



# City of Vancouver *Planning By-law Administration Bulletins*

## Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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# RETENTION AND RENOVATION OF CHARACTER MERIT BUILDINGS - SCOPE AND DOCUMENTATION

*Authority - Director of Planning*

*Effective March 22, 2017*

*Amended July 24, 2020*

## **1 Purpose**

This Bulletin provides direction on the general scope of retention and documentation necessary for projects proposing the retention of character buildings and requesting conditional provisions of the applicable zoning by-laws.

Projects seeking incentives through a Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) or involving heritage designation will require a higher level of retention and documentation than described below.

## **2 Intent**

Many District Schedules have provisions to encourage the retention of existing character buildings. Character buildings can be defined by a number of criteria. For example, some of the existing zoning and guidelines (i.e. RT-3, RT-7/8, RT-10, RM-1 and RT-11) use a “date” threshold as an initial criterion. In addition, these and other zones also have evaluation criteria to determine whether the building has character merit.

Further, the Heritage Action Plan has identified any building constructed before 1940 to be a character building if it also has a number of surviving, prescribed character features, such as the authentic or period massing, roof form, front entry, porch or verandah, exterior wall materials, window openings and frames and details (refer to “Heritage or Character Buildings Review – Interim Procedure”).

In some zones, such as RS-5, RT-4 and RT-5, the retention of a character building may require a different approach to the building design than is generally described in the area guidelines. The retention of the appearance of the character building takes precedence over reflecting the immediate streetscape. For example, an existing 1 ½ storey building on a street of 2 storey buildings should retain its 1 1/2 storey expression rather than adding a second storey.

### **2.1 Scope of Retention**

The retention of Character Buildings usually enables discretion in the zoning (i.e. additional floor area) which necessitates a clear retention scope and method of documentation.

The intent of retention is to keep the character of the existing house, not simply a quantity of construction material. The goal is to maximize retention of the exterior of the building. Unless

**July 2020**

otherwise described in the specific District Schedule or Guidelines, the minimum retention expected for a one-family dwelling, two-family dwelling or multiple conversion dwelling should not be less than 60% and should include the following:

- Roof(s): The primary roof form visible from the street(s), and generally including the existing ridge height and spring level; and secondary roof forms facing the street. Where an existing top floor has low headroom, exceptions may be made provided the addition retains the apparent form of the roof and maximizes structural retention. Retention of existing rafters and roof joists are to be maximized, including sistering joists, where viable ;
- Street-facing Wall(s) (excluding foundation walls) : Including character elements such as dormer and gable end walls, the entry location, entry, porch or verandah roof, bays, window openings, masonry chimney, decorative trims, sills, and details, stonework, etc.;
- Side wall(s) (excluding foundation walls) but: Including dormer and gable end walls for a minimum of half the depth of the building from the street toward the rear walls and as may be required to support the retained roof;
- Floor(s): Coordinated with exterior wall retention. Buildings may be raised but the height of the main floor relative to grade should not be significantly altered. Basement floors may be lowered where foundations are repaired or reconstructed;
- Special Landscape Features: Stone walls at the front property line, in consultation with Engineering Services if the walls encroach onto the boulevard.

Where environmental separation measures are required (rain screens etc.) and necessitate the removal of character features, such as trims, these are to either be re-used if viable or replicated as closely as possible. Alternatives to these measures should be employed where possible to maximize retention.

For other Character Buildings, such as multiple dwellings, commercial and institutional buildings, staff will evaluate minimum retention on a case-by-case basis. In general, street-facing wall(s), the original roof line and/or parapet, and distinctive architectural features on the building exterior are expected to be retained.

## **2.2 Retention Documentation**

At the project enquiry stage, preliminary retention drawings which identify the proposed extent and method of retention should be discussed with Staff. Plans and elevations should clearly indicate what is new, removed, and retained.

At the time of Development Permit application, detailed colour-coded plan and elevation drawings from a Registered Architect or Engineer are to be submitted verifying that the portions of the existing structure shown as being retained can in fact be retained, and that he/she will supervise the construction to ensure the retention occurs. The drawings are to be noted to indicate that all parts of the building shown as being retained will be retained in place, and not removed from their original location within the building at any time:

- “retained wall” means the retention of the existing studs and sheathing;
- “retained floor” means the retention of the existing floor joists and sub-floor; and
- “retained roof” means the retention of the existing roof rafters and sheathing.

The drawings should also indicate, in detail, the proposed strategies for the retention and/or replacement of all exterior doors, windows, trim, and cladding materials.

In addition, a letter signed by the Registered Architect or Engineer, indicating the sequence of construction, are to be submitted, in order to ensure that the construction is carried out in a manner that retains the building on the site at all times.

The application must also include an “Assurance of Retention of Existing Portions of Buildings” letter (copy attached).

A copy of the approved retention drawings and the sequence of construction letters will form part of any approved Building Permit drawings.

**Confirmation of Professional Assurance**

**Assurance of Retention of Existing Portions of Buildings**

*To be submitted at the time of application for a Development Permit where portions of existing building(s) is/are to be retained.*

The Director of Planning  
City of Vancouver  
453 West 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Development Permit Application Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

The undersigned hereby gives assurance that the portions of the existing structure(s) that are to be retained, according to the drawings submitted for approval, can structurally be retained and will not be demolished without prior approval of the Director of Planning or his representative.

Further, the undersigned has been retained to do “field reviews” of the above-mentioned building(s).

As used herein, “field review” shall mean such reviews at the project site as are necessary to ensure that the portions of the building(s) are retained as shown on the approved plans and conditions forming part of the above-noted development permit.

The undersigned also undertakes to notify the Director of Planning as soon as practical if the contract for “field review” is cancelled or suspended at any time during construction.

*If Engineer /Architect is a company:*

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Engineer’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(or PROFESSIONAL SEAL)

*If Engineer/Architect is an individual:*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*The above letter must be signed by a Professional Engineer or Architect registered in the Province of British Columbia as a member in good standing in the Association of Professional Engineers or Architectural Institute of British Columbia.*