



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: May 5, 2026
Contact: Sarah Hicks
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RTS No.: 18313
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: June 3, 2026
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities

FROM: Chief Licence Inspector

SUBJECT: Report Back – Giving Effect to Cooling Rights in a Climate Emergency Through the Licence By-law

Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve, in principle, amendments to the Licence By-law as described in this report and as generally set out in Appendix A;
- FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a by-law to amend the Licence By-law, generally as set out in Appendix A, to be effective immediately upon enactment.
- B. THAT, subject to Council's approval of Recommendation A, Council approve, in principle, amendments to the Ticket Offences By-law as generally set out in Appendix B to be effective immediately upon enactment;
- FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a by-law to amend the Ticket Offences By-law, generally as set out in Appendix B, to be effective immediately upon enactment.
- C. THAT Council request that the Mayor send a letter to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs:
- i. advocating for provincial regulations under the Residential Tenancy Act and Strata Property Act to prohibit landlords and strata corporations from restricting or preventing residents from using portable cooling devices, as outlined in the report; and
 - ii. requesting an update on the Province's progress toward enabling amendments to the *Vancouver Charter* that would allow the City to establish maximum indoor temperature standards, as approved by Council on June 11, 2024.

Purpose and Executive Summary

This report responds to the Council Motion, [Giving Effect to Cooling Rights in a Climate Emergency Through the Standards of Maintenance By-law](#), which requested staff to explore regulatory options that prevent landlords from banning or limiting the use of portable cooling devices when a residential dwelling unit does not have air conditioning.

Staff recommend amendments to the Licence By-law to prevent landlords from prohibiting or restricting tenants from using portable cooling devices when no air conditioning is otherwise provided and to establish an exception process available for housing providers and landlords for instances when they are unable to reasonably comply. Council has the authority under sections 272 and 273 of the *Vancouver Charter* to regulate licensed businesses and impose requirements on landlords through the Licence By-law.

Should Council approve this approach, staff will provide education materials for landlords and tenants on best practices for using portable cooling devices safely. Staff propose a complementary amendment to the Ticket Offences By-law to make disallowing portable air conditioning devices a ticketable offence with a fine of \$1,000.

To complement the proposed regulations, staff also request that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, send a letter to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs in support of regulations in the Residential Tenancy Act and Strata Property Act for restricting landlords and strata corporations from disallowing residents' use of portable cooling devices when cooling is not provided and request an update on the work towards Council's 2024 request to amend the *Vancouver Charter* to regulate maximum indoor temperature.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- [Sections 272 and 273 of the Vancouver Charter](#) grants the authority to establish terms and conditions of a licence to regulate business activity.
- On [March 13, 2024](#), Council approved the third iteration of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy which outlined a suite of actions focused on the five main climate-related hazards facing Vancouver, including extreme heat and supporting indoor cooling and thermal safety at home.
- On [November 27, 2024](#), Council motioned the Mayor to write a letter to the Province to advocate for enactment of climate resilient measures and standards related to extreme heat events.
- On [March 31, 2026](#), Council approved grant funding to the Downtown Eastside SRO Collaborative to support the creation of cooling room retrofits in 6 privately-owned SRO buildings.

City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

Hot weather, especially prolonged extreme heat events, can result in negative health outcomes like heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and death. During the 2021 heat dome, BC experienced

record-breaking daytime temperatures and sustained overnight temperatures resulting in 619 heat-related deaths, 117 of which were in Vancouver. 98% of deaths occurred indoors and most were in homes without adequate cooling systems such as air conditioners.¹ Climate change is increasing risks to health and well-being as Vancouver is projected to experience higher year-round temperatures, with the hottest summer days expected to be hotter, and extreme heat events more frequent and longer; Environment Canada forecasts 2026 to be among the hottest years on record.

High indoor temperatures (above 26 degrees Celsius) disproportionately affect at-risk people including infants and young children, adults over 65, people with limited mobility, people who live alone, low-income individuals, people living with pre-existing physical and mental health conditions, and those who rent their homes. These groups are at higher risk for heat-related illness because of biological susceptibility, time spent in hot indoor environments, and barriers to effectively cool their homes.

Between 2021-2023, the City partnered with Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and BC Center for Disease Control (BCCDC) to collect over 4,500 indoor temperature measurements in Vancouver households in the summer months.² The *Indoor HEAT study* found that nearly 7 in 10 homes reported maximum temperatures of 26°C or higher, 13% reported temperatures at or above 31°C, more than half of participating households reported symptoms of heat-related illness, and 41% of participants reported barriers to purchasing, installing, or operating cooling equipment like air conditioners in their homes. Notably, residents living in multi-unit residential buildings reported more barriers to cooling their homes, and tenants more frequently reported barriers to installing air conditioning compared to owners. The most relevant cited barrier reported across all households were restrictive tenancy agreements or strata bylaws that restrict the use of cooling outright.

The City has been taking action to prepare Vancouver for hotter summer temperatures through the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. Actions taken include an update to the Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) to require one living space in each dwelling unit of new residential buildings to be capable of maintaining an indoor temperature at or below 26 degrees Celsius, cooling retrofits to City-owned community centres and other civic buildings, and grants for cooling and warming rooms in SROs.

Discussion

Following Council's direction to explore regulatory options that prevent landlords from banning or limiting the use of portable cooling devices in a rental unit that does not have air conditioning, staff used a set of guiding principles to help guide the development of the proposed regulation and compliance approach, including:

1. Protect tenant health and safety;
2. Ensure clear and balanced landlord responsibilities; and
3. Avoid regulatory duplication with other levels of government.

The Licence By-law regulates how businesses operate within the city of Vancouver, including protection of public health and safety. The proposed provision would apply to *long-term rental* licence holders which includes a business providing residential rental accommodation for no

¹ [The BC Coroners Service, Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021.](#)

² [Vancouver's Indoor HEAT Study: Key Findings on Household Exposure to Ambient Temperatures in Vancouver from 2021-2023. City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health, and BC Centre for Disease Control, 2026.](#)

less than one month in a single detached house, laneway house, lodging house, rooming house, multiple conversion dwelling, multiple dwelling, non-profit housing or secondary suite. Staff also reviewed whether the proposed regulations should be included in the Standards of Maintenance (SOM) By-law. Council does not have the clear authority under the *Vancouver Charter* to regulate cooling in existing homes under its standards of maintenance powers but Council can, through the Licence By-law, regulate landlords and the conditions they must meet in order to hold a long term rental licence. Whether a tenant is in a secondary suite, a purpose built rental or a stratified building, these regulations will be in place so that a landlord cannot unreasonably deny a portable cooling device.

Staff propose amendments to the Licence By-law to prevent *long-term rental* licence holders from disallowing portable mechanical cooling devices in rental units in buildings that can support them (see Appendix A). This would provide renters the ability to cool themselves, supporting safety and well-being for residents where permanent air conditioning is not available. These proposed regulations do not require landlords to supply the portable air conditioning device; but prevents landlords from prohibiting their use in the rental unit.

To accommodate reasonable building-related challenges associated with enabling the use of portable devices in rental housing, staff recommend including an exception to support landlords who are unable to reasonably comply. Under this process, the landlord may apply to the Chief Licence Inspector, on the advice of the Chief Building Official, with evidence as to why compliance is not reasonably achievable. Documentation must be prepared or authenticated by a certified professional, such as an architect, engineer or Field Safety Representative (FSR), and clearly identify the legitimate barrier preventing an occupant from using a portable cooling device within the rental unit. Examples of reasonable challenges could include limited electrical capacity or building integrity issues. Similar regulations are used by the City of New Westminster for cooling regulations where an owner may apply for an exception from the rules on the grounds that the building owner is unable to reasonably comply with the regulation. The intent of the exception is to mitigate undue hardship on landlords where constraints exist that could otherwise require significant building upgrades or pose major safety concerns.

Provincial authority and considerations

As part of the City's work on reviewing provincial extreme heat mitigation efforts and regulatory approaches that address access to non-permanent cooling for homes in Vancouver, staff engaged with the BC Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs on provincial regulations related to tenants' use of portable cooling devices.

The Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) establishes that terms within a tenancy agreement which restrict or ban the use of air conditioning units could be considered unenforceable if it impacts the health and quality of life of the tenant.³ Specific restrictions may be identified as legitimate with appropriate rationale, including safety or building issues. This also applies to passive cooling measures, like awnings and reflective window coverings. The RTA currently does not regulate maximum temperature for rental units and there are no plans to impose provincial standards on existing rental buildings at this time.

Staff also considered the impact of potential regulation for portable cooling measures on strata units. Section 121(1) of the Strata Property Act states that a by-law is not enforceable if it contravenes any other enactment or law, including municipal regulations.⁴ If a building's strata

³ [Residential Tenancy Branch, Policy Guideline 8: Unconscionable, Unlawful, and Material Terms](#)

⁴ [Government of British Columbia, Strata Property Act Part 7 - Bylaws and Rules](#)

by-laws have active restrictions or limitations on portable cooling devices for dwelling units, the strata council would have an obligation to bring the building into compliance with municipal regulations. These regulations would apply to tenant-occupied strata units in a building where cooling is not otherwise provided. If a legitimate barrier to installing or using an AC unit within the dwelling is identified, the owner may apply for an exception. This proposed regulation would not extend to owner-occupied strata units.

Currently, under *Vancouver Charter* authority, the City is only permitted to regulate minimum temperatures. In June 2024, Mayor and Council directed staff to request a *Vancouver Charter* amendment to grant the City authority to establish maximum allowable indoor temperatures in residential buildings. In March 2025, the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs advised the City that Ministry staff require additional time, research, and policy work before considering the proposed amendment.

In addition to the proposed municipal regulations, staff recommend that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, advocate to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs in support of provincial regulations in the Residential Tenancy Act and Strata Property Act to prohibit landlords and stratas from restricting a resident's use of a portable air conditioning device. A provincial framework would establish a uniform standard, avoiding inconsistent rules and compliance expectations across cities. Staff are also proposing that an update be requested on the progress of Ministry work related to Vancouver's request for an amendment to the *Vancouver Charter* to grant the City authority to establish maximum indoor temperature standards.

Other jurisdictions

Staff reviewed cooling and tenant health and safety regulations in comparable jurisdictions in Canada (Mississauga, New Westminster, Port Moody and Toronto) and the United States (Tempe, Tucson, Palm Springs, Chicago, New Orleans, Portland, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Los Angeles County, Montgomery County, Clark County). In British Columbia, the Cities of New Westminster and Port Moody have regulations to prohibit landlords from disallowing portable cooling devices within rental units. The City of New Westminster has also recently introduced regulations requiring one living space in a rental unit must not exceed a safe indoor temperature (26°C) and increased enforcement staff dedicated to tenant-related matters.⁵ Several other municipalities in Canada and the United States have established regulations to support renters' access to cooling. Among the 16 cities and counties reviewed, 14 have adopted maximum indoor temperature standards. Other approaches included requirements for air conditioning systems to be kept in good working condition (Toronto), mandatory cooling of indoor common areas in new and existing residential buildings (Chicago), and obligations on landlords to provide cooling (including Tempe, Tucson, Palm Spring, Austin, Dallas, El Paso), some of which include phased implementation timelines (Los Angeles County).

Similar to many municipalities, there are several states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Texas, Washington, DC) and provinces (British Columbia, Ontario) with various cooling regulations. With respect to maximum temperature standards, California, Georgia, Texas, and Washington require specific temperature ranges to be maintained in residential care and assisted living facilities, and New York sets a maximum indoor temperature standard for schools. British Columbia regulates the maximum indoor temperature of one living space in large, new residential buildings. Most notably, Ontario and Oregon have regulations to allow for portable cooling with reasonable conditions.

⁵ [City of New Westminster, Business Regulations and Licensing \(Rental Units\) Bylaw Cooling Amendments and Next Steps](#)

Consultation feedback

DBL staff, in collaboration with PDS, conducted a consultation with industry stakeholders, including housing providers and operators, tenancy resource and advocacy groups, and sustainability experts to gather feedback on the possible regulations and solutions for extreme heat mitigation. These findings complement existing data on experiences of high indoor temperatures and barriers to cooling among residents.

Overall, stakeholders were generally supportive of a regulation that prohibits cooling bans, citing the importance of allowing tenants to install non-permanent cooling in their homes to manage high indoor temperatures for safety and comfort. There was a shared sentiment among the stakeholders consulted about the impact of high indoor temperatures, citing the 2021 heat dome as an example of the consequences to health and well-being for households most vulnerable to extreme heat. This proposed regulation was seen as one of many approaches, alongside the desire for education, funding for cooling retrofits, establishing standards for maximum indoor temperature, and exploring building code-based solutions for example, that are necessary to reduce the barriers to cooling in homes.

Stakeholders raised some concerns regarding the potential for an increase in air conditioning use, citing added cost of utilities, potential issues if equipment is improperly installed or maintained, and possible limitations regarding electrical capacity and building upgrades. Electrical capacity and cost of building upgrades were highlighted by some as a significant barrier to compliance for single room occupancy (SRO) buildings and non-market housing as a lot of these buildings have been converted from a hotel with minimal electrical load limits. Illegal suites are also deemed higher risk, as electrical capacity hasn't been reviewed and may not provide the necessary load for the residence.

While electrical capacity is frequently cited as a risk, portable air conditioning units have a standard plug load that is typically already accounted for in building electrical systems. Building owners and landlords are not required to undertake upgrades to comply with the by-law. For buildings that are approaching electrical capacity constraints, there are strategies and operational solutions that can be implemented without upgrades to support existing electrical capacity within a building and mitigate increased demand. To address buildings where documented electrical capacity or other reasonable challenges exist, staff propose an exception to the by-law as described in Appendix A.

Achieving compliance

Education materials can serve as a foundational tool to support compliance, acting as a first step in the City's enforcement approach. Understanding the requirements and expectations of a particular regulation can resolve many issues early on. Resources can also play an important role in keeping Vancouver residents safe and cool when the city is warmest. All stakeholders consulted were supportive of targeted information to complement proposed regulations that highlight the risk and solutions available to mitigate overheating.

Should Council approve the amendments, staff will provide education materials and targeted extreme heat information that outlines how residents and building owners can help ensure resident safety and comfort in homes. These resources will include best practices for portable air conditioning use for safe and effective cooling for tenants; guidance for landlords; and cooling options when mechanical cooling might not be available, including passive cooling strategies. These educational materials will complement the City's existing extreme heat preparedness education, as well as other resources already developed or underway from staff, organising additional and current resources with renters and landlords in mind, and reinforcing understanding of requirement and compliance.

Staff recommend an amendment to the Ticket Offences By-law to establish an offence for disallowing the use of a portable air conditioning device when cooling is not available within the dwelling unit, subject to a \$1,000 fine. This aligns with similar fine amounts set for corresponding ticketable offences for the Licence By-law.

Other extreme heat preparedness and mitigation measures

Measures are currently in place to provide residents access to cooling across Vancouver during periods of hot weather. The following heat preparedness and response actions have been developed for the upcoming summer:

- cooling centres, available when Environment Canada issues a heat warning or declares an extreme heat emergency;
- drinking water and cooling infrastructure, including 300+ permanent drinking fountains with additional temporary drinking fountains, handwashing stations and misting stations added during the summer months;
- targeted supports for older adults, people with disabilities, low-income tenants and other at-risk groups, delivered through the Resilient Neighbourhood Program; and
- extreme heat information provided in Vancouver’s top 12 languages.

There are also several initiatives underway for future summers. Through the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, staff are continuing to explore additional supports for building owners and occupants, prioritizing those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of extreme heat and experience the highest barriers to adapting their homes. Examples include a portable air conditioner assistance program, thermal resilience retrofit pilot programs, and standardization of electrical capacity reporting for rental buildings to support this update to the Licence By-law. As this work progresses, programs will be brought to Council as needed

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report’s recommendations.

Legal Implications

If the Recommendations in this report are adopted, Council will amend the Licence By-law to allow tenants to install portable cooling devices if no air conditioning is available.

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APPENDIX C: Letter from Vancouver Coastal Health

Dr. Michael Schwandt, Medical Health Officer

#800 - 601 West Broadway

Vancouver, BC V5Z 4C2

604-675-3900

May 14, 2026

Mayor and Council
City of Vancouver
Submitted electronically

To the Mayor and Council:

**Re: Giving Effect to Cooling Rights in a Climate Emergency through the Licence By-law
(Staff report to Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities, June 3, 2026)**

I am writing in my capacity as Medical Health Officer for Vancouver in support of recommendations from City of Vancouver staff to amend Vancouver’s Licence By-law, in response to the related Council motion of November 25, 2025. The recommended amendments would prevent landlords from prohibiting tenants from using portable cooling devices (i.e. air conditioning) when cooling is not otherwise provided in a dwelling. Enforceable policy interventions to support cooling in housing can help promote safety and well-being for Vancouver residents, and may prevent illness and deaths during extreme heat events.

In Vancouver and around the world, temperatures are increasing and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent due to human-caused climate change. Among other impacts, Vancouver residents are expected to experience more severe heat waves and poorer air quality from wildfire smoke. These changes have already negatively impacted our community.¹ For example, the 2021 BC heat dome caused the heat-related deaths of 619 people in British Columbia, 117 of whom sustained fatal heat injury in Vancouver.² As we face this reality, there is profound urgency for our communities to adapt and take measures to support climate resilience.

Research has consistently demonstrated the link between high indoor temperature exposure and adverse health outcomes.³ The *BC Extreme Heat Death Review Panel Report* by the BC Coroners Service found that 98% of deaths during the 2021 heat dome occurred in homes, *particularly noting the risk to those without mechanical cooling such as air conditioning or heat pumps.*² In extreme heat, these spaces can become not only uncomfortable but dangerously hot—an important and avoidable risk for older adults living alone, and for people with disabilities or other barriers that limit access to cooler spaces outside the home. While important outreach by governmental and nongovernmental organizations during heat events can reduce some risk, it is unlikely to be feasible at the scale required to systematically protect all of our community members from negative health impacts. To protect health, it is crucial to support local residents with policy interventions that enable safer temperatures *inside the home*.

Environmental protections in rental housing are vital to community health, especially since approximately 55% of Vancouver households are renting.⁴ Tenants often have limited control over their living environment, constraining options to prepare and respond to extreme heat.⁵ A provincial report following the BC heat dome found that current landlord-tenant dynamics can impede installing or using air conditioning.⁶ A three-year study by VCH Public Health, the City of Vancouver, and the BC Centre for Disease Control identified “restrictive tenancy agreements or strata bylaws” as a major barrier to home cooling.⁷ Such restrictions prevent tenants from taking basic, evidence-supported actions to protect their health through potentially life-saving steps.

A VCH consultation process engaging over 100 people at high risk for heat-related illness has found that overheating in the home environment may impact health through heat-related illness, exacerbation of other medical conditions, and through other complex pathways. Residents of the region have indicated that heat affects their daily functioning and disrupts sleep, leading to decreased physical activity, heightened anxiety, and worsening of pre-existing health conditions (e.g. more frequent asthma attacks).⁸

In a changing climate, local residents also face the possibility of simultaneous exposure to both extreme heat and wildfire smoke. During such events, air conditioning in the home can also indirectly protect residents from wildfire smoke exposure by making it possible to keep windows closed and operate an air cleaner. (Meanwhile, the presence of wildfire smoke is a barrier to opening windows to cool a home at night). This is important since wildfire smoke can have both short-term and longer-lasting health impacts.⁹

The update to the Vancouver Building By-law taking effect in 2025 was a major policy step to help provide cool spaces in newly built housing, and the current proposed by-law amendment is likewise an opportunity to protect residents of existing housing. Such policy action to prohibit unreasonable cooling prohibitions is coherent with approaches recently taken by Lower Mainland neighbours New Westminster and Port Moody. The proposed amendment would also complement public health and other partners’ efforts to raise awareness of heat-related risk among local residents, and building owners,¹⁰ and support a recommendation from the Chief Medical Health Officer of VCH that all orders of government “implement policies to protect building residents during extreme heat events.”¹¹

I encourage Council to adopt this amendment to the Licence By-law as recommended by City of Vancouver staff. Thank you for your work in support of the health, safety and well-being of our community, and for the opportunity to provide a public health perspective on this topic.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Schwandt, MD, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer

¹ Vancouver Coastal Health Chief Medical Health Officer (2023). [Protecting Population Health in a Climate Emergency](#).

² BC Coroners Service (2022). [Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in BC in Summer 2021](#).

³ Tham, S., *et al.* (2020). Indoor temperature and health: a global systematic review. In *Public Health* (Vol. 179, pp. 9–17). Elsevier B.V. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2019.09.005>

⁴ Metro Vancouver (2025). [Housing Data Book](#).

⁵ Stern, Rachel N. and Mohammed Rafi Arefin (2024). "Extreme Heat in the Home: Understanding the 2021 Pacific Northwest Heat Wave through the British Columbia Coroners Report." *Journal of Disaster Studies*, vol. 1 no. 1, 2024, p. 103-118. *Project MUSE*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/936412>

⁶ Yumagulova L. *et al.* (2022). [Lived Experience of Extreme Heat in B.C.: Final Report to the Climate Action Secretariat](#).

⁷ City of Vancouver; Vancouver Coastal Health; BC Centre for Disease Control. (2024). [Vancouver Indoor Heat Study](#).

⁸ Vancouver Coastal Health (2025). [Climate, Lived Experience, and Resilience \(the CLEAR Project\) Listening to Communities to Enhance the Public Health Response to Extreme Weather Events for Priority Populations](#).

⁹ Vancouver Coastal Health (2026). [Wildfire Smoke](#).

¹⁰ See for example:

- Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health (2025). [Heat, Wildfire Smoke and Health: Recommended Actions for Owners and Managers of Rental and Strata Housing](#).
- Vancouver Coastal Health (2025). [Heat and Wildfire Smoke FAQ](#).
- Vancouver Coastal Health (2026). [Extreme Heat](#).
- Vancouver Coastal Health (2026). [Wildfire Smoke](#).
- Strata Energy Advisor. (2026). "Cooler Condos: How strata councils and residents can address overheating risk—and why they should." *In press*.