

SECURED RENTAL POLICY: ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY FOR LOW-DENSITY TRANSITION AREA

March - October 2020

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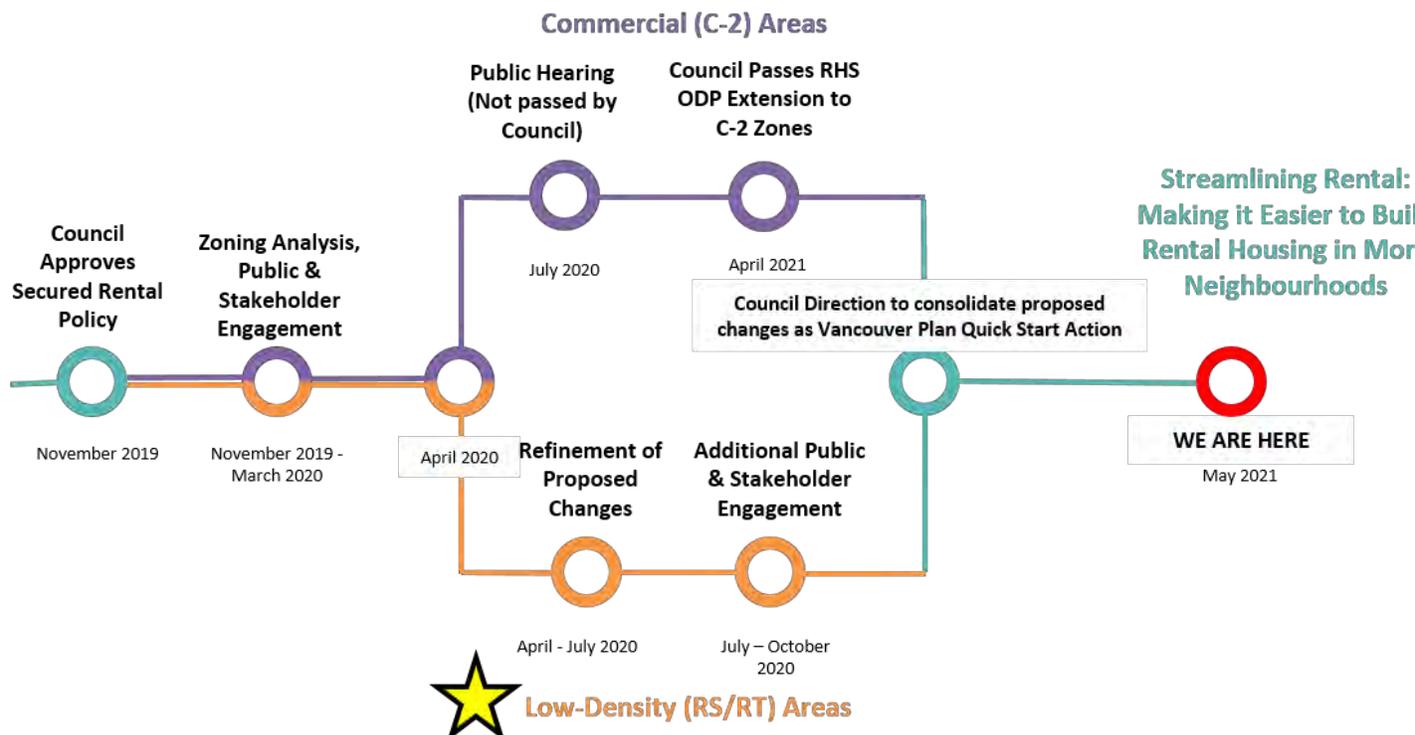
INTRODUCTION

In November 2019, Vancouver City Council approved the Secured Rental Policy, which includes a series of recommendations that enable rental apartments to be developed faster, and in more areas of the city. As part of the approved policy, Staff were directed to prepare changes to create “off the shelf” zoning districts for residential rental tenure for rezonings in select RS and RT areas (low density residential).

The engagement on the proposed rezoning changes for RS and RT areas began in March 2020, but was delayed due to COVID-19 and City Council direction October 2020 to allow for further engagement on these changes and alignment with Vancouver Plan emerging directions.

As part of subsequent work on the Vancouver Plan, including continued public engagement on the provisional goals and community recovery and quick-start actions, Council directed staff to conduct additional city-wide and neighbourhood engagement on opportunities to increase rental housing in C-2 zones and low density transition areas through the Secured Rental Policy, as well as ways to increase social housing. Staff are now carrying out this work under the [Streamlining Rental](#) initiative and anticipate a public hearing in Fall 2021.

This report details the various engagement activities that happened throughout 2020, and provides an overview of the feedback back that Staff received from March to September 2020.



BACKGROUND

The Secured Rental Policy was developed through a substantive engagement process with the public and other stakeholders. In 2018-2019, staff conducted workshops with developers and landlords, a survey of renters residing in buildings constructed under city incentive programs, pedestrian intercept surveys, two public open houses, and an online public survey via Talk Vancouver. Overall, we heard from 3,500 people during the Phase II consultations. Given the previous engagement on the Secured Rental Policy and Council approval of the policy in 2019, engagement in 2020 focused on providing opportunities for comment on the details of how the policy would be implemented.

Previous Public and Stakeholder Consultation

The engagement work conducted builds upon two years of consultation from the Rental Incentives Program Review (August 2018 – October 2019). The following section is an overview of the engagement methods and high level themes that emerged from the Rental Incentive Programs Review.

Phase I

Phase I consultation included engagement and workshops with developers and landlords, a survey of renters residing in buildings constructed under city incentive programs, and pedestrian intercept surveys. The findings were summarized by CitySpaces Consulting and can be found on the City of Vancouver's [Creating New Market Rental Housing page](#).

Key Findings:

- The City's rental housing development incentives are creating new market rental housing
- Incentives are necessary to make construction of rental housing viable
- Current incentives are insufficient, rental housing is only marginally viable to construct over strata developments
- The City's rental housing incentives and programs should be simplified to reduce the length and complexity of the development process
- Increasing the level of affordability in new rental housing is challenging
- Finding rental housing is challenging due to lack of options for renters and high rents for many households in the city

Phase II

Phase II consultation was conducted by City of Vancouver staff during August 2019 to October 2019. Engagement methods include in-person dialogue during public open houses, written comment forms at the open houses, and an online public survey via Talk Vancouver. Overall, we heard from 3,500 people during the Phase II consultations.

Key Findings:

- There is a need for purpose built rental housing in Vancouver – the majority of respondents believed there is a need to build more purpose built rental housing in the city
- Renters are facing significant challenges due to the persistently low vacancy rate and growing population, resulting in renters having to make trade-offs to live in Vancouver
- There is a willingness to see higher buildings to achieve greater affordability of rental units - the majority of survey respondents agreed with the notion of building larger and taller buildings to improve affordability
- Respondents expressed equity concerns about geographic concentration of purpose-built rental housing along busy arterial streets with higher noise and air pollution levels; many renters expressed a desire to live in secure rental housing on local streets.

Specific details about of the public consultation findings can be found in Appendix J of the City of Vancouver's [Rental Incentives Review Phase II Report Back](#).

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Following the approval of the Secured Rental Policy in 2019, staff began work on policy implementation. Policy implementation includes two main proposed actions:

- Amendments to the C-2, C-2B, C-2C, and C-2C1 commercial zoning districts to enable rental housing development up to 6 storeys in select areas through a 'pre-zoning' approach; and
- Simplification of rental housing rezoning opportunities in low density transition areas.

Residents and stakeholder groups were given the opportunity to share their experiences, opinions, and ideas in a variety of ways as part of the Secured Rental Policy implementation process.

The 2020 engagement process included two phases. The methods for providing information and gathering input in each phase are described below.

Phase 1: March/April Engagement Methods

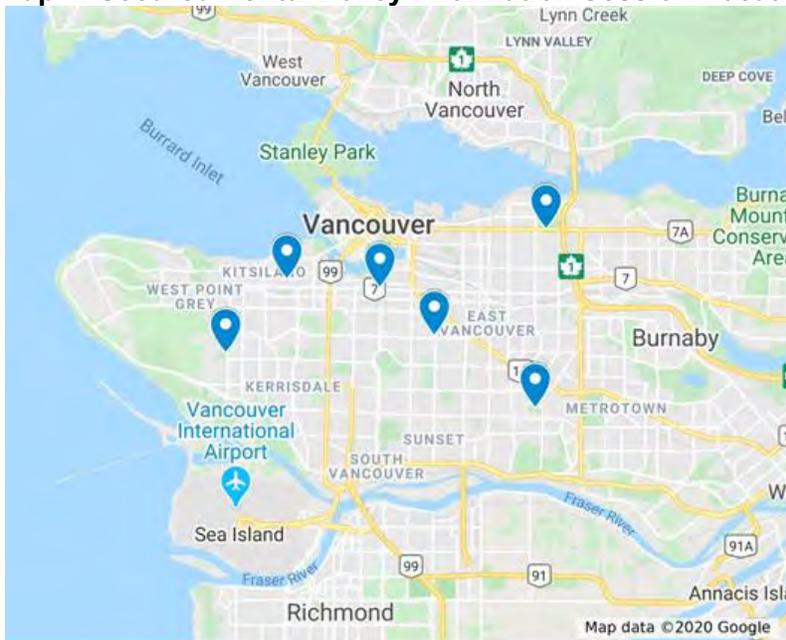
City of Vancouver staff held public and stakeholder engagement from February to May 2020 to refine proposals for implementation of the Secured Rental Policy. The majority of engagement included both proposals for C-2 rental housing zoning amendments and the rezoning policy for rental housing in low density transition areas.

- **Public Information Sessions:** There were six public information sessions held throughout the city in March 2020. Overall, 800 residents attended the information sessions to learn about the Secured Rental Policy, and express their opinions and ideas to staff, and through online and paper comment forms.
- **Online Feedback Form:** An open-comment form was available on the City's Rental Housing website from March 3 to April 3, 2020 for the proposed policy implementation actions. The City received over 400 online responses.
- **Stakeholder Workshops:** Workshops and meetings were held with key stakeholders to engage experts and city builders including:
 - Urban Development Institute - Rental Housing Sub-Committee and LandLord BC
 - Business Improvement Area Executive Directors Meeting
 - City of Vancouver Renters Advisory Committee
 - Workshop with Architects
 - Vancouver Planning Commission
- Based on a request from the West Kitsilano Residents Association, staff joined members on a walking tour of Kitsilano and received verbal comments from participants

Public Information Session Schedule

- Tue Mar 3, Killarney Community Centre (Cantonese interpretation services offered)
- Thu Mar 5, Dunbar Community Centre
- Mon Mar 9, CityLab
- Tue Mar, 10 Hastings Community Centre (Cantonese interpretation services offered)
- Wed Mar 11, Kitsilano Neighbourhood House
- Thu Mar 12, Polish Hall
- Tue Mar 17, Sunset Community Centre (cancelled due to COVID-19)

Map 1: Secured Rental Policy Information Session Location



Notification

The public was notified about the public information sessions and online feedback form through a variety of methods, including:

- Email notification to the Housing Vancouver email list;
- Newspaper advertisements in three newspapers
- Online notification through the City's social media networks and website;
- Poster advertisements distributed to the City's 24 community centres, 22 libraries, and City Hall.

Translation and Interpretation

The materials presented at the public information houses were also available online on the City's Rental Housing website. Summary pamphlets on the proposed changes to implement the Secured Rental Policy were available in English, Punjabi and Simplified Chinese. Interpretation services in Cantonese were available at two information sessions. The feedback period for the online comment forms was extended by two weeks to account for the cancellation of the final information session due to COVID-19.

Phase 2: July-October Engagement Methods

Based on the cancellation of the final Public Information Session due to COVID-19 and the decision to propose minor refinements to the policy, staff felt it would be beneficial to provide another opportunity for comment in Summer 2020. This period of engagement focused solely on the Secured Rental Policy provisions for Low-Density Transition Areas.

The second public comment period was held from July 10 to October 4, 2020. Due to COVID-19, all additional opportunities were online or through written submissions. The following opportunities were provided for input:

- **Website** - a new project page was created using the Shape your City engagement platform. The page included both a comment form and a moderated Q&A function where participants could see frequent questions and responses. As of September 2020, over 1400 people visited the webpage ('aware'), out of which 550 further explored the contents and links of the webpage for more information about the policy ('informed'). 72 of the webpage visitors participated in providing feedback via the online comment form or asked questions about the policy ('engaged').
- **Paper comment forms** – no paper comment forms were requested.
- **Email submissions** - many questions and some comments were received via email.
- **Civic Committees** - the project was presented to the City of Vancouver Renters Advisory Committee on September 23, 2020.
- **Online Stakeholder Meetings** – a stakeholder meeting was held with some groups that had participated in February and March 2020, focusing on technical input on the zoning district schedules. These meetings were held via webinar due to public health concerns related to meeting in person. Participants included:
 - Architects with experience developing similar projects
 - The Urban Development Institute's Rental Advisory CommitteeParticipants were able to provide comment verbally during the meeting, via a short followup survey or via email.
- **Property-specific enquiries** - a number of property owners and small-scale developers contacted the City between November 2019 and April 2020 to ask about the status of the policy and how it might apply to their property or development project. At the time, the City deferred responses as additional time was required to conduct analysis and confirm details of the draft policy. These individuals were offered an opportunity to discuss how the policy and zoning district schedules (if approved) might apply to their property. These property-specific discussions were held during July-September 2020. Overall, Staff met with 16 property owners and small-scale developers to discuss site-specific enquiries.

The second comment period was advertised through:

- **Emails to City lists**, including Housing Vancouver, anyone who signed up for more information at the Public Information Sessions in March or online. An email was also sent specifically to past engagement participants from Vancouver's Punjabi community, as the Public Information Session with a Punjabi translator available was the event that had to be cancelled due to COVID 19.

- **City website** advertised on project page and landing page
- **Social media** advertising

SUMMARY OF INPUT

What We Heard from the Public

1. *Methods for Reviewing Public Input*

Public input was gathered primarily through open-ended online comment forms and email. During the March-April public information sessions, participants were provided with ipads to complete the online comment forms on-site or received paper copies on request. The comment forms and emails are the basis of the summary provided below.

Table 1 provides a total of the number of comments forms and total number of comments received.

Table 1: Number of Comments Received

	March/April Engagement	July-October Engagement	Total
Number of comment forms completed online	371	76	447
Number of paper comment forms completed on paper (in person or by mail)	49	No requests for paper comment forms were received.	49
Total number of comment forms received	420	76	508
Total number of comments*	760	128	880

*As many comment forms included several comments, the number of comments is far larger than the number of forms submitted.

Each open-ended comment form was read and assigned a 'code' and a theme to allow for grouping of similar ideas and preferences. Comments that included multiple ideas were separated and each was assigned its own code and theme. Comments that were off-topic, illegible or did not relate to the questions asked were given a code of either 'Other Concerns' or 'Unclear Comments' and not included in the results. This process was completed following both March-April and July-October comment periods.

2. Who Participated

March-April

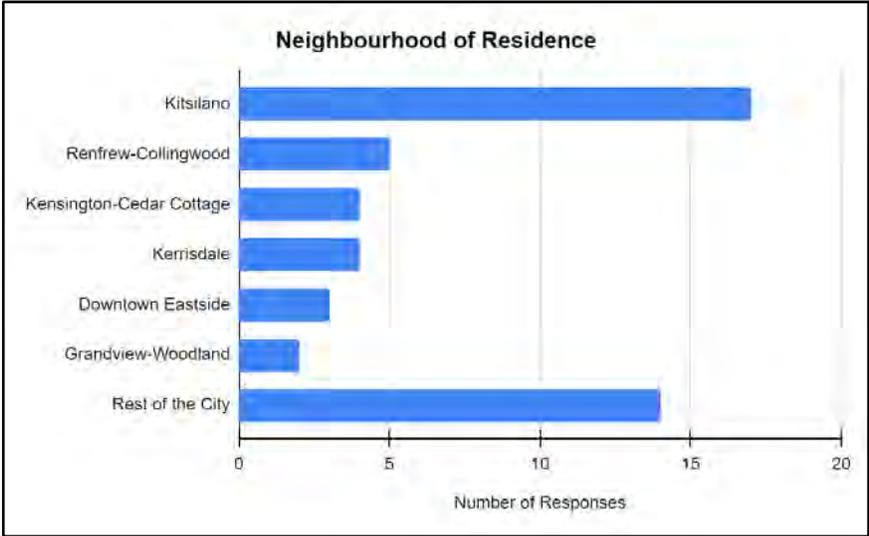
As the comment forms were open ended, little demographic information is known about participants. However, staff are able to provide a rough estimate about which neighbourhoods appeared to include the most participation, as a majority of respondents named a neighbourhood within the comments they submitted.

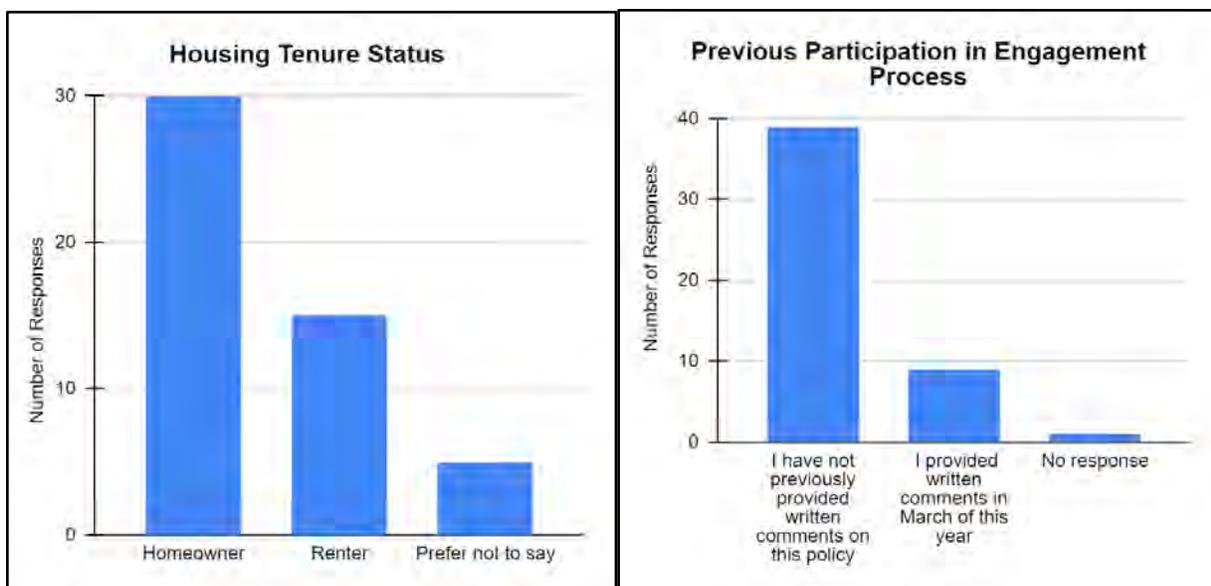
- Around half of the comment forms referenced Kitsilano;
- Around 10% of the comment forms referenced Dunbar;
- Other comment forms either did not include comments about specific neighbourhoods or represented less than X% of the comment forms.

This was generally consistent with the attendance rates at different open houses, where the open house held in Kitsilano included the most participants, Dunbar the second most, and other open houses included a significantly smaller number of participants.

July-October

In the July-October comment period conducted via Shape your City, the comment form did request that residents respond to a small number of questions about themselves. The questions included neighbourhood of residence, owner/renter status, and whether they had previously participated in the engagement process. The results are summarized below (as of August 31, 2020)





3. Summary of Responses

Responses by Neighbourhood

There was a noticeable pattern with respect to responses, a majority of the concerns expressed, appeared to be from residents living in the Kitsilano neighbourhood. These concerns are detailed below.

There was confusion over the scope of the proposed changes. Staff noted a substantial majority of participants at the Kitsilano open house appeared to believe that the policy included a “blanket rezoning” of all areas identified in the eligibility map, and implicitly that rezonings in the neighbourhood would be both common and occur rapidly. This also appeared evident in the comment forms received. In addition, it appeared that few participants were aware that this was an update to an existing policy that already allowed rental housing in these areas that had been in place since 2012. "

Many people who expressed concerns had misperceptions about the policy with most believing that a new rezoning policy was being introduced and that zoning changes were actually proposed rather than an evolution or update to a previous rental policy. Staff note that this misconception is partly due to the new naming convention of the Secured Rental Policy.

Property-specific questions and enquiries for potential development from owners and developers were primarily located in East Vancouver.

Responses by Theme

Urban design

A majority of comments were related to the urban design aspects of the proposed rental building forms set out in the draft off the shelf rezoning district schedules. Respondents cited specific concerns related to the heights, densities, setbacks, and scale of the proposed building forms.

Respondents mentioned the importance of design compatibility with the existing built form in low density areas.

Sample Comments:

- *“Housing such as duplexes/triplexes, laneways, ground floor or basement suites allow for more greenspace and promote a good living environment where people know each other and engage in more community events. We don't need to duplicate crowded high rise buildings because they exist in other countries. They are silos which tend to isolate people more than unite them.”*
- *“The proposed building heights of 5 storeys on arterials and 4 storeys off arterials are too high. Homes north of these buildings would be in shade in all seasons and those to the east and west would have limited sunlight. All would suffer a significant loss of privacy and feel dwarfed by the massive neighbouring buildings.”*

Comment or Question
We need specific housing forms like duplex, triplex, quadplex, townhouse, rowhouse, bigger laneways and additional secondary and infill units instead of apartments to facilitate more ground-oriented and human scale development that blends well in the existing neighbourhoods.
The size, placement and setbacks of the apartment buildings will increase shadowing/solar access issues, impact privacy, or impact neighbourhood aesthetics.
Existing homeowners should be offered additional incentives to expand, renovate and rebuild their buildings.
Require new buildings to match existing buildings, such as through design guidelines.
Retain the diversity of rental housing stock.
Encourage family-friendly options with more two and three bedroom units in rental buildings, instead of tiny bachelor suites.
Ensure the units are accessible to people of different physical abilities.
Remove any minimum parking requirements.

Preserving existing buildings and neighbourhood character

A large number of respondents portrayed the desire to retain existing buildings and preserve their neighbourhood character of their areas. We heard from residents that they are concerned about the pace of change in areas with older homes.

Sample Comments:

- *“The blanket approach to rezoning will have serious negative consequences to the character of many of the neighbourhoods potentially affected”.*
- *“Leave heritage homes alone, and not densify the history of the neighbourhood”.*

Comment or Question
The policy could lead to the loss of our neighbourhood character, heritage, and relationships with neighbours.
The policy should not be applied in areas with a high proportion of character houses.
The policy would result in less attractive streetscape along arterials for commuters and visitors.

Planning and engagement process

Several respondents expressed concerns on how the proposed off the shelf rezoning process would affect their ability to provide their feedback on specific developments. Others brought up concerns regarding the challenges of public consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic. We heard suggestions on ways the planning and engagement process could be improved.

Sample Comments:

- *“.....a blanket rezoning approach is not beneficial to this city as it does not address the issue of specific neighbourhoods. I feel that neighbourhood based planning would actually meet all the criteria the city needs while addressing the unique issues/elements of each neighbourhood.”.*
- *“All decisions by [the] City should be delayed and public feedback should be extended due to current health situation - people are not following this presently”.*
- *“....the proposed policy change will create a bias permit approval process that favours developers, while penalizing/discouraging homeowners that want to increase density through the addition of laneways, infill and duplex housing”.*

Comment or Question
Neighbourhood level consultation/planning is needed, as we feel the changes are large.
More community engagement is required, especially due to the current challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
There is a need for more advertising for community engagement. This should include notifying all residents in affected areas by mail.

Ensure that the online engagement process is accessible to those with no electronic means.
Simplify the language of the engagement material (including the comment form).
Create a more detailed map of areas where the policy applies.
Frame the policy within the context of a comprehensive City wide plan.
Increase density bonus to encourage policy uptake.
The policy is biased towards developers.
Removing the Urban Design Panel review for projects to expedite the development process.
Test the policy in small areas before implementation.

Geographic coverage

Many comments were related to the locations in which the policy would apply. While some commented that the scope of the policy changes should be expanded to more areas in RS and RT zones, others believe that rental projects should only be allowed in major arterial roads. We heard from renters that living on arterial roads poses public health challenges due to the increased noise and air pollution on these streets. Several respondents commented on specific areas that should be added or removed based on their opinions.

Sample Comments:

- *“Remove the 150m limit and allow 6 storey rental buildings in all current RS and RT zones.”*
- *“This is great - rental housing should not only be built on loud, busy, polluted arterials. Renters (approx 50% of Vancouver’s population) have as much right to quiet streets and parks as wealthy homeowners”.*
- *“These projects should stay on major street arteries only”.*

Comment or Question
You are missing sections of arterials in the policy and the map.
The policy should be expanded to a wider area off of the arterial roads to reduce the exposure of the renters to noise and pollution.
The policy should be applied across the whole city to add rental housing in all areas and overcome renter discrimination.
The policy should be limited to the arterial roads only and it should not be implemented in other areas until all areas along the arterials are built out.

Displacement and loss of existing rental units

We heard concerns around the displacement and loss of existing rental units in RS and RT areas. Respondents point out that many of these rental units in basements and laneways provide lower-end of market housing options for renters. Others were concerned about the displacement of existing homeowners as a result of development pressures.

Sample Comments:

- *"....Kitsilano RT8/RT7 areas are a good example of how older homes have already been transformed into affordable multi-unit rentals for families, students and seniors that maintain the heritage character of the neighbourhood while increasing density".*
- *"....This proposal will displace hundreds if not thousands of people. Our community already provides a diverse range of housing choices".*

Comment or Question
The implementation of the policy would result in loss of existing affordable rental housing stock, leading to displacement of existing renters.
If the policy results in increased "development pressure" it would result in displacement of existing homeowners as well.

Public amenities and services

We hear general concerns that additional density may put pressure on existing public services and amenities in the city, including transportation, green space, schools and community centres.

Sample Comments:

- *"....the existing neighbourhood infrastructure is already bursting at the seams".*
- *"....I don't think the infrastructure (sewage, roads, schools) can accommodate what is planned for the next 10 years".*
- *"....the traffic congestion caused by this proposal [is] unsafe in the neighbourhood for the young families".*

Comment or Question
The capacity of public amenities and services like parking, roads, sidewalks, transit, schools, playgrounds, community centres, green spaces, garbage disposal, sewage, landfills and electric grid is limited. So the implementation of the policy would result in increased crowding, traffic and congestion.

Sustainability

Some respondents are concerned that the proposed changes may result in tree removal and less green space in their neighbourhoods. Others told us that this policy may encourage the demolition of existing buildings leading to waste and increased green house gases in the form of new construction.

Sample Comments:

- *"...Terrible loss of trees, shrubs, habitat - what happened to the "greenest" city!!!"*
- *"...This will also create a lot of demolition and waste of perfectly good housing stock".*

Comment or Question
Larger buildings would lead to loss of green space and trees that provide habitat and store carbon.
The policy might encourage increased demolition of existing buildings, leading to waste and increased greenhouse gas emissions.
The costs of achieving green building standards is high, and the mandatory zero emission heating systems would create higher utility bills.

Housing affordability and property tax

Some respondents commented that new market rents are generally more expensive than rents in older existing buildings. We also heard that some property owners believe this policy may increase their property tax.

Sample Comments:

- *"The replacement market rental housing will be much more expensive".*
- *"Property taxes for homeowners will increase substantially because of the extra air space".*

Comment or Question
The new buildings proposed under this policy would have high rental rates.
Property taxes would increase as a result of this policy.
The policy would lead to decrease in property values.

General statements of support or opposition

Many comments supported the policy through general statements of support or disapproval of the policy, but without providing any information on why.

Comment or Question
'I support this policy'
'I am opposed to this policy'

Sample Comments:

- *"These changes are great and will help increase the much needed rental stock in Vancouver. These new policies should be up and running ASAP".*
- *"I am opposed to rental housing in low-density transition areas".*

4. Summary of Questions Received

During the July-October engagement period, staff also received a total of 102 questions from the public through the Shape Your City website, email and phone. The questions were related to four broad categories:

- Eligibility of various sites with respect to the updated eligibility map and new rental zones.
- Policy regulations related to the proposed building forms.
- Process guidelines for development applications.
- Timeline of the policy, especially with regard to the public hearing, approval and acceptance of new applications.

Sample Questions:

- *"...I wonder if my property at [address] will be eligible for the new secured rental policy?"*
- *"Will there be just one new rental zoning type, or will the zoning allowing a 6-plex be different from the zoning allowing a 4-storey apartment?..."*

Table 2 - Number of Questions Received

	July-October Engagement
Number of questions received through Shape Your City website	16
Number of questions received through email	80
Number of questions received through phone	6
Total number of questions received	102

WHAT WE HEARD FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Several stakeholder groups were identified at the outset of the process. These groups were identified based on either specialized knowledge in rental housing or status as a formal organization mandated to provide input on housing or other related City policies.

The stakeholder groups engaged were:

- Registered architects that have experience in developing smaller-scale rental housing projects relevant to these policies;
- Business Improvement Association (BIA) Board of Directors - engaged primarily due to policies related to C2;
- Urban Development Institute (UDI) Renters Advisory Committee
- City of Vancouver Renters Advisory Committee

Registered Architects

City of Vancouver Planning Staff held a workshop with a small group of local architects with experience designing mixed-use buildings and smaller-scale rental buildings. Participants were invited to discuss and share their thoughts on the proposed development forms, share their experiences designing rental buildings, and suggest improvements.

- Flexibility in zoning was a recurring theme of the workshop. Several participants expressed the importance of flexibility in the zoning to allow for adjustment in building design to respond to unique site conditions.
- Specific suggestions included allowing a larger building envelope to allow for multiple design solutions, and flexibility in the chamfer lines for certain sites.
- Attendees noted that the requirements for building height may be restrictive sloping sites where conforming to the height requirements may be challenging.
- Additionally, participants noted potential building code challenges for wood-frame construction at the heights being considered, as the building heights are close to the threshold where non-combustible construction is required.

Urban Development Institute – Rental Housing Subcommittee

City of Vancouver Planning Staff held a rental program review workshop with members from the Urban Development Institute on September 30th, 2019. Staff presented on the progress of the various incentive programs in place, trends in the rental market, and the proposed changes to these programs. Attendees were then invited to discuss and share their thoughts on how these programs could be improved from a development perspective. Overall, 17 industry professionals attended the event, a summary of the findings are below.

Themes

- Developers assert the need for bolder building heights in the proposed rezoning schedules
- Concern regarding the need to submit a proforma to Real Estate Services in the rezoning process. This requirement increases development timelines for developers.

Business Improvement Area Directors

Staff presented the proposed zoning amendments in C-2 areas at a meeting with the BIA executive directors. Staff received limited feedback or concerns from the BIA executive directors on the proposals.

City of Vancouver Renters Advisory Committee

City of Vancouver Planning Staff met with the Renters Advisory Committee to present on proposed zoning amendments for rental housing in C-2 commercial areas, and to give an update on the public engagement opportunities. Overall, the Renters Advisory Committee was supportive of more rental housing, however one member asked the question of why we prioritize rental on arterials.

Vancouver City Planning Commission

City of Vancouver Planning Staff met with the Vancouver Planning Commission (VPC) to present the proposed changes. Attendees were invited to discuss and share their thoughts on the proposed development forms. Overall, VPC members are supportive of creating more rental housing opportunities in low density zones. Members point out the need to ensure rental housing delivery throughout the city, on both east and west sides.

Staff also heard concerns about displacement of small businesses, and the need for the city to create a small business retail strategy. There were general concerns about the impact of the proposed development forms on the public realm impacts. Some suggested using façade treatment to ensure buildings create diverse and interesting street walls and improve the public realm.