



City of Vancouver *Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines*

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LANEWAY HOUSE (LWH) GUIDELINES

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1 Application and Intent

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the Section 11 regulations of the Zoning and Development by-law pertaining to 1 ½ storey LWH throughout the city. The regulations and guidelines focus on creating neighbourly relationships with adjacent properties, a positive lanescape, and enhanced environmental performance of the site overall.

The guidelines are organized into the following topic areas:

- (a) Quality, Durability and Expression
- (b) Livability
- (c) Scale and Massing
- (d) Privacy and Overlook
- (e) Lane Frontage
- (f) Landscape

2 Quality, Durability and Expression

Laneway housing should be designed to be a lasting, quality addition to the neighbourhood. Buildings which are not designed to last are not environmentally sustainable, nor can they be considered affordable when the costs of maintenance and replacement of materials over time is considered.

- (a) Material selection and detailing should ensure performance over time. Vancouver building by-law requirements cover many aspects of building performance, but in addition consideration should be given to elements such as roof overhangs and building projections that both protect surfaces and assist with passive energy performance.
- (b) Modular construction can be used to advantage to reduce on site construction time and costs, however, LWH using modular construction must be permanent non-moveable dwellings following all the by-laws that apply to conventional site-built dwellings. Once assembled, a LWH of modular construction should be indistinguishable from a site-built dwelling.
- (c) While LWH may have a full range of architectural expressions, a LWH should clearly express its function as a residence.

3 Livability

The laneway housing program aims to achieve livable and diverse dwelling unit types while recognizing that the size of the unit is related to the size of the lot: the intention is to provide for studios and one bedroom units on standard lots (33 ft. X 122 ft.) and up to two bedroom units on larger lots. The regulations also provide for small units (280 sq. ft. relaxable to 205 sq. ft.) providing that the design and location provide livable accommodations.

4 Scale and Massing Guidelines

Homeowners can choose to build a single storey LWH, or a 1 ½ storey LWH. The following guidelines focus on the upper level of a 1 ½ storey design as it has greater potential to affect the solar access, privacy and outdoor enjoyment of neighbours. The guidelines apply to any orientation of site, as they are intended to address both solar access and perceived scale from adjacent neighbours.

In general the guidelines direct upper level massing and primary outlook toward the lane so that it becomes a safe and welcoming public space, and a neighbourly relationship is maintained with adjacent properties. To this end, the partial upper storey of the laneway house should have an appearance as close as possible to a half storey. Its eave lines and roof forms should be designed to minimize the apparent size of the upper level. Designs that approach the appearance or impact of a full two storey expression (e.g. gambrel roofs) should be avoided.

Numerical values are given to assist with quick evaluation of proposed LWH designs. Flexibility is intended, and the numbers should be seen as neither finite limits nor conversely a means to justify height unnecessary to the building design.

4.1 Pitched roofs

On pitched roof laneway houses, the partial upper storey should be contained within a simple primary roof form, although secondary roof forms may be provided as outlined in section 4.2. The amount of exterior two storey wall should be limited, in order to emphasize the expression of a partial upper storey only.

The 6 m (20 ft.) height limit for a 1 ½ storey LWH is intended for upper storeys contained within steeply pitched (minimum 7:12) roof forms. The greater ridge height is intended to enable 'lived in' roofs. The spring height should be no more than 3.7 m (12.1 ft.) above grade. Stacked 2-storey forms are not eligible for the maximum height of 6 m (20 ft.).

4.2 Dormers

Dormer roof slopes should generally not be less than 3:12. Dormer walls should be set in a minimum of two feet from the wall below and from adjacent walls (end gables) where possible. The eave height of dormer roofs should be as low as practical to reduce the perceived scale of the partial upper storey.

4.2.1 On a roof where the ridge runs across the property:

- (a) The largest dormer(s) should face the lane, and should not exceed 60% of the width of the partial upper storey.
- (b) Dormers facing the garden should not exceed 35% of the width of the partial upper storey.

4.2.2 On a roof with gable ends facing the lane:

- (a) Dormers facing a required side-yard should not exceed 50% of the building length.

4.3 Flat roofs, shed roofs, and roof pitches less than 7:12:

On flat roof laneway houses, more design care is necessary to minimize the appearance of a two-storey building, and to avoid privacy issues with upper-level decks.

- (a) A flat roof, shed roof, or shallow pitched roof LWH should have an area of lower height adjacent to the garden. The second storey should be set back 1.5 m (4.9 ft.) from the exterior face of the main floor below, facing the principal residence. Projections may be allowed into this area provided they do not exceed 30% of the width of the building and are located to minimize shadowing on adjacent sites.
- (b) Tallest elements and upper level floor space should be located adjacent to the lane, and/or centrally located on the site on larger lots.

4.4 East/West oriented sites:

- (a) A LWH should generally be located toward the south side of the site to reduce shadowing on the site to the north, except where topography or retention of existing significant trees or landscape suggests otherwise.

4.5 Area Exclusions

The by-law identifies areas that may be excluded at the discretion of the Director of Planning. To get the exclusion for volume space and/or reduced height areas under sloping roofs, the following conditions need to be met to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning:

- (a) The exclusions do not noticeably increase the visible mass of the building, or shadowing of neighbouring properties.
- (b) The exclusions assist in creating a simple, logical roof form.
- (c) The excluded areas do not create the potential to 'fill-in' with additional rooms beyond the allowable floor area.

4.6 Height and Location Relaxations

The Director of Planning has the ability to relax the Height and Location provisions of the by-law. These regulations have been set to ensure a modest, neighbourly scale of building, located in the area of the site that might otherwise be occupied by garage, and any relaxation considered must be evaluated against these objectives.

The DOP may consider relaxation of location provisions where:

- (a) There are site circumstances, such as sloping topography or existing trees to be retained.
- (b) The existing principal house to be retained is sited unusually. – i.e., a LWH may be allowed in the front portion of the site when the existing principal house is located at the rear of the site.
- (c) The lot depth exceeds the typical lot depth of 37.2 m (122 ft.), with staff assessment to include the following:
 - (i) Minimizing the extension into the rear yard. Greater flexibility on depth may be considered where the lot width enables the proposed LWH to be sited and designed in a way that it is sufficiently distant or shielded from neighbouring properties to mitigate the effect of any relaxation.
 - (ii) Consideration of the effects on neighbouring properties, including shadowing and privacy.
 - (iii) Providing a LWH presence on the lane. This means that a relaxation of location will only be considered where there are no more than 2 parking spaces on the lane on 9.8 m (32 ft.) wide lots (with Director of Planning consideration of more than 2 spaces on wider lots).
 - (iv) The portion of the building that extends into the rear yard should not exceed a single storey.
 - (v) A LWH may be a one storey unit, or a one and half storey unit, provided the proposed LWH design follows the section of these guidelines regarding upper floor massing, privacy and overlook.
 - (vi) Maintenance of all other regulations including site permeability, etc.
 - (vii) A 1 ½ storey LWH may be located within the same area as a garage, 7.9 m (26.0 ft.) from the rear lane (and subject to setbacks, etc.). On a typical 37.2 m (122 ft.) deep lot, this means that the relative proportion of the length is just over 21% ($7.9\text{m}/37.2\text{ m}$ or $26\text{ feet}/122\text{ feet} = 21\%$). Applying this same ratio of 21% to deeper lots provides a guide for the relaxation of the backyard open space — an additional 0.6 m (2 ft.) extension beyond the 7.9 m (26 ft.) location limit will be considered for every additional 3.0 m (10 ft.) of lot length, as follows: +0.6 m on a 39.6 m lot, +1.2 m on a 42.6 m lot, +1.8 m on a 45.6 m lot, +2.4 m on a 48.6 m lot, (+2 feet on a 130 foot lot, +4 feet on a 140 foot lot, +6 feet on a 150 foot lot, +8 feet on a 160 foot lot), etc. Numerical values are given to assist with quick evaluation of proposed LWH designs. Flexibility is intended, and the numbers should be seen as neither finite limits nor conversely a means to justify unnecessary building length and impact on neighbouring properties.

In all cases, a minimum distance of 4.9 m (16.1 ft.) must be maintained between the LWH and the existing principal house. Sites where this distance cannot be achieved will not be considered eligible for a LWH.

The DOP may consider minor increases in height:

- (a) To accommodate sloping topography.
- (b) Where the proposed LWH and the upper floor massing are, in the opinion the Director of Planning, sufficiently distant or shielded from neighbouring properties to mitigate the effect of any increase.
- (c) Where the increase will assist in the provision of a green roof.
- (d) Where existing buildings immediately adjacent to the proposed LWH exceed the by-law maximums.

5

Privacy and Overlook Guidelines

The following guidelines focus on access and overlook from the upper level of a 1 ½ storey LWH. The guidelines address exterior stairs, window placement, and the design and use of flat roofs at upper levels. As with scale and massing, the guidelines direct outlook and upper level roof decks toward the lane in the interests of making the lane the focus of the LWH, and maintaining a neighbourly relationship with adjacent properties.

5.1

Stairs

Stairs to the upper level should be enclosed within the allowable footprint and building area, except that the main entry may have outside stairs and a landing/porch area within 1.2 m (3.9 ft.) of grade.

5.2

Upper Level Windows

- (a) Living rooms and bedrooms on the upper level should have their primary windows facing the lane.
- (b) Upper level windows facing the garden and side-yards should be modestly sized. Skylights, clerestory windows, or obscured glazing should be considered as a means to enhance interior daylighting without creating overlook.
- (c) A LWH should be designed with consideration given to the relationship between desired window size and placement and the scale of building faces, projections and dormers. Dormers and building faces should not be windowless.
- (d) On a corner lot, primary windows to living rooms and bedrooms may face the lane and/or street.

5.3

Outdoor Roof Decks and Balconies

Balconies and roof decks (other than intensive green roofs) should be designed and located follows:

- (a) The total area should not exceed 8 m² (86.1 sq. ft.).
- (b) Located facing the lane on a mid-block lot.
- (c) Located facing the lane and/or the flanking street on a corner lot.

To ensure that other flat roof areas are not accessible for use other than as intensive green roof areas:

- (a) Balcony railings are not allowed around intensive green roofs (except where required under VBBL) or flat or shallow pitched areas other than outdoor decks described above.
- (b) Doors from the upper level may not open out to intensive green roofs or flat or shallow pitched areas other than outdoor decks described above.
- (c) Flat roofs above the upper storey cannot be used as roof deck areas, and must not have stair access, or railings. Ladder and roof hatch access necessary for green roof maintenance can be provided.

5.4

Short Lots

On short lots, laneway house design, including roof form, building orientation, and window size and placement, should be sensitive to the relative proximity of neighbouring residences.

5.5

Sloped Sites

On sloped sites, LWH should be sited so as to have the least impact on neighbouring properties.

6

Lane Frontage Guidelines

A LWH should be designed to enhance the lane. In effect, the lane becomes the public space or ‘street’ on which the LWH is located.

- (a) Consideration should be given to placing entries and doors on the lane where feasible. Where an entry door is proposed on the lane, an entry porch area that provides a safe and welcoming place for people to stand should be provided. Care should be taken in the

- design of the porch so that people leaving the laneway house can both see and be seen from passing vehicles in the lane.
- (b) Entries should be sited and designed to maximize planting along the lane frontage. On corner sites where entry porches face the street, planted edges should wrap from the street into the lane setback.
 - (c) Dwelling units should have an outlook to the lane on the lower level, and primary windows facing the lane on upper levels.
 - (d) The space between the lane and the dwelling unit should be permeable and landscaped.
 - (e) A LWH should be designed with lighting that enhances the pedestrian experience of the lane at night. This may include eave lighting, porch lighting, bollard, or garden lights, etc. High-wattage, motion-activated security lights are discouraged.
 - (f) Garbage and recycling needs should be provided on-site with a designated storage area that is located along a common pathway, accessible to all units on the lot and screened from private patio areas and the lane frontage.
 - (g) Service or mechanical doors and utility meters should be located on a side or garden facing wall, not on the lane frontage. The location of these items should be illustrated on the elevation drawings.

Alternative parking configurations may be considered if it can be demonstrated that the quality and function of the lanescape is not compromised. Parking configurations must provide:

- (a) A positive relationship of dwelling unit to the lane as described above.
- (b) A 0.9 m (3.0 ft.) landscaped setback. A larger setback should be provided where feasible. There should be articulation of the lane elevation, and additional space provided where possible for more significant plantings, entry porches, or outdoor space. Where minimum articulation is proposed, a 1.2 m (4.0 ft.) setback is encouraged to allow for more substantial planting.
- (c) No increase in required maneuvering area within the 0.9 m (3.0 ft.) setback area adjacent to the lane, or decrease in landscape potential in this area.
- (d) Permeable surfaces for both parking and maneuvering.
- (e) Demonstration of maneuvering acceptable to the Director of Engineering Services.
- (f) Building elements that are not vulnerable to vehicle movement on site or in the lane.
- (g) Green roof areas to compensate for any increased on-site maneuvering area.

7

Landscape Guidelines

The landscape of a LWH should enhance the experience of the lane, improve the environmental performance of the property, and assist with the creation of privacy for the dwelling and for neighbours.

The following guidelines apply to the design and review of LWHs:

- (a) A LWH should be located and designed to preserve existing trees where possible. The Director of Planning may require the retention of a significant tree. The Director of Planning may relax the regulations regarding LWH location and massing, and the required number of parking stalls to accomplish this.
- (b) A LWH should be provided with access to private outdoor space as part of the backyard or an area adjacent to the lane. A lawn or patio area, partially screened by a tree or layered planting, is encouraged. Where the rear yard is limited in size or contains hard surface areas associated with the principal dwelling, a usable upper level deck with a minimum depth of 1.5 m (5.0 ft.) may meet the intent of the guidelines for private outdoor space.
- (c) High quality screening/fencing should be provided along the property line adjacent to surface parking spaces where the Director of Planning has relaxed the landscape setback requirement, and where possible, adjacent to paths required for fire access to the dwelling and lane. Where space is constrained, a narrow area sufficient for vine growth should be provided at the base of the screening or fence, or at the foot of the LWH structure.
- (d) Surface parking spaces should have permeable surfaces: permeable pavers, gravel, grass-crete, or impermeable wheel paths with ground-cover planting in the centre and sides.

- (e) The 0.9 m (3.0 ft.) minimum setback between the building and the lane should be permeable and landscaped where not required for vehicle access.

The following should be considered in the landscape design of a LWH:

- (a) The landscape plan should be developed with consideration of Council-approved Water Wise Landscaping Guidelines.
- (b) Provision of rain barrels.
- (c) Design of the rear yard should maximize soft landscaping (lawn and planted areas). Hard surfaces, including walkways, should be kept to the minimum necessary for functional purposes, particularly when the laneway house is associated with a new principal dwelling.
- (d) Where more than the minimum 0.9 m (3.0 ft.) setback is provided adjacent to the lane, consideration should be given to planting trees in this area. Tree selection should take into account overhead wires and lane visibility.
- (e) Vertical greening should be used as a means to improve both privacy and environmental performance. Vertical greening can include using building walls and/or the provision of fences and arbours as support structures for plants. Tall plantings such as some varieties of bamboo can also provide effective screening and greening in a constrained area.
- (f) Green roofs should be considered to compensate for ground area occupied by dwelling and parking and to provide an amenable outlook from upper levels of neighbouring houses.
- (g) Planted areas that face a street or lane are intended to expand the public realm and should not be blocked from view by private fencing. Fencing, where desired, should be set back from the property line to enhance the prominence of the planting.
- (h) Where possible, plants should be located at grade, in contiguous soil (i.e. avoiding planter boxes).
- (i) Hose bibs should be located near lane edge planting.
- (j) The Protection of Trees By-law applies to all trees on private property, and includes requirements for the retention and replacement of trees on the development site, and consideration of trees nearby on neighbouring sites. In accordance with the provisions of this by-law, laneway house applicants may be required to submit an arborist's report, and may be required to protect neighbouring trees.

Planting of deciduous trees for summertime shading of a LWH should be considered where feasible.