

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

October 20, 2010

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

Dear Mayor Robertson and Councillors:

Re: Laneway Housing

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver (NSV) is concerned that the report on monitoring of laneway housing implementation has not had adequate time for the public to review and comment. This initiative affects approximately 70,000 properties across the city and should allow for more public input and consultation before proceeding further.

We therefore request that the report recommendations be changed. Strike and replace Recommendations A, B, and C as follows:

RECOMMENDATION

~~A. THAT Council direct staff to continue monitoring laneway housing (LWH) implementation, focusing on topic areas directed by Council, and report back to Council with an update one month after 150 LWH units have received final inspection.~~

A. THAT Council direct staff to continue monitoring laneway housing (LWH) implementation and report back to Council and to the public every six months until the 3 years from the July 21, 2009 public hearing is complete to July 21, 2012, or a maximum of 250 applications for LWH have been received by the city, whichever comes first. Reporting needs to be detailed and transparent, especially once 150 LWH have been built and occupied. Reporting should include the ages of the existing buildings that have added a LWH, the distribution of LWH per neighbourhood, lot sizes, all previous topics requested by Council, and additional topics raised by the public.

~~B. THAT Council direct staff to report back with minor amendments to the LWH regulations and guidelines for referral to Public Hearing, as described in this report.~~

B. THAT Council direct staff to consult with the public (including CityPlan Vision committees) and report back with proposed amendments to the LWH regulations and guidelines to address staff and public concerns.

C. THAT Council direct staff to conduct a scoped review of the current regulations and guidelines with a view to improving the neighbourliness and livability of LWH, specifically in relation to the partial upper storey and the overall building size, and to address other concerns raised by the public.

NSV is concerned that the lack of adequate time to fully monitor and review this substantial change in land use is not providing a clear overview of the impacts to the community and on demolition of the existing housing stock.

Recycling through adaptive reuse is the best use of embodied energy and helps retain neighbourhood character and affordability, These are key Council objectives. Therefore, from a city-wide perspective, LWH should primarily be an incentive to retain, not destroy, existing houses. Yet nearly two thirds of approvals to date have been associated with house demolition. That, plus the fact that the rate of house replacements has been somewhat greater than the average for a 9-month period is further cause for concern and continued monitoring.

Also, the report does not cover cases where a new house development did not include a LWH in its initial development permit application (to avoid delay in building the main house), but added a LWH in a subsequent amendment or new application. In these cases, a LWH should be counted as part of a new house development. That staff have ignored or glossed over these issues and indicators is troubling.

We would like to remind Council that laneway housing is a form of infill which was included in all of the CityPlan Community Visions. Therefore issues such as minimum lot size, massing, yard setbacks, and applicable RS areas should be addressed at the neighbourhood level through a CityPlan process.

Regards,

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

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