

Policy

Sewer Capacity Development Review Policy

Approved by Council October 29, 2025
Last amended October 29, 2025

Terms Referenced in this Policy

“Applicant” means rezoning and development permit applicant.

“City Engineer” means City Engineer appointed under section 288 of the *Vancouver Charter* or their designate.

“Combined System” means a system of sewage pipes that is intended to convey sanitary (wastewater) and rainwater/stormwater together.

“Combined System Low Impact Threshold” means the threshold set for Combined Systems in the Sewer Capacity Guidelines.

“development” means the development or redevelopment of a site, or a development or redevelopment project.

“Director of Planning” means Director of Planning appointed under section 560 of the *Vancouver Charter* or their designate.

“Process” means the process by which the City assigns Sewer System Upgrade Requirements to applicants as a condition of development.

“Low Impact Classification” means the classification described in this Policy under which a site is not subject to SSURs.

“No Review Threshold” means the density or other development criteria threshold identified in the Sewer Capacity Guidelines and as described in this Policy.

“Sanitary System” means a system of sewage pipes that is intended to convey wastewater.

“Sanitary System Low Impact Threshold” means the threshold set for Sanitary Systems in the Sewer Capacity Guidelines.

“Sewer Capacity Guidelines” means the guidelines related to this Policy set by the City Engineer and approved by Council, that may be amended from time to time at the discretion of the City Engineer.

“Sewer System Upgrade Requirement” or **“SSUR”** means conditions requiring sewer system improvements or upgrades assigned by the City to certain developments. SSURs are not intended to include sewer service connection requirements between the site and the City’s sewer mains.

“Sewer System” means the City’s system of sanitary, rainwater/stormwater and/or combined and underground sewage pipes, conduits, pump stations, surface drainage and other infrastructure.

Purpose

1. Under the Process, the City of Vancouver (the **“City”**) assigns Sewer System Upgrade Requirements (**SSURs**) as a condition of development on an as-needed basis.
2. Historically, SSURs were based on the estimated capacity of the Sewer System. The form of development was not a direct input into determining the SSURs. This led to

uncertainty, unmanageable development costs, and difficulty in applying SSURs consistently.

3. To manage the impact of development on the Sewer System, while supporting development viability, the City is introducing measures to reduce flows into the Sewer System at their origin by restricting discharge into the Sewer System. Under changes to the *Building By-law* coming into effect in 2026 applicants are required to include adequate on-site discharge controls such that the post-development condition does not increase Sewer System related flood risk for common development typologies.
4. This Policy is intended to improve the Process by defining thresholds to indicate when the City will undertake review to determine whether SSURs will apply to developments.
5. This Policy was established by taking the following into consideration:
 - a. reducing Process complexities and associated costs, for the City and for applicants;
 - b. supporting development viability and accelerating housing and other development projects without increasing flood risk from growth related capacity demands;
 - c. increasing clarity, predictability, consistency and efficiency of the Process, and balancing the need for timely project delivery with ensuring that reasonable Sewer System capacity and function are maintained;
 - d. reflecting a change in approach for remediating existing Sewer System deficits to not burden limited City resources or deter development;
 - e. optimizing City programs and management of Sewer System capacity;
 - f. aligning with land use policies (e.g. City initiated re-zoning) and other rainwater/ stormwater runoff initiatives by the City; and
 - g. streamlining internal processes to optimize use of resources and achieve permitting timeline targets.

Policy Overview

6. The City has undertaken preliminary analyses based on current Sewer System data and understanding to identify site typologies that are not anticipated to increase flood risk related to the Sewer System. The “No Review Threshold” determines the site typologies that will not require review by the City Engineer and will not be subject to SSURs.
7. For all other site typologies, applicants will be required to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the City Engineer or Director of Planning, that the proposed development will not negatively impact Sewer System performance as described in this Policy.

Thresholds

No Review Threshold

8. All sites with residential or commercial zoning as identified in *Section 9 of the Zoning and Development By-law*, or a mixture, that are below the No Review Threshold, are not subject to review or to SSURs.
9. All other sites are subject to review to determine if they meet the “Low Impact Classification” as described below.

Low Impact Classification

10. If a site does not meet the No Review Threshold, the applicant must demonstrate the following, to the satisfaction of the City Engineer or Director of Planning, to meet the Low Impact Classification and not be subject to SSURs:
 - a. for sites that discharge to or contribute to a Sanitary System, the sanitary peak flow from the site in the post-development condition cannot exceed the Sanitary System Low Impact Threshold;
 - or
 - b. for sites that exceed the Sanitary System Low Impact Threshold and/or discharge to or contribute to a Combined System, the sum of the sanitary and rainwater/stormwater peak flows from the site in the post-development condition cannot exceed the Combined System Low Impact Threshold.

Other Site Subject to Review

11. The site typologies not captured by the No Review Threshold or the Low Impact Classification are subject to detailed technical review by the City Engineer to determine appropriate SSRUs.

Guidelines/Criteria

12. The guidelines, criteria and parameters associated with this Policy are set out in the Sewer Capacity Guidelines.

Policy Limitations/ Exclusions

13. This Policy is not intended to address or affect:
 - a. other rezoning or development conditions that may be applicable to applicants, including site service connections, green infrastructure or other, whether related to the Sewer System, or otherwise;

- b. overflows from the Sewer System into waterways which occur as currently designed and approved; and
 - c. the authority of the City to restrict flows of groundwater, rainwater/stormwater and/or other sources from the site to the Sewer System.
14. Sites subject to the *Rezoning Policy for Sustainable Large Sites* are excluded from any thresholds in this Policy, although the Sewer Capacity Guidelines will be considered in assessing SSURs.

Departure from Policy

15. The City acknowledges that circumstances may warrant a departure from this Policy. As such, the City Engineer or Director of Planning retain the discretion to deviate from this Policy regarding the inclusion or exclusion of a development site in any threshold in this Policy.
16. This policy supersedes all previous written and unwritten policies of the City regarding the Process as defined in this Policy.

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Guidelines for the Sewer Capacity Development Review Policy

October 2025 (REV 0)

1.0 Executive Summary

This document accompanies the *Sewer Capacity Development Review Policy* and defines the guidelines, criteria and parameters to be used for determining whether proposed rezoning and development permit applicants will be exempt from a review process as set out in the Policy, and therefore from Sewer System Upgrade Requirements (“**SSURs**”), and if not exempt, the extent of such review.

These guidelines determine if developments will:

1. bypass review altogether (an automatic exemption from SSURs),
2. bypass a detailed review (also an automatic exemption from SSURs); or
3. be subject to a detailed review.

2.0 Context

The City has made changes to rainwater management that impact sewer system management. As of 2026, the City of Vancouver’s rainwater management criteria will require rainwater/stormwater discharge from a development site exceeding 1.0 FSR and/or greater than 1,000 m² to be controlled and limited such that:

1. the first 15 mm of rainfall on non-landscaped area be controlled to a maximum of 5 litres per second per hectare (L/s/ha);
- and
2. the remainder, up to a “10-year design storm”, controlled to 25 L/s/ha.

This updated rainwater discharge control on redeveloped sites creates the opportunity for portions of the combined sewer system to accommodate additional flows from density without the need for sewer system improvements because rainwater discharge controls are expected to reduce rainwater flows, enabling capacity for additional sanitary flows from development. This has allowed for a change in the process for sewer capacity reviews.

3.0 Intention and Overview

The rationale applied by the City when reviewing development applications is that reviews for sewer upgrade conditions, and the conditions themselves, will only be applicable to developments that could negatively impact sewer system performance. The City has decided to allow for densification that is expected to result in peak sanitary discharge below the determined

city-wide average sanitary capacity of the system (**10.5 L/s/ha**) without developer-delivered upgrades. Applicants will only be required to address capacity issues when these issues are anticipated to arise due to the redevelopment. Existing capacity issues will be addressed through City renewal or growth funding sources, as appropriate.

The City's intention with the *Sewer Capacity Development Review Policy* is to set out criteria for sites that will not be reviewed because they fall within the "**No Review Threshold**", and to provide applicants with an alternative pathway to support densification by meeting the "**Low Impact Classification**" and thereby avoiding costly reviews and/or sewer upgrades, all without increasing flooding risk in the sewer system.

As detailed below, the **No Review Threshold** applies to residential and commercial applicants for developments within a certain FSR set out in **Section 4.1**.

The criteria used for assessing the **impact** to sewer system capacity are detailed in **Section 5.0** below and have been set to reflect expected system performance based on available City data.

The goal of the **Low Impact Classification** requirements is to confirm minimal impact from the site on the separate sanitary and combined sewer systems. These criteria have been developed based on technical analysis of the overall sewer system in support of the Policy and guidelines. To fit within the **Low Impact Classification** applicants must demonstrate that they meet the following:

1. **"Sanitary System Low Impact Threshold"**: for sites that discharge to or contribute to a sanitary system, the sanitary peak flow from the site in the post-development condition cannot exceed **10.5 L/s/ha** based on the calculation in **Section 5.2**;

or

2. **"Combined System Low Impact Threshold"**: for sites that exceed **10.5 L/s/ha** and/or discharge to or contribute to a combined system, as set out in the calculation at **Section 5.3**, the total combined peak flows from the site in the post-development condition cannot exceed the total combined peak flow from the site in the pre-development condition for specified design events set out in **Section 5.4**.

All sites may prove alignment with the **Low Impact Classification** and may be exempt from SSURs on that basis.

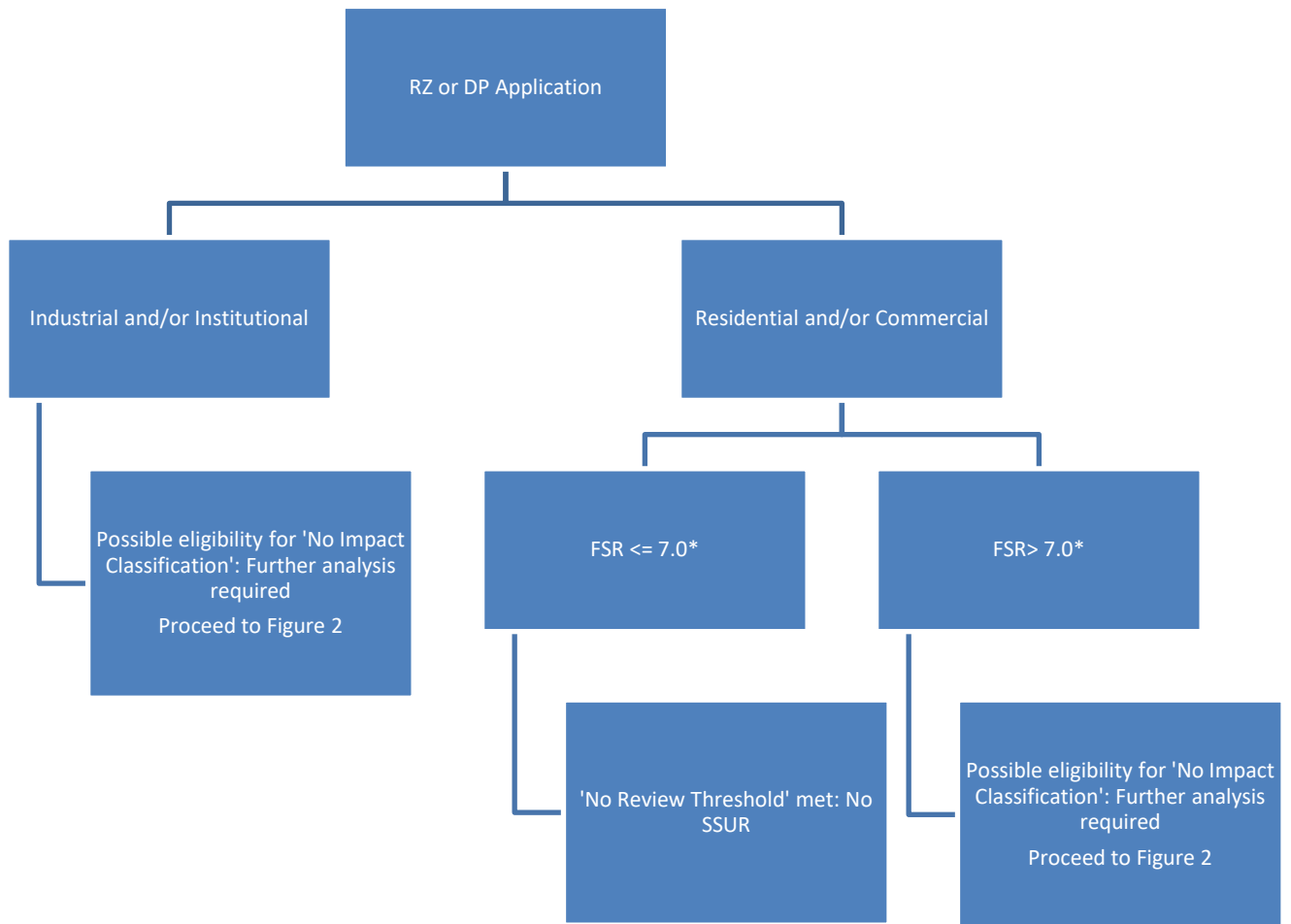
This guideline document provides the necessary criteria and parameters for assessing applicability for typical sites; however, additional sewer, drainage or rainwater infrastructure requirements may apply to Major Projects (including sites under the *Rezoning Policy for Sustainable Large Developments*) as befitting the scope and needs of the development.

4.0 Processing of Rezoning and Development Permit Applications

The process diagrams in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** describe applicability of the **No Review Threshold** and **Low Impact Classification** to applications.

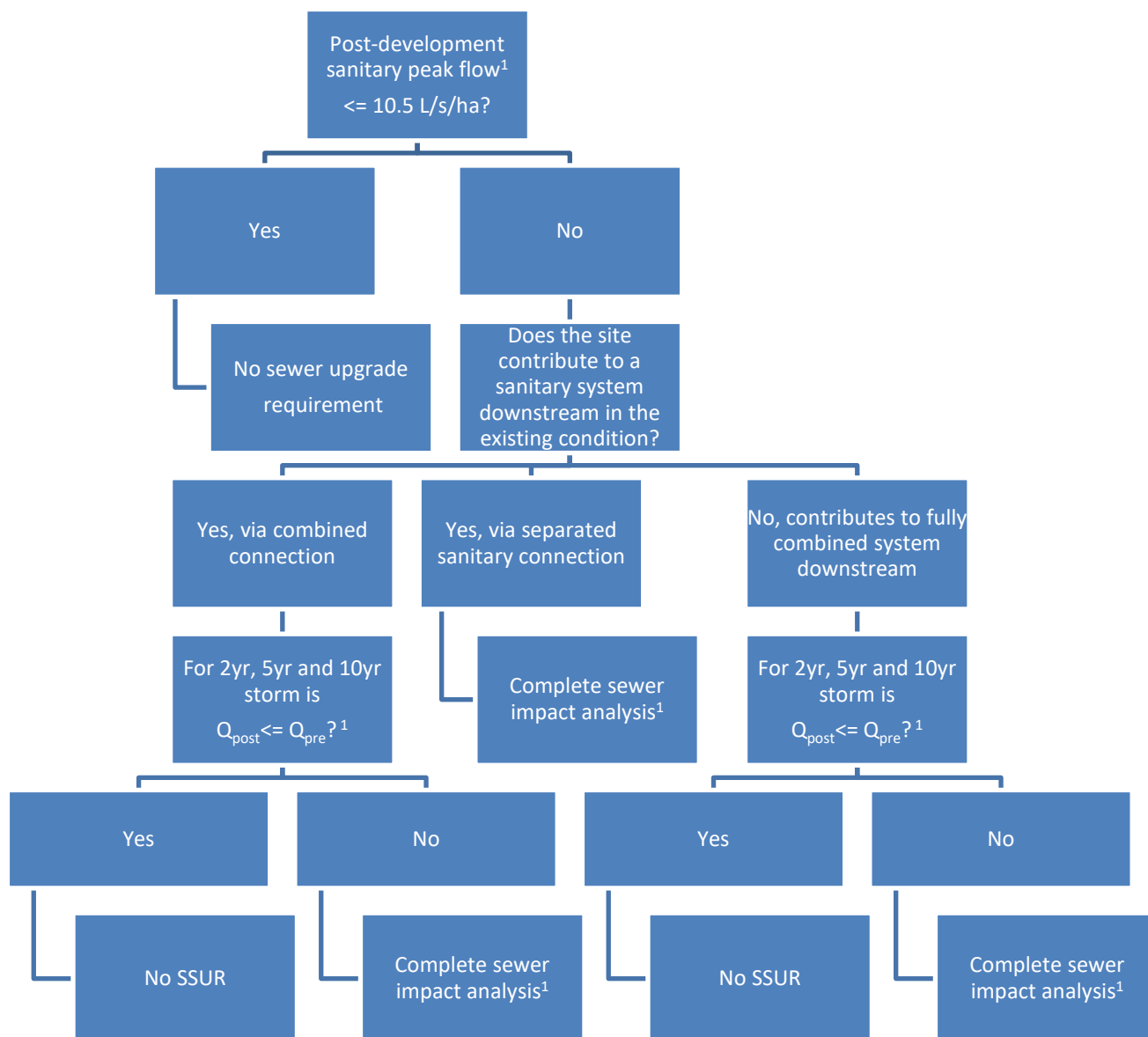
For residential and commercial the ***No Review Threshold*** is met when the proposed development has a **FSR at or below 7.0**.

Sites that fall outside of the scenarios indicated in **Figure 1** will proceed to **Figure 2** for the ***Low Impact Classification*** analysis.



**This FSR shall represent the total FSR for the site and should not be reduced by applicable exclusions in the City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-law 3575*

Figure 1: Process Diagram for Applications – 'No Review Threshold' Applicability



Notes:

1. See **Section 5.0** below for more information on applicable parameters and calculations

Figure 2: Process Diagram for New Applications – Low-Impact Classification Applicability

5.0 Impact Analysis

The following section details the calculations and parameters to be used in quantifying the impacts of a development on the sewer system. The following sections are intended to provide clarification for the terms and calculations noted in the process charts in the preceding sections.

5.1 Updated Assessment Criteria – Low Impact Classification

If the applicant can demonstrate alignment with the **Sanitary System Low Impact Threshold** or **Combined System Low Impact Threshold** described in **Section 3.0** (as applicable), each calculated according to the methodology in **Sections 5.2 to 5.4**, they will be exempt from sewer upgrade conditions under the **Low Impact Classification**. Other sewer, drainage and rainwater infrastructure requirements may be applied to Major Projects as befitting the scope and needs of the development.

5.2 Sanitary Peak Flow Calculation

The pre- and post-development sanitary peak flows (L/s/ha) for the **Sanitary System Low Impact Threshold** will be calculated using the following equation and parameters, intended to represent expected conditions in residential and commercial redevelopment.

$$Q_{\text{sanitary}} = \left(\frac{\text{Res. Per Capita} \left(\frac{\text{L}}{\text{cap day}} \right) \times \text{Peak Factor} \times \text{FSR}}{\frac{86400 \text{ s}}{\text{day}} \times \text{density} \left(\frac{\text{m}^2}{\text{cap}} \right) \times \frac{1 \text{ ha}}{10000 \text{ m}^2}} + \text{I\&I} \left(\frac{\text{L}}{\text{s ha}} \right) \right)$$

Table 1: Parameters to be used for Sanitary Peak Flow Analyses (Residential and Commercial)

Density	Res. Per Capita	Peak Factor	I & I
35 m ² /cap	250 L/cap/day	1.8	0.13 L/s/ha

The FSR in this calculation shall represent the total FSR for the site and should not be reduced by applicable exclusions in the *City of Vancouver Zoning and Development By-law 3575*.

Flows for industrial and institutional redevelopment (expressed in L/s/ha) should be provided by the applicant and shall be calculated and authenticated by the applicant's Engineer of Record.

5.3 Combined System Peak Flow Calculation

The **Combined System Low Impact Threshold** will be determined with the following equation (expressed in L/s/ha) considering sanitary and rainwater/stormwater peak flow discharges:

$$Q_{post-development} \leq Q_{pre-development}$$

or

$$Q_{post-dev\ sanitary} + Q_{post-dev\ storm} \leq Q_{pre-dev\ sanitary} + Q_{pre-dev\ storm}$$

When using this equation, the equation and parameters in **Section 5.2** will be used for estimating the pre- and post-development sanitary flows expressed in L/s/ha.

The values to be used for the rainwater/stormwater runoff peak flows will be as provided in **Section 5.4** to align with the overall city-wide technical analysis.

If the site exceeds the **Low Impact Classification**, a modelled sewer impact analysis will be required by the City Engineer and will be reviewed in alignment with the principles outlined in **Section 3.0**. See **Section 5.5** for more details.

5.4 Rainwater/Stormwater Runoff Calculations

Rainwater/stormwater runoff for the **pre-development** condition has been pre-calculated based on an overall city-wide analysis. These rates are based on calibrated models for the City of Vancouver and are intended to approximate rainwater/stormwater runoff rates of standard site typologies.

Table 2: Pre-development Condition Runoff Rates

Existing Site Imperviousness	Average Peak Rainwater/Stormwater Runoff (L/s/ha)		
	2018 2y1h	2018 5y1h	2018 10y1h
Less than 60%	35	46	54
Greater than 60%	39	53	76

The **post-development** discharge rate is assumed to be **25 L/s/ha** for any of the 2-, 5- and 10-year storm events for the purposes of the **Low Impact Classification** calculation.

5.5 Sewer Impact Analysis

Where a site has been confirmed to not meet the **Low Impact Classification** using the calculations above, and therefore to have a more considerable impact on the sewer system, the City Engineer will require a sewer impact modelling analysis. This analysis will be prepared either by the City, or by the applicant, as determined by the City Engineer. Where flow monitoring data is available, the analysis will utilize a calibrated model.

6.0 Policy Application: Next Steps

The implementation of the *Sewer Capacity Development Review Policy* will continue to be monitored and this guideline may be modified, with approval of the City Engineer, to ensure the stated intention is met. The review of the Policy will include impacts on related City policies and programs such as the Utility Development Cost Levy (UDCL) and/or the Capital Infrastructure Plan, as well as impacts to applicants and to the sewer system.