



City of Vancouver *Planning By-law Administration Bulletins*

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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HERITAGE OR CHARACTER BUILDINGS REVIEW – INTERIM PROCEDURE

Authority - Directory of Planning

Effective June 11, 2014

Amended May 3, 2017 and July 24, 2020

Intent

On December 4, 2013, City Council endorsed the Heritage Action Plan which included a number of immediate and longer term actions to save Vancouver's heritage. The plan included directions to support heritage conservation across the City, including:

Action #1

Council directed, with respect to development proposals that the Director of Planning and/or the Development Permit Board considers, the City is under no obligation to approve any application that seeks development approval under the conditional provisions of the applicable zoning by-laws. In other words, unless preservation of a heritage resource is proposed, staff will consider the outright provisions of the application zoning in the review of applications and proposals.

Action #6

Council directed staff to identify distinct areas of heritage value, particularly areas with high numbers of demolitions of pre-1940 heritage and character homes, and recommend to Council amendments to existing RS zoning to address the loss of this neighbourhood heritage character.

The following interim policy was developed to guide owners, applicants and staff:

Interim Procedure and Determination of Heritage and Character Buildings

Pending the completion of these and other action items in the report, Planning staff have established an interim procedure for handling development applications involving pre-1940 houses. Staff are now seeking further information from inquirers proposing to demolish a building of potential heritage or character value. The first step in the process now includes a determination of whether the existing building is of character merit.

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. Any building constructed before 1940 is considered 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 (see checklist below).

As an interim measure until the heritage consultant completes the Heritage Register updates and associated recommendations for protecting Vancouver's heritage, staff have adopted this same evaluation approach, including the threshold date of pre-1940, into those zoning districts where this criteria does not currently exist (i.e. RS-3, RS-5, etc.) and where conditional zoning provisions can apply, such as increased density, height etc. These conditional zoning areas represent approximately 23% of the one and two family zoning areas in the city, located generally in Arbutus, Dunbar and Kerrisdale.

This interim strategy does not apply to outright zones (i.e. RS-1), which represents approximately 77% of the one and two family zoning areas in the city, or for development applications utilizing the outright provision of the applicable district schedule. The Heritage Action Plan work program will propose a more robust strategy to retain character homes across all the zones in the city.

Based on the information available for a given site within these conditional zones, if a building is deemed to have character merit or the site is listed on the Vancouver Heritage Register, staff may advise the owner as follows:

- a. Where a site involves a building determined to have character merit/heritage value, which could include character homes not on the Heritage register, owners are encouraged to consider retention. Innovative proposals for retention which might include extra density or other relaxations that involve discretion in applying guidelines, policies and regulations may be considered. Staff are encouraged to consider alternative approaches that avoid the loss of potential heritage/character buildings wherever possible. This could include additional floor area in the existing building and/or laneway house, additional dwelling units, and relaxation of other regulations that would encourage retention.
- b. Where a building is determined to have character merit/heritage value and is proposed for demolition, owners are advised that the Director of Planning is under no obligation to approve any rebuild application that requires development approval under the conditional provisions of the applicable zoning by-laws. Staff will consider the outright provisions of the zoning in any application for rebuild.

Where buildings do not have character merit, the building may be demolished and the conditional aspects of the development application may be considered. There may be some limited circumstances when the demolition of a character merit building will be considered by the Director of Planning. For example, if a property is underutilized (a small building on a large site) which could result in large additions that would impact the character value of the original building; or if the building is structurally unsound (confirmed by a registered structural engineer).

Character Merit Checklist for pre-1940 houses:

A. Must have:

- i. **Original massing and primary roof form** - Alterations/additions that are subsidiary to the original massing and primary roof form, such as dormers, are not considered to have altered the character of the house.

B. Plus any four of the following:

- i. **Entry** - Original open front entry, porch or veranda, or only partially filled in, or other original entry feature.
- ii. **Cladding** - Original cladding or replacement cladding consistent with pre-1940.
- iii. **Window Openings** - Original location, size and shape (50% or more). The windows themselves may not be original.
- iv. **Period Details** - Two or more period details such as fascia, window casing or trim, eave brackets, soffits, exposed beam or joist ends, half-timbering, decorative shingling, entry, porch or verandah columns, original wood doors, entry transom/sidelights, decorative or feature windows (special shapes, bay windows, crafted/leaded glass), brick or stone chimneys, piers or foundations, secondary porch, turrets, etc.

- v. **Streetscape Context** - The house is part of a context of 2 or more character houses.

Special Consideration for Severely Altered Houses or Houses Build in or after 1940

Pre-1940s buildings which have been severely altered and do not qualify as character houses may be considered for conditional zoning provisions if character elements are restored as part of a development proposal.

In addition, a house built in or after 1940 that has particular architectural merit and retains original and distinctive character features may be considered on a case by case basis for qualification as a character house. In these special cases, conditional zoning provisions may be supported at the discretion of the Director of Planning.

Under-utilized Assessment

Sites may be considered as historically under-utilized as follows:

Frontages up to 14.0m (smaller lots)
Less than 0.45 FSR

Frontages 14.0 m and up (larger lots)
Less than 0.40 FSR

Date of underutilization is based on the building density **as of November 26, 2013**.