trigger further unintended alterations as they have to be brought in line with Vancouver Building By-Law.

A common result of all of these factors is that the Home Owners are advised by Design Professionals and City Staff that they cannot get a Permit for their renovations without each of these upgrades and the upgrades now exceeded their budget. This is what is contributing to the volume of unpermitted work.

Another common issue is that many "Basements" in character homes do not meet the current definition of a Basement as the floor surface of the storey above is located marginally more than 2.0 m above finished grade, usually due to original construction, the ground settling or even later landscaping, so the lowest floor instead counts as the 1st Storey. This results in a 2 1/2 Storey house that was usually built with an approximate foot print of 25% having a maximum achievable FSR of 62.5% (25 + 25 + 12.5). And unless either the definition of a Basement is adjusted for Character houses then the best solution for any home owner or developer to reach a 75% FSR is to demolish the Character House and build a newer, larger house.

Please see our recommendations sections for what we recommend to address all of the above points.

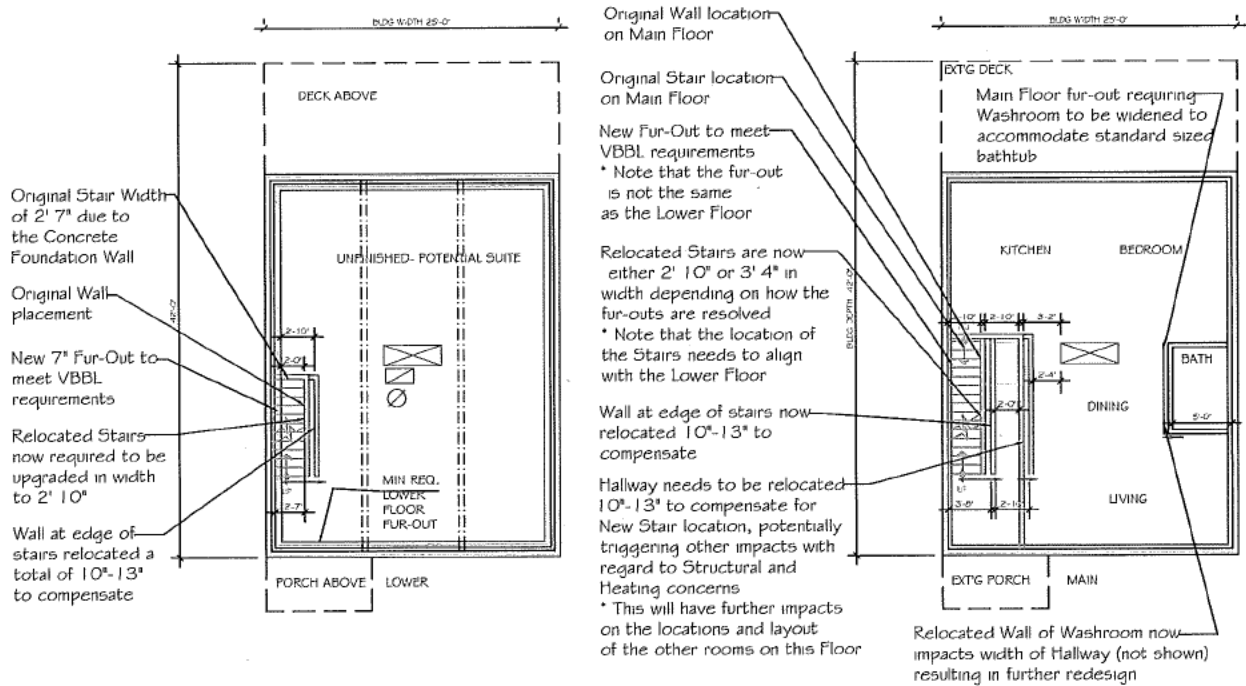


## Examples

We have drafted examples of this based on a number of different projects that we have designed for in the last couple of years.

In the example below you can see how the stairs need to be relocated to be outside of the furred-out exterior walls. This is due to the basement needing a 7" fur-out to meet RSI requirements, this 7" fur-out on average results in a 5.2% loss in usable floor area, more if the ceiling needs to be furred-out as well (see next paragraph). This then triggers that the new stairs be upgraded from 28"-31" width, common width for stairs Basements to allow space for the Foundation Wall, to 34" width resulting in the outside edge of the stairs to now be 10"-13" from where they originally were relocated.

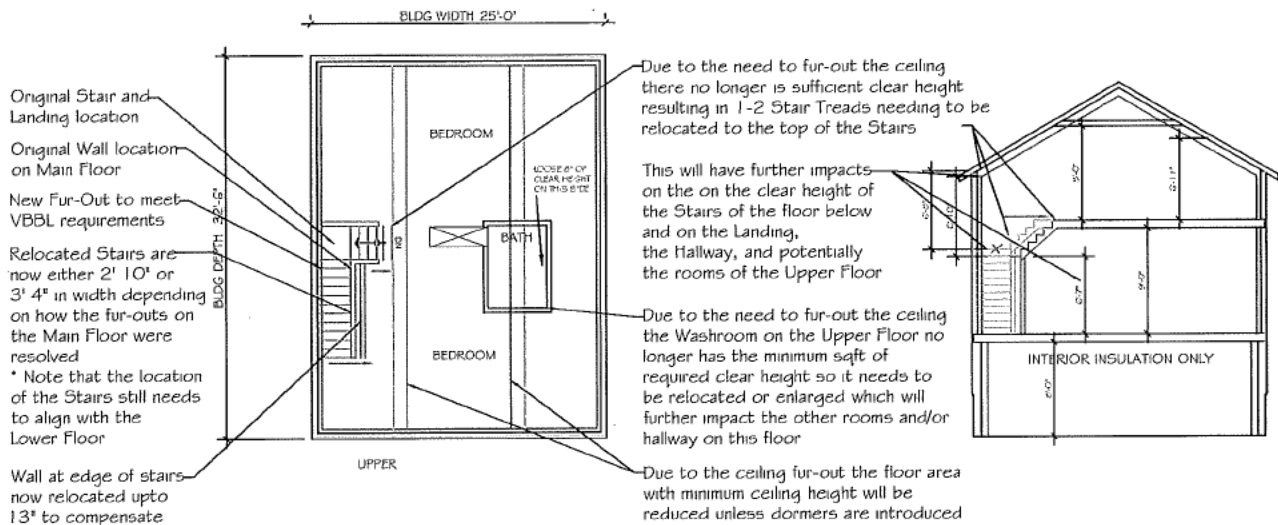
This then impacts the Floor above as the stairs now result in the adjoining hallways no longer having sufficient width, requiring relocation of walls, potentially affecting structural and heating elements.



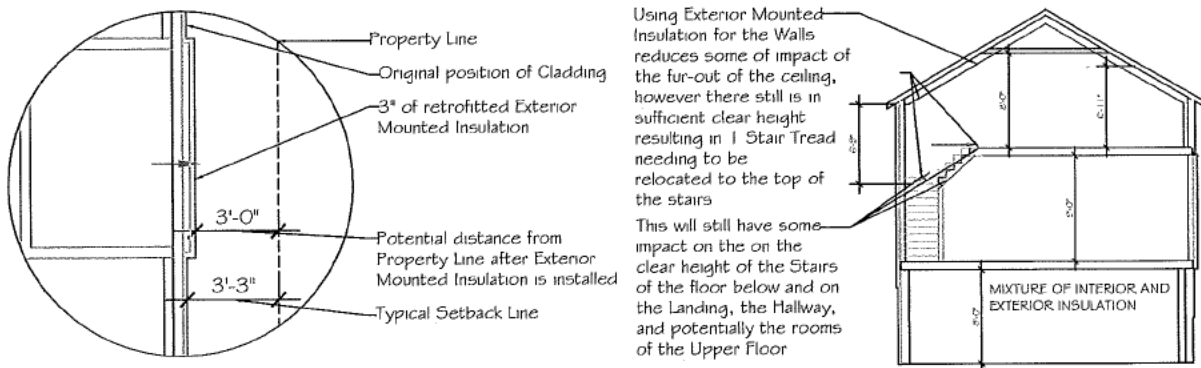
Washrooms have similar issues as the minimum floor area or ceiling height for a Washroom can be impacted, which then requires the washroom be enlarged or relocated which in turn impacts hallways or structural elements. (see figure on upper right of next page for Upper Floor Washrooms)



With the alterations required to the Basement and Main Floors the Uppermost Floor then needs to be adjusted to compensate. However, before this compensation can occur the ceiling usually needs to be furred-out to increase the insulation, commonly a 6.5" fur-out. A fur-out of that size will reduce the overall clear height for the that floor, which in turn affects the clear height over the stairs and frequently results in the stairs needing to be extensively redesigned. Another potential consequence of this is that the amount of floor area in each room that has minimum ceiling height may be reduced. If it is reduced too much then that room may no longer meet VBBL and may need to either be renovated, absorbed into another room, or in extreme cases then that storey may need to be reclassified as storage space. This commonly results in a 2% loss in usable floor area.



In most cases one or all of these consequences could have been avoided if exterior mounted insulation had been used. However, exterior mounted insulation cannot be used on most character houses, or really the majority of houses designed before April 1, 2016, as those houses were designed with the Setbacks calculated to the Foundation not to the Cladding, also houses that were designed pre-1980 were generally built on or, occasionally, over the current Setback Lines. This results in most or all of these houses having insufficient room to allow for exterior mounted insulation. This is due to Fire Safety reasons and is part of the VBBL.



## Recommendations:

### Changes to Insulation Requirements for Renovations

#### Exterior Mounted Insulation

Increasing the opportunities to use Non-Combustible Exterior Mounted Insulation by

- Calculating the Setbacks to the Outside Face of the Foundation only for houses built before April 1, 2016
  - Not calculating the setbacks to the Outside Face of the Cladding can impact Fire Fighter Access paths
  - *Note: If this option is approved we recommend requiring interconnected CO2 / Smoke Detectors in every bedroom and hallway for both Primary and Secondary Suites to promote earlier detection, reduce the potential extent of a fire and reduce the work required by Fire Fighters*
  - *Note: Recommend requiring a minimum of 2" of Non-Combustible Exterior Mounted Insulation*

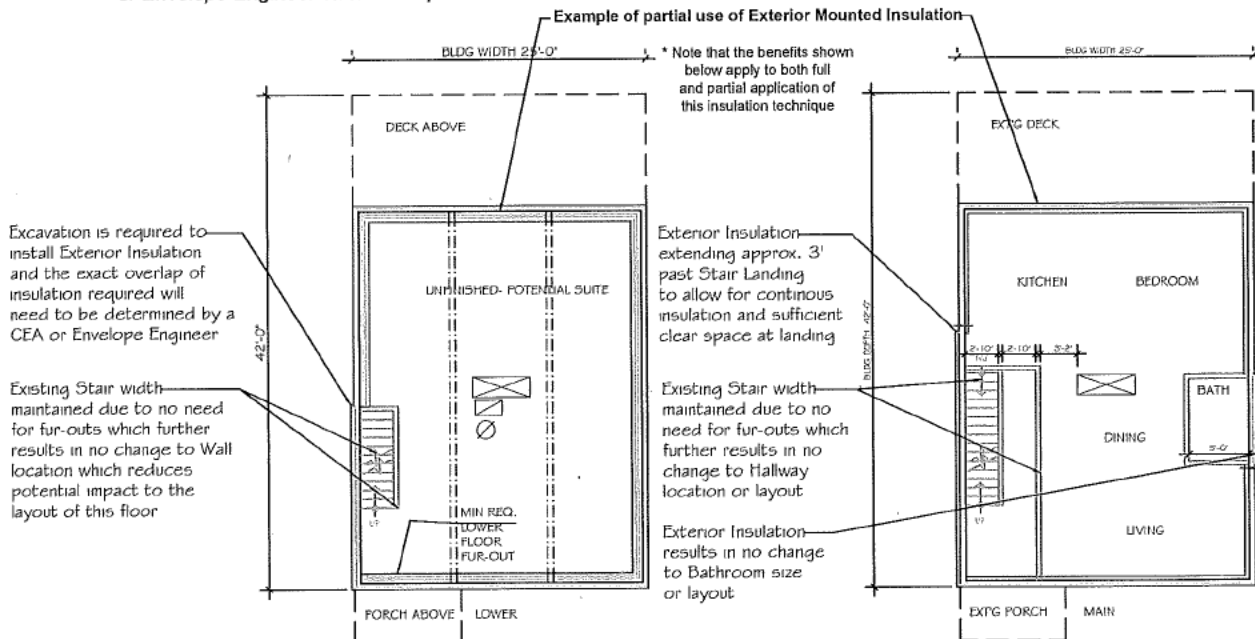
#### In-Wall Insulation

Allowing Trade-Off Path Analysis for

- Reduction or elimination of the thickness of the Insulation required to reduce the Fur-Outs for both Walls and Ceilings

Around Stairs and Washrooms, allowing the use of a mixture of In-Wall and Exterior Insulation so that Stairs and Washrooms do not need to be relocated, even if this impacts Setbacks

- Stairs and Washrooms impact the cost of the renovation the most if moved so this will allow those areas to be retained as they are
- *Note: If this option is instituted then Stairs will no longer necessarily be required to be upgraded to meet VBBL as there would be no change to the existing stairs, which then removes all need to upgrade the stairs in the rest of the House*
- *Note: If this recommendation is instituted we recommend requiring the Exterior Mounted Insulation extend far enough past the ends of stairs to allow for a 3' landing at each end that is the full width of the stairs, or to whatever extent a CEA or Envelope Engineer states is required*



## Providing a Square Footage Exclusion

On each Floor that is upgraded allow a 5.0% FSR exclusion if all walls on that floor are furred-out to meet current VBBL in a Character House

For Ceilings that are upgraded to meet current VBBL in a Character House either allow

- An additional 2.0% FSR exclusion,
- larger Dormers with a relaxation to when and where they can be used (particularly around stairs), or
- increase the options for Trade-Off Path Analysis to reduce fur-outs on ceilings
- *Note: allowing the Applicant the choice of any of these options will create a better variety of solutions to unique scenarios*

*Note: These exclusions will further incentivize Home Owners & Developers to renovate houses and upgrade them rather than demolish and build new*

## Increase to Building Depth for Character Homes

It is common for Character Homes to have extra FSR that cannot be utilized without adding another Floor to the House as the House is already at the Building Depth and/or there is an Existing Non-Conforming Deck that is currently occupying, or potentially past, the remaining Building Depth

A 5% - 8% increase in Building Depth, to a maximum of 50%, will allow Character Homes the ability to renovate and extend the house while still retaining a deck

- 8% is an average of 9.75' of additional Building Depth which is a comfortable depth to have a table and a BBQ on a deck
- 5% is an average of 6.1' of additional Building Depth is the minimum comfortable depth to have a table or a BBQ on a deck

## Definition of Basements for Character Homes

Basements are defined as "a space between two floors, with the lower floor located less than 1.5 m below finished grade and the floor surface of the storey above located not more than 2.0 m above finished grade"

This definition results in many Character Homes, with an average above finished grade height of just over 2.0 m (many are 2.04 m - 2.1 m), to count as 2.5 Storey homes instead 1.5 Storey + Basement homes, meaning that even though there is Building Height and FSR still available these houses cannot be increased in size as they have reached the maximum number of Storeys allowed

The recommendation is to

Alter the final point of this definition for Character Homes to be "2.2 m above finished grade"

- This would allow many Floors that were clearly intended as basements to still qualify as basements.
- This would also mean that many Character Houses that have had the extensive landscaping to create a "level" lot or yard would still count as having a Basement

*Note: This would not apply to Houses with Slab on Grade Lower Floors, only to Houses with Lower Floors that are partially submerged*

## Isfeld, Lori

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**From:** Joel Silverman s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 3:35 PM  
**To:** Public Hearing  
**Subject:** Agenda item 8 from 19 September 2017 Public Hearing

I favour the RS changes being discussed/proposed and applaud the City – staff, Mayor, and Council for undertaking this, arguably overdue, consultation.

I know of several families that, if the changes go through, will explore undertaking projects on their existing properties to accommodate immediate family and to “age in place”.

Contrary to the second speaker’s assertion last evening that the changes will reduce the supply of rental housing, this is at best a dubious opinion and at worst flatly wrong based on the numbers. The creation of 2-3 purpose built homes where previously there was an inefficient (from an energy consumption perspective among others) single family home increases the number of housing options of all types.

Options and opportunity; flexibility and common sense. What alternate universe is this? Great idea!

Best,

Joel Silverman

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**Isfeld, Lori**

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**From:** jesse malm s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 12:53 PM  
**To:** Public Hearing  
**Subject:** Public Hearing September 19, 2017, item 8

Dear Council,

I am in support of the proposed amendment but, in my opinion, more is required.

Vancouver land prices have been increasing for decades, long before the most recent more significant increases that has undoubtedly prompted Council to act. Density, too, has increased over the generations, but density has been increasing in certain areas that cause localised stresses on public infrastructure. Those living in areas of localised density must traverse swaths of lower density areas to reach their places of schooling and employment, and drive/bus their children out of catchment to attend schools with available capacity.

I see no evidence to suggest that land values will not continue to increase above wage growth. Land values increasing faster than wage growth has been a trend for generations and is much, if not most, in part due to the future expectation of population growth and a concomitant push to increase land productivity. This upwards stress on land values above wage growth, in combination with the to-date uneven density increases within the City of Vancouver, has left RS-zoned housing in effect out of the reach of the vast majority of the region's inhabitants.

The majority of the region's inhabitants bear the infrastructure-related externalities associated with large areas of centrally located low-density housing. (Soon, if not already, the majority of City of Vancouver residents will live in non-RS-zoned dwellings.) I conclude that delaying density increases will continue to stress to the majority of metro-area residents. Character housing may be important to some, but there are those who, collectively, bear the burden of maintaining the aesthetics and nostalgia of our past, and I would not want them to be forgotten in the consideration of the appropriateness of this proposed amendment.

I support a Council that supports increasing the City of Vancouver's density across its land base, with the goal of making the entire region and the City itself more productive and sustainable. I see this proposal as an appropriate stepping stone that is in the public interest, and I eagerly await future amendments in a similar vein.

Regards  
Jesse Malm  
Vancouver BC

**Isfeld, Lori**

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**From:** Terry Slack s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 10:55 AM  
**To:** Public Hearing  
**Subject:** Rezoning Application for Character Home Incentives

To Mayor and Council I would like to be on record as fully supporting the protection of livable "Character Homes" in Vancouver ! Vacant Character homes and lots are not being maintained , trees and shrubs are not being watered and consequently die and the proprieties become a serious eye sore to neighbours ! Please take immediate action with bylaw changes that address these serious community issues ! Terry Slack "Dunbar Resident and Home owner "



**Isfeld, Lori**

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**From:** Anne Vavrik s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 21, 2017 2:58 PM  
**To:** Public Hearing  
**Subject:** Support of Items 8 and 9 for discussion tonight

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing because I am in support of both items 8 and 9 which were added to the agenda for tonight after the Tuesday meeting concluded. I am a working professional in my 30s and am unlikely to be able to buy a condo, much less a single family house in Vancouver. If I were to lose my current basement suite, I would likely have to leave the city. I cannot afford current rents for most available apartments. Many of my friends are planning to leave Vancouver because of lack of housing and how much our rents have gone up. I am aware that you receive far more letters against densification than for it. There are numerous factors in this: people like me are alienated due to feeling like this City doesn't care about our situation. We often work multiple jobs to make rent and student loans. I urge you to look beyond those who do not want to live beside renters or the paper millionaires who enjoy a standard of living that my peers never will simply because we lost the generational lottery. Please consider the fact that my whole generation as well as subsequent ones are being priced out of this city and the impacts this will have.

Thank you.  
Anne

**Isfeld, Lori**

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**From:** Karen Sawatzky s.22(1) Personal and Confidential  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 21, 2017 3:59 PM  
**To:** Public Hearing  
**Subject:** Agreement with staff recommendations on item #8 (new housing choices in RS zones)

Dear Mayor and Council,

I would like to express my support for the staff recommendations under item #8 to be considered tonight, regarding incentives for retaining character homes and increasing housing choice in RS zones. I do agree with what is proposed because I view it as positive, though inadequate, step in the right direction, i.e. diversifying and densifying RS zones. I think we need to be a lot bolder to deal with the scale of our housing crisis and in order to achieve a meaningful increase to our abysmally low rental vacancy rate, but as I said, it's a positive step that I recognize you have faced opposition for taking, and I appreciate that.

In future, I hope you will allow a broader range of choices in these same zones - both in the interests of solving our housing crisis and in the interests of shifting to a more sustainable land use pattern. If we can have a three or four-storey house on given lot, why should we not be able to have a three or four storey purpose-built apartment building on that same lot - one that provides secure, long-term housing for renters? I know there are local architects and builders who can provide attractive, space and energy-efficient designs for this.

So, this is a necessary, but by no means sufficient step. Thank you and please push ahead. Also, this article published by Sightline writer Alan Durning today is timely and relevant to this issue and others before council this week and in the ones ahead: *Yes you can build your way to affordable housing: lesson from unexpected places* <http://www.sightline.org/2017/09/21/yes-you-can-build-your-way-to-affordable-housing/>

Thank you,

Karen Sawatzky

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