

## MOTION ON NOTICE

### 9. Addressing the Continuing Demolition of Character and Heritage Houses in RS Zones

Submitted by: Councillor Hardwick

#### WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver undertook a multi-year Character House Zoning Review in order to curb the large number of wasteful demolitions that take place every year and continue to do so;
2. Demolition is a major contributor to our affordable housing crisis as liveable homes are redeveloped for the luxury market, eliminating affordable secondary suites that displaces renters, while the price of the new home is significantly more expensive;
3. Character homes help to meet the Greenest City goals to mitigate the climate crisis since, among other things, destroying enduring homes built of quality natural materials and replacing them with much larger synthetic homes with a shorter life-span is not sustainable;
4. A 2018 [study](#) by UBC Architecture Professor Joseph Dahmen concludes the following: "...it can take years before the embodied greenhouse gas emissions associated with new construction are offset by more efficient operations.. The average carbon dioxide emission payback period of 168 years for a typical high efficiency new home renders it unlikely that emission savings will be realized before it is replaced..." ;
5. Retention tools add definition and vibrancy to neighbourhoods, improve housing choices and affordability, and accommodate growth while retaining neighbourhood character;
6. Conditional zones such as RT-7 & RT-8 in Kitsilano have few demolitions and are among our most vibrant, family-friendly neighbourhoods while providing equitable treatment of character retention and non-character building streams;
7. Despite 75% support city-wide in the Character House Zoning Review for "increased flexibility in zoning to support Character Home retention", the City under the previous Council chose to not implement the needed conditional Kitsilano RT-like zoning changes that have worked successfully to retain character houses;
8. Despite 76% support city-wide in the Character House Zoning Review for "use of design guidelines to clarify requirements and support renovations", design guidelines were not implemented so poor design and lower material quality (like faux rock or tile facades) continue to undermine neighbourhood character;
9. Surveys showed 70% support city-wide in the Character House Zoning Review for allowing multiple secondary suites. Allowing two secondary suites as an incentive for character house retention is an option that was not implemented;
10. New outright duplexes, with four units including secondary or lock-off suites, allowed in RS zones in October 2018 puts more development pressure on character houses;

11. The current RS zoned character house incentives have not prevented demolitions: Recent Staff update shows 235 character houses have been demolished in 2018 while only 27 have been retained through character house incentives;
12. Although some previous changes have been made, Building By-laws, and how they are applied, continue to make renovation of character and heritage houses difficult to implement;
13. Many houses have been converted to have two secondary suites, with three rental suites in total, (top floor, main floor and basement), but one is usually unauthorized unless changes are made to allow them through the Secondary Suite Program and the Building By-law to make them legal and safe for affordable rentals and owners' mortgage helpers. The current Secondary Suite Program already allows relaxations to the Building Bylaws and Zoning and Development Bylaws such as waiving sprinkler requirements, lower ceiling heights, only one required exit, removal of interior stairs, etc. for one secondary suite;
14. Further changes are required to both RS zoning and the Building By-laws, if character and heritage houses are to be meaningfully retained and adaptively reused.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to provide a report for Council to consider referring to Public Hearing changes to all RS Zones city-wide as follows:
  - a. To add conditional zoning mechanisms (similar to Kitsilano RT7 & RT8 zones) with a low outright floor space ratio of 0.50 floor space ratio "FSR" in all RS zones, (except for RS3 & RS3A that would have an equivalent but different low outright calculation method) where further increases in density, and development for a laneway house, secondary suite or duplex, are earned through two approval streams: one stream for incentives for character house retention and the other stream for non-character house lots;
  - b. To increase options beyond current incentives to retain character houses, (including 0.75 FSR + 0.16 Laneway House; 0.75 FSR Multiple Conversion Dwelling, "MCD"; 0.85 FSR with Infill; 0.85 FSR MCD with Infill) add the following:
    - i. allowing two secondary suites (for rental only, not for strata MCD) in the main house, with conversion under the Secondary Suite Program to ensure acceptable safety and liveability standards, and any related Building By-law changes that may be required to do so;
  - c. For non-character house lots to earn density above outright 0.50 FSR for a single family house with basement suite, to the full conditional 0.70 FSR (with development options as per current zoning) the following would have to be achieved:
    - i. design guidelines followed; and
    - ii. at least a duplex is provided in the main dwelling when the existing house is demolished (except RS3 & RS3A where duplexes are not currently allowed) - e.g. an existing single family house cannot be replaced with a new single family house, so single family is only for

existing houses that are renovated, not new. However, to provide more flexibility to use the new duplex units together, allow to have an internal connection that could be easily closed off if the units are to be separated for strata for future downsizing or for the next owner;

- d. Provide design guidelines for both character house retention and non-character house lots to ensure quality of design and materials, and appropriate fit into neighbourhood character streetscape.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to bring forward a report for Council to consider for approval of changes to the Building By-law to allow more flexibility and exemptions for character house and heritage retention options including the following:
- a. Explore alternative options to fire sprinkler requirements, while addressing life safety issues, for a character house (with up to one secondary suite) when building a strata infill in rear yard;
  - b. Explore allowing laneway house services to connect to a character house including up to one secondary suite, for storm and sanitary sewer lines, even if unseparated where difficult to separate, in order to retain mature trees since retaining mature trees on private property is also a City priority;
  - c. Allow flexibility where a character house or heritage building was built under other building code requirements of its era and allow current building codes to provide equivalencies, while addressing life safety issues, as may be approved by the Chief Building Official from time to time. Provide explanatory guidelines to the public;
  - d. Allow two secondary suites to be converted through the Secondary Suite Program as an incentive for character house retention only, and related amendments as required.
- C. THAT Council direct:
- a. The Mayor to write a letter to request the province to amend the School Tax surcharge to exempt City of Vancouver defined pre-1940 character houses, and heritage houses listed on the City of Vancouver heritage register as a retention incentive;
  - b. Staff to bring forward a policy report, for Council consideration of approval for local heritage density transfers as part of a Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) for exceptional heritage listed "A" properties in RS zones that are vulnerable to demolition, to be landed within the same neighbourhood in a community supported scale and location, but not for addition to the Density Bank; and
  - c. Staff to report back on rates of demolitions in one year trial period after zoning and building by-law changes are implemented as per above, if Council enacts the changes.

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