

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. **Unlocking Community Potential: Collaborating with Faith-Based Groups for Affordable Housing and Social Impact in Vancouver**

Submitted by: Councillor Bligh

WHEREAS

1. To meet the needs of Vancouver's growing population and ensure our city remains vibrant and diverse, it is important that we have an affordable and varied supply of housing;
2. Vancouver is a City of Reconciliation grounded in right relations with the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), səliiwətał (Tseil-Waututh Nation), and urban Indigenous communities;
3. On Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at the Standing Committee of Council on City Finance and Services, Council directed staff "to facilitate the creation of new programs, policies, or mechanisms under the City's Housing Development Office that will unlock the delivery of new middle-income housing in the city on City-owned land" including "exploring potential partnerships with First Nations, private sector/industry partners, other government agencies, non-profits and faith-based groups.";
4. Faith-based religious groups have long been an integral part of Vancouver's rich community fabric, and the City recognizes the positive social impact congregations have contributed to the city and its people, including providing shelter, support, housing for vulnerable populations and other amenities;
5. Faith-based groups own substantial land assets in Vancouver. These lands have enormous potential for community-oriented redevelopment in alignment with the City's goals of inclusivity, sustainability, and reconciliation;
6. Many properties owned by faith-based religious groups are rapidly aging and face extensive deferred maintenance issues. These properties represent a significant, yet untapped, potential for addressing Vancouver's significant housing needs and other challenges;
7. There is an increasing interest among faith-based communities to redevelop their properties and to utilize their spaces and lands for broader social purposes beyond traditional worship, reflecting a mission-based commitment to community welfare, reconciliation, and achieving greater social impact;
8. Despite having significant land holdings, many faith-based groups lack the specific knowledge required to initiate redevelopment projects and could benefit from guidance and support from the City, such as advice on the various City programs that could help to facilitate socially impactful redevelopment of properties;

9. There is a clear, mutually advantageous opportunity for the City to collaborate more closely with faith-based groups, specifically to explore innovative solutions for the redevelopment and optimal use of their land resources for greater social impacts, such as enhanced community services, providing affordable housing, and meeting other social impact objectives; and
10. The City of Vancouver has various existing policy pathways that could assist faith-based groups in moving their redevelopment projects forward. For example, (i) the Social Housing or Rental Tenure (SHORT) Program, which aims for faster production of affordable housing by reducing development approval times for high-impact multi-family housing projects, (ii) the Interim Rezoning Policy for Social Housing, Seniors Housing, and Institutional, Cultural and Recreational Uses, and (iii) additional height and density for mass timber construction in rezoning applications.ⁱ

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council recognizes the housing, social impact, and community benefits potential of properties owned by faith-based religious groups by formally inviting faith-based groups, BC Housing, the Provincial and Federal governments, and other stakeholders to a City hosted dialogue to advance and expedite the collaborative redevelopment of these unique properties.
- B. THAT Council directs staff to report back regarding resources and staff support available to faith-based groups and organizations considering redevelopment projects in Vancouver, as well as potential policy and/or regulatory changes that would support the deployment of these properties to deliver affordable housing.

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ⁱ SHORT seeks to complete rezoning approvals in 28 weeks and development permits in 12 weeks, cutting around 40 weeks out of the current process. SHORT criteria to determine if a project qualifies for this special priority process include the level of affordability for renters, locations on government or non-profit owned land with secured funding, and inclusion of an Indigenous partner or residents.