

MOTION ON NOTICE

8. Increasing Affordable Housing Options Through Character House Incentives in RS Zones

Submitted by: Councillor Hardwick

WHEREAS

1. Demolition of existing RS character housing in Vancouver is a major contributor to our city's affordable housing crisis, whereby properties are redeveloped and liveable homes replaced with significantly more expensive homes typically built for a luxury market, the frequent result of which is the elimination of affordable secondary suites and the displacement of renters;
2. Destroying enduring Vancouver homes built with quality natural materials, and replacing them with much larger single family homes made with synthetic materials, and an inherently shorter life-span, is not sustainable and inconsistent with the City's Green objectives and the City's local efforts to prevent and otherwise mitigate the impacts of a global climate crisis;
3. In relation to Greenhouse Gas Emission (GHG) reduction objectives, 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....";
4. Making retention tools available adds definition and vibrancy to neighbourhoods, improves housing choices and affordability, and accommodates growth while retaining neighbourhood character – for example, conditional zones such as RT-7 and RT-8 in Kitsilano have led to some of our city's most vibrant, family-friendly neighbourhoods, while providing equitable treatment of character retention stream in relation to various non-character building streams, and has resulted in few demolitions;
5. The City of Vancouver undertook a multi-year Character House Zoning Review, with extensive public consultation, in order to curb the large number of character and heritage house demolitions that take place every year in the city;
6. Many of the publically supported options identified in the City's multi-year Character House Zoning Review have not been implemented and the demolition of sustainably-built, enduring housing stock continues virtually unabated – for example:

- Despite a full 75% support city-wide for “increased flexibility in zoning to support Character Home retention” demonstrated through the Character House Zoning Review, the City chose – under the previous Council – to not implement conditional zoning changes along the lines of those that have worked successfully to retain character houses in Kitsilano and served to create vibrant, family-friendly neighbourhoods;
 - Despite 70% support city-wide for allowing multiple secondary suites in character homes, but allowing two secondary suites – as recommended – was not implemented by the previous Council;
 - Despite 76% support city-wide in the Character House Zoning Review for “design guidelines to clarify requirements and support renovations,” design guidelines were not implemented by the previous Council leading to poor design and lower quality materials such as faux rock or tile facades which continue to undermine neighbourhood character;
7. There are 60,000 RS-zoned lots across the city that can help to address the city’s housing crisis and support the City’s climate change objectives through character house retention options and adaptive reuse of character homes;
 8. Enabling character house retention options can enable the creation of a great number and range of affordable housing units spread across the city’s 60,000 RS-zoned lots while also accommodating growth in ways that are consistent with the City’s many stated goals and objectives, including the City’s stated Greenest City goals related to waste reduction, and would not preclude further changes that may come later under the City-wide Plan;
 9. The City’s current Secondary Suite Program already allows relaxations to the Building By-laws and Zoning and Development By-laws, such as waiving sprinkler requirements, allowing lower ceiling heights, requiring only one exit, removal of interior stairs, etc., for one secondary suite;
 10. Many houses in the city have been converted to have two secondary suites, with three rental suites in total (i.e., top floor, main floor, and basement), although one of these units is usually unauthorized unless changes can be made to allow all three units through the Secondary Suite Program, and subject to the Building By-law to make them legal and safe, for affordable rentals and owners’ mortgage helpers;
 11. If character and heritage houses are to be meaningfully retained and adaptively reused as intended by the Character House Zoning Review, further changes are required to the City’s RS zoning, the Vancouver Building By-laws, the Secondary Suite Program, and other by-laws and policies;
 12. Although some previous changes have been made by the City, the City’s Building By-laws and how they are applied continue to make renovation of character and heritage houses difficult to implement,

and current RS zoned character house incentives have clearly not prevented demolitions (NOTE: a recent staff update shows 235 character houses have been demolished in 2018 while only 27 have been retained through character house incentives);

13. The new duplex zoning approved by the city in October 2018, which allows for four units including secondary or lock-off suites, has only served to place increased development pressure on character houses and neighbourhoods and made the situation worse;
14. The Character House Zoning Review included years of consultation, and if zoning changes are delayed, an increasing amount of our city's heritage and character house stock will be lost along with the affordable housing opportunities they represent.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to provide a report for Council by December 10, 2019, to consider implementing the following changes as a priority in Q1 to all RS Zones city-wide, including the required staff resources, preferably from reassignment and/or additional resources as may be required in the 2020 budget:
 - a. To add conditional zoning mechanisms (similar to Kitsilano RT-7 & RT-8 zones) with a low outright floor space ratio of 0.50 floor space ratio "FSR" in all RS zones, (except for RS-3 & RS-3A 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:
 - 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 changes to the Secondary Suite Program and Vancouver Building By-law that may be required to allow this;
 - 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:

design guidelines followed; and

at least a secondary suite is provided, or on lots with over 49 ft. frontage, a duplex is provided in the main dwelling when the existing house is demolished (except RS-3 & RS-3A where duplexes are not currently allowed). However, consider allowing an option for the duplex to have an internal connection if one owner has both units or the owners agree in writing, that could be easily closed off as would be required if the units are to be separated for strata for future downsizing or for the next owner; and

- 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 changes to the 2019 Vancouver Building By-law to allow more flexibility and exemptions for character house and heritage retention options, and better process including the following:

- a. Expand the Alternate Requirements under Section 11 to provide acceptable solutions that 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 alternatives, while addressing life safety issues, as may be approved by the Chief Building Official from time to time. Provide clear explanatory guidelines to the public. Some examples include:
 - i. Explore alternative options to fire sprinkler requirements, while addressing life safety issues, for a character house (with up to one secondary suite) when only minor renovations are proposed, and when a strata infill is added in rear yard, limit sprinklers on the main existing house, that is not being substantially renovated, to only apply to protect the side yard means of egress;
 - ii. Explore alternative options for laneway house sewer services for an existing character house, allowing discretion to the Director of Planning and Chief Building Official in order to retain mature trees since retaining mature trees and landscape on private property is also a City priority and any related amendments to the Sewer By-law 8093;

- iii. Explore alternative options to prevent a basement in a character house from being counted as a storey under the Fire Code when the main floor is more than 6 ft. above grade, which many character houses are, especially if it is raised to create a liveable basement. If the basement is counted as a storey, it would make a typical 2 ½ storey house counted as 4 storeys and then the Part 3 of the Vancouver Building By-law (for multifamily construction) would apply. This should be avoided;
 - b. Allow two secondary suites to be converted through the Secondary Suite Program as an incentive for character house retention only, and related amendments to the Secondary Suite Program as required; and
 - c. Provide the recently established Renovation Centre with specialized staff, processes and resources, to be included in the 2020 budget, to improve the approval of renovations and character/heritage retention incentive programs;

C. THAT Council direct:

- a. Staff to report back by Q1 2020 on potential tax incentives for retention options in RS zones for heritage houses listed on the City of Vancouver heritage register such as for property tax waivers as part of a Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA), as are now allowed in other areas of the city, and/or request the province to waive the Additional School Tax, or other potential options;
- b. Staff to bring forward a policy report by Q1 2020, 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 (but where part or all of the increased density could not be accommodated onsite without ruining the heritage values), with the density transfer 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 after zoning and building by-law changes are implemented as per above, if Council enacts the changes.

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