

Character Home Zoning Review

Welcome



This study explores ways to encourage greater retention of pre-1940 Character Homes in single-family neighbourhoods zoned RS (one-family dwelling). City Council requested this work as part of the Heritage Action Plan (HAP), a comprehensive review of the City's Heritage Conservation Program.

We are seeking public feedback to inform and shape directions and recommendations to City Council. The information is organized in the following categories:

- 1 Background
- 2 Study Areas
- 3 Zoning Options
- 4 Regulatory Approach
- 5 Other Considerations



Character Home Zoning Review



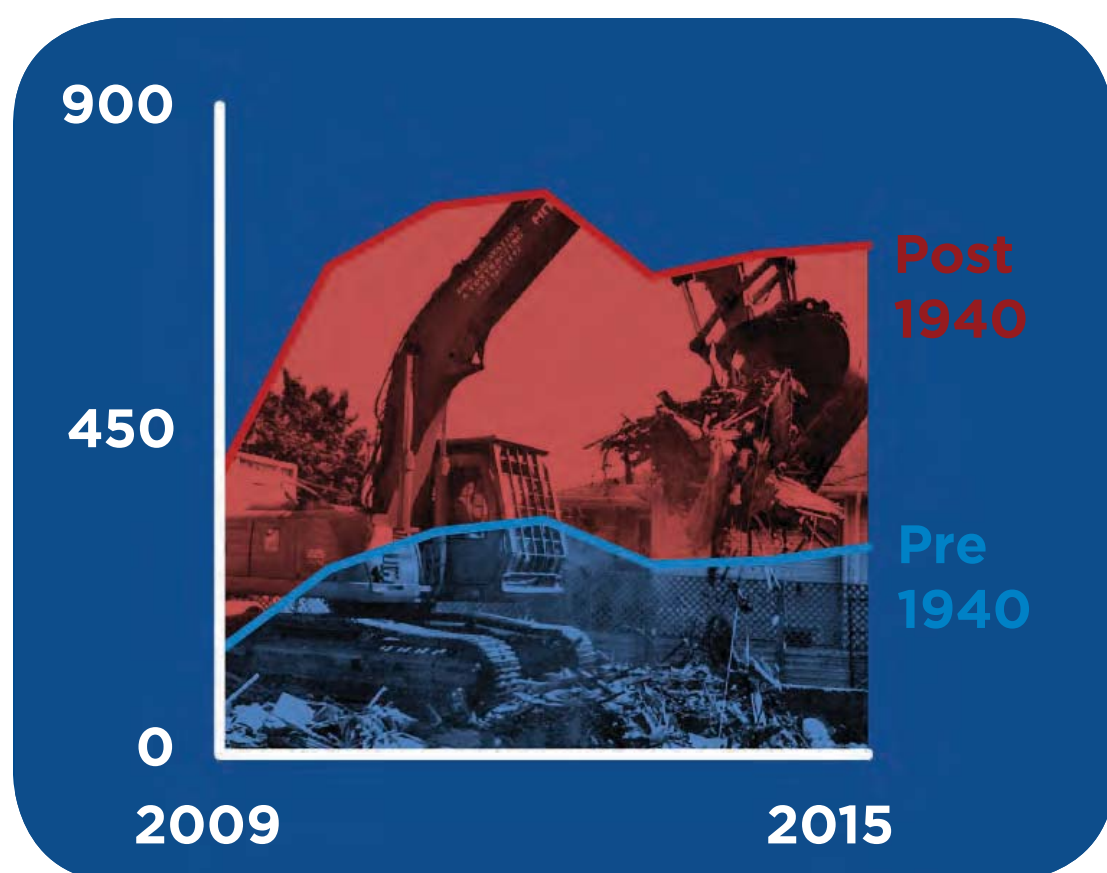
Community input is an important part of this study. Key questions are listed throughout the material. Please review the information, ask questions and share your views. Information boards and a feedback form are available on line at:

vancouver.ca/characterhomereview

Study Timeline

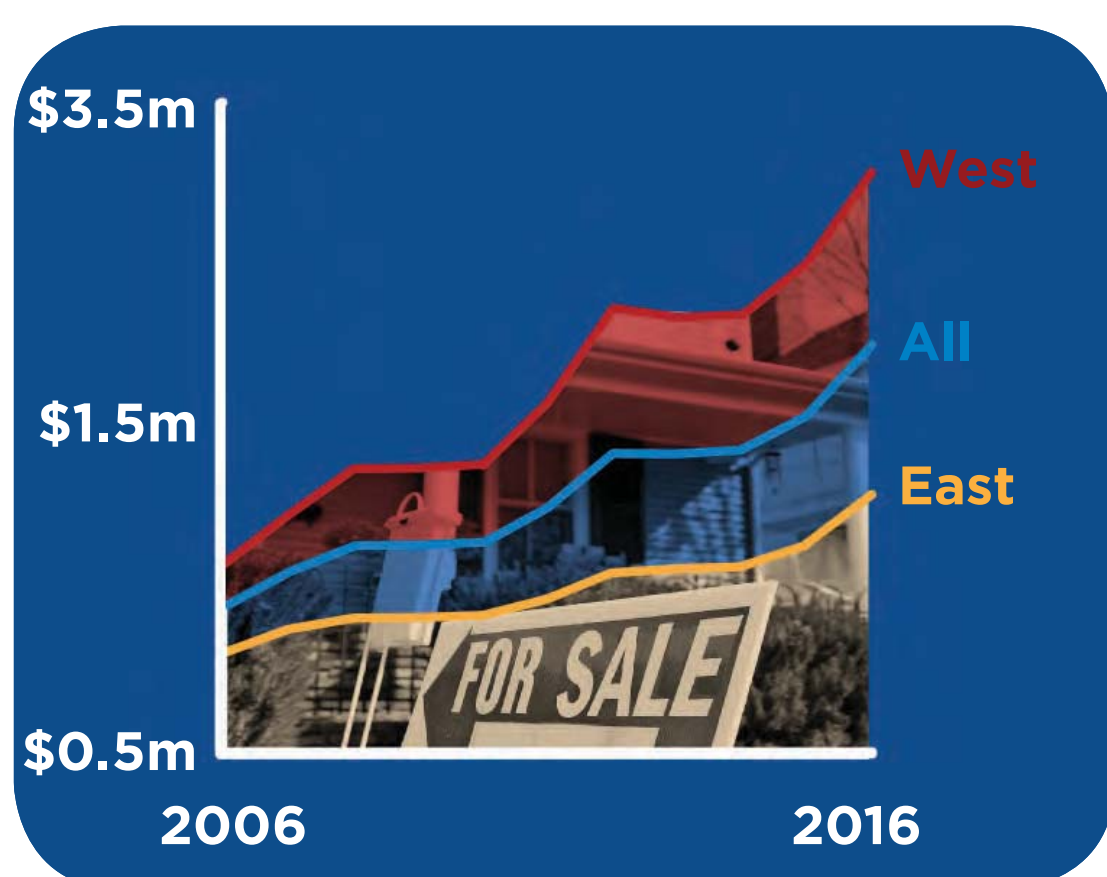


The Character Home Zoning Review was initiated in response to community concerns about demolitions of high-quality older homes and the size and scale of new homes being built in single family neighbourhoods.



Increasing Demolitions

- High-quality, renovated older homes still suitable for family living are being demolished and replaced with larger single-family homes.
- Newer homes are also increasingly being demolished and rebuilt.
- On average, annual home demolitions have increased 80% between 2009 and 2015, 73% on average for pre-1940 homes.



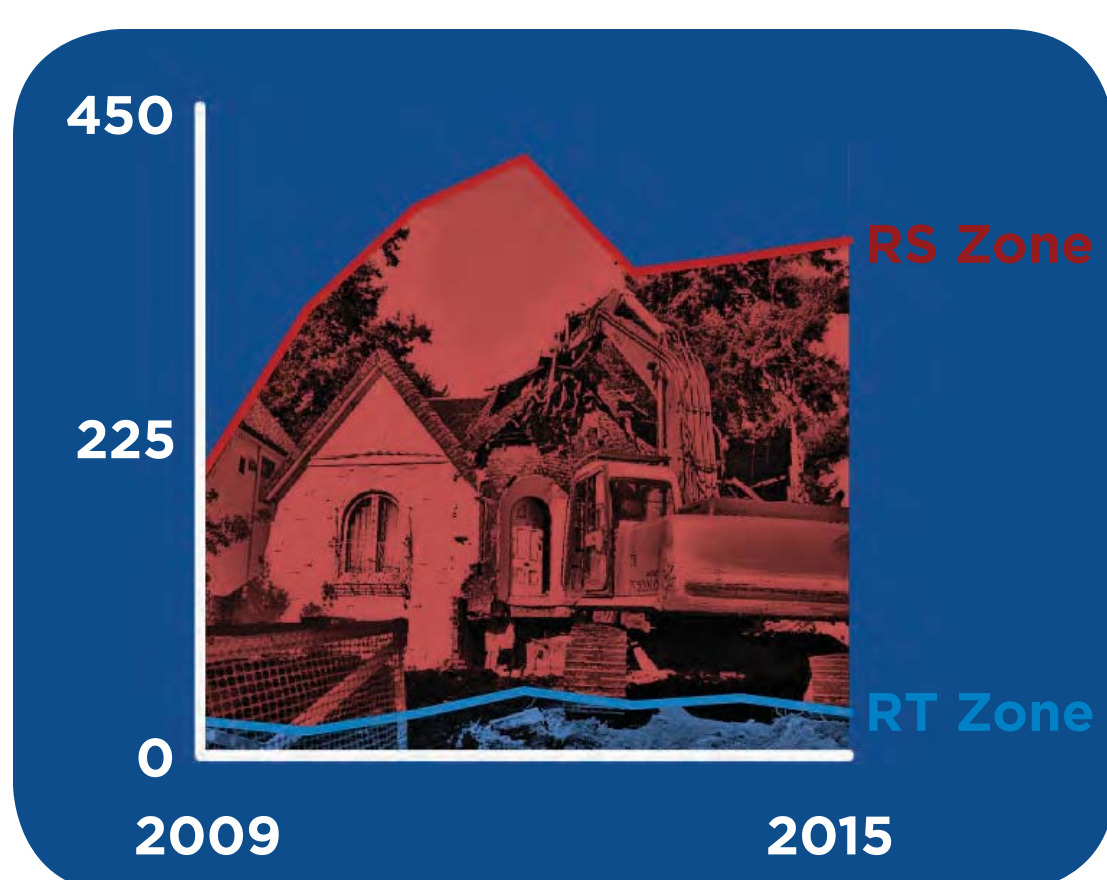
Rising Property Values

- Surging property values have made single-family homes unaffordable for many people and has increased redevelopment pressure on older homes.
- Single-family property values have increased nearly 200% in the last 10 years.
- Last year alone residential property values increased 25-35%.



Compatibility of New Homes in Older Neighbourhoods

- Un-renovated pre-1940 homes are typically half the size of new homes allowed under current zoning.
- In 2009, zoning changes increased allowable size of single family homes by 17% to support better secondary suites.
- In 2015, 54% of new homes included a secondary suite (an increase from 11% in 2008), 47% included a Laneway House.



Managing Neighbourhood Character

- The City has used zoning to manage neighbourhood character retention since the 1970s (e.g. HA zoning in Gastown and Chinatown, and RT zoning such as Kitsilano RT-7 and RT-8, Mount Pleasant RT-6, Strathcona RT-3).
- RT zoning includes special incentives for character retention (e.g. more floor area and different dwelling unit choices).
- Demolition of pre-1940 homes in RT zones is infrequent, and has seen little change in the last 10 years.

Currently, a home is deemed a “Character Home” if it was built before January 1, 1940 and retains original features that give the property a distinctive quality or appearance.

Character Merit Assessment

The City uses a set of criteria to determine Character Merit of pre-1940 homes in certain zones. This assessment is usually done at the time of a development proposal. If a home meets the minimum number of criteria (minimum four out of seven) it is considered to have Character Merit and can access special benefits in zoning if the home is retained.

Character Merit Checklist

- Original roof form
- Original open front porch or veranda
- Original siding
- Period windows (50% or more), original location, size and shape
- Original casings or trim (50% or more)
- Period details or decorative elements (e.g. two or more brackets, beams, joist ends)
- Other period features (e.g. porch, roof, foundation)

Not all pre-1940 homes have Character Merit

It is estimated that 80% of pre-1940 homes retain sufficient features to be considered as having Character Merit.

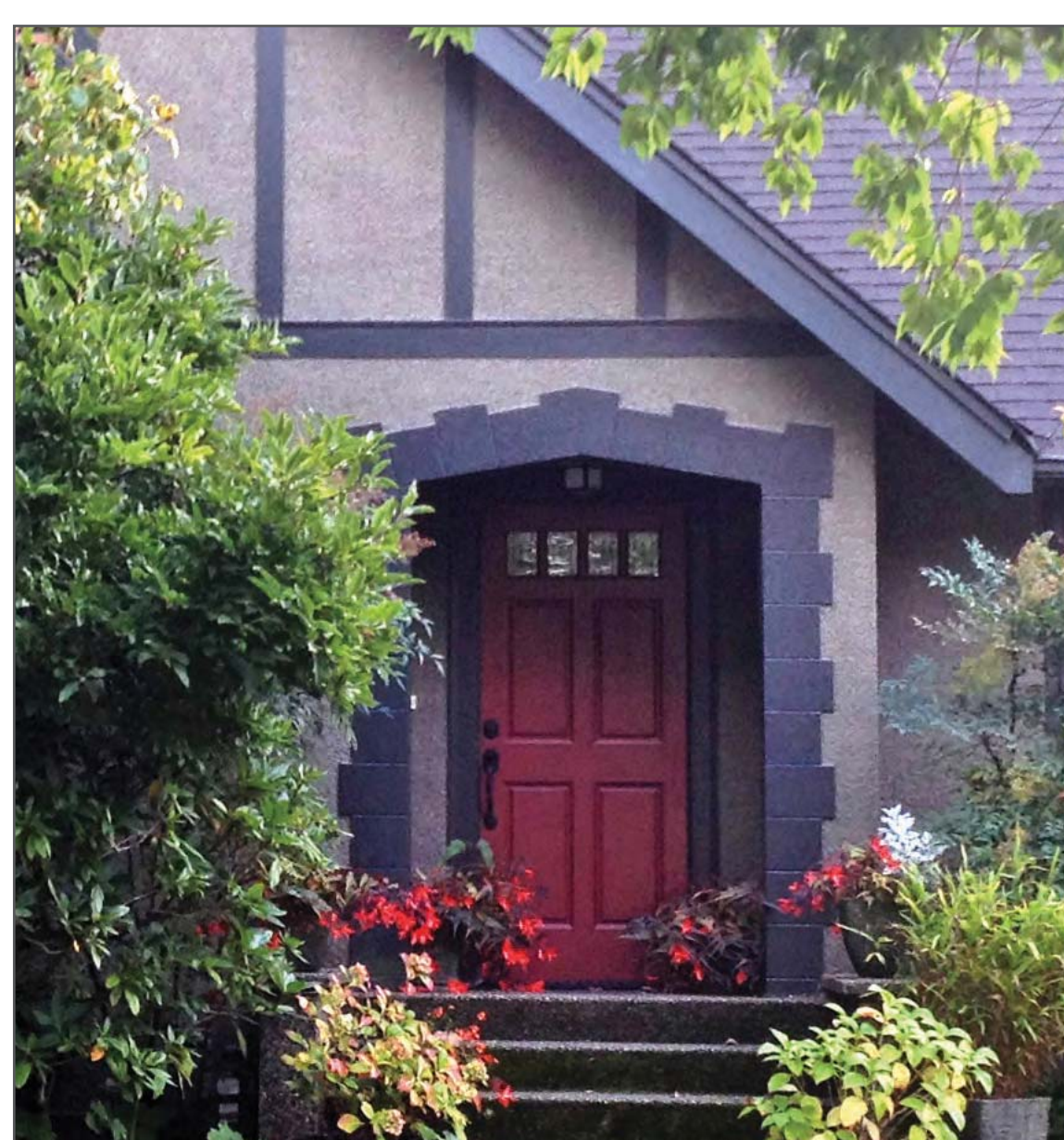
Why Pre-1940?

- Many residential neighbourhoods were built before the start of World War II.
- Homes of this era were built by skilled craftsmen using high-quality materials.



What about Post-1940 Homes?

- Post-war homes were simpler in style and used lower quality materials.
- Some may have unique character worth conserving and could be candidates for heritage incentives.
- Buildings as young as 20 years old can be added to the Vancouver Heritage Register.



This review was initiated in response to community concerns. Staff have discussed the issues with stakeholders and the public over the past year and heard diverse viewpoints.

Challenges for Character Home Retention

- Zoning allows new homes to be much bigger than Character Homes.
- Renovation permits are complicated and can take a long time to receive.
- Current land values are high and sellers want a maximum sale price. Many buyers prefer new homes.
- Many buyers want features that are hard to fit into older homes (e.g. 11 foot ceilings, en suite bathrooms, large media rooms).

Ideas to Encourage Greater Retention

- Increase floor area for retention and reduce the floor area for new homes.
- Allow more secondary suites.
- Allow flexibility to convert a larger home into multiple dwelling units.
- Allow larger dwelling units in the rear yard (Laneway House or infill building).
- Improve processing times and simplify requirements for retention.
- Focus retention efforts in certain areas where there is significant character.



Survey Results

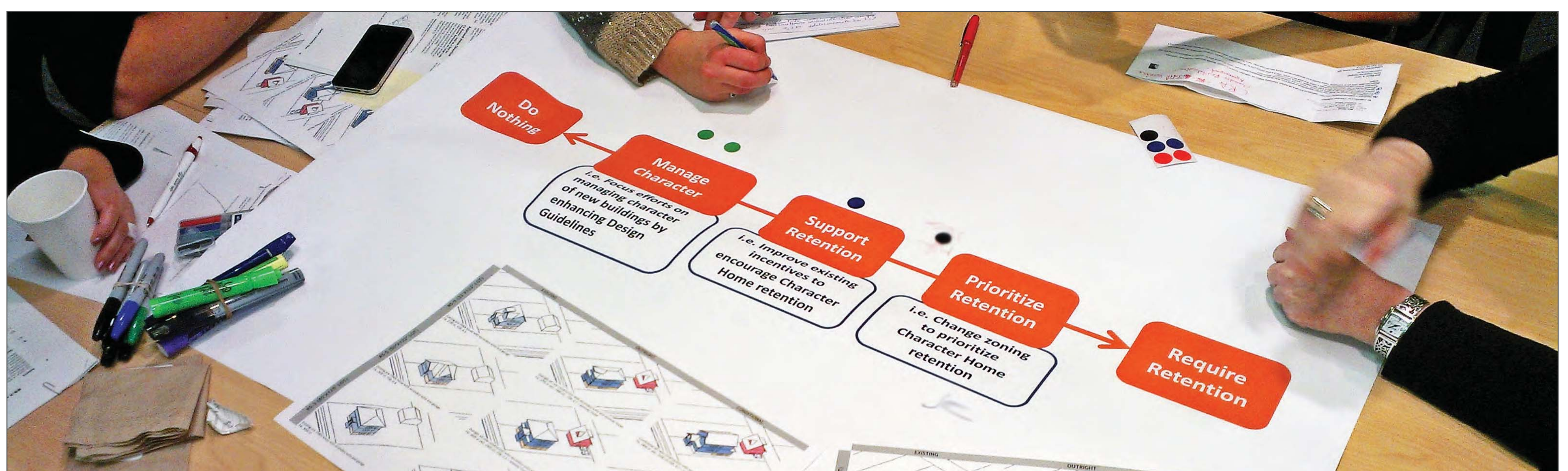
In 2015 we conducted a public survey on attitudes towards heritage and character buildings. Here is what we heard from respondents:

- 93% personally value historic places and heritage buildings (74% a lot, and 19% some)
- 92% personally value character buildings (70% a lot, and 22% some)
- 90% think the retention of character buildings should be encouraged (5% no, and 5% unsure)

*TalkVancouver Survey (1,125 respondents)
February and March 2015*

Other Considerations

Stakeholders told us they want to understand the impacts of retention options (e.g. economic, rental housing stock, parking), and that more diverse voices are needed in the discussion.



1 Character Homes add definition and vibrancy to our neighbourhoods

- Character Homes give many streets a unique and consistent character, and include features that provide a neighbourly face to the street.
- When new homes are much larger than adjacent homes, they compete with neighbourhood character, particularly if they remove mature landscaping and have different setbacks.



Study Activities

- Identify high concentration areas of Character Homes to explore special zoning opportunities, and confirm what character means for each area.
- Look for ways to improve size and compatibility of new homes being built in study areas.

2 Retention tools improve housing choices

- Many young families cannot afford single-family homes. Seniors have limited options to downsize and remain in their communities.
- Zoning tools to encourage Character Home retention could offer new housing choices and lower price points in single-family areas.



Study Activities

- Consider different housing unit types and tenures for Character Home retention that are not currently found in RS zones.
- Continue single-family ownership and current rental housing on all other RS zoned sites (e.g. secondary suites and Laneway Houses).

3 Character Homes help meet Greenest City goals

- Character Homes were built using high-quality local materials, while new homes are often made of lower-quality, composite materials that have greater environmental and health impacts.
- Although new homes may be more energy efficient, they often use more energy per person than an older home (e.g. having more floor space to heat and cool).



Study Activities

- Support retention of Character Homes to reduce demolition waste and demand for new resources, while maintaining “embodied energy” of existing materials.
- Help energy efficiency of Character Homes through ongoing support of the Heritage Energy Retrofit Grant (Vancouver Heritage Foundation) and look at other related initiatives.

4 We can retain Character Homes and accommodate future growth

- The City is seeking to increase affordable housing and accommodate new residents, particularly around transit. Identifying neighbourhoods with Character Homes worthy of retention and being aware of potential growth areas when developing new policies will protect important places while supporting the City’s evolution.



Study Activities

- Identify areas where future planning work may seek to increase housing supply (e.g. along rapid transit priority streets) and review significance of Character Homes in these areas.
- Recommend that future planning programs take into consideration study areas and retention of Character Homes when exploring new housing forms and density increases.