

Livability Amendments to Zoning Bylaw



CASE STUDY | JANUARY 2024



Photo credit: City of North Vancouver

1. Background

The City of North Vancouver is steadily growing, with a population increase between 2016 and 2021 of 10%. The City allows for secondary suites in single-family and duplex zones and also allows coach houses in virtually all single-family zones. Demand for gentle density and one off rezonings have grown recently as property values have increased. The level of resources for applications of this scale is an issue that both staff and Council are interested in addressing through a Zoning Bylaw overhaul in 2023. Solutions may involve creating better base zones (to allow for quicker rezonings) or pre-zoning for gentle density.

Policy/program

Livability amendments to zoning bylaw

Municipality

City of North Vancouver
(2021 population: 58,120)

Gentle Density Types Involved

- Secondary suites
- Coach houses
- Secondary suites and one coach house
- Duplexes, duplexes with suites
- Triplexes (requires rezoning)

2. Key Players

Municipality

- Most of the gentle density changes occurred under the Planning and Development Department however, the coach house and duplex processes were simplified under Development Planning Division at the request of residents and Council.
- The current policy review (Zoning Bylaw overhaul) for gentle density is being moved forward by the Community and Long-Range planning Department.
- Community and Long-Range Planning currently develops policy for expanding gentle density and leading the public engagement.
- Planning and Development Administration, Development Planning along with planning assistants are involved in the permitting and development process.
- The overhaul of the Zoning Bylaw (underway in 2023) is supported by many departments such as building, transportation, economic development, communications, and development services.

Stakeholders

- Development and building industry stakeholders
- Public opportunities included online surveys
- Chamber of Commerce is more recently concerned about affordable housing and is supportive of more housing options.

3. Description of policy/program/project

Gentle density with secondary suites in single-family zones began in 1993 and accessory coach houses were added as a use in 2010. Duplex zones have been allowed secondary suites since 2013, and in 2017, zoning bylaw amendments allowed for both a secondary suite and accessory coach house on the same lot. More recent density enhancements started in earnest as a result of the 2018 Livability Report and amendments to the zoning bylaw. A 2016 Housing Action Plan defines some policies that are referred to as part of rezonings.

The Housing action plan process explored various housing alternatives and sought feedback through an online survey and information boards at City locations. The livability amendments to the zoning bylaw modified the regulations for one-unit and two-unit residential use to further enable smaller lot single-family and duplex development, to improve the design and functionality of single-family and duplex dwellings through set back and height relaxations, and to facilitate more attainable housing options. Basements were also allowed in coach houses to facilitate additional storage options. Along with the design changes, the amendment eliminated the requirement for a duplex development permit and simplified coach house guidelines. Engagement (prior to the public hearing) included, webpage project descriptions, focus group sessions with the building industry and public open house.

Secondary suites, coach houses, and duplexes are all identified in the zoning bylaw. Currently, homeowners/applicants wishing to build one of the types of housing have a relatively similar process to a single-family home building permit application, however the coach house process has development permit requirements to ensure a suitable site layout and the fit in the neighbourhood. Coach House Development Permit Guidelines and a number of zoning requirements were updated on in 2022 as part of the Livability Amendments to allow for a more streamlined process.

4. Outcomes

Applications are being tracked but reporting is irregular, i.e., when needed to support a change to zoning, processes or other.

- Suites and ADUs – There were 80 applications for coach houses as of 2018 with 30 applications per year since then to 2021.
- Duplex – many are being added, and the zoning as-a-right has been in place for a long time.
- Triplexes – require individual rezonings, three have been approved and two are being processed.

5. Lessons learned

Facilitators

- Working with staff most familiar with application processing to simplify the application and development process and requirements as a result of learning, feedback and new reports that support changes.
- Gradually making gentle density more permissive in the zoning bylaws as a result of learning, feedback and new reports that support changes.
- Engagement practices that include visual presentations of options, surveys, open houses, and focus groups.
- Simplifying the re-zoning process where required and not expecting community amenity contribution agreements for smaller projects.
- Reduced parking requirements in specific areas such as Moody Ville.
- Reducing requirements for development permits for duplexes and simplifying guidelines for coach houses.

Challenges

- A lack of staff time in general to advance gentle density initiatives.
- Zoning has not yet caught up with OCP designations and so applications for triplexes and fourplexes take additional staff time and is inefficient
- There is little design guideline direction for triplexes and fourplexes so this leads to slower processes in the rezoning.



6. Next Steps

The City of North Vancouver is in the midst of a zoning update process that among other things will consider how to incorporate the most popular gentle density rezoning types into the standard bylaw. The result of this work should be a more streamlined process for adding gentle density such as triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses and duplexes.

7. Resources

Housing Policy alternatives Research Report: <https://www.cnv.org/-/media/City-of-North-Vancouver/Documents/Housing/CNVLIVE133280ov2HousingActionPlanUserFriendlyDocumentforCouncilWorkshop.ashx>

Housing Policy alternatives summary brochure: <https://www.cnv.org/-/media/City-of-North-Vancouver/Documents/Housing/CNVLIVE133280ov2HousingActionPlanUserFriendlyDocumentforCouncilWorkshop.ashx>

Housing Policy alternatives information boards: <https://www.cnv.org/-/media/City-of-North-Vancouver/Documents/Housing/HousingActionPlan-Information-Boards.ashx>

Coach House: <https://www.cnv.org/Business-Development/Permits-Inspections/Building-Permits/New-Coach-House>

[Coach House Information Handout](#) - includes a summary and explanation of the most common Zoning and Development Permit requirements

[Building Permit and Development Checklist for Coach House](#)

Suites: <https://www.cnv.org/Business-Development/Permits-Inspections/Building-Permits/Secondary-Suites>

[Building Permit Checklist for Interior Renovations of Single and Two Family Dwelling units](#)