



Zoning and Development Control in the West End - Frequently Asked Questions

May 05, 2010

What are the land use regulations and policies that regulate development in the West End?

The consideration of development proposals primarily relies on the following Council-approved zoning and guidelines:

In the Residential Areas of the West End:

The RM-5, RM-5A, RM-5B AND RM-5C District Schedules
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/BYLAWS/zoning/rm-5.pdf>

The RM-6 District Schedule
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/BYLAWS/zoning/rm-6.pdf>

For the RM District Schedules, decisions and advice are guided by the following Council-approved Guidelines:
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/W002.pdf>

In the Commercial Areas of the West End:

The C-5 and C-6 Districts Schedule
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/BYLAWS/zoning/c-5&6.pdf>

What is the role of the policy plans prepared for the West End in the 1980's?

There is a West End Commercial Areas Policy Plan that was adopted by Council (1986):
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/W006.pdf>. It provided the basis for drafting the C-5 and C-6 zoning districts that apply to Davie St., Denman St. and Robson St.

There is also a West End Residential Areas Policy Plan (1987):
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/rezoning/applications/1401comox/documents/weresplan.pdf>. Rather than adopt this Policy Plan, Council approved five new residential zoning districts for the West End neighbourhood and a set of guidelines.

What is the intent of the zoning in the residential areas of the West End?

The intent of the RM (**R**esidential **M**ultiple dwelling zoning districts) is to permit a variety of residential developments and some compatible retail, office, service and institutional uses. Emphasis is placed on development that is compatible with neighboring development with respect to streetscape character, open spaces, view retention, sunlight access and privacy.

The RM-5A, RM-5B and RM-5C Districts permit greater densities than RM-5. The additional intent of the RM-5 District is to require developments suited to families with children. The additional intent of the RM-5C District is to permit a greater range of uses.

The intent of the RM-6 District is to permit high density residential development and some compatible retail, cultural, recreational, service and institutional uses. Emphasis is placed on development that recognizes the formal character of Georgia Street and is compatible with the West End residential character along Alberni Street.

What is the permitted density in the West End areas zoned RM?

The density of areas is regulated by a combination of the following within these existing zones:

- (1) the permitted floor space ratio (FSR);
- (2) the permitted height;
- (3) design guidelines, in the case of the RM Districts.

The FSR determines the amount of floor space that can be built on a site, before density transfers for heritage or density bonuses. The permitted floor space (total building square footage) is arrived at by multiplying the FSR times the site area. The West End RM Districts identify the following permitted densities:

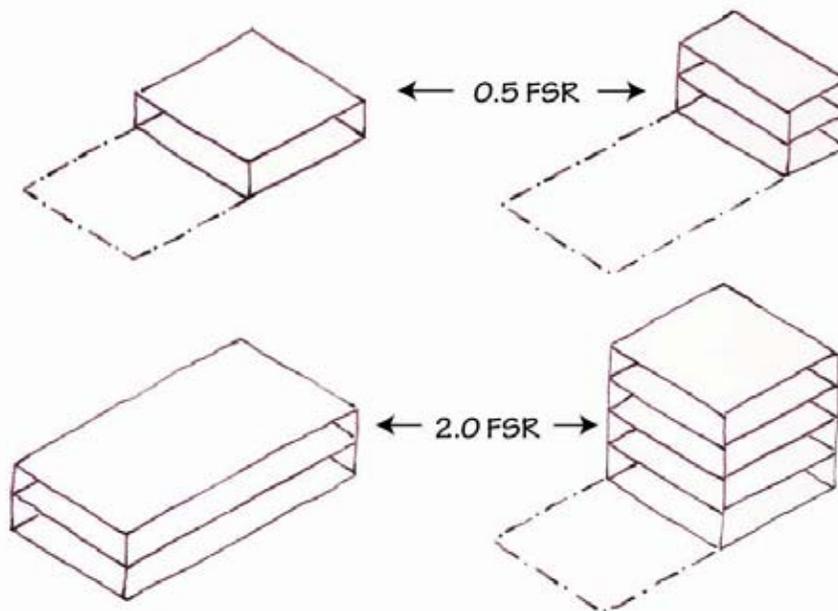
West End Residential Districts Max Permitted Density (before a density transfer and bonusing)

RM-5	1.5
RM-5A	2.2
RM-5B	2.75
RM-5C	2.2
RM-6	2.5

In RM-5A, RM-5B and RM-5C, smaller sites (20.2 m or less in width) are limited to lower densities.

Densities higher than those identified above can be approved in one of two ways:

- 1) Increases in the permitted floor area through a heritage density transfer or a density bonus for the retention of a listed heritage building or for the provision of an on-site public cultural, recreational or social facility;
- 2) Council approval of a site-specific rezoning application to change the zoning from RM to CD-1) Comprehensive Development District.



FLOOR SPACE RATIO

Can the allowable density on some sites in the multiple dwelling district zones be increased without a site-specific rezoning?

The Development Permit Board can consider proposals to increase densities within the existing RM zoning without a rezoning through:

- Heritage density transfer: A 10 per cent increase in the density permitted on a site can be achieved through a transfer of density from a heritage building elsewhere in Vancouver's central area. The transfer of heritage density supports the rehabilitation of a heritage building in another location. For example, in RM-5, this could increase the permitted density to 1.65.
- Density bonus for the retention of an 'on-site' heritage building: In cases where the development includes the retention of an 'on-site' heritage building, a density bonus can allow more density.
- Density bonus for a public facility: The permitted density for a site can be increased through a density bonus for providing a social, cultural or recreational facility. Typically, a non-profit uses the facility and the City retains ownership.

In all cases, where an increase in permitted density is considered, planning staff review the proposal in the context of the Council-approved West End RM-5, RM-5A, RM-5B and RM-5C Guidelines (see below for the section on the West End Guidelines).

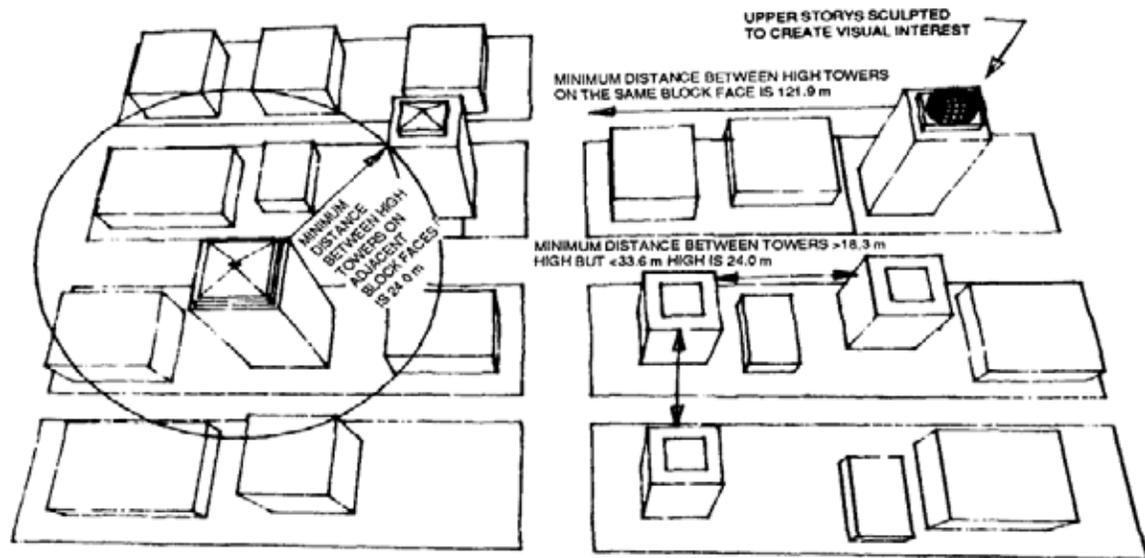
What building heights can be considered in the West End multiple dwelling districts?

Since the late 1960's, building heights have been a concern to some in the West End community. For this reason, an 'outright' building height of 18.3 m (60 ft.) or about 7 storeys can be considered in this zoning at a defined height. For example, in RM-6 the 'outright' building height is 12.2 m (40 ft.) or about 4 storeys.

The RM zoning districts allow for the consideration of higher buildings throughout the West End. However, these opportunities for considering higher buildings are limited because of the provisions of the Council-approved West End RM-5, RM-5A, RM-5B and RM-5C Guidelines (see the next paragraph). The Development Permit Board or the Director of Planning can consider building heights up to 58 m (190 ft.) or about 21/22 storeys. In RM-6, the corresponding building height is 64 m (210 ft.), or about 24 storeys.

The guidelines provide guidance on the opportunities for and siting of residential towers. Residential towers or higher buildings are defined as buildings exceeding 18.3 m (60 ft.). The minimum distance between towers or 'tower separation' is identified in the guidelines. Based on the tower separation guidelines, there are only a handful of sites that are zoned RM where buildings exceeding 33.6 m (110 ft.) can be considered. The illustration below identifies the guideline provisions for the separation between buildings exceeding 18.3 m (60 ft.).

The rezoning applications for 1401 Comox Street and 1754 Pendrell Street appear likely to be able to address the suggested spacing for higher buildings in the West End Guidelines.



How is the rate of change regulation regarding rental housing applied in the West End?

Council introduced the rate of change regulations in some multiple dwelling districts initially in 1989 to slow the demolition of rental housing. In 2007, Council applied a rate of change regulation to all multiple dwelling zoning districts and set the permitted rate of change at zero, pending the completion of a rental housing strategy. If a development is proposed for a site with six or more rental units, the rate of change regulations require the replacement of the rental units on a 1 to 1 basis either on or off-site or the provision of another form of affordable housing.

Also, STIR projects cannot be developed on sites where existing rental housing would be demolished.