



**HOUSING
VANCOUVER**

Renovations in Rental Apartments

Information for Landlords and Renters

Background

Vancouver's existing purpose-built rental housing, generally contained in apartments, is an important part of the City's affordable housing stock, providing safe, secure, and affordable housing to over one third of Vancouver's renting households. However, over 80% of Vancouver's existing rental apartment stock was constructed before 1980 - with the oldest generation coming up to over 60 years of age by 2020. As Vancouver's rental stock ages, it is important to understand the type of renovations and development that might be required to ensure the safety and resilience of the stock, as well as the potential impact on residents.

Intent

This guide is intended to provide information on the types of renovations typically seen in rental apartment buildings, the types of permits generally required by the City of Vancouver under the Zoning and Development By-law and Vancouver Building By-law, and the potential impact on existing residents.

The information in this guide has several limitations that should be considered:

- The information in this guide provides the typical impacts on tenants for various types of work, as specified by building professionals; however, each project is unique and the scope of work may vary and/or change over time, which will result in different tenant impacts. The information provided in this guide is not definitive and actual impact on tenants will vary for each project.
- The information in this guide is specific to the City of Vancouver and does not consider permit types, scope of renovation or development, and impact on residents in other locations and jurisdictions.

The City of Vancouver cannot make a determination about when a residential tenancy agreement may or may not end under the Residential Tenancy Act. All determinations of whether a residential tenancy agreement may or may not end due to renovation or redevelopment work are governed by the Residential Tenancy Act.

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Introduction

Renovations and the Life Cycle of a Rental Building

The life cycle of a typical concrete or wood frame building in Vancouver depends on a number of factors, including the types of construction materials, impact of external factors like climate, and the level of maintenance over time. Upgrades and renovations are an important part of the life cycle of buildings. As buildings age, core systems come due for repair or replacement, including windows, interior and exterior walls, pipes, and electrical wiring. Buildings constructed prior to modern seismic, fire, and energy codes may require upgrades to bring them into compliance and to meet Council objectives for resilient buildings - such as introducing sprinklers and emergency exits, installing energy-efficient heat pumps, or undertaking seismic upgrades. These renovations are often crucial for resident comfort and safety and for the long-term resilience of the building.

Owners of aging buildings may also opt to undertake more ‘cosmetic’ upgrades to modernize the building’s internal and external features. These upgrades - such as re-piping to allow dishwashers or washer/dryers, or new kitchen or bathroom layouts are generally not critical to ensuring the safety or resilience of rental buildings, but may help to make older units more livable or suitable to the needs of households like families.

In some cases, as a rental building reaches the end of its ‘life cycle,’ the level of upgrades needed may approach or exceed the cost of replacing the building entirely. In these cases, redevelopment may become a more economically viable option. Redevelopment may be more economically viable in cases where a new building could achieve greater height or density than what is currently on the site, or where the building layout could be reconfigured to allow more overall units.

Understanding Landlord Responsibilities and Tenant Rights During Renovations and Redevelopment

Residents of existing rental buildings have rights and protections. The *Residential Tenancy Act* governs all residential tenancies throughout the province and includes rights and responsibilities for landlords and tenants in the case of redevelopment and renovation. According to the Residential Tenancy Policy line on [Ending a Tenancy: Landlord’s Use of the Property](#), in order to end tenancies for renovations, renovations or repairs must be so extensive that they require the unit to be empty in order for them to take place, and the only way to achieve this must be by terminating the tenancy. A landlord cannot end a tenancy for renovations or repairs simply because it would be easier or more economical to complete the work. Furthermore, if repairs or renovations require the unit to be empty and the tenant is willing to vacate the suite temporarily and remove belongings if necessary, ending the tenancy may not be required.

Understanding the City’s Process: Permits and Renter Protections

City of Vancouver development and building by-laws regulate development to ensure work is being undertaken in a way that is safe for workers and residents and meets code and building requirements, and that existing buildings are upgraded as needed to ensure life/safety requirements. These objectives are carried out through two main policies - the [Vancouver Building By-law](#) and the [Zoning and Development By-law](#), and regulated via the permitting process, which includes mandatory application materials and reviews by development and building staff prior to permit issuance, as well as mandatory inspections throughout the construction process.

For certain types of permits where existing tenants in primary rental housing will be displaced as a result of redevelopment or major renovation, the City of Vancouver also has additional protections for renters under the Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy. The City of Vancouver’s Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy applies to both rezoning and development permits for primary rental buildings where existing renters will be permanently displaced and tenancy agreements will end. Primary rental housing includes purpose-built market rental housing, non-market or social housing, buildings with residential rental units above commercial spaces, and large multiple conversion dwellings with six or more units.¹ A Tenant Relocation Plan under the City’s policy must include compensation based on length of tenure, moving expenses, right of first refusal to return to the new building at discounted rents, and assistance finding new accommodations.

Table 1 outlines the types of permits typically issued for development in residential buildings and associated resident protections from the Province and City where applicable.

Table 1: General Permitting Requirements for Typical Scopes of Work for Renovations in Existing Rental Apartments and Applicable Renter Protections

Permit Type	Typical Scopes of Work Requiring This Type of Permit	Applicable Renter Protections
Development Permit	A development permit is required for scopes of work involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete redevelopment • Major renovation involving a change of use or dwelling count, or unit layout or configuration • Alteration to external appearance of the building (e.g. re-cladding, balconies) 	City of Vancouver Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy AND <i>Residential Tenancy Act</i>
Building Permit	A building permit is required for alternations involving physical changes to the interior or exterior of a building, except as excluded below	<i>Residential Tenancy Act</i>
Trades Permits	A trades permit is required for any and all work impacting gas, plumbing, electrical, and sprinkler systems	<i>Residential Tenancy Act</i>
No Permit Required	Some types of work may not require a permit such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing fixtures, cabinets, and flooring • Painting interior walls • Carrying out non-structural maintenance or minor repairs to exterior 	<i>Residential Tenancy Act</i>

For specific information on what permits are required, please visit the Development and Building Services Centre website at <https://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/building-and-renovating.aspx>

¹ Certain types of secondary rental are also covered by the Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy; please refer to the Policy for additional information.

Renter Impacts from Typical Renovations

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of common work undertaken in rental buildings and the potential impact on residents. This information comes from building professionals based on general experience in the City of Vancouver; however, each project is unique and the scope of work may vary and/or change over time, which will result in different tenant impacts. The information provided in this guide is not definitive and actual impact on tenants will vary for each project.

General information on common work undertaken on rental buildings and potential impacts on residents in this chapter includes:

- Types of permits required
- General impact on suites, including length of impact
- Potential service or other disruption types on tenants
- Aspects of work that may require units to be vacated

Section 2.2 describes the potential impacts on tenants from upgrades/work to individual building systems. Section 2.3 describes the potential impacts on tenants from upgrades/work on multiple building systems and/or major development.

The information in this guide and the City of Vancouver cannot make a determination about when a residential tenancy agreement may or may not end under the *Residential Tenancy Act*. All determinations of whether a residential tenancy agreement may or may not end due to renovation or redevelopment work are governed by the *Residential Tenancy Act*.

Typical Tenant Impacts of Upgrades to Individual Building Systems

Table 2 outlines the typical impacts on tenants for various types of work to individual building systems. The typical impact on tenants listed in Table 2 are based on the expertise of building professionals; however, each project is unique and the scope of work may vary and/or change over time, which will result in different tenant impacts. The information provided in this table is not definitive and actual impact on tenants will vary for each project.

Table 2: Typical Tenant Impacts of Upgrades to Individual Building Systems

Type of Upgrade		Does work involve disruptions to tenants? If yes, for how long?	What aspects of work might require tenants to leave the unit?
Upgrades to kitchen and bathroom finishes, flooring replacement or repairs	Permit generally not required for repairs and upgrades to kitchen/bathroom fixtures or flooring	Workers in suites, tenants may have limited access to kitchen/bathroom while work is underway.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Re-piping	Plumbing Permit Building Permit may be required in some cases (e.g. where new firestopping and wall repairs are required)	Water shut off + workers in units; 3-8 hours per day per suite. Total time to complete varies based on invasiveness of work; ranges from 3 to 17 days per suite.	Presence of asbestos in drywall taping compound or ceiling spray texture may require a few hours' absence for abatement. If work is more invasive then tenants may need to leave the unit for duration of the work
Boiler replacement	Plumbing Permit and Gas Permit	Water may be shut off in units for a maximum of 1-2 days.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Upgrades to hydronic heating systems (valves & piping)	Plumbing Permit	Work requires 1-2 hours in each suites to replace heating equipment.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Renewal or installation of fire sprinkler systems	Sprinkler permit	Water shut off + workers in units; 3-8 hours per day per suite. Total time to complete varies based on invasiveness of work; ranges from 3 to 17 days per suite.	Presence of asbestos in drywall taping compound or ceiling spray texture may require a few hours' absence for abatement. If work is more invasive then tenants may need to leave the unit for work to proceed.

Heat pump installation - Central Systems	Electrical Permit + Plumbing Permit	Water shut-off, 3-8 hours during the day. Installation of a make-up air unit (for corridor and central space ventilation) does not involve any impact on suites.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Heat pump installation - Suite Based Systems	Electrical Permit + Building Permit	2-4 hours per suite.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Modernization of elevators	Building permit and electrical permit	Elevator may need to be shut down for the duration of work - could require several months depending on the type of upgrade and number of elevators in the building.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Repairs and upgrades to the electrical system	Electrical permit	Suite impact depends on extent of repairs; repair of main switch only does not involve construction in suites but a full re-wiring (rare) does impact suites. Main switch repair may require temporary shutdown of power (typically 1 day).	A full re-wire is generally combined with renovations to other building systems as part of a building-wide upgrade. The combination of these upgrades may require tenants to leave units for the duration of the work.
Re-roofing (could include energy efficient upgrade)	No permit required for replacement Building Permit may be required for certain scopes of work	Minimal impact on suites.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.
Balcony and decks	Development Permit + Building Permit	Temporary removal of sliding glass doors, worker access to balconies + noise. Minor repairs may require 1-2 days per suite; extensive repairs may require 3-5 days per suite.	Work is unlikely to require tenants to leave units.

<p>Rehabilitation of cladding/envelope (could include energy efficient upgrade)</p>	<p>Development Permit + Building Permit</p>	<p>Minimal impacts on individual suites; work involves construction noise and lack of light due to scaffolding for up to 6 months.</p>	<p>Potential asbestos but not likely to require tenants to leave units Commonly combined with window replacement</p>
<p>Replacement of windows and sliding glass doors (could include energy efficient upgrade)</p>	<p>Development Permit + Building Permit</p>	<p>Work requires 1-2 days per suite. May involve disruption and noise; potential asbestos exposure depending on level of work.</p>	<p>Potential asbestos exposure in suites - may require tenants to leave units for a few days while work is underway Commonly combined with cladding/envelope repairs</p>

Typical Tenant Impacts of Redevelopment or Upgrades to Multiple Building Systems

Table 3 outlines the typical impacts on tenants for major development or work to multiple building systems. Compared to the types of work to individual building systems outlined in Section 2.2, redevelopment and upgrades to multiple building systems are typically more complex projects involving multiple scopes of work. This work is more likely to involve longer-term impact on tenants. The typical impact on tenants listed in Table 3 are based on the expertise of building professionals; however, each project is unique and the scope of work may vary and/or change over time, which will result in different tenant impacts. The information provided in this table is not definitive and actual impact on tenants will vary for each project.

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Table 3. Typical Tenant Impacts of Redevelopment or Upgrades to Multiple Building

Type of work	Permit required	Impact on suites /renters
Seismic upgrades	Development Permit + Building Permit. Some upgrades may require Building Permit only.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant impact varies based on building structure and scope of seismic upgrades required • Some work may involve extensive structural upgrades impacting exterior and interior walls, residential units and parking, etc. • Some buildings will only require minimal improvement or less invasive forms of upgrade
Multiple renovations not involving changing unit layouts or moving walls - E.g: Structural work plumbing and/or electrical systems involving repairs to walls and ceilings	Building Permit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on suites will vary based on scope of work • Work involving disconnection of services/plumbing or impacting interior walls may require tenants to leave units in order to proceed • In some cases, work could be staged in a way that minimizes impact of work
Multiple renovations involving changes to use or number of dwellings, unit layouts, moving walls	Development Permit + Building Permit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on suites will vary based on scope of work • Work involving changing/removing walls in order to change unit layouts will may require tenants to leave units in order to proceed • In some cases, work could be staged in a way that minimizes impact of work
Redevelopment involving demolition of existing structure	Development Permit + Building Permit. Rezoning may also be required if applicant is seeking greater height or density than permitted under existing zoning.	Full redevelopment of a rental building will require renters to vacate

Additional Resources

- Learn tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities under the BC Residential Tenancy Act [🔗](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies): <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies>
- Get tenant information and representation from the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre [🔗](http://tenants.bc.ca/): <http://tenants.bc.ca/>
- Take the free online course Renting it Right [🔗](http://www.rentingitright.ca/): <http://www.rentingitright.ca/>
- Look up residential rental buildings in Vancouver with health, safety, maintenance, tidiness, and other issues: https://app.vancouver.ca/RPS_Net/search.aspx
- Contact the City of Vancouver Renters enquiry line: 604-673-8291 or renteroffice@vancouver.ca