BALCONY ENCLOSURE FOR NEW BUILDINGS

Authority - Director of Planning
Effective January 24, 2012

This Bulletin, including illustrations, demonstrates how enclosed balconies will be considered as part of a requested floor area exclusion through the rezoning and development application processes. Applicants should recognize that the illustrations provided are not intended to suggest a singular formulaic solution. Applicants must refer to the Balcony Enclosure Guidelines - Adopted by Council 1995, Amended up to 1996, to ensure that all aspects of the guidelines, applicable to their building proposal, have been addressed.

There are two principal design aspects of the enclosed balcony which are assessed when consideration is given for a requested floor area exclusion:

- the construction and interior relationship of the enclosed balcony within the unit layout; and
- the exterior appearance and character.

The following text in normal face are excerpts, from the Balcony Enclosure Guidelines. *Italicised text within this bulletin clarifies further the intent of the Guidelines.*

**General Design Considerations**

The purpose of an enclosed balcony is to afford an occupant the year round enjoyment of those uses to which an open balcony normally would be used in fair and warm weather.

While a balcony enclosure may provide many attractive uses for the occupant, careful attention should be given to creating an identifiable architectural element such as through a distinctive shape and a predominance of clear glass.

- Enclosed balconies seeking FSR exemptions should be positioned, configured and finished to function similar to an open balcony (solarium or indoor garden) rather than as a den or bedroom.
- Balcony enclosures should be designed to be distinct but integrated within the overall architecture of the building.
- In plan, enclosed balconies should have their own discrete identity, from neighbouring façade elements and not intrude into the unit’s living space layout.
Figures A and B below illustrate supportable approaches for addressing the primary design principle for where enclosed balconies should be positioned and configured similar to an open balcony, resulting in a distinctive identity for the enclosed balcony within the façade composition. In order to address the primary design objective as an identifiable architectural treatment, the amount of projection should be no less than 450 mm.

Floor Plans

**Figure A**

**Figure B**

Figures C, D, E, F and G illustrate examples that are not supportable as they generally do not result in a discrete identity, intrude into the living space, function as a den or bedroom and are not readily convertible to an outdoor amenity. To maximize daylight penetration into a dwelling unit, dimensional attributes of the enclosed balcony should have its longer dimension parallel with the exterior.

**Figure C - not supportable**
- compromises internal living space within the dwelling unit and lacks exterior expression

**Figure D - not supportable**
- configured as a separate room
Figure E - not supportable
- enclosed balconies (longer dimension of enclosed balcony should be along the exterior wall)

Figure F - not supportable
- inverted

Figure G - not supportable
- tandem open and enclosed balconies (inverted enclosed balconies)

Elevations

Figure H - supportable
- an identifiable architectural element with a distinctive shape and a predominance of clear glass

Figure I - supportable
- balcony enclosures to be distinct but integrated with the overall architecture of the building
Enclosed balconies should:

(a) be identifiable as a distinct façade component, typical expressed as a distinct shape and through a predominance of clear glazing (i.e. floor-to-ceiling for the full exterior perimeter of the space which will also mitigate additional building bulk by maximizing the glass area of the enclosure and its ‘lightness’);

(b) have a minimum clear horizontal dimension of 1.8 m and a minimum area of 4.5 m²;

(c) maximize glass area to admit natural light to the interior space beyond and have windows openable from the inside to facilitate natural ventilation. Openable windows should be absolutely maximized to allow the space to be utilized in a manner similar to an open balcony whenever desired by the resident;

(d) be grouped so as to maintain and enhance visual interest. Visual interest achieved through façade modulation and the play of solids against voids should be respected;

(e) have impervious floor surface such as tile to allow the space to be used as a greenhouse solarium (e.g. gardening);

(f) be limited to one balcony enclosure per dwelling units, although additional enclosures may be appropriate for large-sized dwelling units, having regard for the potential increase in the building bulk;

(g) be generally limited to lower floors in high-rise development noting the views, shadow and building bulk impact that can result from enclosure of balconies in towers; this may offer noise buffering in certain locations, such as on busy arterial streets. Be located so as to maximize acoustic buffering of the unit; and

(h) Incorporate a narrow (up to 0.6 m (2 ft) in depth open ‘balconette’ or French balcony as an extension of the enclosed balcony may, where appropriate, expand the usability of this space. Access to the French balcony should be through full height sliding or French (hinged) doors so that the enclosed balcony can function similar to an open balcony when so desired. Guardrails should be open rail or glass to maximize natural light penetration.

Figure J – not supportable

- exterior treatment indistinguishable from other habitable rooms, stacking of enclosed balconies above/below habitable rooms without distinction with the exterior treatment
BALCONY ENCLOSURE FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS

Authority - Director of Planning
Effective - July 1996

In January 1996, Council amended the Floor Space Ratio (FSR) regulations of those District Schedules which contain FSR exclusions for enclosed balconies. In that amendment Council decided to limit the amount of FSR excludable under the regulations, to a maximum amount of 50% of the approved balcony area in any building. Also in January 1996 Council amended the “Balcony Enclosure Guidelines”, which were originally adopted in April 1985, to further deal with design issues raised by the enclosing of balconies on both new and existing buildings.

One of the main ideas discussed in the amended Guidelines is the importance of an ordered and sensitive approach to the enclosing of balconies on existing buildings, and especially on high-rise towers. To encourage such an approach, section 5.4.1(b) of the Guidelines encourages the applicant to consult with “the original designer of the existing building if possible, or another architect, to assess the design compatibility of the proposed balcony enclosures with the existing building facade”. The Submission Requirements, found in the Appendix to the Guidelines, recommend a preliminary development application to arrive at a comprehensive scheme for the enclosing of balconies on existing buildings. Such schemes are intended “to establish a comprehensive idea of the future appearance of the building” before any individual enclosures are approved.

Since the amendments to the regulations and Guidelines, the Planning Department has received a number of Development Applications for the enclosure of individual balconies in existing high-rise residential buildings. Evaluating these applications has proved difficult in most cases, since there is no way for staff to determine the ultimate number or location of all potential enclosures. At the same time, it is likely that over time most buildings will gradually achieve the maximum of 50% enclosure permitted in many districts. The final result could therefore well be a random and inarticulate pattern of enclosures, detrimental to the appearance of individual buildings and to the general urban environment.

As a result, applicants intending to apply for balcony enclosures should be aware that the Submission Requirements contained in the Appendix to the Balcony Enclosure Guidelines will be administered by staff as written. A preliminary development application to establish a comprehensive enclosure scheme for the entire building may be required before any individual enclosure applications are processed. This may apply even if some enclosures have already been approved in the past.

To determine whether or not a preliminary development application is required, applicants should contact the Development Information and Application Centre, Second Floor, East Wing, City Hall, to schedule a review of the building by a Facilitator. Photographs of the building and general building statistics (see section 1 of the Submission Requirements) may be required to make the determination.
There may be some buildings and situations for which a preliminary development application will not be required. These situations might include low-rise buildings (up to 4 storeys), or the lower floors of high-rise buildings where it might be reasonably assumed that the balconies in question would be included in a future comprehensive enclosure scheme. These applications must still, however, include the building statistics listed in section 1 of the Submission Requirements.

If a preliminary development application is required, applicants will be encouraged to work with their building’s Strata Council to engage the original building designer, or other architect, to prepare a comprehensive scheme according to the principles discussed in the Balcony Enclosure Guidelines. Once a preliminary development application for the comprehensive scheme has been approved, enclosure applications from individual suite owners (whose balcony enclosures are among those approved as part of the comprehensive scheme, and who then wish to enclose them) will be processed through a combined Development and Building Permit process. Applications for the enclosure of balconies which were not part of the comprehensive scheme will likely not be approved.