



Consultation Summary

Vancouver Character Home Zoning Options

Prepared for the City of Vancouver | March 2017



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Introduction

The Vancouver Heritage Action Plan (HAP) was approved by Council in December 2013. Since that time, key areas of action and implementation have been formalized while ongoing public consultation has sought feedback from residents regarding specific proposed action and implementation strategies. The five key areas of action and implementation:

1. Heritage Conservation Program review;
2. Heritage Register upgrade;
3. Character home zoning review;
4. Sustainability initiatives; and,
5. Awareness and advocacy initiatives.

To date, some key milestones have been reached for the implementation of the Heritage Action Plan including a Heritage Conservation Area (HCA) in First Shaughnessy and a review and analysis of character home zoning options in RS-3, RS-3A and RS-5 zones.

As a key area of implementation, four study areas were identified for the Character Home Zoning Review. The purpose of this process was to explore policy and regulatory options to incentivize retention of character homes in the study areas, and obtain feedback from the public and stakeholders on the proposed options.

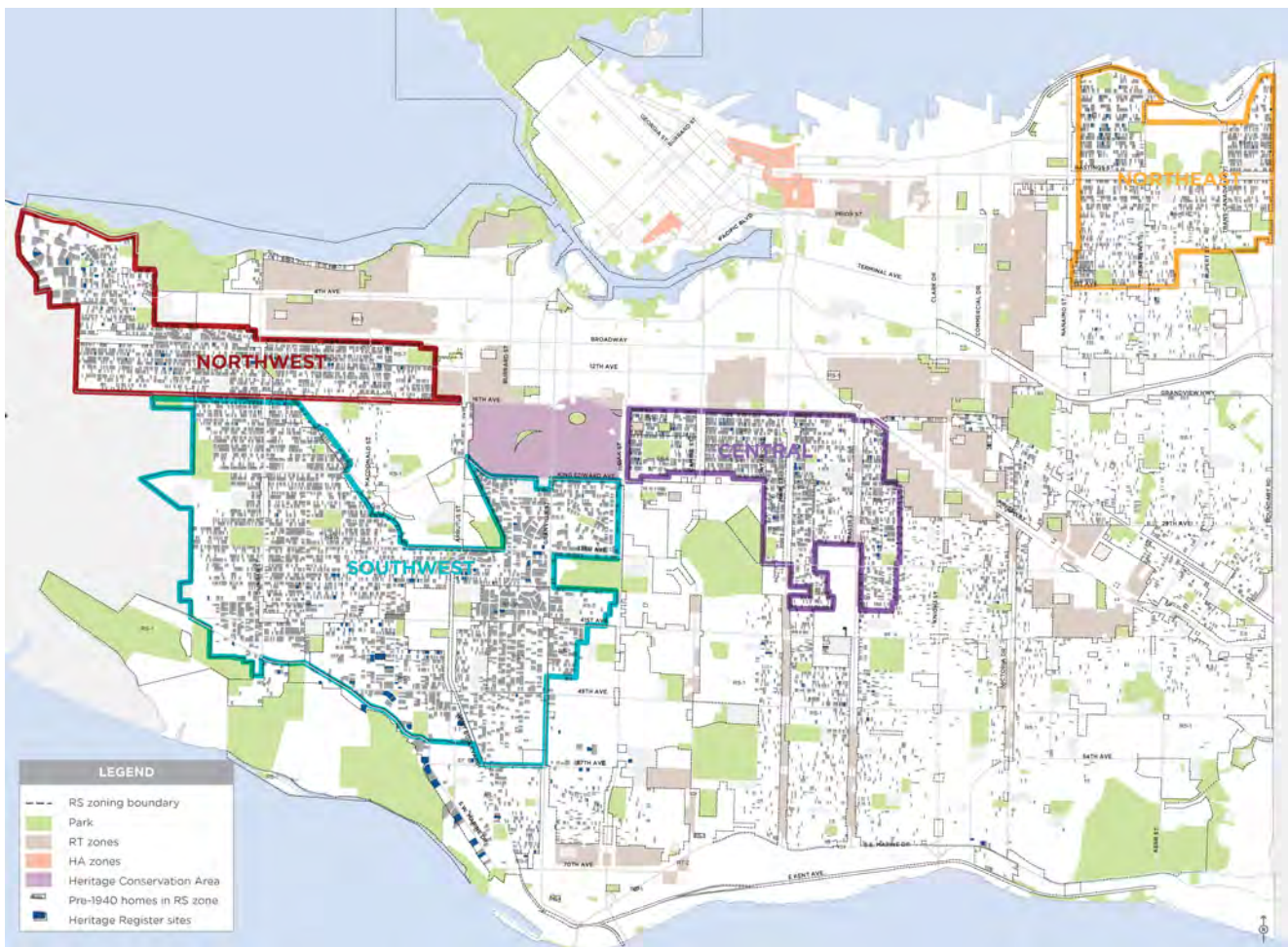
Specifically, this report summarizes consultation efforts related to character home retention in the study areas, which focused on a continued dialogue on how character is defined in Vancouver and potential policy and regulatory options to support character home retention.

Consultation Study Areas

Four study areas (Northwest, Southwest, Central, and Northeast) were identified based on the following criteria:

- High concentration of pre-1940 homes (the majority of blocks having 50 percent or more pre-1940 homes);
- General character and quality of homes in the surrounding area;
- Current zoning boundaries;
- Neighbourhood history and role in early Vancouver;
- Adjacency to existing Character Areas (e.g. RT zones, Heritage Conservation Areas); and,
- Community Visions character area boundaries.

Of the 66,509 total homes in RS zones, the four study areas comprised 26,755 homes. Of those study area homes, 44% are pre-1940.



Consultation-At-A-Glance

To facilitate feedback from the public and stakeholders, the following activities were undertaken:



ads printed in
4 newspapers

4 Open Houses
with over
1,000
total attendees



282
responses on the
Visual Explorer
display board

Over
31,060
notifications
mailed out to homes in
the study areas

Over 18
hours of one-on-one
engagement
with residents and
stakeholders

1 Workshop with
50 design
practitioners

Posters
placed in all
library
branches and
community centres



30
display boards
to share information

Over
8,400
views on the
Character Home Zoning
Review web page

2 hands-on
activities
to spark ideas

3,322
surveys
completed
with over 11,000
open-ended comments

Consultation Activities

Open Houses

In total, over 1,000 people attended four open houses held in November and December 2016. Two open houses were held at the Hellenic Community Centre on Arbutus, one was held at Vancouver City Hall, and one was held at the Pacific National Exhibition. Three were held in the evening for 4 hours with one held on a Saturday for 6 hours. All Open Houses included representatives from City staff and consultants to engage with participants on the presented content. Information, ideas, and concerns were shared through one-on-one engagement, informal group discussions, and the interactive activities. A summary of the responses received by staff at the Open Houses can be found in the “What We Heard” section of this report.

Interactive Activities

Below are descriptions of some of the fun and interactive activities incorporated into engaging with residents, generating discussions and valuable feedback on the Character Home Zoning Options.

VISUAL EXPLORER

The Visual Explorer game is a tool for creative conversations using imagery. An adapted version of the activity was developed using a wide variety of images relevant to character in Vancouver. Participants chose an image that, in their opinion, represented character. Participants then described why it represented character, recorded their comments on sticky notes, and displayed those comments on a display board for other open house participants to review and discuss.



LEGO ACTIVITY

The LEGO activity is a tool for hands-on conversations using physical models that represent the proposed zoning options. With support of content outlined in the display boards, LEGO models at a 1/16th scale were developed to provide open house participants with a three-dimensional visual activity to learn and provide feedback on the proposed zoning options. The following models were created using LEGO bricks for participants to explore a sample neighbourhood:

- 2,000 ft² Character House with an 800 ft² footprint;
- 2,800 ft² New House (Current) with a 900 ft² footprint;



- 2,000 ft² New House (Option) with a 670 ft² footprint;
- 1010 ft² and 220 ft² Additions;
- 640 ft² Laneway House with a 400 ft² footprint; and,
- 800 ft² Infill House with a 500 ft² footprint.

The activity included a “Sample Neighbourhood” map that was scaled to illustrate how each model could be positioned on typical residential lot sizes in the City.



Practitioner Workshop

The City extended an invitation to design practitioners to provide an in-depth review and comment on the technical aspects of the proposed zoning options. Invitees to the workshop were a mix of architects, designers, home builders and small-scale developers with substantial recent experience working in RT zones on character retention projects, or in RS zones on retention projects and/or new home construction, particularly in the single-family discretionary zones (RS-5/3/3A). A total of 50 design practitioners attended the workshop which included an overview of the study, facilitated small group discussions, and reported back to the group key themes. The Workshop focused on three main topics: the character merit assessment, character retention projects, and new home construction. A summary of the responses recorded by staff is located in the “What We Heard” section of this report and a transcript of the discussion notes is attached as Appendix B.



Survey

The City of Vancouver prepared a survey consisting of multiple choice and open ended questions related to the proposed options for character home retention. The survey was made available online, as well as in hard copies at the open houses, with a total of 3,322 surveys submitted by the deadline of January 15, 2017. The survey included many opportunities for participants to submit open ended comments and over 11,000 open-ended comments were made in the 3,322 submitted surveys. A summary of the survey is found in the “What We Heard” section of this report and a full summary of the survey findings can be found in a separate report by the City of Vancouver.

What We Heard

Open Houses-At-A-Glance

Over 1,000 people attended the four Open Houses hosted by the City. Below is an at-a-glance summary of the reoccurring themes from group discussions and one-on-one conversations staff had with attendees at the Open Houses.

The following bullets are the summarized key themes of **support** based on the proposed options for character home retention:

- Support for the retention of character homes
- Increasing housing options through suites, laneway homes and strata units
- Increasing choice for homeowners with character homes
- Reduction of the size and scale of new homes
- Strengthening design guidelines for protecting neighbourhood aesthetics
- Significant interest in the strata infill house option, especially as a mortgage helper with more immediate recoup of costs
- Streamlining of the permit process, especially for character home renovations
- Interest in the various grants and financial incentives for character home retention

The following bullets are the summarized key themes of **concern** based on the proposed options for character home retention:

- Potential impact on property values
- Potential impact on future saleability
- Cost of maintaining character homes
- Concern that higher density options are not proposed as a part of this process (ie.. townhouses, rowhouses, low-rise apartments)
- Concern that 0.5 FSR does not allow large enough spaces for larger families
- Unsure that 1940 is the appropriate cutoff for character merit
- Concern that an increase in staff time required due to administration of character merit checklist could delay permitting process

The following bullets are a summary of the **questions** from participants based on the proposed options for character home retention:

- How will the City incentivize character home retention on irregular lots where laneway or infill homes are not possible?
- Why are ideas to allow higher density housing in new construction not being considered in this review?
- Can setbacks be adjusted to allow for more units on a lot?
- Are there potential property tax incentives for retention of character homes?



Open House Key Themes

The following summaries the key themes collected through staff conversations with open house attendees.

Character Retention: Throughout the Open Houses, participants expressed concern with the number of demolitions in their neighbourhoods and indicated support for character home retention, however staff collected a variety of mixed responses to the proposed retention tools.

Size and Design of New Homes: A key theme at the Open Houses were a concern with the size and design of new homes in the City. For homeowners who indicated they lived within the study area, there were many comments about new homes being constructed in ways that were, in their opinion, incompatible with the existing neighbourhood character. This included concerns about both size (maximizing allowable FSR) and design (box-like, overshadowing older homes). Participants who expressed these concerns were generally in favour of incentives for character home retention and the reduced size for new homes to provide a disincentive for demolition.

In addition, there were also some concerns expressed by attendees with regard to potential loss of green space, privacy, and parking through the incorporation of laneway homes and the proposed infill units.

Impact of Reduction in FSR: A consistent topic of conversation with City staff were related to the proposed reduction of FSR to 0.5 for new homes. While some participants spoke in favour of the FSR reduction to provide disincentives for tearing down a character building, there were an equal number of participants who presented their concerns for this component of the proposed zoning options. Concerns included the potential negative impact on market value for individual homes, the limitations on space in new homes for families, and the possibility that a lower FSR could lead to property owners not incorporating secondary suites.

Housing Options and Affordability: Participants expressed support and concern for the proposed zoning options based on issues of housing mix and affordability. Many homeowners who attended the open houses expressed interest in the infill home strata option. They commented that the strata infill option could provide equity faster through sale, rather than the laneway home rental option.

A number of Open House attendees also commented that the options presented did not fully address their concerns regarding housing affordability throughout the City. A key theme that was communicated was a

desire to see more housing options available within RS zones including townhouses and low-rise multi-unit buildings. Comments included concerns regarding the unaffordable prices of single detached homes and the limited rental housing options within RS zones.

Cost to Upgrade or Maintain: A key theme that also emerged through conversations at the Open Houses was the cost associated with the ongoing maintenance and upgrades to a character home. While there are incentives available to offset some of these costs, a common concern from participants was the ongoing costs to maintain an energy inefficient character home as well as the cost of renovations when building an addition to a character home and the upgrades that could be required by the City and the Building Code.

To many participants, the costs associated with building a new home were cheaper and less ambiguous, compared to the costs associated with renovating a character home. It was posited to staff by participants that the character merit design elements can be incorporated into new homes, which could be a less costly process.

The Character Merit Question: A consistent issue brought to staff's attention was a variety of concerns regarding the definition of character merit. Many attendees were concerned that the character merit checklist process was not fully realized yet and expressed their concerns about the implications for their home and its value.

Other comments regarding the character merit checklist included concern that using a date (1940) for defining character homes may not achieve the desired goal for retention of character buildings. Participants commented that some pre-1940 homes are not worth saving due to poor maintenance and energy inefficiencies, and that some post-1940 homes are worth retaining because of their contribution to the character of a street and neighbourhood.

Streamlining the Process: A consistent comment brought to the attention of staff at the Open Houses was how the development application process should be streamlined while the character merit checklist could require additional staff review time. Participants also expressed concern that the character merit checklist could add time to the process.



Interactive Activities

VISUAL EXPLORER

The following summarizes the reoccurring themes from the responses and feedback provided by participants at the Visual Explorer activity. Samples of the sticky note comments provided at the activity are provided in Appendix A.

Reoccurring comments from this activity suggested character is:

- Street & Neighbourhood collectively
- Quality materials
- Interesting and attractive

Reoccurring comments from this activity expressed concern that character is:

- Culturally influenced and reflects values of a different time
- A subjective exercise, hard to assign a specific time period
- Costly to maintain, based on the proposed definition of character



LEGO ACTIVITY

The following summarizes the reoccurring themes from the responses and feedback provided by participants at the LEGO activity.

Participants expressed support for the following:

- Incentives for retention of character homes
- Increasing housing options and mortgage helpers
- Design standards for new homes
- Streamlining permitting process

Participants expressed concern for the following:

- Potential impact on property values for non-character homes
- Increased FSR may limit green space
- Increased units may have impact on parking availability



Questions:

- How will the character merit assessment be administrated?
- Should “greener” new builds have similar FSR incentives?
- What is the strategy for retaining character homes outside of the Study Areas?

Practitioner Workshop-At-A-Glance

A total of 50 architects, design and building professionals attended a Practitioner Workshop hosted by the City. Below is an at-a-glance summary of the recorded themes from the small group discussions and feedback provided by participants in the practitioner workshop.

The following bullets are the summarized key themes of **support** based on the proposed options for character home retention:

- Allowing larger additions to character homes and proposing options for repurposing existing homes could be effective for retention
- Strata infill units could be an effective incentive for character retention
- Increasing efficiency for processing applications
- Design requirements could be an appropriate strategy for character retention

The following bullets are the summarized key themes of **concern** based on the proposed options for character home retention:

- Character merit criteria is subjective, lacks flexibility and may result in unfeasible retention projects
- Compliance with proposed character merit criteria in addition to all other building regulations is challenging
- 0.5 FSR for new builds would discourage secondary suites, impact livability, and could reduce property values

The following bullets are a summary of the **questions** from participants based on the proposed options for character home retention:

- How does the character merit criteria fit with other City planning goals?
- What happens when retention conflicts with sustainability and livability?



Practitioner Workshop Key Themes

The Practitioner Workshop included three main sessions of table discussions on three topic areas: character merit assessments, character retention projects, and new home construction. Over the course of the Workshop, the following were the key themes that emerged through the small group discussions.

Concerns with Character Merit Assessment: An overall theme that emerged through the workshop was overall concern with the proposed character merit assessment. Comments included concern that the criteria were subjective and could be misinterpreted. The suggestion was made that the criteria could be weighted to place more value on the massing and form of a structure. An additional suggestion posited that greater flexibility and discretion for working with the unique challenges of character retention projects. Additionally, participants expressed concern that the proposed criteria threaten the feasibility of retention projects, in particular with the requirements of the building code.

Impact of FSR Reduction: When discussing the topic of new home construction, participants expressed strong concerns with the proposed reduction of FSR for new homes. Participants were concerned that the change would reduce property values, discourage the addition of secondary suites, negatively impact livability for families, and threaten project feasibility. By reducing home sizes, commenters expressed that owners would find it more difficult to justify building a secondary suite and that developers would experience more difficulty with accommodating the space needs of families.

Livability and Sustainability: Through the small-group discussions, participants indicated concern that the proposed zoning options and character merit checklist could limit a designer's ability to meet livability and sustainability requirements. Participants commented that home livability is challenging when there are increased restrictions, especially when those restrictions could be subjective. They also commented that the proposed zoning options could make it more difficult to build environmentally friendly houses.

Affordability: The suggestion was made by participants that the character retention conversation should not happen in isolation to the ongoing affordability conversations in the City.

Design Guidelines or Design Regulations: A consistent issue brought to staff's attention during the workshop was the consideration of design guidelines or design regulations as a tool for retention projects. There was not full agreement as some participants commented that character retention could be prioritized through strong design guidelines while others commented that guidelines may not provide enough incentive for character retention. Alternatively, some participants suggested that clear and simple design regulations would be more practical and efficient for use by designers and developers. Generally, participants expressed support for a balance of flexibility and regulation, but also expressed that the current ideas presented did not find this balance.

Other Incentives: Some participants commented that incentivizing character retention would likely reduce demolitions of character homes. Many went on to suggest types of incentives that they believe would be effective, such as strata titling and subdivisions for infill and laneway homes, relaxation of tree retention requirements, density transfer, and expedited permit processing.

Survey-At-A-Glance

The City of Vancouver issued a survey on Character Home Retention through their Talk Vancouver web platform and made hard copies available at the open houses. The survey contained both multiple choice and open ended questions. These questions allowed participants to review the Open House Boards, at the Open Houses or online, and provide comments on the content. Participants were asked to provide feedback on:

- Areas of concern when thinking about single family zones;
- The definition of a character home;
- The identified character home zoning review study areas;
- The proposed zoning options, including floor area, building design, and number of dwelling units; and,
- Other considerations including grants and special requirements.

The survey was available online for 7 weeks. Participants were given until January 15, 2017 to submit their responses. A total of 3,322 responses were received and a summary of the survey findings are included in a separate City of Vancouver report.

Closing Comments

A key element of implementing the Vancouver Heritage Action Plan process is engagement with residents and stakeholders. This is evident through the opportunities made available through the Character Home Zoning Review process. Through the consultation activities and events outlined in this report, the City received a significant response from the community, revealing the importance of this conversation to City residents. Through conversations at the Open Houses, the Practitioner Session, and the online survey, several consistent themes emerged with a variety of perspectives and concerns catalyzed by this phase of the Heritage Action Plan.

Feedback over the course of this phase was a mix of support and concern over the proposed zoning options. There is support for using some zoning options to incentivize character home retention, while there is an equal measure of concern regarding the potential land-value impact of reducing FSR limits and housing affordability and diversity. Through the practitioner workshop, support for a balanced approach in regards to flexibility and regulation was expressed, but participants indicated that the current ideas if all implemented do not find that balance.

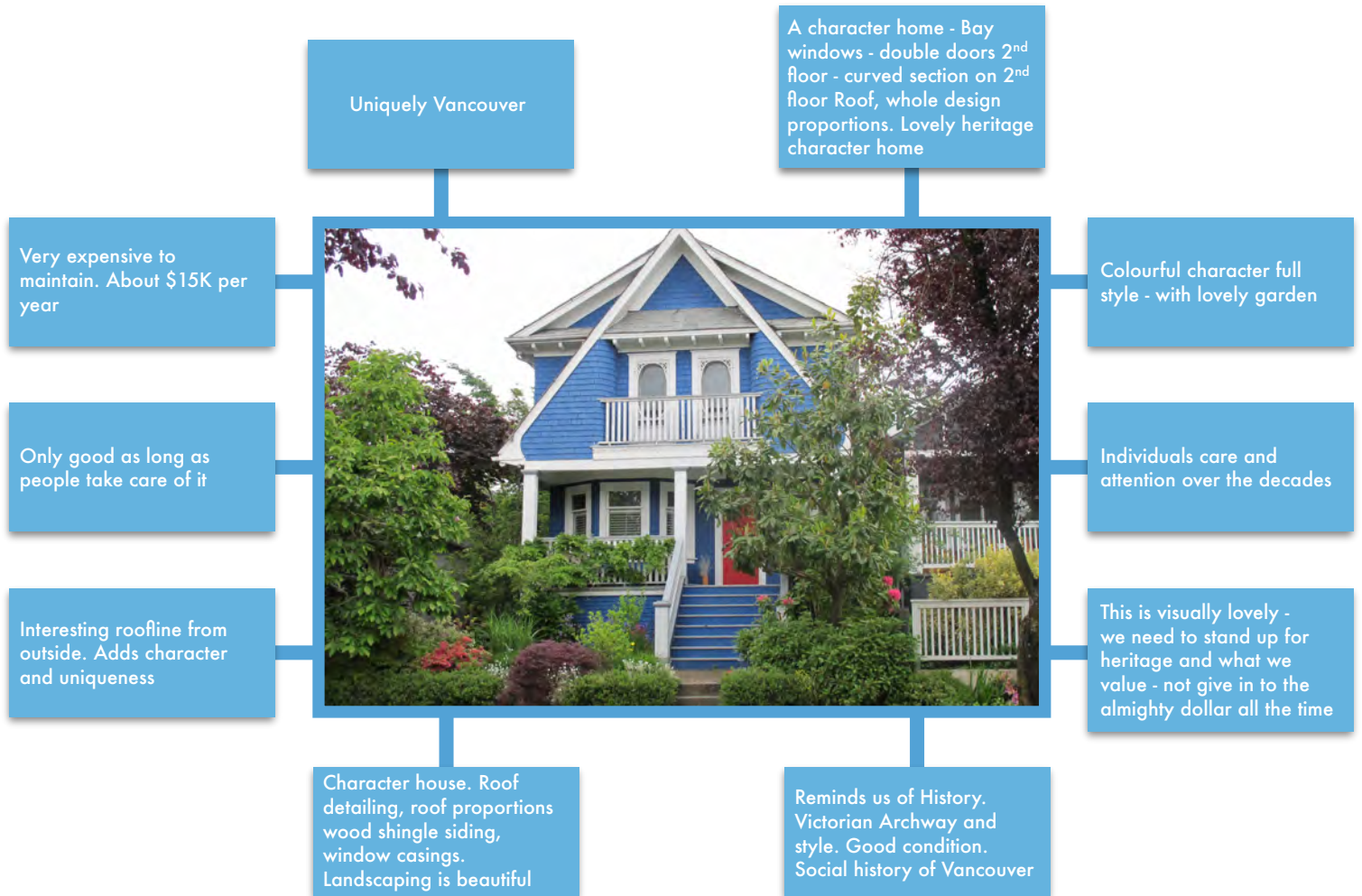
Based on comprehensive input from the public and stakeholders, it is clear that there are many diverse views about what the City should do regarding character homes. Feedback from the consultation process indicates that the diverse perspectives and opinions are polarized, and planning issues and opportunities outside of this technical exercise are inherently relevant and influential.

The purpose of this Consultation Summary is to report on the consultation activities in addition to those summaries found in the separate City of Vancouver report on the survey findings. In terms of next steps, this report of the community and stakeholder input will be presented to City Council for consideration during their review of staff recommendations for moving forward with this stage of the Heritage Action Plan.

APPENDIX A

Visual Explorer Responses

DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?



DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?

Front porch makes the lot
and block feel more
welcoming

Character! Original
window frames, nice
roofline and real chimneys



Well articulated buildings
with distinct design
features

Materials you can
no longer get at any price

DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?

Add suite to retain = good

Craftsmanship and design
are wonderful

Verandahs add character
and a good feeling when
people sit in them.
Different roof levels



Front balcony is character
feature

Too many modifications,
loses character, losing
modesty

DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?

Just a box

New house is a box and boring

Different is ok. Needs time for landscaping to mature. Duplex = good

Like the old porch. Nice roof line. Modern house box, not warm



Subtle patterns and symmetries but not necessarily identical

Need more housing options. House on left is equitable

Make it fit without being a replica

Older house sadly decayed - out of context now with modern neighbours

House on left looks like a power station. Energy efficient but hideous

DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?

Is character and should be allowed to have renovation. Relax to keep

If you gave incentives to keep, sure

Community and history



Beautiful old home

A home or development built solely to satisfy an economic or population need is not an example of character

DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?



DOES THIS PHOTO REPRESENT “CHARACTER” IN YOUR OPINION?



APPENDIX B

Practitioner Workshop Discussion Notes

Character Home Zoning Review - Practitioner Workshop

Round Table Discussion Notes

Discussion Topic 1: Character Merit Assessment

SUMMARY:

- The criteria should be weighted
- The criteria are too subjective
- There should be flexibility / room for negotiation in assessing character merit
- Character merit assessments should be unbiased
- Character merit assessments should be predictable
- The criteria do not capture essence of what is character
- Modern interventions do not necessarily detract from character
- Homes that do not meet the character criteria could be made to meet criteria through renovation
- 1940 date is not an appropriate measure of character
- Character merit should be assessed beyond street elevation (i.e. the whole house)
- Qualitative criteria should be considered in assessing character
- Context should be considered when assessing character
- Not everyone agrees that character homes are worth preserving
- The criteria threaten feasibility of potential retention projects
- It is unclear how character merit assessment fits in with other planning goals

TRANSCRIPT:

The criteria should be weighted

- Most important:
 - Massing, roof form
 - Major components - retaining % openings/size needs to be higher and clearer
 - Massing/form important
 - Massing should have more merit
 - Most important criteria are:
 - Massing / form
 - Date built
 - & should be weighted
 - Date built, massing, form = important
 - Form, scale - mass to retain
- Least important:
 - Detail

- Weighting:
 - Should be weighted
 - Weighting Yes!
 - Weighted is absolutely necessary
- Items 3, 4, 5 are related
 - #5 less important for character retention (vs. heritage)

The criteria are too subjective

- How do staff evaluate what is “original”?
 - And how do we evaluate “partial” porches? (how much can be filled in?)
- 1st house: hard to retain. Practitioners perform a character merit assessment. Not a great house to retain. Subjective.
- “window openings” is too vague. Very subjective.
- Checklist is subjective... valid → what comes after is key
- What are we fighting for??
 - On a case-by-case basis, with more room for negotiation with and architect or designer
- Current list too subjective

There should be flexibility / room for negotiation in assessing character merit

- Allow interpretive and qualitative data (evaluate on case-by-case) & room for negotiation
- Flexibility!!
- Becoming less flexible... need to move back to being more flexible
- There needs to be flexibility / discretion in handling character retention projects
- Allow for flexibility to provide innovation within modern living styles
- Planning needs to be more flexible on renovation projects e.g. guidelines approach, broader scope of consideration
- More support for contemporary additions and infills (flexibility)
 - City shouldn’t dictate style
 - Contemporary additions complement character!
 - Encourage contrast while respecting original components

Character merit assessments should be unbiased

- City staff doing character assessments vs consultant
 - Public assurance that it’s less biased
- Staff biased to retain
- What about another step in process?
 - i.e. 3 architects / 3rd party to evaluate
 - independent group with expertise, opinion
- Should an architect or designer be involved in the evaluation process?

Character merit assessments should be predictable

- Potential issues with consistency of evaluations (particularly over time)
- System is opaque, more transparent or clear to the public
- Higher caliber for evaluation of character homes
- Need a dedicated, multi-disciplinary, streamlined process to address character retention projects (not a panel of experts)

- Character housing renovation centre
- Have consistent, predictable interpretation
- Establish a “character housing renovation centre”

The criteria do not capture essence of what is character

- Checklist:
 - Can’t check 3 without 4
 - Criteria do not make sense
 - Superficial
 - Fundamentally disagree
 - Unable to change roofline is limiting
 - Need context of streetscape
 - Symbolic retention
- Character replication → Disney Effect
- Several criteria need tweaking
- trees add character

Modern interventions do not necessarily detract from character

- Modern interventions should be allowed
- Respecting neighbourhood character does not mean dictating style and parameters
 - Design intent = the important bit
 - Protecting character details relentlessly (and on principle alone) = a waste of time
- Incentives for retention while contrasting modern additions

Homes that do not meet the character criteria could be made to meet criteria through renovation

- Bonuses need to be made available to non-character houses that can be shown to have character merit through restoration
- Flaw: materials can be removed to reveal character material

1940 date is not an appropriate measure of character

- Character is character. 1940 irrelevant. Character is a design guideline feature built new or retain
- Extend date to 1945 or 1950s
- character should not be limited to pre-1940s
- Date built → extend to 1945 or 1950s
- Options should be made available even to post 1940s

Character merit should be assessed beyond street elevation (i.e. the whole house)

- Why do we only evaluate the frontage?
 - Why not a character interior?
 - Can we retain character while altering the frontage? i.e. adding a second story...?
- Expand the definition of character beyond the original frontage
- Streetscape weighted priority (façadeism)
- Needs to be more than face value

Qualitative criteria should be considered in assessing character

- Should homes be evaluated qualitatively?
 - Is the home “special”?
- Broaden the definition of character and allow interpretive and qualitative criteria
- Allow interpretive and qualitative data (evaluate on case-by-case) & room for negotiation
- Character should be based on a vernacular (vs. of a particular House) - what the house can be when it grows up
- Identify qualities instead of stylistic mandate

Context should be considered when assessing character

- Context should be included in assessment
- Streetscape
- Streetscape feasibility to retain

Not everyone agrees that character homes are worth preserving

- Homeowners forced to live with a building style they don't agree
- Character retention not valued (particularly of smaller homes in RS zones)
- Homeowners are forced to live in an older home that is not necessarily favoured
- Degree of retention should be better aligned with the homeowner's priorities
- Clear on what character retention is for; define
- As long as new construction follows the neighbourhood's existing pattern of massing and cadence, what is the point of retention?
- Qualities of a livable city > needs of fickle homeowners (“protect our homes!”... “how dare you devalue our neighbourhoods!”)
- By the character merit standards they are “character” but the houses are of little value
- Old homes not valued by homeowners → should align with their priorities
- Too much time / resources spent on retaining old homes

The criteria threaten feasibility of potential retention projects

- Small houses with minimal detail are more difficult. Poor outcome/product
- More staff trained and informed on viable projects
- Structural needs to be considered (i.e. structural integrity of the building itself)
- Case studies: all character but 2nd floor not “livable” / functional
 - → marketable to higher end
- How feasible to retain
- Underutilization 40-60%
 - → <60% of allowable FSR (Introduce underutilization criterion)
- Evaluation deeper - structural (concern over costs associated with low structural integrity)
- Small houses hard to retain
- Retention should be conservative
- Feasibility to retain
- Incentives to retain
- Many houses are marginal and difficult to work with

- character needs to be incentivized to a safe and higher value
- What are we retaining?
 - Hard for designer to be accountant i.e. interpreting % retention
- Character is being treated too much like heritage

It is unclear how character merit assessment fits in with other planning goals

- What happens when retention conflicts with sustainability and livability?
- Is the checklist stifling innovation?
- Livability
- Corner lots are a missed opportunity
- Character of Tomorrow → density, max SF, accommodate population
 - New construction with character merit
- Within planning there needs to be a value hierarchy to meet set objectives.
- Project merit needs to be fair to everyone
- Council initiatives and rationales need to be better incorporated
- Character retention not worth it if home does not meet sustainability/livability requirements
 - And qualitative goals
- Current standards and regulations for retentions / additions actually decreases livability of the overall home in some cases
 - Living spaces patch worked together
- It is incredibly difficult (and expensive) to maintain sustainability goals and to comply with new regulations when performing a retention. If adding a rain screen requires removal of the cladding... then what's the point???
- What is the point of retention if you need to tear a house apart in order to meet sustainability & livability requirements???
- Too hard to look at in isolation of discussion of unit type and affordability

Discussion Topic 2: Character Retention Projects

SUMMARY:

- On incentives:
 - Proposed incentives for retention are insufficient
 - Relaxing yard setbacks would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Restricting FSR to 0.5 would be effective in reducing demolitions of character homes
 - The ability to sell or transfer density would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Subdivision would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Relaxation of tree retention requirements would be effective incentive for character retention
 - The option to repurpose existing homes as laneway homes would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Allowing larger additions to character homes would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Basement FSR exemption would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Strata titling would be an effective incentive for character retention
 - Expedited processing of character retention applications would be an effective incentive for character retention
- Some of the proposed criteria are more feasible than others
- Compliance with proposed criteria in tandem with other regulations is challenging
- There is variability in feasibility of criteria across different neighbourhoods / streets / houses
- Process of neighbourhood approval could challenge retention projects
- Different proponent groups have different needs
- Design Guidelines should be considered for retention projects
- Character retention should consider future housing needs
- Process for Character Merit Assessment and approval of retention projects should be clear and timely

TRANSCRIPT:

On incentives:

Proposed incentives for retention are insufficient

- Incentives for retention are not meaningful
- Tools that wouldn't work well:
 - Floor area exclusions e.g. RT approach for parking
- What retention tools to improve outcomes

- Character is being treated too much like heritage →not asking for major bonuses
- Impacts of retention on cost
- City-proposed incentives aren't appealing enough
- More incentives for retention (FSR)
- More incentives are needed for retention
- building outright is winning over retention
- Increase incentives for retention
- Each project needs to earn density

Relaxing yard setbacks would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Yard setbacks

Restricting FSR to 0.5 would be effective in reducing demolitions of character homes

- 0.5 FSR is a big enough disincentive to prevent demolition of character houses

The ability to sell or transfer density would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Density transfer
- Sell bonus density!
- Bonus density transfers

Subdivision would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Subdivide

Relaxation of tree retention requirements would be effective incentive for character retention

- Option to replace mature trees
- Allow mature tree removal and replacement
- Tree replacement

The option to repurpose existing homes as laneway homes would be an effective incentive for character retention

- repurpose bungalows as laneways
- Keep main homes and separate homes in the back of the site rather than additions which overwhelmed the retained house

Allowing larger additions to character homes would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Sympathetic 2-storey additions need to be considered for low character homes

Basement FSR exemption would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Subterranean living space
- Below-grade additions
- Allow subterranean lives
- Give more carrots to character retention e.g. exempt basements

- Crawlspace have been converted to livable spaces
- No limit on basement floor area, just above grade, would allow basement suites.
- Allow designers to be creative in finding livability solutions and subterranean spaces

Strata titling would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Strata infill housing strong incentive
- Strata is enough
- Allow option for strata in all areas
- Strata for laneway
- Flexibility re: new units in existing form and ownership e.g. strata
- Incentivize retention, i.e. infill strata is good, strong incentive
- Strata titling is enough incentive, don't "down zone"

Expedited processing of character retention applications would be an effective incentive for character retention

- Processing times!
- "down zoning" will consume staff time and not meet objectives

Some of the proposed criteria are more feasible than others

- need ability to create livable buildings (5' ceilings not accepted)
- need minimum 7' ceiling
- Brackets easy to retain
 - But fascia, window sills often damaged
- Retaining roof line is restrictive
- Building upgrade → costly
- How to buy character / old wood → contemporary style
- Easiest elements: roof, massing
- Difficult: foundation, roofline if low profile (e.g. California bungalow)
- Roofline being the biggest barrier, therefore looking at "superficial" aesthetic choices
 - Adherence, no flexibility
- Size is major limiting component → affects what elements are "easy" vs. "difficult" to work with
- incentivizing character homes will stop demolitions

Compliance with proposed criteria in tandem with other regulations is challenging

- Code requirements, upgrades, degree of retention
- Limitation on assessing as "structurally unsound"
- Where is owner's interest? Could be putting owners at risk if not fully compliant e.g. water, fire
- There is less flexibility in interpretation of regulations - building inspectors (staff) have had discretion removed
 - Interpretation also varies; inconsistent advice
- VBBL is inflexible
 - Needs more flexibility to address character
- Need dedicated, streamlined processing → Housing Renovation Centre was a dream

- Economics - if full upgrades required, retaining character house will be more expensive than building new
 - Balance land value economics through use, # units

There is variability in feasibility of criteria across different neighbourhoods / streets / houses

- Strata → density → may not fit Dunbar, Point Grey
- Case Study #3 Extra House - simple, existing housing
 - Good incentive for achieving density
 - Increased value
 - Housing options
 - Limited areas of the city you can do this
 - Front/back subdivision
 - Redefine character
- Case Study #2 BC Ferry - disagree with forcing retention!
 - You can replicate same plan but new
 - Retain concept, not literal structure
 - Design Guidelines new const.
 - Select certain elements to replicate
 - Character is form, people complain about massing
 - Add level in middle → raise roof → changes massing
 - Fitting new layer in City within old Zoning Bylaw
 - New generation of density
 - Need more flexibility to design façade
 - Bring massing to front; front yard is dead space
 - Reduce setbacks
 - RS1 does not work → too restrictive on front yard
 - Need flexibility
 - What's the aversion to above grade? Massing
 - Show what you can do with new construction of Design Guidelines without retention
 - Sentiment value to be addressed
 - Visualization of the city and blocks → present to public
 - Include streetscape in Design Guidelines
 - Mail out notification too widespread
 - Should be able to modify
 - City internal review produces vague comments
 - Retention = loss opportunities
 - Need better clarity on what can or can't be modified
- Level of Retention:
 - Depends on bldg. - size (small not good) designs get rejected, therefore too aggressive
 - "good bones" mandatory
- Citywide application would have better effect on character retention
- Don't want to create "Mickey Mouse" land with the whole City
- Neighbourhood role to control

Process of neighbourhood approval could challenge retention projects

- process of neighbourhood *approval* [notification process] makes case #2 difficult

- public input can kill density project
- neighbourhoods dislike change

Different proponent groups have different needs

- “worth it” to who?
- How can the City so strictly determine level of retention? This is a private home, not a piece in a museum!
- Depends who it’s for: developer vs. owner-occupier each have unique needs
- Degree of retention should be better aligned with homeowners’ priorities

Design Guidelines should be considered for retention projects

- retention should be voluntary with guidelines
 - with incentive = strata +FSR
- take it back before, with strong design guidelines
 - guidelines should follow design guidelines = better results
- you can preserve character by building with new design guidelines
- Focus on streetscape via design guidelines
- additions can be poor aesthetic (incompatible)
- Guidelines like RT
- Triplex in RS form: creative approaches to keep overall form but integrate new layout/unit count
- Have technology to replicate character homes with new construction → Design Guidelines
 - Get specs and rebuild all new

Character retention should consider future housing needs

- real change in demographics
- views are changing within homeowner groups
- Should not maintain an 1FD zone

Process for Character Merit Assessment and approval of retention projects should be clear and timely

- [Character Merit Assessment] Process should be quicker than 1-2 weeks, whatever the approach
- Process too long
- Planning needs to be clear and timely on character retention. Process must be easier
- Require professionals (certified) to do the reviews, to reduce staff time

Discussion Topic 3: New Home Construction

SUMMARY:

- FSR should not be restricted for new home construction:
 - 0.5 FSR would reduce property values and development feasibility
 - 0.5 FSR would discourage the creation of additional dwelling units
 - 0.5 FSR would negatively impact liveability, particularly for families
 - 0.5 FSR would negatively impact housing quality
 - 0.5 FSR would be contrary to achieving other planning goals such as housing affordability and environmental sustainability
 - FSR above 0.5 should be considered if the design is exceptional
- Proposed zoning changes would not prevent the construction of incompatible single-family houses
- Increased density in single-family neighbourhoods should be incentivized in new home construction as well as character retention
- New construction in of itself is not responsible for bad design / incompatible neighbourhood fit
- Design Guidelines for new construction would be an effective way to enhance neighbourhood character
- Do not require neighbourhood notification for new construction
- The Character Home Zoning Review process is raising concern within the development / building industry

TRANSCRIPT:

FSR should not be restricted for new home construction

- Understanding about pre-1940, but this “new construction” concept restrictions replaces everything
- Bad plan. Bad idea. Wrong direction
- Keep same differential between the two
- Step back. Flawed
- Tear-down 1995 = can only build this concept → terrible idea
- Confusing! This applies to all replacement homes
- Will result in legal battles
- Creating one type of client
- Will there be exclusions for FSR under sloping roof forms - like current RS 5?
- Requiring 0.50 FSR for new construction on non-character house sites make no sense
- 0.8 for retention
- No downzone
- 0.7 remains
 - 0.6 above grade new
 - 0.85 retention
 - Larger size infill e.g. 0.25 rather than 0.16
- 0.25 below, 0.45 above grade is ideal

- Keep the FSR as is (outright)
- Yes, it's a big enough stick, 0.5 FSR
- What's the point?
- Purely punitive
- Give .75 or .8 to retain
- Goes back to envelope
- Just give them the crawlspace, they will dig it out anyways
- Why are we stuck on 0.5? Focus on above grade sq. ft.
- Again, wrong direction
- Punitive

0.5 FSR would reduce property values and development feasibility

- Ridiculous ratio of sq. ft. / lot size / property value
- Impacts property value
- This will reduce property values. Unintentional results.
 - Bad for existing homeowners; good for aspiring homebuyers
- 0.5 FSR not workable
- Also more expensive to build per square foot
- 4 m for 1400 sf. due to economy of scale (vs. could buy a floor of a condo building)
- 0.6 minimum that people used to
- Expectation 0.7 → 0.5 not support

0.5 FSR would discourage the creation of additional dwelling units

- Concept for new construction (0.5) absolutely wrong direction and too punitive. Backfire. Reverse on affordability. Lose all secondary suites. Density gone.
- This approach will kill suites, reversing what was achieved in 2009 → forget the two thirds / one third arrangement
- No downzoning, you'll eliminate suites
- 0.5 is too small for basement suite
- Going to a smaller dwelling (e.g. 0.5) would not improve compatibility with older houses and would do away with suites and become a "box"
- Suites will be lost at 0.5
- Basement → small for 1FD → 0.5 not feasible
- Additional units would help create diversity in neighbourhoods
- No personal space in basements
- Lose suites → can't afford to buy without suite
- Basements are not visible. Why does it matter?
 - Incentivizes rental units
- Contrary to density
 - Exemption to downzoning if doing multi-family; should only apply downzoning to one-family dwelling

0.5 FSR would negatively impact liveability, particularly for families

- 0.5 too punitive - doesn't allow 1FD with more family members
- 0.5 FSR is too small for family living

- Livability is greatest challenge if 0.5 is imposed. Should allow higher FSR for retention and keep a more reasonable FSR for new (0.6)
- Livability is greatest challenge is 0.5 is applied
- Not livable (0.5 FSR for 33' lots)
- floor area for livable SF home:
 - 0.4 or 0.5 effectively outlaws new houses
 - Challenge at 0.5
 - More appropriate at 0.6
 - Impact on 33' lot much different from that of 50' lot

0.5 FSR would negatively impact housing quality

- Compatible of new homes with older? No, therefore becomes a “box”
- Quality of construction will be affected, therefore meet only minimum standards when keeping character
- Housing stock at 0.5 will have a very short lifespan
- Form/scale/massing
 - Would achieve a more basic box
 - 2/3 - 1/3 ratio
 - Get rid of below grade-above grade massing
 - Will improve compatibility with older character homes
- Balance out, therefore allow earning back (good design should be exempt from 0.5 FSR)
- Will result in building a box without character to max sq. ft. (0.5 FSR for 33' lots)

0.5 FSR would be contrary to achieving other planning goals such as housing affordability and environmental sustainability

- Below-grade construction should be exempt, and should in fact be encouraged to help tackle housing affordability while maintaining neighbourhood fit and fabric
- 0.5 FSR will be less affordable because would not allow for more family members in one house
- Affordability is gone (0.5 FSR for 33' lots)
- Physically couldn't build a passive house ← volumetric requirements

FSR above 0.5 should be considered if the design is exceptional

- Allow earning back of FSR
- Designers all have different response to how to “earn back” additional FSRs

Proposed zoning changes would not prevent the construction of incompatible single-family houses

- Have consultants (independent authority) chime in to establish definition of quality design
- Over regulation tends to encourage cookie cutter design
- Guidelines
 - New faux heritage houses are ugly
 - New construction should not be restricted by guidelines
 - But there's also an argument for some guidelines
 - Guidelines should be applied based on context e.g. streetscape

- Need big enough carrot for guidelines
- Guidelines are easy to circumvent
- No agreement on guidelines, but agreement not to over-regulate process
- Going to a smaller dwelling (e.g. 0.5) would not improve compatibility with older houses and would do away with suites and become a “box”
- Simply build new to look old!!!!
- Disincentivizing new homes is unfair to new homebuyers (who may not want character homes) and to architects whose creativity and innovation is being stifled.
- These small houses will be beside these new large homes and won’t “fit”

Increased density in single-family neighbourhoods should be incentivized in new home construction as well as character retention

- Always use incentives
- 3 tiers:
 - Preserve house
 - Price covenant 5 units
 - Rental (6 units)
- Subdividing 50’ lots and corner lots
- Decreasing front yard setbacks
- Disincentivizing new home construction is unproductive!
- Exempt below-grade construction
 - Possible solution to increasing density while retaining neighbourhood aesthetic
 - Don’t discourage density... just find more creative solutions and let designers innovate!
 - Discouraging density in new home construction is counterproductive to housing affordability (requiring retention in order to increase density is not always appropriate for new buyers... not everyone wants a character-styled home!)
- Abolish above-grade density penalties for sloping sites
- Should be able to earn (back) additional FSR based on quality design (with or without guidelines)

New construction in of itself is not responsible for bad design / incompatible neighbourhood fit

- Why are there barriers to innovation in new construction?
- Keep a minimum standard for construction that is not led by an architect, but don’t hold credited and innovative architects to the same mandate. They know how to find alternative design solutions!
- Will 0.5 make houses better?
- Suggestion to restrict massing above grade

Design Guidelines for new construction would be an effective way to enhance neighbourhood character

- Design regulations - cut down by about 1/3 - yes, if clear and simple
- Design regulations vs. guidelines → speed things up
- Yes! To design regulations

- Guidelines vs. Regulations: regulation only if they are clear and simple and speed things up, predictable interpretation!
- Design Guidelines for new construction!!!!
- YES = Design Regulations = more efficient compared to guidelines
 - Context of streetscape
 - Control massing
 - Practical
- Technical Design Guidelines ← Design Criteria / Design Regulations

Do not require neighbourhood notification for new construction

- Design review could be similar to LWH regulations, where requires planning review, but no notification
- Either Design regulations or design guidelines reviewed by planners are ok - but no notification

The Character Home Zoning Review process is raising concern in the development / building industry

- Currently no due process
- There are more demolitions at the moment during Character Home Zoning Review process due to concerns about less FSR for new houses
- Don't over-regulate the process
- Don't regulate like LWH, which are too regulated





585 - 1111 West Hastings Street, Vancouver BC V6E 2J3 | 604.687.2281

5th Floor, 844 Courtney Street, Victoria BC V8W 1C4 | 250.383.0304

www.cityspaces.ca