

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. Enhancing Housing Density Near Under-Enrolled Vancouver Schools

Submitted by: Councillor Zhou

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver has the following Mission Statement: "To create a great city of communities, which cares about its people, its environment and the opportunities to live, work and prosper." (POLICY NUMBER: CG-001-01);
2. The health and vitality of Vancouver's communities is one of the reasons our city is considered one of the best places on earth to live. To ensure the continued sustainability and liveability of our neighbourhoods, City staff work with community groups and other agencies to address critical social issues that affect us all and to ensure the needs of all residents are met;
3. According to the Vancouver School Board (VSB), the school district has seen a 26-year history of generally declining enrolment despite an overall increase in Vancouver's population. Several factors have contributed to this enrolment decline including an aging population, a reduced birth rate, and housing unaffordability and unattainability that has resulted in a greater number of families with school aged children moving out of the city; ⁱ
4. According to the VSB, Kindergarten to Grade 12 enrolment in 2011 was 51,758 students, but in 2021 enrolment was just 47,386. This represents an 8.4 per cent decline in VSB enrolment over the last 10 years or roughly 4,400 fewer students. Current VSB forecasts indicate a further decline in the years ahead. Examples of Vancouver schools with declining enrollment include Southlands Elementary and Bayview Community Elementary; ⁱⁱ
5. Families with children are key to a diverse and vibrant society. Making sure Vancouver has the right kinds of housing to support families is therefore important to the overall success of our city;
6. To meet the needs of the Vancouver's growing population and to ensure that our city remains vibrant and diverse, it is important to have a varied supply of housing, including new forms of attainable and affordable housing for families with children to reinvigorate our neighbourhoods and repopulate the city's considerable number of valuable school sites, many of which suffer from under-enrollment and risk being lost forever;

7. *Housing Vancouver* is the City's 10-year housing strategy and intended to reduce the city's housing affordability gap and provide a strong foundation for the future of Vancouver. The strategy aligns with the long-range *Vancouver Plan* which is meant to guide growth and change in the city for the next 30 years. The stated intent of the *Vancouver Plan* is to present a unified vision of the city's future by implementing bold Council-approved plans to address climate and affordability issues, to align with regional planning initiatives, and to advance Reconciliation, equity, and resiliency initiatives; ⁱⁱⁱ
8. A key goal of the Vancouver Plan is to create complete, connected, and culturally vibrant neighbourhoods;
9. In November 2022, the Province of BC enacted the *Housing Supply Act* which gives the Province the authority to set housing targets in municipalities, starting with those known to have the greatest need and highest projected population growth (the Housing Supply Act came into force in May 2023). The provincial targets are intended to encourage municipalities to address local barriers to construction so that housing can be built faster, including updating zoning bylaws and streamlining local development approval processes. A target of 28,900 housing units has been set for the City of Vancouver;
10. On September 14, 2023, Council voted unanimously to open up neighbourhoods across the city to allow for the development of multiplexes that will create homes for families and help a greater number of people build a future in Vancouver. It means more people will now have the opportunity to call Vancouver neighbourhoods home with up to six strata units, or up to eight secured rental units on larger lots, allowed on lots previously reserved for single-family homes or duplexes;
11. The zoning changes implemented by Council to allow multiplex housing in neighbourhoods across the city directly aligns with the objectives of the *Housing Vancouver* strategy and the *Vancouver Plan*, including the goal of creating neighbourhoods that are more complete and connected, with more housing choice. The changes implemented by Council also align with the Province's *Homes for People* housing plan which encourages construction of small-scale, multi-unit homes through zoning changes, more housing for middle-income households, and streamlined permitting processes;
12. On Monday, October 16, 2023, Council gave direction to staff to accelerate several housing delivery actions to provide more housing options for people across the city, including direction to proceed with implementation and pre-zoning of the city's 26 Village Areas outlined in the Vancouver Plan to increase the supply of townhouses, multiplex buildings, and mixed-use low-rise buildings between 3-6 storeys;

13. A known planning gap exists between the City’s growth plans and VSB land-use decisions whereby the VSB’s demographic forecasting does not effectively incorporate the City’s municipal growth projections and city land-use planning;
14. An 8.4 per cent decline in VSB enrolment over the last 10 years, which represents roughly 4,400 fewer students, threatens the health and vitality of Vancouver’s neighbourhoods and communities and places valuable school sites at risk of being lost forever. Ensuring that our city has the right types of housing to support families is therefore vitally important to the success, sustainability, and ongoing vibrancy of our city and underscores the need for specific policy tools focused on increasing family-oriented housing density in proximity to under-enrolled Vancouver schools.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT Council direct staff to engage with Vancouver School Board (VSB) staff to explore opportunities to increase family-oriented density in proximity to Vancouver school sites, in accordance with a variety of City of Vancouver planning objectives, with particular emphasis on Vancouver schools that are at risk of closure due to under enrollment and provide an initial report back to Council with recommendations by the end of Q3 2024;

FURTHER THAT Council requests the Mayor write to the Vancouver School Board (VSB) and the BC Ministry of Education requesting further consultation with the City of Vancouver regarding demographic projections for school enrollment to ensure that the projections account for any City planning and land-use changes.

* * * * *

ⁱ According to the VSB, both the birth rate and the number of school-aged children continue to decline in the city. And although there is growth of school-aged children in certain high-density areas of the city such as Olympic Village, the North Cambie Corridor, and Downtown core, this growth is offset by the declining number of school aged children in other areas in Vancouver (*District Enrolment Considerations – Feb 14, 2023*). <https://www.vsb.bc.ca/page/62596/district-enrolment-considerations>

ⁱⁱ From the VSB Board Chair Annual Report for 2022 (dated October 31, 2022): The VSB is a large, urban and multicultural school district that manages and maintains a total of 122 sites, comprised of 88 elementary schools, 12 annexes, 18 secondary schools, 1 online learning school (VLN), and 1 alternate secondary school. <https://www.vsb.bc.ca/page/38012/board-chair-annual-report-2022>

ⁱⁱⁱ According to the Vancouver Plan, about 86,000 existing households in Vancouver need better housing. This number is expected to increase by 50,000 over the next 10 years, with equity-denied groups disproportionately impacted. <https://council.vancouver.ca/20220706/documents/cfsc1presentation.PDF>