

Wong, Tamarra

From: Cassandra McColman s. 22(1) Personal and Confidential
Sent: Thursday, June 25, 2020 10:57 AM
To: Kirby-Yung, Sarah; Bligh, Rebecca; Hardwick, Colleen; Boyle, Christine; Swanson, Jean; Carr, Adriane; Fry, Pete; Dominato, Lisa; Wiebe, Michael; De Genova, Melissa; Stewart, Kennedy
Cc: Kelley, Gil; O'Donnell, Theresa; Adcock, Jessie; Anne McMullin; Jeff Fisher; Public Hearing
Subject: UDI Letter- Regulation Redesign Amendments to Zoning Development and Parking By-laws
Attachments: UDI Letter- Regulation Redesign Amendments to Zoning Development and Parking By-laws_June 25, 2020.pdf

Good morning Mayor Stewart and Council,

On behalf of Anne McMullin, President and CEO of the Urban Development Institute, please see the attached letter regarding the Regulation Redesign Report that is on the agenda for the Public Hearing scheduled for this evening (June 25, 2020). We hope that you will consider our comments on the proposed amendments.

Please get in touch if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Thank you,

Cassandra McColman | Policy and Research Coordinator
Urban Development Institute

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June 25, 2020

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

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Regulation Redesign – Amendments to Zoning & Development and Parking By-laws

The Urban Development Institute (UDI) has been working with the City of Vancouver and **several stakeholder groups on the City’s Regulation Redesign Project for almost a year and half. As in the past, we continue to support staff’s efforts** to clarify, modernize and simplify the City’s myriad of land use policies, regulations and guidance documents. As such, we support the staff proposals being put forward at the June 25 Public Hearing. However, we also offer two recommendations:

1. That the City be bold in the review of its very lengthy development review process; and
2. That the City, as part of the proposed amendments to balconies, consider welcoming a new approach that will make apartment units more liveable and open - retractable glass balcony systems.

UDI agreed to participate in the Regulation Redesign External Group (RREG) that Council established because it has been extremely difficult for even experienced professionals to **navigate Vancouver’s labyrinth of numerous and conflicting requirements** – many of which were written decades ago – and are not clear. We have found that the complexity of the regulatory framework and the lack of clarity of policies has substantially delayed our **members’ projects. In many circumstances this is because it** takes additional staff time to interpret policies/regulations and manage the inevitable conflicts that arise. In addition, requirements have been imposed on projects in an inconsistent manner that is not transparent to builders or the public.

Through the efforts of staff and the RREG, we have been working to identify and address these issues. The Report before Council on June 25 represents one step in the process. As noted in the staff report, Vancouver Council has already approved other Regulation Redesign Project improvements to the *Zoning and Development By-law* in 2018 and 2019.

Although the changes may appear to be substantial because of the length of the red-lined document, these are necessary housekeeping amendments to clarify policies and processes in a *Zoning and Development By-law* that is very old and cumbersome for all who use it. The proposed changes focus on issues such as balconies/decks; when the Director of Planning can make decisions in place of the Development Permit Board; how hardship issues are managed; parking matters; updating the language about relaxations/discretion; and the overall

reorganizing of the *By-law*, so it can be better understood. Similar changes are proposed for other Official Development Plans (ODPs).

We ask that Council adopt the changes proposed by staff in their May 12 Report and support the ongoing work of the Regulatory Redesign Project.

The Need for More Substantial Processing Improvements

Although we fully support the Regulatory Redesign Project and staff's proposals, these are still primarily housekeeping improvements, and are not nearly enough to address the long processing times that proponents face– up to five years to obtain rezonings, development permits and building permits for a development.

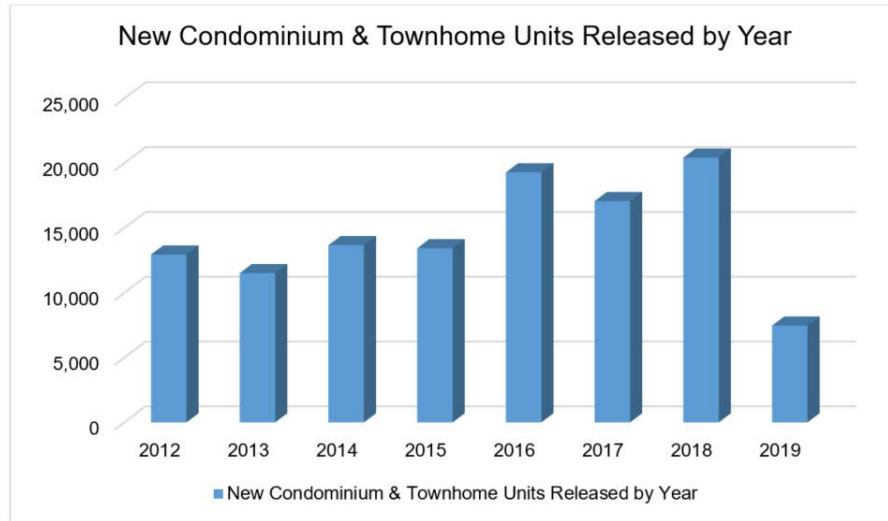
As we have noted to staff in our meetings, the City needs to take the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to fully review and improve its development review process. **As the former Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel stated, "Never allow a good crisis go to waste. It's an opportunity to do the things you once thought were impossible."** Council has already taken a key step in this regard by clarifying that the Letter of Enquiry stage is voluntary.

We believe that all issues and steps of the review process should be on the table for consideration, including:

- Removing some steps in the development approval process all together;
- Waiving public hearings in cases where projects conform to an ODP or a Community Plan (although we recognize this would require a *Vancouver Charter* amendment, but similar language is already in place in the *Local Government Act* for other B.C. municipalities);
- Allowing virtual Public Hearings, Committee meetings, and Open Houses to continue after the COVID-19 pandemic is over;
- Tracking the length of time of each step in the development review process – including how long it takes for proponents to respond to City staff comments;
- Establishing timeframes for each step of the development review process;
- Increasing opportunities for third-party technical reviews, such as the City's [Certified Professional Program](#).
- Embracing technology throughout the process, so proponents as well as staff can track the progress of projects; and
- Having concurrent Rezoning and Development Permit reviews and consider eliminating the Urban Design Panel requirement for rezonings not processed concurrently.

We understand that the City is embarking on a Development Process Redesign Initiative. We ask that staff be bold in their review and recommendations.

This is critical for our members and the economy as well as the City's ability to meet its own housing targets under the *Vancouver Housing Strategy*. Delays not only slow the release of new homes, they add risks and costs to projects. We already saw a drop off in project launches and the release of units for sale in Metro Vancouver in 2019 (see the table below), and so far, in 2020, only 2,207 units have been released for pre-sale due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In previous economic downturns, we have seen substantial rebounds in market demand, which may not be able to be met if we do not resolve the key issues in Vancouver's development process.



Metro Vancouver data as presented by Urban Analytics

Improving Suite Livability in Apartments through Retractable Glass Balcony Systems

We understand that Council will be receiving a presentation at the June 25 Public Hearing about a relatively new approach in British Columbia to enhance balcony spaces in apartments through [retractable glass systems](#). UDI is supportive of this type of technology and asks that the City consider embracing it. The time to do this is now because proposals regarding definitions of and floor area exclusions for balconies are part of the staff report to Council.

As apartment units of all types are getting smaller, enhancing the usefulness and livability of balconies is becoming more important. Currently, many balcony spaces are not being fully utilized – especially during our winter and rainy seasons. This issue is being highlighted even more now due to the social distancing restrictions placed on households due to COVID-19. Retractable balconies would provide residents with the flexibility to enjoy their balconies as outdoor areas during sunny and hot days and either partially or fully protected spaces when the weather turns for the worse. There are additional benefits to these systems, including:

- Improved energy savings of up to 15%;
- Protection from winds, especially for balconies on upper storeys of highrise buildings;
- Up to a 50% reduction in noise levels for apartment units; and
- Reductions in maintenance costs because these types of balconies will be less exposed to weather elements such as rain and snow.

Although these systems are relatively new to B.C., they have been installed throughout Europe, and have been accepted in other jurisdictions in Canada such as Toronto and Mississauga. In addition, Abbotsford, the City of Langley and the Township of Langley are allowing them – with the same floor area exemptions as regular balconies. In part, this is due to the fact that these types of balconies do not create an enclosure, and instead are single paned, fully retractable windbreak with constant ventilation to the outside elements. This ensures that these systems cannot create a hermitically sealed space and therefore cannot be used for other uses other than outdoor living.

Furthermore, they do not significantly impact the exterior appearance or bulk of a building.

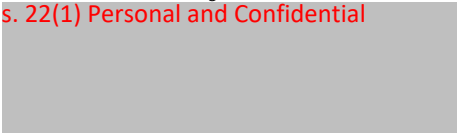
There are several companies that can provide these systems, and one has a manufacturing plant in Canada – the Lumon Retractable Balcony Glass System – which has undergone product tests and approvals from the National Research Council and Canadian Construction Materials.

We request that the City encourage the use of these retractable glass balcony systems by providing the same floor space exemptions for them that standard open balconies receive.

UDI would like to thank the City for involving us in the Regulation Redesign External Group. We support the recommendations in the May 12 staff report. However, we ask that the City take bolder steps to better manage and reduce the lengthy development review process our members face. We also recommend that the City of Vancouver incent the construction of better balconies by enhancing the floor space exclusions for retractable glass systems.

Yours sincerely,

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Anne McMullin
President and CEO, Urban Development Institute