

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

May 4, 2009

Mayor Robertson and Councillors
City of Vancouver
453 West 12 Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

Re: Basements in Single Family Zones

This proposal to add more outright FSR and conditional height for new construction would act as a further incentive to demolish and replace existing houses with even larger new single family construction. This is not a sustainable way to be adding basements.

It further concerns us that the combination of proposed additional FSR and laneway houses permitted in new construction would be a very powerful incentive to demolish and replace existing stock. Nowhere does the report link the two initiatives and discuss possible unintended consequences. All changes to RS zones should be considered together to ensure that the overall impact would be an incentive for retention and renovation rather than demolition and replacement. At this point it looks like each of these proposed changes would primarily have the effect of acting as an incentive for demolition, both independently and cumulatively.

This proposal raises the following concerns:

1. Additional outright FSR and additional building height would be incentives to demolish existing houses. These would be on top of further incentives for demolition if laneway housing is allowed for new construction as proposed.
2. Large lots would continue to have the same above grade area with the additional area in the basement, to create even bigger new single family monster houses. Above grade floor area is only reduced on small lots.
3. There is no condition that floor area in the basement would be suite ready.
4. If adding FSR is intended to make it feasible to add another floor to existing houses, then the additional FSR should be conditional on retention of the existing house.
5. Basement height increase also allows an overall building height increase that does not consider the impacts of additional height on adjacent properties.
6. Since it would still be possible to build a house under current zoning options, this proposal would not change the pattern of building new slab on grade houses.
7. Land values will be affected because overall FSR is increased, and especially on large lots where above grade floor area is not reduced.
8. The additional outright FSR takes away the incentive for design review in RS5.
9. The proposal undermines heritage incentives.
10. Rezoning and then monitoring does not allow for adequate oversight. There needs to be more consideration to add measures for incentives to retain existing buildings before rezoning.
11. There has not been enough time for the public to consider the proposal before it has been referred to public hearing.

We recommend that this matter be referred back to staff to be considered together with all proposed changes to single family zoning, including laneway housing. There needs to be incentives to retain existing buildings which are not currently provided. The proposed changes to RS zones will affect most of the City and should involve much more detailed consultations. Creating bigger new monster houses is not a green or sustainable initiative.

Regards,

Ned Jacobs
On behalf of the Steering Committee
Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

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