

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

April 29, 2009

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

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

Re: Mayor's Round Table on Affordable and Rental Housing

Thank you for including us in the Mayor's round table on rental housing. Attached is our one page submission that summarizes our comprehensive approach to protecting and increasing affordable and market rental housing. We also did not know what specific options would be brought forward, although our expectations were confirmed that they would be similar to the Vancouver Planning Commission's report for information that was received by Council in February. We now have a few more general comments and will provide further input once we have time to discuss it with our network of neighbourhood groups.

We are supportive of building new rental housing. However, this proposed program called Short Term Incentives for Rental (STIR) raises many concerns in addition to those listed in our attached submission as follows:

- a) Any new rental projects must not involve the demolition of the existing rental stock for replacement with more expensive new construction rentals.
- b) The proposals discussed would do nothing to increase the supply of affordable rentals and if existing rentals are not fully protected, would further reduce net affordability to tenants.
- c) STIR appears to be a development industry driven initiative that is contrary to, and in conflict with, the neighbourhood based planning platform that this Council was elected on. We are especially concerned about proposed incentives that increase height and density, as this could abrogate council-approved local-area plans and Community Visions, undermine heritage incentives, further devalue the density in the Heritage Density Bank, and inflate the value of land.
- d) If DCL exemptions are granted as an incentive for developers to build rental stock, the City needs to find an alternative means of funding amenities.
- e) Market rentals are not "amenities" and developers should not receive significant bonuses to build them. Condos that are only rented for a period of time and then can later be sold as strata should not be considered rental.

f) As we said in our attached submission “B-5) Implement inclusionary zoning”, it was a serious mistake to permit strata-only development in Vancouver. Permanent rentals should be a required (not bonused) component in all multi-family projects. At the round table, an economic analysis of how STIR would work on a project gave an example of an East Vancouver site because they could not make the numbers work on the West Side or Downtown. Inclusionary zoning will result in a steadily increasing supply of rentals throughout the city without requiring incentives or density bonusing, and is not subject to the inherent inequities, unintended consequences and dangerous precedents that make STIR so problematic. Under present market conditions financing is dependant on rental value, making this an ideal time to introduce inclusionary zoning.

We note that a main concern voiced by the development representatives at the meeting was for this program to be brought forward as soon as possible and for decreasing timelines for project approvals. Unless the City comes up with a process and proposal that will be community supported, we predict that this initiative will create a ground swell of community opposition, quite likely resulting in delays and little progress. We would like to work with you to find a community supportable approach at the initial stages, which at this point does not appear to be the case.

Regards,

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

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