



REFERRAL REPORT

Report Date: April 26, 2021
Contact: Paul Storer
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RTS No.: 14217
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: July 20, 2021

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services
SUBJECT: Removal of the Alma Street West Side Building Line North of West Fourth Avenue

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability be instructed to make application to amend the Zoning and Development By-law to remove the Alma Street, West Side Building Line north of West Fourth Avenue;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to prepare the necessary amending by-law, generally in accordance with Appendix E, for consideration at public hearing.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report recommends an amendment to Schedule E of the Zoning and Development By-law to remove the Alma Street, west side Building Line north of West Fourth Ave.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

November 2020: Council directed staff to review the Alma Street Building Line north of West Fourth Ave, with a consideration of the important transportation and planning initiatives underway (see **Appendix A**);

July 2013: As part of the Point Grey-Cornwall Active Transportation project, Council directed staff to make Point Grey Road west of Macdonald St a local street;

May 1956: Council adopted the Zoning and Development By-law, which included a Building Line of 12.2 m (40 ft.) from the centreline of the road on the west side of Alma Road (as it was called at the time), north of West 12th Avenue.

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

Building lines were established with the adoption of the Zoning and Development By-law in 1956 and are described in Section 14 of the current Zoning and Development By-law. Building lines define an area on private property where development cannot occur to allow for wider street right-of-way. Typically this space may be used for transportation and surface utility purposes, such as for sidewalk widening, road widening, turn-bays, cycling facilities, transit facilities, tree planting, or landscaping and green infrastructure. More information on building lines is included at **Appendix B**.

The typical local street right-of-way measures 10 metres (33 feet) on both sides of the centre line of a street, for a total width of 20.1 m (66 ft). The building line on the west side of Alma Street (formerly Alma Road) north of West Fourth Avenue was established in the original Zoning and Development By-law. It is 12.2 m (40 ft) on the west side of the street, measured from the street centre line, with 2.1m (7 ft) of the building line area on private property.

The floor space ratio (FSR), or density permitted on a site, is calculated based on the size of the site. A building line does not impact the calculation of FSR for a site. The Zoning and Development By-law requires setbacks to be measured from the building line rather than the property line. This may influence the maximum floor area that can be constructed on a site, similar to other site-specific characteristics, e.g. existing mature trees. Initial analysis shows that for a site with the same dimensions as these Alma St properties, the buildable above grade floor area would be about 10.2 sq. m (110 sq. ft) less as a result of the building line.

Staff typically seek dedication of building line land as road in three circumstances: for major conditional approval development permits, on subdivision, and for a rezoning. Additional information is included in Appendix B.

A petition to remove this building line, was received from residents on the west side of Alma Street north of West Fourth Avenue on April 25, 2019. A follow up letter with additional information was received on May 29, 2019. In November 2020 Council asked staff to review the need for this building line (see Appendix A). A map of the building line along this section of Alma Street is included at **Appendix C**.

Strategic Analysis

In July 2013, as part of the Point Grey-Cornwall Active Transportation project to complete the Seaside Greenway, Council directed staff to change the section of Point Grey Road west of Macdonald Street from an arterial street to a local street. With this change, Alma Street north of West Fourth Avenue was also functionally removed from the arterial street network. The follow up letter from the residents on May 29, 2019 included this point as part of their rationale for removal of the building line.

Alma Street north of West Fourth Avenue still serves as a critical link for walking, cycling, and motor vehicles to access Jericho Beach and local and regional destinations such as Brock House, Jericho Tennis Club, Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, and Old Hastings Mill Park and Store Museum. There are a number of current and upcoming planning processes in the neighbourhood that will consider transportation and land use changes and potentially identify new walking, cycling or green infrastructure corridors, as well as space for other public realm improvements. These include: the Vancouver Plan; planning for the Millennium Line extension from Arbutus to UBC; and, the Jericho Lands Planning Program, currently in the Policy Statement phase. The Jericho Lands are being developed by MST Partnership and the Canada Lands Company.

Similar to many local streets, the current 20.1 m (66 ft) street right of way includes one travel lane in each direction and parking on both sides. On the east side of the street there is no front boulevard and a narrow sidewalk at the curb. On the west side there is a narrow front boulevard and sidewalk. Given that these sidewalks are walking connections to Jericho Beach and other local and regional destinations, both sidewalks should be improved over time to meet City goals for active transportation and to improve connections to transit.

Staff have reviewed mobility and public realm possibilities for the future of the street if the building line were to be fully achieved and if the building line were to be removed from the Zoning and Development By-law. Retaining the building line would preserve the opportunity for an improved public realm. This could include more generous sidewalks and green infrastructure, while retaining parking on both sides of the street. However, staff analysis shows that, given Alma Street is not functioning as an arterial street north of West Fourth Avenue, City goals can still be achieved within the existing right-of way, potentially through road space reallocation. **Appendix D** provides cross-sections of potential street improvements for both options, including several examples to illustrate how the existing street width could be used differently. Further work and engagement would be required as part of any future process to make these types of changes to the street.

Financial

There are no financial implications to removing the building line.

CONCLUSION

Since Point Grey Road west of MacDonald Street has become a local street, Alma Street, north of West Fourth Avenue has functionally been removed from the arterial network. While retention

of the building line on the west side of Alma Street north of West Fourth Avenue provides the possibility for a more generous public realm in the future, Staff believe that City goals can be achieved within the existing right-of-way, through a future redesign of the street. For these reasons, the General Manager of Engineering Services recommends removing the building line. A draft copy of the amending bylaw is attached in **Appendix E**.

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Council Motion

From Standing Committee of Council on City Finance and Services Minutes, Wednesday, November 25, 2020:

4. Petition for the Removal of the Alma Street Building Line (Motion B.2)

At the Council meeting on November 24, 2020, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services meeting on November 25, 2020, in order to hear from speakers.

The Committee heard from three speakers in support of the motion.

MOVED by Councillor Bligh
THAT the Committee recommend to Council

WHEREAS

1. Council has received a petition from seven owners with properties along the west side of Alma Street between 4th Avenue and Point Grey Road to remove the Alma Street Building Line north of 4th Avenue;
2. Building lines as described in Section 14 of the *Zoning and Development By-law*. Building lines were typically adopted for transportation and surface utility purposes, such as for:
 - Sidewalk widening,
 - Road widening,
 - Turn bays,
 - Cycling facilities,
 - Transit facilities,
 - Tree planting, or
 - Landscaping and green infrastructure;
3. The west side of Alma Street, north of 4th Avenue has a building line, as defined in the *Zoning and Development Bylaw*, and as part of the Point Grey Road improvements, has functionally changed from an arterial street to a local street;
and
4. Local streets typically have less requirement for road width than arterial streets.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to review the Alma Street Building line north of 4th Avenue, with a consideration of the important transportation and planning initiatives underway;

FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to report back no later than July 31, 2021.

CARRIED (Vote No. 06715)
(Councillor Wiebe opposed)

Background Information on Building Lines

History and Purpose of Building Lines

Building lines are described in Section 14 of the Zoning and Development By-law. Typically they are used for transportation and surface utility purposes, such as for sidewalk widening, road widening, turn bays, cycling facilities, transit facilities, tree planting, or landscaping and green infrastructure.

The use of building lines was recommended in the 1929 "A Plan for the City of Vancouver, including Point Grey, and South Vancouver and a General Plan for the Region", prepared by Harland Bartholomew and Associates. A building line defines a proposed future property line on private property where the City may seek the long term widening of a street right-of-way for transportation or other public uses.

Building lines were established through Vancouver's Zoning and Development By-law through Council by-law enactments between 1946 and 1956. As with any amendment to the Zoning and Development By-law, changes to building lines require a Public Hearing and decision of Council.

How Building Lines are Used

Initially adopted to provide for future widening of existing roads, the additional right of way created by building lines can be used for other related purposes. These include widening a sidewalk, adding a bike lane, adding a median, creating additional space for utilities, or creating a transit right-of-way. An example would be Robson St, where building lines have resulted in wider sidewalks and a more attractive pedestrian environment.

If an owner proposes to rezone or subdivide a property, the City may require that the area between the existing property line and the building line be dedicated to the City at no cost to the City. Development is not normally permitted in the area between the existing property line and the building line except for landscaping, fences, and temporary structures. The objective of setting back development from the building line is to lessen the impact on the site should the City need to acquire the area before redevelopment occurs.

Dedications of the building line area (the area between the property boundary and the building line), can be required in certain circumstances from land owners whose lots abut a City street. It is a slow and gradual process, which over time, provides the City with a widened right-of-way at no cost to the City. In other circumstances, the City must purchase the required land at market value.

Dedication of land can be required in three circumstances: for certain major conditional approval development permits, on subdivision, and for a rezoning.

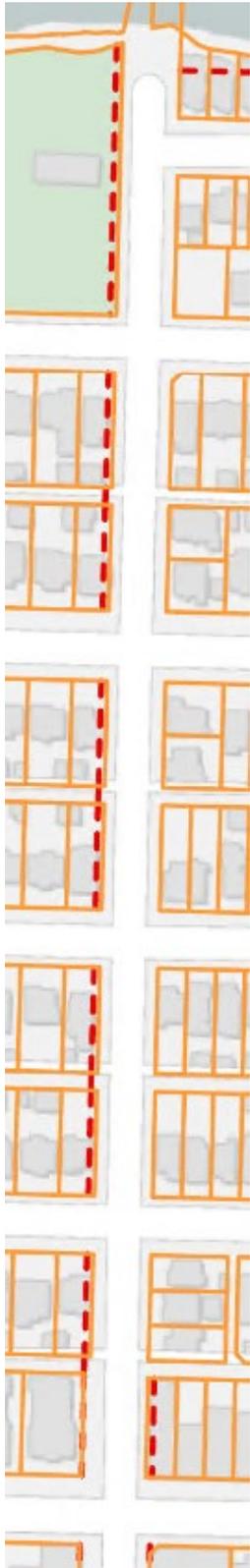
Building Lines Around the City of Vancouver

A May 18, 1999, City of Vancouver report to The Standing Committee on Transportation and Traffic estimated, there were over 5,500 lots within the City with building lines running through them. Building lines exist along a great number of City streets and additional land has been

acquired over time through the presence of these building lines. Often this has enabled wider sidewalks along arterial streets with better pedestrian separation from traffic.

The 1999 report also notes that changes to building lines have been made, often as part of wider planning processes for an area. This has included reducing or removing building lines in some instances. The report also states, as the petitioner's mention, that building lines can be reviewed to determine which ones are still needed, and that the width and location of the building line can be adjusted if necessary.

Building Line Along Alma St, North of West Fourth Ave



Point Grey Rd

W 1st Ave

W 2nd Ave

W 3rd Ave

W 4th Ave

Legend:

- Building Lines
- Property Parcels

Cross-Sections

Current Condition (figure 1): Most of Alma St, from West Fourth Ave to Point Grey Road has an 11 m (36 ft) roadway, 1.5-1.8 m (5-6 ft) sidewalks and a treed boulevard on the west side. Parking is permitted on both sides. There is no dedicated space for people cycling.

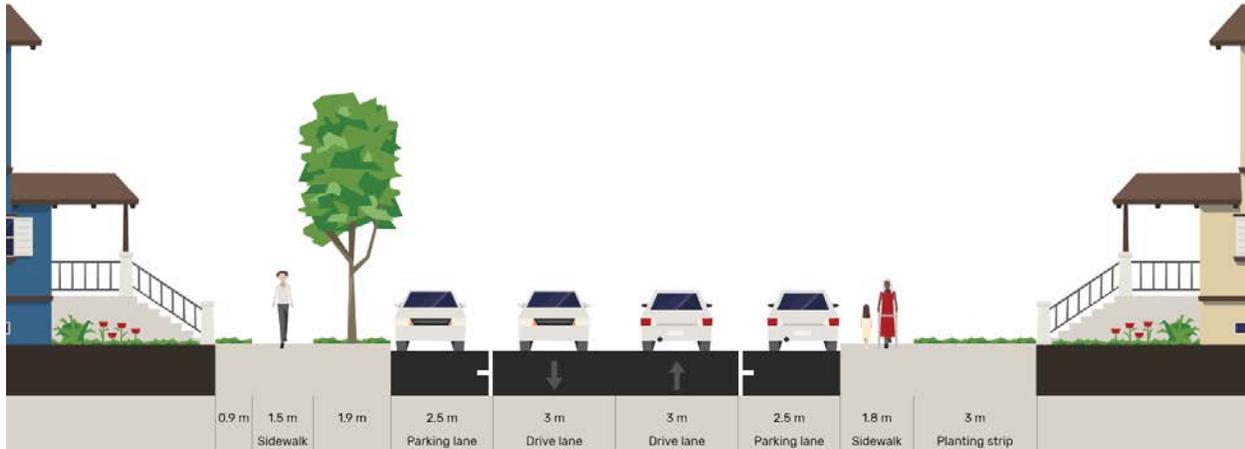


Figure 1: Current Cross-Section of Alma St (North of West Fourth Ave)

Future Condition with Building Line (figure 2): With the extra 2.1 m (7 ft) afforded by the existing building line on the west, the west sidewalk could be widened to 3.0 m (9.8 ft) and a second row of trees added without affecting most of the existing street trees or the roadway. Green infrastructure could potentially be included in this rebuilt area.

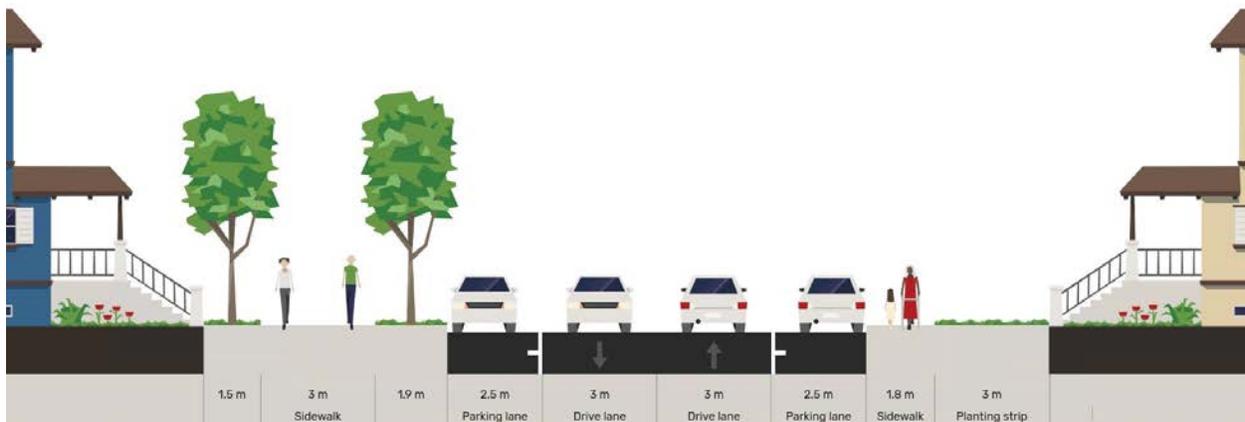


Figure 2: Potential Alma St Cross Section (North of West Fourth Ave) with Building Line

Future Condition without Building Line (figures 3 - 6): With just the existing street dedication, and preserving the existing street trees, a number of options exist for an alternate street design. Figure 3 shows the west sidewalk widened to about 2 m (6.6 ft) in most places. In addition, space for green infrastructure could be provided removing one side of parking.

Figure 4 shows an alternate option. With parking on the west side removed, a wider sidewalk and boulevard can be accommodated on the east side of the street.

Figure 5 shows that wider sidewalks and green space would be delivered on both sides of the street if parking was removed entirely.

Figure 6 shows an option including protected bicycle lanes, which largely replace on-street parking. These options require varying levels of intervention but show that a number of options exist for changing the street in the future within the current right of way.



Figure 3: Potential Modified Alma St Cross Section (North of West Fourth Ave) with existing road width – green infrastructure or landscaping on west side



Figure 4: Potential Modified Alma St Cross Section (North of West Fourth Ave) with existing road width – additional sidewalk space and boulevard on eastern side of street



Figure 5: Potential Modified Alma St Cross Section (North of West Fourth Ave) with existing road width – additional sidewalk space and boulevard on both sides of street, and no on-street parking



Figure 6: Potential Modified Alma St Cross Section (North of West Fourth Ave) with existing road width – protected bicycle lanes and new boulevard strip on eastern side of street, with no on-street parking

