

Pre-Approved Building Plans



CASE STUDY | JANUARY 2024



Familiar Faces Render. Alyssa Quiring, Line of Work Studio, Vernon, BC.

1. Background

The RDNO is one of 27 regional districts in BC and provides a variety of services such as community planning, building inspection, parks and recreation, drinking and agricultural water and solid waste management to more than 91,000 North Okanagan residents. It acts as a partnership between five electoral areas and six municipalities.

The RDNO was looking for ways to further support gentle density infill forms in the rural/electoral areas reducing as many barriers as possible to support the development of additional housing units. The Regional Housing Needs Assessment for the North Okanagan has identified that housing affordability and supply across the housing spectrum (non-market to market) is one of the most significant challenges for communities within the region and is predicted to worsen. The Regional Housing Strategy identified several actions to help lessen the costs and increase the supply of affordable housing units, including the concept of pre-approved plans for Secondary Dwellings.

Policy/program

Pre-Approved Building Plans

Municipality

Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO)
(2021 population: 91,610)

Gentle Density Types Involved

- Two family dwellings or a Secondary Suite in rural/electoral areas
- Some of the municipalities already allow secondary suites and other accessory dwelling units

2. Key Players

The design competition was targeted at all electoral areas and all the municipalities within the region except for the District of Coldstream, as their zoning did not permit additional dwelling units.

Local Government

- Regional District of North Okanagan planning and building departments
- City of Armstrong
- City of Enderby

Stakeholders

- Village of Lumby
- Township of Spallumcheen
- City of Vernon
- Designers - the competition was open to anyone in Canada. Submissions were received from architects, designers, and students.

3. Description of policy/program/project

The RDNO board of directors approved a budget for a Secondary Dwelling Design Competition in December 2022, and staff initiated the design competition in January 2023, with the goal of selecting winning secondary dwelling (accessory dwelling units e.g., carriage home or garden suite) plans that would be ready for purchase in spring/summer 2023.

The purpose of the design competition was to make it easier and more affordable for the average homeowner to build a Secondary Dwelling on their property, thus increasing the supply of additional housing units within the region.

Using a pre-approved plan results in a quicker application review process and quick and easy access to award-winning designs at a lower cost than traditional building plans. The electoral areas do not require a development permit to build a Secondary Dwelling; however, some of the municipalities still require a development permit for some elements (e.g., setbacks for privacy). An applicant is responsible for any additions or changes to the plan or any modifications to the site beyond what the plan's built-in adaptability can accommodate. An applicant may request contact information for the designer from the RDNO.

Rendering



Floorplan



Optional Layouts and Exteriors



Single Storey. Dennis Lowe, Stillwater Designs. Salmon Arm, BC.

Objective

To generate high-quality, pre-approved Secondary Dwelling building plans for communities within the North Okanagan. Using pre-approved plans will:

- Create efficiencies in the building permit review process, expediting the application review timeline and enabling applicants to proceed to construction at a quicker rate.
- Result in high-quality, innovative designs at an affordable price.
- Simplify and reduce barriers for applicants who may have thought about building a Secondary Dwelling but have felt overwhelmed by the costs in the design and permitting process.

Assuming there is sufficient uptake, there will be additional housing units to accommodate residents within the region, alleviating some of the existing backlog in need.

Design parameters

Designs needed to consider the urban and rural context. The communities of Armstrong, Enderby, Lumby and Vernon are situated within an urban context and the focus was on infill within the community cores. The Township of Spallumcheen and the Electoral Areas B, C, D, E and F fall within a more rural context and the Secondary Dwelling designs needed to meet the Agricultural Land Commission's regulations for additional residences on parcels less than 40 hectares.

The Secondary Dwellings are backyard houses – an accessory use to a single-family home – and the lots may not be subdivided. The design competition had two categories, single-storey and two-storey designs.

The budget for the Design Competition was \$30,000, with prize money allocated to each category. Funds were also set aside for communications, advertising, and honoraria for the jurors of the competition:

- 1st prize - \$5000
- 2nd prize - \$3000
- 3rd prize - \$2000
- 4th prize - \$2000

Evaluation criteria

1. Design (10 points)
2. Good home, good neighbour (10 points)
3. Affordability (25 points)
4. Flexibility and longevity (5 points)
5. Eco-Design (5 bonus points)



Carleton Cottage. Conor Nicell, Dana Simeoni and Max Godfrey, Carleton University, London, ON.

Rendering



First Floor Floorplan



Second Floor Floorplan



The Karinya 2. James, Eduful, Konzept Plus Inc., Ottawa, ON.

Review process

The Design Review Panel consisted of:

1. Building Inspector
2. Architect
3. Architect or Designer
4. Local Builder
5. Planner

Residents were also invited to vote for the “People’s Choice” award, which was a non-monetary prize.

Submissions

69 submissions were received, the majority from students, for the one- and two-storey categories. The Design Review Panel selected the top four winners in each category (eight total) and an additional five sets of designs available for purchase. While the designers of the additional five designs did not receive a cash prize, they were happy to be included in the pre-approved designs as they would still receive \$1000 for each set of plans that are purchased.

The 13 unique designs have been reviewed for BC Building Code compliance and preliminary zoning compliance with all participating electoral areas and municipalities. The RDNO wished to have a variety of designs and ensure they were each universal enough to suit an urban as well as a rural context. The selected designs needed to meet the bylaw requirements (e.g., height) for all the communities, and focused on affordability, i.e., they did not include elements requiring additional professional review.

Business arrangement

The pre-approved plans are available for sale from the RDNO for \$1000 (plus GST and PST) for one set of printed plans and a PDF. Additional printed copies are available for \$10 per page. The designer receives \$1000 as a royalty for each use of the design. The designer may sell the design/plans outside of the region at their chosen price. If the RDNO chooses to retire the designs from the program, the rights return to the designer.



4. Outcomes

There have been a number of inquiries from residents within the RDNO curious about the designs, their layouts and opportunities for them to built on their own property. Despite the initial interest, only one set of plans has been sold to date. It is hoped that there will be more significant uptake in the spring of 2024. The current market conditions, high interest rates and challenges in securing financing seem to be hurdles inhibiting the level of uptake that was originally anticipated.

There have also been a number of inquires from residents and communities outside the RDNO boundaries to purchase the designs. The RDNO is only providing direct sale to local residents as the design competition was paid for using regional tax dollars. Those inquiries by residents outside of the region were redirected directly to the designers.

The RDNO has provided a printed catalogue with all the designs for each community.

Rendering



Floorplan



The Louise. Levi Weaver, Papa Draftsman, Kelowna, BC.

5. Lessons learned

Facilitators

- There was significant value in a jury review – architects and builders together discussed the designs for livability as well as affordability. Having everyone's perspective at the table was invaluable to ensure the most affordable yet livable designs were selected.
- A strong communications plan, which included posting ads in architectural magazines and post-secondary schools across the country along with targeted marketing, was key in obtaining a high number of submissions.

Challenges

- It was challenging to create designs at a regional district level; needed to use the “lowest common denominator”; community-specific design competition may have been easier and more flexible in responding to each community's bylaw provisions.
- It was more effort than expected to review 69 plans; staff needed to vet first before going to jury.
- Administrative components (e.g., purchase by resident and then building permit process) were not built into process; no fees are being charged for administrative work (\$1000 go directly to designer).
- Financing seems to be the biggest barrier to uptake of the plans.



6. Next Steps

- i. Do another push to create awareness and to promote plans available for sale.
- ii. Create more online accessibility to the plans.
- iii. Link to resources about financing options, e.g., the anticipated resource from the Province on leveraging funds.

If there is more uptake, the RDNO would consider launching another design competition in the future.

7. Resources

- | [North Okanagan Housing Design Competition terms of reference](#)
- | [Permit application documents that may be required](#)
- | [North Okanagan Regional Housing Strategy](#)



The Willow. Joe Guliker, Guliker Design Group Inc., Chilliwack, BC.