

## **A Time For Ideas:**

### **Recommendations from the City of Vancouver Creative Advisory Group for Housing Innovation.**

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## **Introduction.**

Over the past several months, the members of the City of Vancouver Creative Advisory Group for Housing Innovation has met to discuss and identify ideas that will assist in ameliorating the City's current housing affordability crisis. The Advisory group comprised a diverse cohort drawing from a number of sectors, although there various members had a range of views and experience.

The working group was mediated by City of Vancouver Housing Policy staff, including Chris Puzio, Kirsten Baillie, Dianna Hurford and Abigail Bond. The group members are:

Marianne Amodio, Architect AIBC, Chair

Jake Fry, CEO Smallworks Studios and Laneway Housing Inc., Small Housing Society of BC, Director

Bryn Davidson, B. Eng. M.Arch LEED-AP, Principal of Lanefab Design Build.

Ouri Scott, Architect AIBC

Ian MacDonald, Architect AIBC

Jim O'Dea, Terra Housing, Inc.

Ericka Stephens-Rennie, Vancouver CoHousing.

Allan Forrester, Forrester Homes Corp.

Inge Roecker, Asst. Prof. U.B.C., AKBW, M.Arch., BES

## **Synopsis.**

There was consensus amongst the advisory panel for the City of Vancouver to create new policy that supports densification and variation in housing typologies throughout the City.

There was overwhelming sentiment that bold new policies are needed to both resolve the current housing affordability crisis and provide an array of need housing typologies and scales that are currently missing from our communities. There was a recognition this shift had a further benefit of addressing the falling population levels found in many single-family neighborhoods.

This said, the group recognized the need to respect the essential nature and feel of neighborhoods in changes to housing in these communities. As a group, we believe it is possible to preserve the character of existing neighborhoods and promote a greater sense of community, while at the same time evolving the housing typologies found in traditional single family neighborhoods.

We believe that we are at an exciting crossroads, where opportunities for design innovation woven into our existing urban fabric can assist in housing affordability. Essential to this change is a shift from a regulatory focus on prescriptive building forms to a focus based on outcomes that meet clearly-stated goals of community and planning staff.

The strategies outlined below are bold and tenable. They represent years of study and experience by Architects, Developers, Residential Designers, Contractors, Members of Co-housing groups. Some represent more intrepid solutions requiring policy changes or new policy while others are simply “no-brainer” solutions that will improve policies already set in place.

We feel that the time is opportune for City Council to embrace new forms of living and promote innovative design. These strategies should be promoted by City Council as positive changes that empower current property owners and those seeking affordable housing options.

## Overall Recommendations:

The creation of a **City-Wide Vision** for Housing that is based on today's values of vibrancy, diversity, inclusion, affordability and sustainability;

That this **City-Wide Vision** imbed our **Indigenous Values** - such as **The Seven Generations Principle**;

The creation of new City-Wide policies that are based on this **City-Wide Vision**;

That these new policies define **performance-based and qualitative criteria** that are based on the City-Wide Vision, in lieu of prescriptive design guidelines;

Reframing the intent of our 'single family' and 'two family' zoned neighbourhoods such that the primary goals are based on the **City-Wide Vision**, in addition to neighbourhood character;

Allowing for a **greater diversity** of both new and historic building forms, including multi-family forms, to be re-introduced into **all** Districts of the City of Vancouver;

Devising a **set of priorities** for each individual project in concert with the Urban Planner, thus allowing for a clear set of project principles. This allows a project to become unencumbered by a competing set of regulations;

Recognizing that **permit timelines have a direct impact on affordability** thus, establishing strict timelines for permitting on each project and removing the requirement for development permits or rezonings for all small-lot projects;

The removal of **redundant and irrelevant regulations** (for example, maximum site coverage and area of impermeable materials calculations in certain districts.);

The creation of a culture that truly incentivizes design innovation by supporting it through policy. Create the **City of Vancouver Innovative Housing Policy**;

Celebrating and promoting design innovation by **building a project on City-Owned property** that serves as an example of the new vision. This can be a competition based format, such as My Micro NY;

**Engendering a spirit of opportunity and excitement** within the City so that our community can see future possibilities for themselves as developers.

**Actively engaging the voices** of those citizens who are actually affected by housing affordability.

## Specific Strategies:

**Allow Multiple Dwellings** in every residential and mixed use zone of the City, including secondary suites, multiple suites, laneway housing, triplexes, duplexes and fourplexes with multiple suite and secondary suites.

**Allow for increased density** across every residential and mixed use zone of the City.

Allow Stratified **Laneway Housing or Infill** in every residential and mixed use zone of the City;

**Allow for a derivation from the appearance of a single family neighbourhood** for multiple family developments: ie. Basement suites opening to the front yard; multiple door entries at the front elevation;

**Allow lot subdivision** every residential and mixed use zone, with no minimum lot width;

Allow **incremental increases in density** to multi-family districts - small additions to upper floor of townhouses and multi-family dwellings, for example.

Allow for the **legalization** existing multiple suites or “too small” dwelling units;

Promote the calculated, case by case reduction and/or removal of **Building Bylaw trigger upgrades** for both Part 3 and Part 9 buildings to assist in a more affordable construction;

Encourage building owners to **repair and upgrade existing buildings** through incremental increases in density, property tax reductions, DCL relaxations, etc. as an incentive for **maintaining current rental rates**;

Allow for **Conditional Density** for achieving affordability and climate protection goals;

Exclude existing basement FSR up to 7' high, remove above grade FSR requirements, and adopt the Development Permit determination of grade so that **smaller-scaled developments are not considered Part 3 buildings** due to grade depressions or sloped sites;

**Remove height envelopes** - use maximum average height or no maximum height requirement;

**Remove prescriptive front, rear and sideyard requirements**;

Allow for **transferrable density** (i.e. small main house and larger LWH/Infill);

Remove site coverage rules (while maintaining site permeability rules);

Allow for **multiple occupancies and uses into Part 9 housing developments**: small scale commercial: retail/ artists' studios, etc. with the recognition that the incorporation of work into live creates affordability; and the addition of retail creates an income stream. Building code bylaws must work to promote this;

Allow smaller Multiple Dwelling developments with **no requirement for underground parking**;

## **Conclusion:**

It is only with clear and positive action that we can begin to mitigate the Housing Affordability Crisis and address the need of the Vancouver citizens (present and future). The City of Vancouver Creative Advisory Board for Housing Innovation represents a broad range of the community housing sector. Collectively, we see opportunity in every corner of our City.

We encourage City Council to embrace the talents of the local housing community and promote and utilize creativity and innovation as a tool to help shape our City's future.