



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: May 31, 2007
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Meeting Date: June 12, 2007

TO: Standing Committee on Transportation and Traffic

FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Building Line Review of 41st Avenue, 49th Avenue, and SW Marine Drive west of Granville

RECOMMENDATION

THAT any further work on the building line review of SW Marine Drive, West 41st Avenue and West 49th Avenue be postponed indefinitely or until at least after the development of a new long range transportation plan, noting that the principles of the 1997 Transportation Plan, including no increase in arterial network capacity and giving priority to pedestrians, bikes, transit and good movements over private automobiles will continue to be applied to these streets and that staff pursue improvements for pedestrian, bike and transit modes as opportunities arise.

COUNCIL POLICY

Transportation Plan, adopted May 1997, includes the following policy:

Policy 3.3(1): The existing network of primary and secondary arterial roads within the city will generally not be expanded. The exception to this is for the completion of the Port Road connection to the freeway, to provide for Port related traffic.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the Building Lines study for the westside transportation corridor. The studied corridor includes the sections of 41st Avenue, 49th Avenues and SW Marine Drive, west of Granville Street.

BACKGROUND

The use of building lines for the purpose of road widening was recommended in the 1929 "*A Plan for the City of Vancouver, including Point Grey, and South Vancouver and a General Plan for the Region*", prepared by Harland Bartholomew and Associates. A building line defines a proposed future property line on private property where the City may seek the long term widening of a street right-of-way for transportation or other public uses. Building lines are part of the zoning and development bylaw and are created through a process that includes a public hearing. Building lines were first established on 41st Avenue, 49th Avenue and SW Marine Drive in 1956.

Initially adopted to provide for future widening of existing roads, the additional right of way created by building lines can be used for other related purposes. These include widening a sidewalk, adding a bike lane, adding a median, creating additional space for utilities, or creating a transit right-of-way. An example would be Robson Street, where building lines have resulted in wider sidewalks and a more attractive pedestrian environment.

If an owner proposes to rezone or subdivide a property, the City may require that the area between the existing property line and the building line be dedicated to the City at no cost to the City. Development is not normally permitted in the area between the existing property line and the building line except for landscaping, fences, and temporary structures. The objective of setting back development from the building line is to lessen the impact on the site and reduce cost if the City needs to acquire the area before redevelopment occurs.

The future planned street right-of-way widths of 41st Avenue, 49th Avenue, and SW Marine Drive, are 100 ft, 80ft and 100ft respectively. In some places where the building line has been dedicated on both sides, the street right-of-way is currently at its future width. For most of the area, the building lines have not been dedicated, or have only been dedicated on one side. In the review area, there are almost 763 properties along the three streets. For about 35% of the affected properties, the city has already acquired building line areas. The building line has been dedicated on about 99 residential properties on 41st Avenues, 26 properties on 49th Avenue and 140 properties on SW Marine Drive.

DISCUSSION

PAST PUBLIC PROCESS

In 2001, the City of Vancouver reviewed building lines on 41st Avenue, 49th Avenue and SW Marine Drive, west of Granville. The purpose of this review was to consider whether the City will need the extra right-of-way in the very long term (50 years or more in the future).

As part of the review process, several public workshops were undertaken by city staff to review the options and issues on each of the three streets. Property owners helped to shape the review.

After reviewing current building lines and possible options for their amendment with property owners through several public meetings and open houses, city staff and area residents were unable to achieve consensus on the building line issue.

Residents generally expressed concern about the perceived growth in traffic and the impact of traffic on the neighbourhoods. There was a strong sense from residents that traffic growth should be restricted and that maintaining the existing building lines would provide land that could be used to expand the number of traffic lanes and thus facilitate and encourage traffic growth. This sentiment was particularly strong in terms of growth at UBC. The residents were concerned with regard to neighbourhood liveability and believed widening the existing right-of-way would lead to a decline in liveability. Property owners were also concerned about the impact on property values and the requirement that the building line be dedicated to the City, at no cost to the City (at the time of rezoning and subdivision).

Of the people who participated in meetings, the overwhelming response was that the building lines should be removed and that the right-of-way widths be set at 66 feet (20.1m).

STAFF REVIEW

Following the public consultation City staff felt that some building lines could be reduced somewhat but should be retained to preserve future transportation options and facilities.

Staff thinking on building lines for the three streets is summarized below:

- 41st Avenue: The 100-foot building line could be reduced to 86 feet. However, the long term potential exists for light rail transit along this corridor. Moreover a new B-Line service is proposed for 41st Avenue. This was a key element of the Vancouver/UBC Area Transit Plan. A reduced building line may limit options for improving transit and providing an enhanced pedestrian realm.
- 49th Avenue: The 80-foot building line could be eliminated but in the long term the existing 66-foot right-of-way would not provide sufficient width to accommodate on-street bicycles safely away from traffic and replanted trees (once the existing trees come to the end of their natural lives).
- S.W. Marine Drive: The 100-foot building line could be reduced to 86 feet, except at the intersection of 49th Avenue and in the curvilinear stretch (generally between 49th Ave and west of 57th Avenue), where more work is required to understand future requirements.

City staff reviewed the development impacts of building lines. They concluded that the presence of a building line may affect the value of property, but there is no reliable information to that effect. The advice from BC Assessment Authority is that it is too difficult to determine how a building line may affect the value of a property. Residential properties on busy streets typically have a lower market value than properties on nearby local streets. If there is also a building line on the property, it is not easy to establish how much of the lower value to attribute to the building line.

For most residential properties, the building line has no affect on the amount of floor space that can be constructed. On small or odd shaped lots, the set-backs required by the Zoning and Development By-law, may prevent the owner from achieving the full development potential of the property. However, in most cases the floor space ratio (FSR) is not affected.

When a property affected by a building line is rezoned or subdivided, the City requires that the building line area be dedicated to the City. The City considers this loss of land and development potential to be off-set by the increased land value the owner gets from the rezoning or subdivision.

Staff reviewed traffic volumes over the last ten years and observe no significant change.

Regarding liveability, a wider street right-of-way does not necessarily mean more cars and a lower quality for the urban environment. In the long term, a wider right-of-way may provide opportunities for "great street" treatment and for providing practical alternatives to the car.

Both the Regional and City Transportation Plans place great emphasis on promoting ways to reduce the number of trips that people make by car. Providing good transit and pedestrian facilities are essential and can generally be achieved by a wider street-right-of-way. As an example, staff have been working on a redesign of the intersection of 49th Avenue and SW Marine Drive in order to install a signal at this location and improve the pedestrian crossing. A reconfigured intersection that accommodates the existing traffic lanes, bike lanes, and new sidewalks does not fit within the 66ft right of way and additional land is required. This minimally designed intersection would not accommodate a bus stop. An ideal intersection would include the potential for bus stops and some on-street parking and/or loading. If the City chooses to advance construction of this intersection, land would need to be purchased where the building lines have yet to be achieved.

Given all the above reasons, city staff have concluded that the existing building lines should be retained to preserve options for future facilities. Any further review of building lines should only be done in the context of new or updated Regional and City transportation plans.

CONCLUSION

As building lines may affect properties, it is important to consider if they should be modified or removed. As a result, in 2001, the City of Vancouver reviewed building lines on 41st Avenue, 49th Avenue and SW Marine Drive, west of Granville. The purpose of this review was to consider if the City will need the extra right-of-way in the very long term (50 years or more in the future). Several public meetings were undertaken by City staff to discuss options and issues on each of the three streets with the property owners. Unfortunately City staff and property owners have been unable to achieve consensus on the building line issue. Residents wanted all of the building lines removed whereas city staff believe that they could be reduced but in general they should be retained to protect future transportation and streetscape options. Staff recommend postponing any further work on building lines review indefinitely or until at least until after the development of a new long range transportation plan.

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