

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

For consideration at the Standing Committee meeting of City Council on October 9, 2024

2. Potential to Update the Vancouver Building Bylaw to enable Single Egress Stairs Low & Mid-Rise Buildings to Align with Provincial Changes to the BC Building Code and Deliver Better Quality Housing Options

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. This Council has committed to and is advancing work on streamlining policies, processes and permitting, in order to deliver more housing faster to help address the housing crisis in Vancouver;
2. Missing middle housing options and options for families and family-sized units are an important part of the housing continuum, and are options that are sorely needed in Vancouver;
3. In October 2023, Council passed the motion entitled “Accelerating Housing Delivery Through Transformative Change” where Council directed staff to explore the steps and measures to harmonize and otherwise align the Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL), which regulates the design and construction of buildings (including administrative provisions related to permitting, inspections, and the enforcement of these requirements), with the BC Building Code (BCBC), which governs how new construction, building alterations, repairs and demolitions are completed, for a more rapid delivery of housing in the City of Vancouver. And the motion directed that staff outline the differences and distinctions between the City’s By-law and the Province’s Building Code, along with the impacts of these differences and distinctions in terms of the timely delivery of housing;
4. On August 29, 2024, the Province of BC and BC Minister of Housing announced changes to the BC Building Code (BCBC) allowing single egress stair (SES) designs in low and mid-rise buildings, with the intention of having larger layouts and more multi-bedroom apartment options available for families and people who need them, and where development was previously not possible due to lot size, cost and other limitations.

The Provincial updates to the BCBC removed the code requirement for a second egress, or exit, stairwell per floor in buildings up to six (6) stories, to make it possible to build housing projects on smaller lots and in different configurations, while allowing more flexibility for multi-bedroom apartments, more density within areas of transit-oriented developments and the potential to improve energy efficiency in buildings. Previously, the BCBC called for at least two egress stairwells in buildings three storeys and higher.

To ensure the continuing safety for residents, updated BCBC requires that all new SES designed buildings will require specific safety measures, including sprinklers, smoke-management systems and wider stairwells;

5. The BCBC SES changes were drafted following the release of the report, "Single Egress Stair Building Designs: Policy and Technical Options", in June 2024 that included engagement with representatives of the fire services community amongst other stakeholders;
6. On September 3rd, the Fire Chiefs Association of BC (FCABC) and the BC Professional Fire Fighters Association (BCPFFA) raised concerns regarding the BC Provincial Government amendment of the BCBC to allow a Single Exit Stairway (SES) in multi-residential buildings, indicating that the changes responded to some of the fire service's concerns identified in the report authored for the Province on June 25, 2024 by Robert Heikkila, with Jensen Hughes entitled Single Egress Stair Building Designs: Policy and Technical Options Report, but did not go far enough to address all life safety concerns.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to report back in Q4 2024 on the potential to and required changes needed to align the Vancouver Building By-law with the BC Building Code, in order to permit single egress stairs in low & mid-rise buildings in buildings up to six (6) stories to enable larger layouts and more multi-bedroom apartment options for families and people who need them.
- B. THAT the report back be guided by advice of Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services and consideration of VFRS concerns, or recommendations with respect to the identification or potential inclusion of supporting life safety and firefighting measures.

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