

Schedule 114 to the Minutes of the  
Public Hearing meeting of  
Richmond City Council held on  
Tuesday, September 8, 2015.

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| To Public Hearing |                      |
| Date:             | SEPT. 8 2015         |
| Item #            | 6                    |
| Re:               | BYLAWS 9280+<br>9281 |

**From:** john terborg <john\_terborg@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 8 September 2015 16:04  
**To:** McPhail,Linda; Brodie,Malcolm; Au,Chak; Dang,Derek; Day,Carol; Johnston,Ken;  
Loo,Alexa; McNulty,Bill; Steves,Harold; Weber,David  
**Subject:** Bylaw 9280 - Public Hearing submission  
**Attachments:** John ter Borg public hearing submission - Richmond news articles 2015.pdf  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

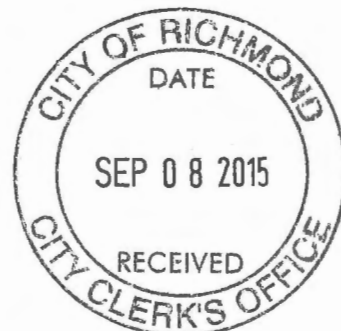
Hello all,

Find attached, my submission for tonight's meeting.

Included are articles from our local newspapers highlighting the conversation that has been happening in our City this past year.

Thank you,

John ter Borg  
5860 Sandpiper Court  
Richmond





City council is backing a bylaw change to halt construction of houses with a three-storey appearance in areas controlled by the city's zoning bylaw.

They're not only big, they're ugly, according to one city councillor who hopes to close a loophole that has allowed houses to be built a half-storey higher than the city intended.

"Somebody pretty smart has gone out to reinterpret our bylaws," said Coun. Harold Steves. "Hopefully we're closing the door on the three-storey houses."

City council voted unanimously last week to tighten Richmond's zoning bylaw and no longer permit three-storey houses in zones that only allow for two-and-a-half storeys.

Homebuilders have been using existing regulations to the fullest, including maximizing floor area and adding an allowable half-storey on top of the bottom two floors. The city had intended this half storey to be concealed inside a pitched roof but more builders are using a flat roof to effectively create a third floor while staying within the maximum height of nine metres (29.5 feet).

Flat roofs will now only be permitted if the roof area doesn't contain a habitable half-storey. The same applies to gambrel designs common to barns.

Other changes include additional setbacks for half-storey areas and prohibiting decks on the upper half-storey.

Steves said council once rejected the idea of apartment buildings along the waterfront north of Steveston Highway. Instead, builders have been erecting houses with a similar massing.

The veteran councillor said he hopes the changes to the zoning bylaw will lead to better house designs.

"These flat roofed houses are basically not only big but they're ugly," he said. "The bylaw [changes are] making it very clear that we do not accept three storeys in a two-and-a-half storey zone."

Coun. Linda McPhail, chair of council's planning committee, said it's how these new houses fit into established neighbourhoods that concerns residents.

"We heard from residents that these homes appear dominant, and in some cases people feared their privacy is being infringed upon due to placement of balconies and the like. Hopefully the changes before us is a move in the right direction."

The proposed changes will go to a public hearing April 20.

Properties governed by [land use contracts \(http://www.richmondreview.com/news/294853571.html\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/news/294853571.html) that allow three-storey houses is still under city review.

## Construction criticism

# richmondREVIEW

Richmond has become a construction city

Richmond Review  
July 17, 2015 04:33 PM

### Editor:

Richmond has become a construction city; whether it be for new complexes or single-family homes, the sight of development signs are inevitable.

However, when I look back at the past 10 years of my childhood, bulldozers, hard hats, orange cones, and dusty roads are not the images that come to mind. As matter of fact, I recall playing tag in the lush green fields of parks, rollerblading around the calm, peaceful neighbourhoods, and not having to worry about getting run over by masses of dump trucks, loaders, or excavators.

So what happened?

In the recent years, swarms of slightly-aged, but perfectly livable homes, have been demolished in order to create monstrous homes or towering residences. I am grateful that my immediate neighbourhood as yet to join this vexatious craze; but right outside of our nurturing and safe environment, the building that once served as a second "home" to hundreds of youth—Steveston Secondary School—is being knocked down in favour of new developments.

But that's not it.

If one continues walking down the street towards Williams Road, you will see clumps of already-sold houses being prepared to be turned into new townhouses, and many already built and ready to be moved into.

Now, I can no longer bike freely or drive with my windows down without the imitations of dust-clouds and traffic disturbances.

Thus, this new era of expansion is not only harming the environment, but is also disrupting families and their young ones, who deserve to grow up in the same loving and warm atmosphere as we all did.

Ankie Wong

Richmond

# richmondREVIEW

Elections, not workshops, are the time to make changes

The next election is where the average citizen has the chance to exercise real power and affect real change

Richmond Review  
July 15, 2015 05:06 PM

Editor:

I wasn't able to attend the [recent "public workshop"](http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/letters/treat-the-taxpayers-as-the-key-stakeholder-in-saving-richmond-s-neighbourhoods-1.1995221) (<http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/letters/treat-the-taxpayers-as-the-key-stakeholder-in-saving-richmond-s-neighbourhoods-1.1995221>) on mega-house development but everything I have gleaned from reading letters and talking to those who did attend confirms my suspicions about what the latent function of this forum would really be.

One of the time-honoured strategies used by politicians and public servants to deal with pressure that is building up inside a boiler is to let a little of that steam out by holding public hearings, workshops, forums, or information sessions where they create the illusion of being concerned about issues but remain confident that they can avoid any real pressure to change the ways in which they do things. They know that most people will fall for this old trick and will believe that by venting their anger at such controlled gatherings they will somehow be able to convince those in power to respond to their concerns.

This strategy is a cynical, self-serving corruption of the democratic process and the proof lies in the fact that the so-called 'public' forums or workshops related to town-planning, urban development, and multiculturalism that have been organized in Richmond over the past few years have resulted in zero change in the attitudes and priorities of our mayor, city council members, and planning departments.

Developers will continue to do what they are allowed to do, and our elected officials and those who run various city departments will continue to allow them to do so. It's a comfortable reciprocity that neither party wants to see altered or disrupted. And they know that an uninformed, naive public will likely keep voting them back into office so all they need to do to propagate the illusion of 'democracy in action' is periodically run a tent show and have their most personable shill work their magic on the disenchanted crowd. Works every time!

The bottom line is that through a combination of an uncaring, unconcerned government and uneducated and passive voters who have taken far too long to awaken themselves to the issues that are having a detrimental effect on their lives, the City of Richmond is being transformed into a community where the building of houses in a way that is totally disassociated from the process of enlightened community-building has taken priority over the creation of homes and the preservation of vibrant neighbourhoods.

Forget the workshops and forums—they are simply created to allow the politicians to let a tiny bit of steam out of the boiler at no cost to their positions or power. The next election is where the average citizen has the chance to exercise real power and affect real change, assuming they actually care to do so.

It's a simple binary choice: concede power or exercise it—take your pick.

**Ray Arnold**

**Richmond**

**Monster homes, 16-storey apartments don't create communities**

# richmondREVIEW

Richmond Review  
October 31, 2012 12:00 AM

Editor:

Re: "[The future is yours-take a look](http://www.richmondreview.com/editions/?iid=i20121026071356650&amp;pid=p20120309121148491&amp;type=pl) (<http://www.richmondreview.com/editions/?iid=i20121026071356650&amp;pid=p20120309121148491&amp;type=pl>)," Oct 26.

I was surprised to see in Friday's edition of *The Richmond Review* this four page spread reviewing the findings of the public hearings on the OCP so soon after the Open House on October 20th. It talks about 'protecting single family neighbourhoods and character' which is a joke when the city allows the tearing down of perfectly good houses with gardens, to permit the building of monster houses built to the lot line with a paved front yard and no green space around them at all. If you want to protect the character of single family neighbourhoods, what needs to be done is to legislate that all houses must have green space around them where kids can play without the mother or caregiver having to pile them into a car and take them to the local park. You will never create a community by building monster houses and 16-storey apartment blocks no matter how many parks and green spaces there are.

**Patrick Gannon Sr.**

**Richmond.**

# richmondREVIEW

More trees gone from Richmond

Richmond's vision statement should be changed to read "the most treeless city."

Richmond Review  
July 17, 2015 04:29 PM

Editor:

Walking our dog in the Shellmont area tonight and could not help but notice another house gone and its three trees. I'm thinking that Richmond's vision statement should be changed to read "the most treeless city."

**Brendan Narowsky**

**Richmond**



## Paving over Richmond

richmondREVIEW

Richmond Review

October 12, 2012 12:00 AM

Editor:

Re: "[Leave some green spac \(http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/letters/172493021.html\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/letters/172493021.html)," Letters.

Can we pause for a moment to reevaluate our vision for what's left of our beloved city please? This is becoming quite sad, watching concrete replace trees and grass. It is heartbreaking to think of our children growing up never seeing nature or wildlife that isn't in a cage or out of our city limits.

It is horrible to feel that high density housing is more valued by our city council than personal/family space and livability.

The greenbelt behind our home was massacred right before Thanksgiving this past weekend. We used to have families of owls nesting there each year. Foxes, hummingbirds, chickadees and so much more lived in this space. Soon there will a monster home and that is all.

My son is too young to remember the nature that used to inhabit this area. He will only know of the concrete.

This is not right, and I implore Richmond to speak up about the future state of our city if we want any semblance of green left at all. We should be able to live 'with', and not at the 'expense of' and I would rather my son grow to be more familiar with the sound of a chirp of a robin than the roar of an exhaust pipe.

Lia Stables-Weekes

Richmond

richmondREVIEW

Residents are losing what they love about their neighbourhoods

ahead of homeowners and current residents

Shame on council for once again putting developers and future residents

Richmond Review  
July 8, 2015 04:17 PM

Editor:

I have been talking with family and neighbours about Richmond council's plans to write up bylaws protecting our neighbourhoods after many years of avoiding the obvious problem.

Richmond residents were overjoyed to hear that council was finally making this a priority, so it is extremely disappointing that council has put this off for another three months for "public consultation" (ironically on an issue the public has been united and vocal about for years).

During that time, how many neighbourhoods are going to suffer because a long overdue solution has been put off even longer? Every time a new house is built further back on the lot, neighbouring residents' backyards lose sunlight.

What used to be a green backyard becomes a tiny courtyard. Every time trees are cut down and replaced with oversized concrete driveways, and mega homes with metal fences are built that don't fit the existing streetscape, neighbourhoods are forever changed and not for the better.

How many more residents will lose what they love about their neighbourhoods because of this delay?

How many planned subdivisions of the 1970s and '80s will become "little boxes" of different colours, "all made out of ticky-tacky", and which "all look just the same." Shame on council for once again putting developers and future residents ahead of homeowners and current residents.

Kudos to Carol Day, however, for voting not to delay this discussion and continually standing up for the voices of the people of Richmond.

When the next election comes around voters need to remember who is on their side protecting neighbourhoods and who is more interested in pandering to the developers.

Michael Seidelman

Richmond



# richmondREVIEW

Public forum to tackle topic of megahouses

Richmond hosts workshops ahead of expected new rules for builders

Matthew Hoekstra / Richmond Review

June 30, 2015 01:51 PM



A large home under construction in the Westwind neighbourhood.

Call it the monster house, the megahouse or the mansion, new homes that take full advantage of lot size and building rules have become common enough to draw the ire of some longtime residents.

City staff will be listening at a public workshop next week ahead of expected changes to building rules.

Earlier this year city council put new limits on house construction, restricting houses to two-and-a-half storeys, limiting flat roofs, requiring greater setbacks for half-storey areas and prohibiting sky-high decks.

But after critics complained the changes didn't go far enough to address overall size, council ordered staff to probe further restrictions.

On Monday the city announced it will host a public workshop on July 8 to collect comments about the size of new houses—height and massing in particular. The city will hold a workshop for developers the following day.

At issue are the rules of zoning bylaw 8500, which council wants to further amend to address concerns about new houses being built "out of scale" in established neighbourhoods. The bylaw, which governs new home construction, doesn't cover all of Richmond—some areas have special land use contracts—but likely will once those contracts end.

Staff plan to report to planning committee July 21. Proposed changes could go to a public hearing in September.

Coun. Linda McPhail said council started hearing concerns late last year from older neighbourhoods of single-family homes.

"A lot of it is in neighbourhoods like Westwind, 40 to 45 years old. The houses are changing, and the houses are significantly different than the remaining homes," said McPhail, who chairs the city's planning committee. "There may be other ways we can look at to better transition these new homes."

## Megahouse workshop

•Public workshop on height and massing of new houses: Wednesday, July 8 from 4 to 7 p.m. at Richmond City Hall council chambers, 6911 No. 3 Rd.



Many new houses are egregiously oversized, questionably legal and are clearly negatively impacting the privacy and natural light of adjacent homes, says a letter-writer.

**Editor:**

No Richmond resident could fail to observe the rampant demolition of older Richmond homes (464 in 2014; on track for over 500 in 2015) and their subsequent replacement by much larger houses that dwarf their neighbours.

Many new houses are egregiously oversized, questionably legal and are clearly negatively impacting the privacy and natural light of adjacent homes. Changing streetscapes are irrevocably altering the character and livability of Richmond neighbourhoods.

This is not about new house styles or who is buying them. It is about houses that are too tall, too wide and too deep for their lot size.

Richmond council is considering changes to the zoning bylaw. Purportedly, these changes will reduce the massive height and imposing front, back and side wall faces of new houses. I hope that the mayor and councillors are up to the task of analyzing critically the proposals presented to them. City planners have consulted extensively with the builders' lobby. Concessions to builders are eroding reasonable, common sense solutions, such as regulating just how far back a house can extend into its backyard, how close to the neighbours it can be, fixing a maximum height and reducing the area on second floors.

I urge council to listen to the voices of Richmond residents and homeowners in a public forum. As tempting as all that additional revenue generated for the city from permit fees and taxes on high value properties might be, and despite generous campaign contributions to politicians from the developer community, current homeowners deserve to be heard above the clamouring and complaints of builders crying foul. Strengthen the bylaw to reduce massive houses, do not water down common sense proposals, and above all, enforce the regulations.

**Elizabeth Hardacre**

Richmond

Richmond has become a concrete jungle

"Campaign promises are campaign tactics and rarely come to fruition"

Richmond Review

July 15, 2015 05:10 PM



**Editor:**

How well I remember writing a letter to the editor back in 2008 regarding campaign promises.

We are leaving after 28 years of living here and watching the city becoming a very different place from what it was back then. We had been fairly regular attendees at council meetings, but after a few years gave up because we never, ever saw any application for re-zoning turned down.

As a portent of things to come we attended an all-candidates when Malcolm Brodie was running for mayor for the first time. I am attaching a copy of the letter to the editor which I wrote and had published.

The last sentence is still true, i.e. "campaign promises are campaign tactics and rarely come to fruition." So true, when you see how Richmond has become a concrete jungle with developers doing more or less whatever they want.

**Patricia Gannon**

# richmondREVIEW

Richmond needs a new slogan

The sign at the entrance to the tunnel states "Island City by Nature"

Richmond Review

July 10, 2015 05:25 PM

Editor:

I was born here in 1927 and am appalled at the destruction to beautiful Lulu Island and the sad end for so many Richmond residents.

Many people have just given up and moved to points further east and south, e.g. Ladner, Tsawwassen, Langley, Aldergrove, etc. These old time residents are irreplaceable and reflect Richmond's loss.

The sign at the entrance to the tunnel states "Island City by Nature." Sadly, a more appropriate name today is "Concrete City by Developers."

Geraldine Wray  
Richmond

## Richmond tightens rules on new houses, but critics say it's not enough

# richmondREVIEW

Matthew Hoekstra / Richmond Review

April 28, 2015 12:00 AM

City council is backing a bylaw change to halt construction of houses with a three-storey appearance in areas controlled by the city's zoning bylaw.

Developers are facing new height limits on houses built in many areas of Richmond, but critics warn construction of mansions with hulking upper floors will continue.

At a recent public hearing city council voted unanimously to tighten Richmond's zoning bylaw and no longer permit three-storey houses in zones that only allow for two-and-a-half storeys.

Homebuilders have been using regulations to the fullest, including maximizing floor area and adding an allowable half-storey on top of the bottom two floors. The city had intended this half storey to be concealed inside a pitched roof but more builders are using a flat roof to effectively create a third floor while staying within the maximum height of nine metres (29.5 feet).

Flat roofs will now only be permitted if the roof area doesn't contain a habitable half-storey.

Other changes include additional setbacks for half-storey areas and prohibiting decks on the upper half-storey.

But critics told council the changes won't adequately address "excessive massing" of homes, especially those built by developers bending the rules.

"Excessive massing by new houses is intruding on (neighbours') privacy, their access to sunlight and their enjoyment of their own backyards," said Lynda ter Borg in her public hearing presentation. "Longtime homeowners are feeling helpless."

City staff acknowledged the changes don't address concerns of interior ceiling height or exemptions over staircases and entryways.

After approving changes to the zoning bylaw April 20, civic politicians asked staff to "investigate options to better control issues related to overall building massing and construction of high ceilings." They also called for an analysis of what other municipalities are doing, and ordered staff to consult with residents and builders.

Meanwhile, the [Westwind Ratepayer Association for Positive Development \(http://www.richmondreview.com/news/296260151.html\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/news/296260151.html) is hosting a town hall meeting on "mega houses" Wednesday, April 29 at 7 p.m. at Westwind Elementary School, 11371 Kingfisher Dr.

That neighbourhood is one of many in Richmond where development is governed by land use contracts. Some new homes built under such contracts are out of character with existing development, but the city can't overrule contract rules.

Now an end to such land use contracts is in sight.

On Monday Mayor Malcolm Brodie announced the city has approved a process to consider early termination of land use contracts to ensure new development is consistent with municipal zoning.

Land use contracts surfaced in the 1970s, providing specific development regulations for an area. Many such regulations are different from city-wide zoning regulations.

There are 94 land use contracts in Richmond governing 4,000 single family homes, according to the city. Of those contracts, 21 also govern more than 1,600 residential strata units, along with parks, schools, health care facilities and a church.

Last year the province required municipalities to prepare for 2024, when all land use contracts expire, while also allowing cities to terminate contracts before then.

Staff are now creating a process for early termination. A special public hearing is scheduled for late 2015 on the proposed changes.



## Richmond to curb three-storey houses

richmondREVIEW

Matthew Hoekstra / Richmond Review

March 20, 2015 12:00 AM

Homebuilders have made exploiting the city's zoning bylaw to turn a two-and-a-half storey house into three storeys, such as this house in West Richmond.

It's billed as a stunning three-storey 3,000-square-foot mansion with water and mountain views, set on a dyke-side street in West Richmond-and recently offered for sale at \$2.5 million.

Trouble is, the city doesn't allow three-storey houses here. Now Richmond is seeking to tighten its zoning bylaw and close a loophole some homebuilders have been exploiting.

"Those houses stick out like a sore thumb. It's not the conventional Richmond we know today," said Coun. Bill McNulty.

Trends in single-family house construction in Richmond have resulted in homebuilders using existing regulations to the fullest, according to the city. This includes maximizing floor area and adding an allowable half-storey on top of the bottom two floors.

The city had intended this half storey to be concealed inside a pitched roof-but more builders are using a flat roof to effectively create a third floor while staying within the maximum height of 9 metres (29.5 feet).

"It's really better defining what we mean when we say half-storey," said Ted Townsend, city spokesperson. "I think there's been some scope-creep. Under the exiting regulations people are building what we'd consider three storey."

See Page 7

City council's planning committee asked city planners to review the zoning bylaw-which regulates residential properties not covered by land use contracts-after hearing concerns of houses being built with "an apparent three-storey character."

Proposed changes would ban construction of a flat roof-if the roof area will contain living space. The same applies to similar roofs such as gambrel designs commonly found on barns.

Flat roofs will still be allowed, but the roof area couldn't contain a habitable half-storey.

Other changes include additional setbacks for half-storey areas to eliminate large flat exterior walls, and prohibiting decks on the upper half-storey-something a number of recently built houses feature, staff say.

City council's planning committee endorsed the changes Tuesday.

The problem isn't unique to Richmond, as many cities in Metro Vancouver are facing similar challenges, planners told councillors.

Coun. Linda McPhail, planning committee chair, said with the high cost of land, owners are seeking to maximize the use of the lot. But it's how these new houses fit in older established neighbourhoods that concerns residents.

"They just appear so dominant, and in some cases they may have positioned balconies so people feel their privacy is being infringed upon," she said. "Under the old regulations, people were just really taking it to the limit. The flat roof examples-I don't think we ever expected to see those kinds of homes under the regulations, but they were allowable."

Coun. McNulty said residents are concerned about the massing of houses, especially when gables and third-floor decks are added, and called the new rules "progressive."

"It preserves the character of a neighbourhood," he said.

A public hearing is tentatively set for April 20.

Residential properties governed by [land use contracts \(http://www.richmondreview.com/news/294853571.html\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/news/294853571.html) that allow for three-storey houses is another area under review by city staff.

richmondREVIEW

## Shame on city hall for forcing misery on us

The city does not appear to have a master plan for the flood of new building permits that they are processing in record numbers

Richmond Review  
July 15, 2015 05:08 PM

Editor:

It was July 8, 2015 and city hall was reaching out to the people for input regarding the long-standing dispute over mega/monster homes being built in Richmond.

Sadly the reach fell far short of the need. Emotions ran high as it was declared by some that what was once a Garden City is no longer thanks to the greed and uncontrolled development driving city hall. Questions flew fast and furious. However, the city hall staff in attendance had very little to say leaving many questions unanswered. The lip service that was offered was insulting at best.

The decision makers are obviously being shielded by their technical staff. One comes away from such a meeting with a feeling of total despair over the fact that a bad situation is becoming worse as ethnic influences grow stronger and stronger.

The city does not appear to have a master plan for the flood of new building permits that they are processing in record numbers. Much needed bylaw revisions are being all but ignored and replaced by excuses after excuses.

I admire the determination of the people of Richmond that goes back many years. Faced with rejection after rejection, they still soldier on. Shame, shame on the officials at city hall for forcing misery on so many who continue to see their tax dollars squandered.

Alan Johnson

Richmond

## richmondREVIEW<sup>area</sup>

Richmond Review

June 27, 2014 12:00 AM



New home under construction in Westwind.

**Editor:**

As a 25-year resident of Trumpeter Drive in Richmond I am calling on the council and the zoning department of the City of Richmond to enact a moratorium on the permit issuing of three-storey houses.

It is time for a design review and usage review of three-storey houses that do not fit the scale or design of the neighbourhood.

The current three-storey monster house under construction on Trumpeter Drive and Puffin Court neither fits the scale of the neighbourhood nor the overall design of the current residences. The lack of design review and the inappropriate scale of the house is an appalling insult to the neighbourhood and the neighbours who in the vast majority are disgusted by this monster house.

The City of Richmond needs to pay more attention to the design and continuity of urban communities.

It is time for a comprehensive urban planning review and stop to Richmond's history of disjointed neighbourhood planning.

The reason people buy in this neighbourhood is for the maturity of the landscaping and scale of the neighbourhood. I am not against new construction in the least. I am opposed to poor planning, poor design and irresponsible predatory practises resulting in destroying a neighbourhood.

I implore the city to take a look at what is currently built. It's time for a moratorium on new construction until a policy that defines parameters of design and scale is determined. What is currently under construction is inappropriate in size and design.

I look forward to discussing an action plan.

**Joel Berman**

**Richmond**

## Too many monstrosities

richmond**REVIEW**

Richmond Review

July 4, 2014 12:00 AM

Editor:

Re: "[Time for a moratorium on three-storey houses in Westwind area](http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/letters/264986591.html) (<http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/letters/264986591.html>)," Letters, June 27.

I think letter writer Joel Berman's point regarding a design and usage review is well made and should be expanded to other areas of Richmond and beyond the three-storey houses to include the huge houses being erected on almost the entire lot that are cropping up all over the city.

What ever happened to the mandatory set-backs from the road/sidewalk we used to have? Many of these new houses are monstrosities with stone walls, gates, concrete or paving stone front yards leaving little, or no, areas of grass or landscaping. They dwarf the neighbouring houses and are changing the neighbourhoods, and not for the better. Where we used to see trees, flowers and shrubs, now we see walls, three or four car garages, and paving stones!

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Berman's request for a comprehensive urban planning review, and urge that it be done before we are a city of monster houses and driveways.

I have lived in Richmond since 1971 and am sad to see what we had disappearing, and not so slowly. I understand that change, and progress, are both necessary, and support both, but not at the cost we are now paying in our lovely neighbourhoods.

**Amy Abramson**

**Richmond**

richmond**REVIEW**

Treat the taxpayers as the key stakeholder in saving  
Richmond's neighbourhoods

Too many developers and builders at the public workshop on monster

houses

Richmond Review  
July 9, 2015 10:38 AM

Editor:

Wednesday's "[public workshop](http://www.richmondreview.com/news/public-forum-to-tackle-topic-of-megahouses-1.1984807)" on monster houses (<http://www.richmondreview.com/news/public-forum-to-tackle-topic-of-megahouses-1.1984807>) was useful, in contrast to the sham consultation the City of Richmond is prone to. Leader Barry Konkin of the development applications department was attentive, action-oriented and good-humoured while keeping just enough control of the packed council chambers. If Konkin were king of Richmond, future monsters would adapt to fit in.

*Some brought a cocky sense of entitlement and even played the racism card. In essence, they then told the public "Your problems don't matter, so just be nice."*

Unfortunately there were too many developers and builders at the public workshop. They were not content with getting their own stakeholder workshop the next evening. Some brought a cocky sense of entitlement and even played the racism card. In essence, they then told the public "Your problems don't matter, so just be nice."

Public servants like Barry Konkin may get somewhere swimming against the tide of the developers-first culture at city hall, with its lobby group of developers and builders behind the scenes, but the need there is for a change in culture. An obvious step is to treat the taxpayers as the key stakeholder in saving Richmond's neighbourhoods.

In this issue—monsters versus neighbourhoods—the taxpayers' leadership is evident. It's realtor Lynda ter Borg's group ([wrapd.org](http://wrapd.org)) that's getting to the bottom of things through its expertise and months of selfless effort. Development staff have met once with them, and I gather it was collegial and productive.

Clearly there's a window of opportunity for a taxpayers' voice that adds the missing element at city hall. With that and a sea change in values at the top, some neighbourhoods will survive.

**Jim Wright**



## What does the future hold for monster homes?

**richmond** **REVIEW** Richmond Review  
May 1, 2015 12:00 AM

### Editor:

Soon, we will be entering the fourth decade of the phenomenon known as the "monster home" or "mega mansion."

For terms of reference, (and not attempting to establish a formal definition) it would be reasonable to submit the aforementioned are a new generation of single family homes which are built to maximize the given permitted square footage.

In days of olde, such large homes were the domain of the upper classes, whether it was to "keep up with the Joneses" in neighbourhoods such as Shaughnessy, or simply large, often old money/ pioneer homes that had middle class homes develop around them over time.

Regardless, the vast majority of homes that existed prior to the Monster Home era were between the 1200 sq. ft. (ie single-storey rancher) to 2400 sq. ft. (two- storey) range. Many long - term Richmond residents can recall neighbours who found such homes more the norm yet were still sufficient to raise large families.

However, in the Monster Home era, we see these older homes being replaced with new homes in the 5,000-plus sq. ft. size range, far in excess of any practical needs.

Monster homes on what the city defines as arterial routes are now themselves being demolished , to be replaced by higher density multi -family units. In the inner subdivisions, the original smaller homes are being demolished, to the point of extinction, to cater to an irrational niche industry, shall we say "Ghost City Unlimited. "

Excluding the arterial routes, whose zoning may change any time into higher density, history has shown that the fate of large monster homes is not positive. Vancouver's wealthy Shaughnessy area, after the Great Depression, was referred to as " Poverty Heights." Many of the residents lost their homes, which drastically collapsed in value. Many of these homes were converted into multi-tenanted rooming houses and nursing homes, or, ironically, "affordable housing.

Over that last 30 years, every local government has succumbed to the monster home madness. This market will collapse.

In its wake will remain a huge oversupply of large homes whose inflated prices will collapse, the vultures will swarm in, and turn them into crowded rental units. Or, more simply stated, neighbourhoods with Mega Homes = Future Slums and Ghettos.

To politicians and urban planners: Planning to Fail ? Failure to Plan ? Does it matter as this un-natural disaster looms to the point of no return? History will show you have all failed us miserably and sold us out.

**R.A.Hoegler**

**Richmond**

# richmondREVIEW

What if Richmond dealt with the mega house issue?

What if city council actually demonstrated that they believed in the "Vision of a Sustainable Richmond"

Richmond Review  
July 17, 2015 04:38 PM

Editor:

My husband and I attended the public workshop on height and massing of new houses July 8 and the workshop for developers July 9. What became abundantly clear is the lagging interest of city council in the mega house issue, the slow response to not only enforce the existing home size restriction bylaws and close some loopholes surrounding the building of mega homes.

So I started to think...what if? What if city council actually demonstrated that they believed in the "Vision of a Sustainable Richmond." What if builders and developers didn't have free reign to just build luxury homes and condos suitable to a specific market. What if the character of single-family neighbourhoods was protected?

What if city planners did some planning for a diverse, vibrant community—not just culturally diverse but socio-economically diverse? What if in order to maintain that diversity, long time residents weren't told, if you don't like the changes "cash out and leave"?

What if work and the proximity to family, determine in part, the location of a residence? What if Richmond is our home, and not just a residence of convenience and opportunism? What if environmental sustainability was a priority, limiting the building of houses with 5-7 bathrooms—and perhaps avoid them being rented out as hotel rooms?

What if every new mega house didn't have a wall around it that signals "keep out," atypical of a Canadian welcome? What if a beautiful backyard garden buzzing with life was as important as a great room with 20-foot ceilings? And what if there were stricter rules around recycling house demolition waste thus avoiding the tons of housing waste at the dump, while the rest of us recycle carrot peelings? What if our tree protection bylaws were enforced and green space valued? What if we didn't have people like [Kerry Starchuk \(http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/sign-crusader-is-the-best-of-the-best-1.1931820\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/opinion/sign-crusader-is-the-best-of-the-best-1.1931820) and [Lynda ter Borg \(http://www.richmondreview.com/news/richmond-tightens-rules-on-new-houses-but-critics-say-it-s-not-enough-1.1931871\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/news/richmond-tightens-rules-on-new-houses-but-critics-say-it-s-not-enough-1.1931871) who care enough about Richmond to bring some of these concerns to the attention of city council?

What if realtors/developers actually reported large cash transactions to reduce money laundering? What if we all looked the other way just so that we could max out on our property value? What if we had a strong proactive civic leadership, that set "best practices, bylaws and policies" to work for a bet ter Richmond for all? What if it was about more than just money, greed and opportunism. What if .....?

N. McDonald

Will megahomes be council's Waterloo?

# richmondREVIEW

A critical mass of Richmond citizens have exhausted their patience

Richmond Review  
July 13, 2015 02:11 PM

Editor:

Has Richmond council (finally) met its Waterloo?

Having lived in Richmond for over 50 years, combined with an interest in local politics and history, it has become beyond obvious, that since the city hired its first urban planner in the 1950s, Richmond's "elected" councils have been kept insulated from their citizens, by choice and/or design.

An early example of this was the Brighthouse Estates issue in the early 1960s, whereby the then council submitted to Richmond citizens a referendum to purchase the 600-acre Brighthouse Farm in the City Centre. The referendum failed, but council still proceeded with the purchase without mandate and proceeded with re-zoning of the farm to a commercial/industrial park and housing.

There is a long list of controversial issues in Richmond's past (ie. Terra Nova, oval, B.C. Packers site, Garden City lands etc.) whereby council made decisions diametrically opposed to the wishes of the majority of Richmond citizens.

One particularly nauseating and oft-repeated mantra submitted by Richmond councils, past and present, is "YOU elected US, thus you have to trust O-U-R judgement."

Oh really?

The June 22 council meeting, standing room only, which I attended, whereby council, via an 8-1 vote, again delayed solutions to [a long simmering issue \(http://www.richmondreview.com/news/public-forum-to-tackle-topic-of-megahouses-1.1984807\)](http://www.richmondreview.com/news/public-forum-to-tackle-topic-of-megahouses-1.1984807) on the mega mansions, but may ultimately become Richmond council's "Waterloo". We also witnessed the usual council "bully" keeping most of Council in line. (Exception: Kudos to gutsy Coun. Carol Dey).

However, I sense that a critical mass of Richmond citizens have exhausted their patience regarding this arrogant, insular, hubris-ridden bunch at city hall, and this latest slap in the citizens face may be the long-overdue rallying cry and tipping point to take our city back.

R.A. Hoegler

Richmond

# richmondREVIEW

## What is the city going to do about the recent rash of tree removals?

Richmond Review

October 31, 2012 12:00 AM

Editor:

Re: Large trees being removed or killed with impunity by builders.

Our neighbourhood is being denuded of large trees, trees that are owned by the city and trees that are supposed to be protected by the city's Tree Protection Bylaw. These healthy trees are being cut down or killed by builders who, in the interest of maximizing their profits, are building monster homes for foreign investors.

There appears to be no process to actively inform the residents in the neighbourhood of the building permit plans, no willingness to share the plans in a manner that is open and transparent, and no appeal process once a building permit has been issued that will forever change the beauty of our neighbourhood, and no penalties for builders who kill protected trees.

Two examples:

1. In August I called the Tree Protection Bylaw office and the Parks Department to investigate what action the city was taking on protected trees that were killed by the builder at 6760 Gamba Dr. I have dutifully followed up and received the same answers: "Our inspector will check this out and get back to you." A couple of days ago I walked by the Gamba Drive property only to discover that the trees are slated to be removed on Wednesday, and no indication that they will be replaced with trees of equal stature.

It was brought to my attention by a neighbour that at the time the home was built, that the crew who were infilling the ditch had damaged the root systems of the trees. In less than two years, the six protected city-owned trees that were left on the property have died. These were all tall mature evergreens.

2. On Sept. 29, I sent a letter to the Tree Protection Bylaw office requesting information on two large trees at 4411 Stonecrop, as it appeared that the home was being prepared for demolition. I received a reply two weeks later, on Friday, Oct. 12 at 4:44 p.m. While calling on Monday morning to understand what steps could be taken to appeal the decision to remove the trees, the tree felling crew showed up at 8:20 a.m. and proceeded to cut down two healthy large trees. The reason provided in the letter was simply that "significantly impacted with the new house & driveway construction along with plans for Hydro going underground." It was also noted that "Also, the trees has poor structure from being topped number of years ago. All neighbouring trees are to be protected and retained."

My photographs of the trees shown no evidence having poor tree structure, and there are no neighbouring trees on the property. The trees were located at the front of the property and could have been accommodated. In fact, like all new home construction in our neighbourhood, the builder followed a scorched-earth practice and cleared the lot from one end to the other.

Considering that the only large trees left in our neighbourhood are on properties with homes, that once sold will most likely be replaced by a monster home, we are in grave danger of losing one of the key features that makes our neighbourhood such a desirable one to live in.

I would like to know what my elected representatives are going to do regarding the apparently weak tree protection bylaw and the current practice of denuding our neighbourhood of large trees.

Paul Dylla



**City prioritizes developers**

Richmond News  
October 10, 2012 01:00 AM

The Editor,

Has anyone noticed that even with the countless letters in our local newspapers decrying the unchecked and halfheartedly regulated construction of mega-houses, the mayor and city council never seem to feel it is necessary to acknowledge those concerns, or even attempt to present a rationale for the type of development?

Kind of reveals to what and to whom our elected officials' real priorities and concerns are dedicated, doesn't it?

Ray Arnold, Richmond

**Letter: Stop Richmond's development 'insanity'**

Richmond News  
January 30, 2015 11:11 AM



Most homes in some neighbourhoods in Richmond are out of reach for the 'typical' family

Dear Editor,

The definition of insanity usually includes references to extreme folly, senselessness, foolhardiness, and irrationality. Riding a bicycle on a busy road at night dressed totally in black certainly qualifies, as does smoking a pack or two of cigarettes a day, eating hamburgers and fries for dinner seven days a week, and staring at your iPhone while driving above the speed limit through a school zone.

And then we have a community that does nothing to prevent the development of houses and buildings that only offshore investors and wealthy part-time inhabitants can afford and that remain unoccupied for most of the year.

Pure, senseless, irrational insanity — what else would those full-time, permanent residents who have been priced out of the housing market in Richmond possibly call what has been allowed to happen in this city?

But, don't forget there is also insanity involved in continuing to vote those who are the most culpable back into public office year after year. Seems there are more of us who are capable of irrational insanity than we would like to admit to ourselves.

Ray Arnold

Richmond

## Houses too big for their britches

New Westwind Ratepayer Association calling on city to limit house size and character

Graeme Wood / Richmond News

March 13, 2015 12:54 PM



Lynda Terborg is joined by (from left) Joel Berman, Lee Bennett, Neil Cumming and Martin Woolford to form the city's first ratepayer association, which aims to lobby the city regarding regulations on home size and character.

In response to the city's slow-moving acknowledgement of zoning bylaw loopholes that are "decimating" neighbourhoods, longtime local real estate agent Lynda Terborg has created the city's first ratepayer association for her Westwind neighbourhood — the Westwind Ratepayer Association for Positive Development.

"We don't want wards, we don't want a representative for Westwind, we just want (the city) to listen to us and have input, not just sit behind closed doors and come up with a solution of their own," said Terborg, who is urging other residents to do the same in their areas.

A ratepayer association is a group of residents who lobby the city on behalf of its neighbourhood's interests. They are prominent in other Metro Vancouver cities, said Terborg.

At issue is the city's failure to amend roughly 4,000 land-use contracts — initiated in the 1970s — which allow homebuilders to build three-storey homes on relatively small lots. Such contracts don't fall under the city's zoning bylaws.

"It was incomplete language. Who would have known that," said Terborg, noting now that property values have risen, developers are taking full advantage of the land-use contracts that don't clearly dictate a home's living space relative to the property footprint.

"Developers are already door-knocking here so hard, and they're not offering owners their due market value."

She points to one recently built home that is listed for \$2.4 million after the older, now demolished, home was sold for \$784,000. The new, three-storey home has a total floor area of 6,200 square feet, whereas the older home was just 1,600 square feet, on a 5,300 square foot lot.

Members say they worry about the future of the neighbourhood due to its unaffordability for new families.

"Good people run away when they see bad things happen," said Terborg.

Another problem she sees is the city's lack of design protocol. She points to builders who have built "French chateaus" next to modest homes.

The city claims the land-use contracts were out of the city's controls. However, last year the province changed laws to allow the city to amend the contracts. Terborg argued that the city could have lobbied the province years ago, and, at least, should do something now.

"Now they pretend it's a provincial problem. Provincial problem — my foot! They had the problem in wording in the first amendment," said Terborg.

"It's almost a whole year later and we aren't talking publicly about a fix. Look at the escalation of permits. In 10 years, we'll be decimated," she warned.

Terborg said large homes built under land-use contracts are "out of character" and would be non-conforming under city zoning.

The new homes overshadow older ones, robbing them of sunlight, thus causing drainage problems and ruining gardens in their wake. All-in-all quality of life, for those who wish to remain in their family homes, is being ruined, said Terborg.

Coun. Linda McPhail, who lives in the Westwind neighbourhood, concurred that some of the homes "are really pushing the boundaries" and offered to review the bylaws.

Joe Erceg, Richmond's manager of planning and development, has stated the city is in the process of amending the current terms of land-use contracts.

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## Megahome bylaw goes to public hearing

Residents have opportunity to address city councillors on megahomes at April 20 hearing

Graeme Wood / Richmond News

March 24, 2015 03:28 PM

Here, a Google maps image shows an old home that was reduced into rubble, along with its lawn, and turned into a \$2.5 million mansion that towers over the rest. Kittiwake Drive, Westwind neighbourhood, 2015.

In its first attempt to respond to widespread complaints within the city over large, new homes — colloquially known as mega or monster homes — the City of Richmond is proposing a bylaw amendment that will tighten height restrictions to eliminate flat-roofed, three-storey homes.

The new, proposed bylaw — presented by city planners to city council Monday — will reduce the height of flat-roofed homes from nine metres to 7.5 metres, thus eliminating a homebuilder's ability to build overt three-story homes.

Such homebuilders will still be allowed to construct three-storey homes at a height of nine metres, but the third storey must be somewhat hidden within the pitched roof of the home.

Furthermore, no balconies will be allowed above a second floor of a home and roof and window setbacks will be amended to improve privacy concerns.

The changes were welcomed with cautious optimism from real estate agent Lynda Terborg, who spoke to council after it approved the bylaw, which is now set for a public hearing on April 20.

"I'm delighted council is moving so swiftly in addressing something the public is so aware of," said Terborg, who recently created the first neighbourhood ratepayers' (homeowners) association in Westwind.

However, Terborg noted the changes still don't fully address the largess of the homes relative to their older counterparts.

"How is it we're sitting here with puffed up houses on steroids?" she asked, noting homebuilders are still maximizing regulations related to such things as floor area and ceiling heights.

A city report to council stated the new homes were being built in such a manner as it reflects "current market land and construction prices."

The bylaw allowing for such three-storey homes was last amended in 2008, when the city stipulated "two-and-a-half storey homes could be built.

"The increasing use of flat roof designs was not envisioned when the definition was amended," noted the report.

Coun. Bill McNulty took credit for the changes.

"There are groups that are on our side on this," he said.

Coun. Harold Steves was also pleased with the amendment.

"Now, the bylaws making it very clear we do not accept three-storey buildings in a two-and-a half-storey zone,"

The bylaw, if approved following the public hearing at Richmond City Hall, will be reviewed in one year's time.

City planners have told council they continue to work on amending roughly 4,000 land-use contracts, which presently do not fall under city zoning bylaws. Homes on land-use contracts, which once fell under provincial jurisdiction, can be built with three storeys, up to 11.5 metres, and can maximize floor area even greater than the city's regulations.

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**Letter: Delusions of grandeur are not neighbourly in Richmond**

Richmond News

April 16, 2015 11:18 AM



Houses built in the 1970s are now dwarfed by those built after 2010.

Dear Editor,

Re: "Welcome to the neighbourhood; Nothing monster about this manor" News, March 27.

In response to your front page article, I would like to share the following:

The house is indeed a manor, in a neighbourhood that was not manor-intended.

This new home is presented as a model of co-existence, as it is, according to owners not a monster home, in a cohesively planned neighbourhood that is now being transformed by mega homes.

On my street alone, in the last year, four of them now disrupt the landscape: a provincial French palace, two castles, and a Vegas hotel with abundant garden lighting to highlight the palm trees to prove it.

My opinion is that, although the "manor" discussed in the article does have tasteful features, such as lovely windows and doors and a nice "Cape Cod-inspired shingle style," it still grossly imposes on the neighbourhood, as it stands out, dominating the cohesively planned, unpretentiously charming houses that surround it.

It is mentioned in the article that the neighbours were consulted, giving the reader the impression the owners want to make an effort to be neighbourly. It would have been nice to look at examples of houses nearby where the owners worked with the existing frames and tastefully renovated the houses without oppressing the landscape.

The builder says the homes need to be large to allow for storage space, compensating for the lack of basements.

In this age of environmental concern, shouldn't we be trying to consume less, thus making storage space less necessary?

Do we need to live ideals of royalty by having large balconies overlooking the "peasants" with their smaller homes that live nearby?

Building the home smaller than what the owners were allowed does not hide the fact that the house is still a mega home, and the nice gestures of consulting with neighbours is but a minor action.

Call it a manor or a monster, either way, it's much larger and grand than most homes in the neighbourhood.

Thank for you for the opportunity of express my opinion.

Elaine Beltran-Sellitti

Westwind resident

**Letter: The City of Richmond has sold out**

Richmond News

April 23, 2015 05:36 PM

Here, a Google maps image shows an old home that was reduced into rubble, along with its lawn, and turned into a \$2.5 million mansion that towers over the rest. Kittiwake Drive, Westwind neighbourhood, 2015.

Dear Editor,

The politicians who run the City of Richmond have sold out to property tax revenue greed.

Perfectly good, older homes are being tom down to be replaced by mostly over-sized homes that look out of place in the neighbourhood and out of the market price range for many families.

Developers have taken advantage of the weak mindedness of the politicians and have maximized the usable property space to where some lots are all house and paving stones. (Not good for the environment).

Three-story new homes should never have been allowed. It's a perfect example of politicians not taking their jobs seriously in protecting the best interests of neighbourhoods. They will defend their lack of oversight in this matter with wiggle room excuses.

Now, the politicians have allowed ultra-small two-storey towers to be built on the same property as the oversized home. More property tax revenue for the city but at what expense to the character of the neighbourhoods ?

The two most pressing problems of this world, according to a recent UN study, are over population and over development. The Richmond city politicians have no true ethical understanding of what is meant by over development. They are part of the problem because their mindset has been influenced by the relentless pursuit of progress and development. Eventually, a new mindset has to take place, but it certainly won't happen with the current batch of politicians running the City of Richmond.

JG Jardey

Richmond

**Letter: Richmond bylaws need to be fair to all**

Richmond News

April 30, 2015 01:53 PM

Dear Editor,

Re: "Megahome bylaw needs work: Residents," News, April 23.

Residents of Westwind subdivision should be commended for their analysis of the building bylaw and over-inflated houses. This was a significant project that has the potential to have positive impact on all of Richmond's single-family neighbourhoods, something that we've needed for a long time.

There should be an immediate moratorium on new permits so that the bylaw can be repaired. Mayor Brodie is quoted as saying that a moratorium would impede homeowner rights, but he forgets that his first duty is to protect the rights of current homeowners/taxpayers, not someone who wants to build a new home according to a flawed bylaw.

Changes to the bylaw should include an honest, simple method of calculating total building height. In Richmond, you measure from the eaves to the top roof point and divide by two, then add this to the measurement from the eaves to ground level.

Another major change should be the alignment of Richmond's allowable room height to conform to that used by Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey which all limit room height to 12 feet while Richmond's nominal limit is 16 feet.

These high-ceiling rooms should always be counted as double floor space, but apparently this isn't being done. This rule should be followed scrupulously — with every application.

If Richmond wants to be respected as a well-run municipality, it needs to ensure that its bylaws are transparent, fair, and equitably managed.

Marion Smith

Richmond





## Letter: Where were you ratepayers when we raised a warning?

Richmond News

April 23, 2015 05:36 PM

Dear Editor,

Re: "Too big for their britches," News, March 13.

A number of years ago I started writing letters to the media warning of the consequences of allowing the wholesale takeover of our neighbourhoods by shoddily-built giant, pseudo-mansions. It seemed quite evident to me at the time that the existing bylaws and codes related to allowable square footage, building footprint, and elevation formulas were providing developers and off-shore investors a clear field to impose their standards and values on our community, and only the totally naive would believe they had the best interests of Richmond and its citizens in mind when it came to their developments and purchases.

Now, after so much irreparable damage has been done to our community and so many vital neighbourhoods have been turned into semi-ghost towns, people are waking-up to the fact that we have not only allowed the designing of our community to be taken over by parties who are not the least bit interested in how their activities affect the social and environmental dimensions of life for full-time citizens of Richmond, but we have also sold away the future as well.

These houses are not homes, and never were intended to be such. They are not really even houses – they should be more appropriately characterized as safety-deposit boxes where wealthy foreigners can drop and protect their money.

Look into the future and try to imagine what our neighbourhoods will look like 10-20 years from now. Canadian

citizens and young couples with families will never be able to afford one of these out-of-scale monsters, and they will either be flipped over and over again to other disconnected off-shore investors and/or, because of their shoddy construction, fall rapidly into disrepair and be demolished for the purposes of building more unoccupied money shelters. Consider that there is a good chance that the residential neighbourhoods that are being so dramatically changed by what is happening will remain as empty and bereft of human spirit and soul as many are rapidly becoming today. Not a particularly promising legacy we have forged, is it?

All due respect to the initiative behind the formation of the Westwind Ratepayers Association and all those others who are now starting to become concerned about this issue, but I have one question to ask those involved: Where were you seven, eight years ago when the few of us who could see what was coming raised the warning flag? More astute and educated voting in our local elections back then would have gone a long way towards ensuring that you would not have to be forming such an association today!

But, to paraphrase an old adage: "Some are capable of waking up when they see the light, but others will only wake up when they finally begin to feel the heat."

Ray Arnold

Richmond



## **Residents contend city bylaws being flouted by megahome developers**

**Public hearing addressed only 10 per cent of megahome problem, says Steveston realtor**

Graeme Wood / Richmond News

April 22, 2015 03:10 PM

Lynda Terborg is joined by (from left) Joel Berman, Lee Bennett, Neil Cumming and Martin Woolford to form the city's first ratepayer association, which aims to lobby the city regarding regulations on home size and character.

Homebuilders and developers are flouting city bylaws to construct megahomes.

That's the message Richmond City Council received from the Westwind Ratepayers' Association at a packed public hearing at city hall Monday for a proposed bylaw amendment to flat-roofed homes.

"What we see is a pattern of excessive massing on the upper floors of homes," said real estate Lynda Terborg.

About 40 homes in Richmond are being demolished for development each month. At issue are large, new homes — accused of being out of character from planned neighbourhoods — that overshadow older ones, thus blocking sunlight, causing drainage issues and ruining privacy.

The proposed bylaw is intended to curb three-storey homes with flat roofs and prohibit third-storey balconies. But Terborg said such homes only account for about 10 per cent of new housing stock.



**8899 Carrick Road (off Francis Rd.) Richmond**

With the help of a study conducted by her son John Terborg and friend Kathryn McCreary, both engineers, Terborg contested the majority of new homes are illegally including 20-foot ceiling rooms without counting the space twice-over in the livable floor area, as prescribed in bylaws (homes have size restrictions relative to lot size). This results in the contentious bulky, box-style homes.

"It's quite obvious there is a huge amount of empty space and that increases the height of the house, which is what we are concerned about. I think we've got a problem," said Coun. Harold Steves.

Council created a new referral, tabled by Coun. Linda McPhail, to investigate housing "massing," particularly as it applies to double height ceilings.

Terborg and others are calling on a moratorium on permits until better enforcement comes into place.

"You cannot have a city approving housing that is in violation of its bylaws," she told the News.

"We don't have time to refer back anymore, something needs to change now," she added.

Terborg and others also want Richmond to drop its double ceiling maximum height from 16 feet to about 12 feet, to come in line with other municipalities. She is also asking the city to measure the height of a home from the top of a house and not from the mid-point of a sloped roof, as is presently done.

Such a measurement method can add about five feet in height to Richmond homes, compared to homes in other municipalities.

Measuring the mid point of a sloped roof started in 2008 following a bylaw amendment aimed to placate residents' concerns over megahomes.

Terborg said she can't find a logical explanation as to how such a change did the exact opposite of what was intended. She contends the city has turned a blind eye to bylaw infractions for years now.

Coun. Carol Day said a clearer definition on the maximum heights of homes is "critical" in limiting home sizes.

Mayor Malcolm Brodie said moratoriums would impede on homeowner rights. He noted the city will look to better enforcement with the new referral. He said the existing proposed bylaw will move ahead and the new concerns could be addressed in a subsequent bylaw amendment.

There was no opposition to the proposed (flat-roof) amendment at the hearing. Councillors Chak Au and Bill McNulty were absent.

#### **Land-use contract amendments will take more time**

Brodie noted the bylaw amendment does not apply to land-use contracts.

About 4,000 residential properties do not fall under city zoning bylaws, meaning homes can be built up to 39 feet high (instead of 34 feet high) with much greater density.

City spokesperson Ted Townsend said it will take time for staff to amend the contracts to bring properties under city zoning.

"It's not as simple as the city passing a bylaw ...We can't simply unilaterally do so and the process is expected to be complex and lengthy, not withstanding the need to consult," he said.

Townsend noted the city's legal team must assess the legalities of getting rid of the contracts, which were created by the province decades ago.

Last May the province put forth legislation that allows municipalities to extinguish the contracts.

Specifically, in Richmond, there are 49 land-use contracts in Richmond governing 4,009 single family lots. Another 21 contracts govern other uses such as parks, public facilities and multi-family residential homes (855 townhouses and 785 apartments).

"That's a lot of people directly impacted, not to mention their neighbours, many of whom have differing viewpoints on how the issue should be handled given potential impacts on land values, neighbourhood character etc. The process needs to ensure all viewpoints are heard," said Townsend.

He provided no timeline for when city staff will present to council a plan to extinguish the contracts.

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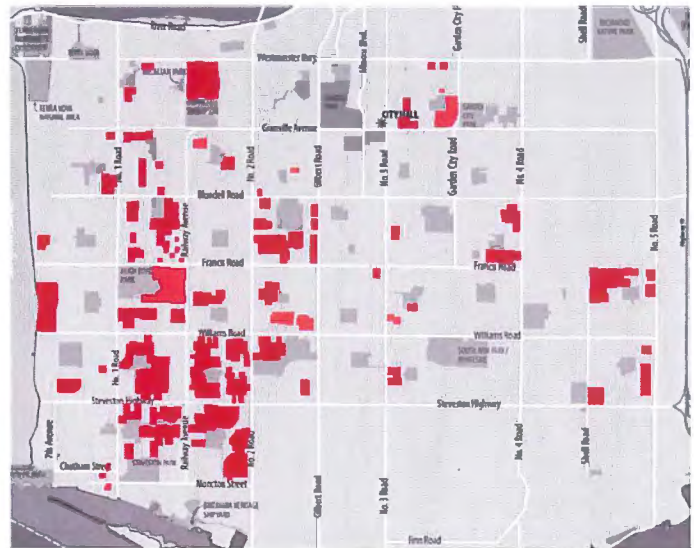


## **Developers swing back at those opposed to Richmond megahomes**

Homebuilders concerned about property values, while residents

Graeme Wood / Richmond News

May 1, 2015 02:15 PM



Land use contracts are noted in red. City of Richmond Image.

Residents gathered Wednesday April 28, 2015 at Westwind elementary school to discuss how the City of Richmond can prevent a new wave of megahomes from ruining, as they say, the aesthetics and character of their neighbourhood. But not everyone agrees, as homebuilders contend land values will decrease if homes sizes are limited.

Things got a little less than neighbourly in the school gym of Westwind elementary where about 100 residents of the area came to talk about megahomes rising up around them.

The meeting was called by real estate agent Lynda Terborg and the Westwind Ratepayers Association to galvanize Richmond residents to demand the City of Richmond to ramp up enforcement of home size restriction bylaws and extinguish land-use contracts. (The contracts, as they stand, allow developers to build homes significantly larger than is permitted by city bylaws.) While most in the crowd seemed to be onside with the organizers, a number of developers who are building the types of megahomes in question, were also there, ready to swing back.

In fact, part-time homebuilder Rocky Mangat, an appliance retailer in Vancouver and Richmond resident, challenged Terborg's allegiances.

"You're playing both sides of the fence," said Mangat, as he held up an email written by Terborg, in February, telling a potential client that a Westwind property for sale has the opportunity for a "big rebuild."

After the meeting, Terborg told the Richmond News, "I'm a realtor. I make no bones about telling people that," noting she was merely stating facts for her client.

Ratepayer Graham Johnson noted the city's Official Community Plan calls on continuing "to protect single-family neighbourhoods," and one of the stated goals of Richmond First councillors (Bill McNulty, Linda McPhail and Derek Dang) is "balancing growth while protecting the character of single-family neighborhoods."

"That doesn't seem to be reflected in some of the construction," stated Johnson to the crowd void of city councillors and officials.





This modest home, with a backyard, now faces a wall, in the form of a newly built megahome, that will block out sunshine, thanks to a homebuilder's interpretation of a land-use contract. Richmond B.C. April 2015.

At issue is the fact — according to Graham, Terborg and others — that the city is failing to enforce its own bylaws regarding house height and size restrictions.

But moreover, a number of properties throughout Richmond exist under old land-use contracts, that have never been amended to include certain amended bylaws regarding height and size.

"Walls are being erected along people's backyards," said Terborg.

Mangat said he agrees bylaws must be followed, but he argued that extinguishing the land-use contracts (and thus bringing the properties under city bylaws) for single-family homes will ruin property values.

"My mother lives on a property (with a land-use contract) and she's counting on that value for her retirement," he told the audience at the Westwind elementary gym.

Mangat and his colleagues who attended the town hall meeting, including prominent developers Ajit Thaliwal and Raman Kooner (who combined to donate \$20,000 to Richmond First last election), met with city planners on Thursday to express their views.

"We agree there are a lot of ugly homes being built, but this is (a result of) very few people in the homebuilder network," said Mangat.

"A lot of people bought these (land-use contract) lots because they have these contracts on them," said Kooner, who expressed concerns about the rights of homeowners and called for community dialogue including all stakeholders.

On Monday Mayor Malcolm Brodie announced the city would begin the process of extinguishing land-use contracts. The process will require public consultation and the earliest the city claims the contracts could be extinguished is 2016.

Notably, the contracts will expire in 2024 at any rate; the city is merely — potentially — expediting the issue.

Gordon Price is an urban planner, development consultant and former Vancouver NPA councillor who now is now the director of the City Program at Simon Fraser University.

He said land-use contracts initially acted as a sort of "envelope" for the size of homes back in the 1970s. The development that is occurring now is a result of people trying to maximize the size of homes — essentially the hot real estate market has pushed home sizes to the brink of what is allowed.

Price contends if land-use contracts are extinguished there would likely be a hit to property values in the short term.

"However if properties are on an even playing field, the market would adjust," said Price who speculated the 36,000 other homes dictated by city bylaws could theoretically rise in value (with all other market factors excluded).

Terborg contends each home is different and must be assessed based on its unique criteria (such as location), and a land-use contract and/or home size alone doesn't necessarily mean higher value.

Another issue for her is how the neighbourhood looks aesthetically; because land-use contracts can exist on one side of a street and not the other, it may result in neighbourhoods becoming a hodgepodge of different sized homes.

Price said a hodgepodge of housing may or may not be detrimental to the housing values in a particular neighbourhood.

He said what is "probably more critical" than an aspect such as the shape of a roof, is open space on a lot, noting aspects such as gardens and privacy are factors to consider.

"There are values that are as important, if not more, than just the short term price of housing," said Price.

Terborg is also asking the city for the reinstatement of design controls, via a design panel.

"We want fair play for all and for everyone to live by the same rules," she said.

Mangat agreed, in part.

"As far as the sizing of homes we have to respect the realities. ...Immigrant families need these big homes. As far as character goes, let's sit down to discuss it," said Mangat.

He noted "in the same boat of fairness there has to be some sort of compensatory action for these property owners," should land-use contracts be extinguished.

Furthermore, cries for a moratorium on home builds while the city amends its bylaws, as suggested by Terborg, would put people out of jobs, said Kooner.

City of Richmond spokesperson Ted Townsend said under new provincial legislation the land-use contracts can be extinguished via a public hearing without the expressed consent of each individual property owner. Nor is there any requirement for the city to compensate those affected by the changes, he said.

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## Letter: Hope for Richmond's future?

Richmond News

May 14, 2015 10:50 AM

Dear Editor,

I recently met a young man who managed to effectively undermine my pessimistic assumption that there are no people of his age group in Richmond who are aware of or care about how badly mismanaged the development of this community has been over the past 10-20 years.

While he and I share the same opinion that those in charge of the running of Richmond's government and its planning departments have wilfully failed to ensure that the city's building codes and bylaws are properly and fully enforced, and have therefore cynically undermined the trust placed in them by the public to do so, he made it clear to me he had a much more optimistic outlook than I do about the possibilities for changing these attitudes and conditions in the future.

He came across as a well-educated, extremely dedicated, and thoroughly altruistic community activist — the kind of person who I fervently hope will someday wrest political power away from the self-serving, unconcerned, and ethically suspect individuals the public has been voting into office in this city since my family moved here in the 1950s.

If more young citizens like him join together in challenging the political status quo in this community we might yet experience what it is like to have enlightened, responsive, and responsible governance in Richmond.

Ray Arnold

Richmond



**Letter: Monster home madness will implode in Richmond**

Richmond News

May 7, 2015 09:32 AM



A relatively new home on an arterial road in Richmond is slated for demolition. The City of Richmond has a policy to densify arterial roads with townhomes. Market forces have resulted in developers knocking down such homes, questioning the environmental and planning policies of the city.

Dear Editor,

Soon, we will be entering the fourth decade re: the phenomenon of the monster home/mega mansion.

For terms of reference, it would be reasonable to submit the aforementioned are a new generation of single family homes built to maximize local government's permitted square footage.

In days of olde, such large homes were the domain of the upper classes, whether it was to keep up with the Joneses in neighbourhoods such as Shaughnessy, or simply large, often old-money pioneer homes that had middle class homes develop around them over time.

Regardless, the vast majority of homes that existed prior to the monster home era were in the range of 1200 sq ft. (ie single storey rancher) and 2400 sq ft (two-storey).

Many long-term Richmond residents will recall such homes were the norm, and still sufficient to raise large families.

However, in the monster home era, we see these older homes being replaced with new homes in the 5,000 + sq. ft. range, far in excess of any practical needs.

Monster homes on what the city defines as arterial routes are now themselves being demolished, to be replaced by higher density multi-family units.

In the inner subdivisions, the original smaller homes are being demolished, to the point of extinction, to cater to an irrational niche industry.

Excluding the arterial routes, history has shown that the fate of large monster homes is not positive.

Vancouver's wealthy Shaughnessy area, after the Great Depression, was referred to as Poverty Heights. Many of the residents lost their homes, which drastically collapsed in value. Many of these homes were converted into multi-tenanted rooming houses and nursing homes, or, ironically, "affordable housing".

However, Shaughnessy was a relatively small niche with respect to the Metro Vancouver area.

Over that last 30 years, every municipal government has succumbed to the monster home madness. This market will collapse. It is only matter of time when the irrational exuberance implodes. In its wake will remain a huge oversupply of large homes whose inflated prices will collapse, the vultures will swarm in and turn them into crowded rental units.

To politicians and urban planners, history will show you have all failed us miserably.

R.A.Hoegler



## Letter: Click, there's no place like home

Richmond News  
May 20, 2015 03:16 PM



Dear Editor,

As a lifetime (50-plus years) member of the Richmond community, I feel a sense of anguish in what is currently taking place here with rampant development and the changes that have exploded over the past decade.

An intrusion of development. This tells of my dream to click my ruby red slippers together three times while reciting "there's no place like home" and, hopefully, getting back to a place I once knew and loved. Lately, it's unrecognizable and heartless.

The breaking point for me was in reading a notice from the city that my aunt, a resident here for 70-plus years, just received. It indicated that the trees and hedges bordering her home of 50 years were "in conflict of demo and construction and were being removed."

The City said it would replant new trees "if area permits" (which likely won't be so). In what world is this OK, when developers looking to profit can "change" the face of our lifetime homes/properties without any regard or respect?

Here are my poetic thoughts:

*"Build it, they said, "and they shall come"*

*But the shortsighted plan trampled on some*

*Boundaries were stretched as huge monster homes*

*Looked more like castles that Kings and Queens own*

*Invaded the neighbourhoods, despite peasants' cries*

*No beauty to be found in developer's eyes*

*Just money, that's all, as memories crashed down*

*To supersize Richmond, their once friendly "town"*

*They'd lived here forever, helped make this place great*

*And would never have imagined they'd meet this sad fate*

*Planners didn't care as some castles sat bare*

*"Afterall", they proclaimed, "that's money parked there"*

*Dollar signs blurred their visions, their focus was wrong*

*And they forgot all the words to that Joni Mitchell song*

*The hospitals - crowded, schools bursting to the brim*

*Traffic was a nightmare and the future grew dim*

*For they only saw the present(s), they lived for today*

*As they bulldozed the houses and trees in their way*

*The taxes grew higher, homes no longer afforded*

*By the peasants', whose dreams would all be aborted*

*For decades they'd lived, side by side in bliss*

*They couldn't believe it was coming to this*

*They were told to be happy with their home values high*

*But they cared not to pack up and leave with goodbye*

*There clearly is no mercy in greed and power*

*Shame on you, Richmond, in your darkest hour*

*Can't open a window without hitting a wall*

*Don't care about trees as, in numbers, they fall*

*The farmland will slowly be phased out too*

*Who needs crops when you've money to stew?*

*But you can't eat cash and you need room to breathe*

*People are of value, and some will grieve*

*As their peaceful tranquility's a thing of the past*

*With luxury cars whizzing steadily past*

*It's lovely to blend a variety of cultures*

*But developers are picking the bones like vultures*

*They're onto something here, so it's full steam ahead*

*But the Richmond we knew is officially dead*

*Some values aren't only measured in money*

*Like a yard full of neighbours gathered when it's sunny*

*But there'll be no neighbours or yards to be seen*

*High rises are in and gray's the the new green*

*There is no turning back once paradise is lost*

*We've been sold out here, at such a great cost*

*RIP my fine city, I shall never forget you*

*The beauty you once held*

*Before greed beset you.*

D. Wilde

Richmond

## Council to decide on 'mega home' bylaw proposal

City council to deal with the compromising bylaw on Monday as developers and residents clash

[Graeme Wood](#) / Richmond News

June 17, 2015 04:08 PM



Residential bylaw amendments being proposed by the City of Richmond this June hope to fix residents' concerns such as this wall looming over a backyard. April, 2015.

It was supposed to be a compromise for the most recent round of a decades-long debate on mega homes that has pitted Richmond homeowners against developers.

"What we are recommending is a compromise on either side," explained Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Joe Erceg of the city's new proposed bylaw amendment, at a four-hour planning committee meeting Tuesday evening.

The changes are meant to manage the shape of new homes and how they fit in established neighbourhoods. But neither side was 100 per cent convinced.

Some spoke to specifics of the bylaw whereas others claimed there was a bigger issue; that being new residents – mostly immigrants — who have different ideals.

Homebuilder Sam Sandhu said the issue is never going to go away.

Sandhu said he faced discrimination when he built his large home for his extended family in the 1980s.

He then noted the 1990s brought wealthy Asian immigrants who "wanted to be private and not converse with anyone." So they too built large homes. This led to jealousy and resentment from established Richmonders, said Sandhu.

"The camaraderie in the community, the communication, the social sectors; they start dissipating. ...What it is is an underlying problem that will always exist."

What is happening now is a new wave of Asian immigrants with similar desires, such as homes with large cathedral ceilings, at the expense of backyards, stated another homebuilder.

A common complaint from others was that such homes are an assault on established lifestyles, as once-private backyards are turned into walled caverns.

The proposed bylaw amendment reduces two-storey house heights by five feet, from 34 feet to 29 feet, and interior double-ceiling allowances by four feet, from 16 feet to 12 feet. Furthermore, accessory buildings will also be curtailed and home setbacks will be better managed so new walls don't loom over other properties. However, the proposed amendment does not curtail the floor area ratio of a new home, nor does it improve enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, the bylaw proposes to add 160 extra square feet of extra high ceiling space for a home (which would have to be to the back or middle of the home, not on the sides).

Neil Cumming, of the Westwind Ratepayers' Association, called for clearer language in the bylaw so it wouldn't be further misinterpreted. Fellow area resident John Terborg said the city needs better design protocol measures. He asked for the city to implement a checklist for developers and the public.

But several developers shot back, claiming more time was needed to assess the changes.

Dana Westmark, representing the Urban Development Institute, suggested a less prescriptive recipe, as he believes the new bylaw could lead to homogenous homes. He said new homes should create a "gentle transition" from old to new by comparing the design to the older surrounding stock.

Coun. Chak Au questioned how bylaw subversion could be prevented if the existing bylaw isn't improved. As it stands Erceg admitted that there were "shortcomings" in the existing bylaw.

Amit Sandhu of Ampri Real Estate Development Group also asked for more time, citing the changes would affect his compact single-family homes. He said such changes (particularly setbacks) would shrink his homes further (as they are built close together). Erceg said the bylaws can be manipulated for specific zones, where the city may want to allow for such homes (about 1,600 square feet, in a close row).

Coun. Bill McNulty wanted more time for consultation and described the process as "trying to kill a fly with a sledgehammer."



Coun. Linda McPhail also wanted more time but councillors Au, Harold Steves and Carol Day disagreed, choosing to send the proposal to Richmond City Council on Monday without a decision. A special public hearing is tentatively scheduled for July 6.

Should the amended bylaw pass through city council, it would be applied to potentially soon-to-be-terminated land-use contracts, which apply to roughly 4,000 homes in the city. Such properties allow for much greater home sizes than those under the existing city bylaw.

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## **Letter: City must resist dazzle of developers' gold**

Richmond News

June 24, 2015 01:18 PM

Dear Editor,

Re: "Council tackles mega homes management," *News*, June 18.

No Richmond resident could fail to observe the rampant demolition of older Richmond homes (464 in 2014; on track for over 500 in 2015) and their subsequent replacement by much larger houses that dwarf their neighbours.

Many new houses are egregiously oversized, questionably legal and are clearly impacting negatively the privacy and natural light of adjacent homes.

Changing streetscapes are irrevocably altering the character and livability of Richmond neighbourhoods.

This is not about new house styles or who is buying them. It is about houses that are too tall, too wide, and too deep for their lot size.

Richmond councillors and the mayor currently are considering changes to the zoning bylaw. Purportedly, these changes will reduce the massive height and imposing front, back and side wall faces of new houses.

I hope that the mayor and councillors are up to the task of analyzing critically the proposals presented to them.

City planners have consulted extensively with the builders' lobby.

Concessions to builders are eroding reasonable, common sense solutions, such as regulating just how far back a house can extend into its backyard, how close to the neighbours it can be, fixing a maximum height and reducing the area on second floors.

I urge the mayor and councillors to listen to the voices of Richmond residents and homeowners in a public forum.

As tempting as all that additional revenue generated for the city from permit fees and taxes on high value properties might be, and despite generous campaign contributions to politicians from the developer community, current homeowners deserve to be heard above the clamouring and complaints of builders crying foul.

Strengthen the bylaw to reduce massive houses, do not water down common sense proposals and, above all, enforce the regulations!

**Elizabeth Hardacre**



## Council fumbles 'mega home' management

After a detailed report from city planners to amend zoning bylaws, Richmond City Council calls for more time

[Graeme Wood](#) / Richmond News

June 23, 2015 11:10 AM



Councillors Linda McPhail and Carol Day sit side by side on council but couldn't be further apart when it comes to policies on development. June, 2015.

Richmond City Council postponed a decision to amend the city's residential zoning bylaws, which could have stopped mega homes in their tracks.

As such, developers have at least another three months to "build big" under the existing bylaws.

At [Monday evening's council](http://www.richmond.ca/agendafiles/Open_Council_6-22-2015.pdf) ([http://www.richmond.ca/agendafiles/Open\\_Council\\_6-22-2015.pdf](http://www.richmond.ca/agendafiles/Open_Council_6-22-2015.pdf)) meeting the majority of councillors cited the need for more public consultation from all sides of the issue.

"I suggest that a little more analysis and to engage the community would be beneficial," said planning committee chair Coun. Linda McPhail.

With Coun. Ken Johnston absent, council nearly unanimously proceeded to direct staff to consult for four more weeks. With the item off the meeting agenda,

people filed outside without having had the opportunity to speak. After a public hearing was scheduled for July 6, the earliest one can occur now is early September.

Last week, developers and residents raised several bones of contention with the proposed bylaw amendment, which was supposed to be a compromise between the two sides.

As a result, a set of new recommendations from director of planning Wayne Craig was tabled in a letter to council before Monday's meeting.

In the recommendations is the option to implement design controls on new homes, which, if implemented, "would add significant time to the processing of single-family building permits."

As such, a large group of homebuilders was on hand to witness the meeting along with many residents concerned about mega homes ruining backyards, privacy and the character of neighbourhoods.

Only Coun. Carol Day opposed the postponement, citing the fact roughly 40 homes per month are being demolished.

Day said she wanted to debate the merits of the staff recommendation.

"The referral (postponement) should come after we have the opportunity to hear from the people," said Day.

The proposed bylaw amendment would reduce the height of two-storey houses by five feet, from 34 feet to 29 feet, and interior double-ceiling allowances by four feet, from 16 feet to 12 feet. Furthermore, accessory buildings will also be curtailed and home setbacks will be better managed so new walls don't loom over other properties.

The changes are meant to manage the shape of new homes and how they fit in established neighbourhoods.

The city's proposal also gave developers a few carrots in the form of extra ceiling height within the interior of a home and maintaining 34-foot high two-and-a-half storey homes.

Craig's department also gave council a series of options to approve (such as changing certain proposed measurements to setbacks) and recommended reviewing the changes after one year.

Although Coun. Chak Au voted to postpone the decision he read a letter from a concerned resident stating that 'the time for a public hearing is before, not after the bylaw is drafted.'

While raising concerns about the process he concluded "we should make a decision based on good information."

Coun. Harold Steves said he needed assurances from staff that the existing bylaw would be enforced over the summer. When he got that he too voted to postpone the debate.

Coun. Alexa Loo said if there's a summer rush to build big homes then it would mean people want them and thus it would be unfair to "cut them out ...before giving it a closer examination."

She questioned if four weeks was enough time for staff to consult and make additional changes but Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Joe Erceg interjected and stated that it was.

Councillors Bill McNulty and Derek Dang also voted to postpone any debate. As such a public workshop is planned to take place.

"Let's get this right," said McNulty.

Among the many complaints over the new stock of housing being built in the city, is design and character.

In his letter, Craig noted council can implement design guidelines to regulate the form and character of homes by mandating development permits for certain residential neighbourhoods.

This would effectively solve some of the concerns raised by developer and Urban Development Institute member Dana Westermarck; namely that a house should conform to its surroundings (and thus a one-size-fits-all bylaw is ineffective). Ergo, in Westwind a new home would likely feature pitched roofs while in Broadmoor a new home could be more of a large box-style home — said to be popular amongst new Chinese immigrants — to conform to that neighbourhood's late 1990s stock.

Craig cautioned that the legal feasibility of such a plan would need to be "comprehensively examined" and individual permits "would add significant time to the processing of single-family Building Permits."

Craig dismissed concerns from developers that the new bylaw would affect compact single-family homes. Yet, he noted to council that it has the ability to alter the bylaw at any time. He also presented an example of a bylaw amendment for council's consideration.

Au said he didn't want to be reviewing this issue every six months.

Craig reiterated that it was the opinion of city planners that the amended bylaw would be clear enough as to not require new enforcement measures, a common complaint from the Westwind Ratepayers' Association. Even still, he said it would be possible for the city to provide a new checklist of bylaw rules on the building application form.

The proposed bylaw amendment would encapsulate all single-family homes in Richmond save for about 4,000 properties that fall under a provincial contract, known as a land-use contract, which allow for even bigger homes.

Such contracts are in the process of being extinguished by the city. When that occurs all residential properties would fall under the powers of city zoning bylaws.

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## Mega homes prove politicians out of touch

Dear Editor,

Re: "Mega home bylaw on hold,"  
News, June 25

The elected politicians (past and present) of Richmond are acting like misbehaving children denying any responsibility for the city's out of character neighbourhood monster homes and foreign owned property speculating investment ghost houses.

This is good evidence that our politicians did not drive, nevermind

walk, the various neighbourhoods of our city and seriously question what was beginning to happen with developers flouting the city's bylaws and negatively changing the character of some neighbourhoods. Where was, and is, the leadership at city hall?

As I write this letter, I am parked in front of a hideous looking, bylaw-flouting, three-storey home being built with a two-storey detached micro rental suite. It's a ridiculous-

looking building for this neighbourhood.

The city bureaucrats in the planning and permit department sat on their collective butts and did nothing. No one within these departments had the foresight or fortitude to effectively address the concern of oversized, sometimes strange looking, homes being built in some neighbourhoods.

**Molly Palm**  
Richmond



# Playing with democracy



**EVE EDMONDS**

*Editor*

EDITOR@RICHMOND-NEWS.COM

Call it a Catch 22.

City council postpones a decision on a new bylaw that would address concerns regarding mega home developments, pending more public input.

Meanwhile, the residents and homebuilders who had attended said meeting, hoping to offer public input, file out without having had the chance to voice their concerns because the bylaw has been postponed.

I get that process matters, and the process in this instance is that if a bylaw is sent back to staff, the issue is off council's agenda and it's on to the next item.

However, process can also be a way to, intentionally or otherwise, stifle debate and bury dissent. Not everyone would be willing to give up a Monday night to participate in the functioning of our democracy. It does not bode well for any of us if those willing to do so are sent home without an opportunity to speak or even witness councillors address the issue.

If there was one buzz word that made its way into every speech and press release during the last civic election, that word was "engagement." Candidates of all slates and stripes committed themselves to greater community engagement.

Of course, the irony here is that the bylaw is deferred due to a lack of public input. Never mind the fact offering public opinion regarding the bylaw is exactly what those folks were there to do; there has been a deluge of public input on this issue over the last few years, if not decades.

I could easily fill every page in this paper just with the mega home letters we've received to date.

And what about the formation of the Westwind Ratepayers' Association? Not to mention the fact the association managed to pack the Westwind elementary school gym with residents and developers all offering "public input" on this issue, albeit with no councillors present.

And then there's been the various petitions and protests at city hall.

I get that Coun. Linda McPhail's suggestion to defer speaks to the specifics of this particular bylaw, which, as it currently stands, may well need to be honed. However, it didn't escape anyone's notice that deferring the issue just at the start of summer, when council doesn't sit, has allowed for an even lengthier delay.

Now the plan is to host two "public education" meetings on July 8 for residents and July 9 for developers, although anyone can attend either. (See story page 8.)

Okay, let's try this again. I imagine many of the same folks will be there. But this game is getting wearing, and wearing people's patience with democratic engagement is a dangerous game indeed.



## Trees play important role in neighbourhoods

Richmond News

June 26, 2013 01:00 AM

The Editor,

Living in Richmond has convinced me that when it comes to one issue in particular, the world can be divided simply into two distinct groups of people: those who love trees, foliage, gardens, and green spaces, and those who don't.

And if what is transpiring in our neighbourhood represents what the future will look like in our residential areas, then one can only conclude the City of Richmond has decided to ignore the values and concerns of the former and pander to the interests and demands of the latter.

Every new mega pseudo-mansion ensures the removal of at least one mature tree. Far too many of those are destroyed simply for the purpose of allowing the addition of a third garage space, many of which simply end-up being storage areas.

The footprint of these buildings is such that front lawns, large trees and shrubbery, complementary gardens and backyards are made irrelevant.

The concepts of the space around a home being an interactive, integral part of the living environment as well as an important dimension of its aesthetic qualities have been almost totally abandoned in the city's apparent desire to fill its residential neighbourhoods with treeless lots and empty, tax-generating, out-of-scale houses.

Of course, if people choose to concentrate most of their lives indoors and ignore any aspect of living around their homes, that is their right and privilege. But there seems to be an almost total lack of concern for the fact that the presence or absence of mature trees and foliage not only plays an important role in affecting the personality of an entire neighbourhood, but also the character and quality of the lives of those who reside in it.

A tree is not just removed from a lot, it is removed from the lives of neighbours who love its existence, love its beauty, love the birds that nest in it, love the shade it casts on hot days, love the privacy it might facilitate, love the ways in which it enhances the view through a window, love the ways in which it softens the impact of brutal architecture, and love the ways in which it reminds us that it is nature that has always nurtured us, not our technologies.

Call me a tree-hugger if you like, but in an either/ or world, I would much rather look up at a beautiful tree than the massive face of yet another property line-crowding mega house and would prefer to walk by open lawns than stone walls, iron gates, and expansive brick driveways, and I gladly accept the raking of leaves in the fall as the small price I have to pay to enjoy the proximity of beautiful greenery.

And, most certainly, I would rather have faith in the city departments that are supposed to protect our trees rather than be constantly disappointed and enraged by their half-hearted attempts at doing so.

But those are the things that differentiate my values and priorities from those who seem to have gained the favour of Richmond's mayor and council. It is they who have managed to reduce the issue to simple black and white (or green and grey) terms.

Ray Arnold Richmond

## Letter: Hopes dashed as City of Richmond defers bylaw

Richmond News

July 2, 2015 11:39 AM



Dear Editor,

Re: "Mega home bylaw on hold," News, June 25

I have been talking with family and neighbours about Richmond council's plans to write up bylaws protecting our neighbourhoods after many years of avoiding the obvious problem.

Richmond residents were overjoyed to hear that council was finally making this a priority, so it is extremely disappointing that council has put this off for another three months for "public consultation" (ironically on an issue the public has been united and vocal about for years.)

During that time, how many neighbourhoods are going to suffer because a long overdue solution has been put off even longer? Every time a new house is built further back on the lot, neighbouring residents' backyards lose sunlight. What used to be a green backyard becomes a tiny courtyard. Every time trees are cut down and replaced with oversized concrete driveways, and mega homes with metal fences are built that don't fit the existing streetscape,

neighbourhoods are forever changed and not for the better. How many more residents will lose what they love about their neighbourhoods because of this delay? How many planned subdivisions of the 1970's and 80's will become "little boxes" of different colors "all made out of ticky-tacky," and which "all look just the same."

Shame on council for once again putting developers and future residents ahead of homeowners and current residents. Kudos to Carol Day, however, for voting not to delay this discussion and continually standing up for the voices of the people of Richmond.

When the next election comes around voters need to remember who is on their side protecting neighbourhoods and who is more interested in pandering to the developers.

**Michael Seidelman**

**Richmond**



## Tensions palpable at mega home forums

Ambiguous bylaws and poorly detailed permit applications to blame for mega homes, city claims

[Graeme Wood](#) / Richmond News

July 15, 2015 06:37 PM



Participants at an open forum at Richmond City Hall for mega homes witnessed and displayed some palpable emotions. July 8, 2015

"What it really looks like is builders want to maximize profits. I don't see any other reason for what's going on here ...And, I'm wondering what's going on between the (City of Richmond) and builders out here when letters of instruction to the builders just get sloughed off?" said a long-time Richmond resident whose fury over the changing character of neighbourhoods and the erosion of housing affordability was palpable.

His question was followed by an eruption of cheers at the packed open house for residential zoning regulations on July 8 at Richmond City Hall.

The man's question was similar to one posed by real estate agent Lynda Terborg who breached the issue of mega homes at city hall some months ago.

In May Terborg asked city councillors to "rigorously enforce our bylaws and stand behind the plan checkers and inspectors because it is obvious they cannot sustain the pressures being out on them to look the other way."

When asked by the Richmond News if bylaws are being broken, plan review manager James Cooper stated, "we do not issue permits if they do not meet zoning requirements. Applicants bring plans and we review them against the criteria."

When asked if the plans (designs) being submitted are matching what is actually being built, Cooper stated, "for the most part they are," however there is "ambiguity" in the existing bylaw that has led to excessive volume in homes (and thus a lack of green space and large walls blocking out sunshine).

Presently, homes in Richmond that are purchased for one to \$1.4 million are being demolished, rebuilt and sold for upwards of \$3 million. A typical large custom 4,000 square foot home may cost in the range of \$800,000, [according to some builders \(http://harlequinhomes.ca/how-much-to-build-custom-home.html\)](http://harlequinhomes.ca/how-much-to-build-custom-home.html). Should a home be built to be larger than it should be, the windfall on flipping such a home could be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Cooper's department is now leading a review of zoning bylaws. Included in the proposed changes is a five-foot reduction in the height of homes, tighter setbacks, more detailed home design submissions and a new bylaw checklist for designers and builders.

Many homebuilders, who were given equal weight for public input at a subsequent meeting on July 9, have cried foul at the changes.

Several have said the problem is confined to Terborg's Westwind neighbourhood, but Cooper replied his phone "rings every seven and a half minutes" and that it was "unfair to say a small group of people are complaining."

Builders argue that the proposed changes to house setbacks (distance to property lines) are unfair and put their businesses at risk. Many stated the changes will affect small, compact houses, although Cooper, disagreed.

"No one's trying to take one square foot of floor space from anyone. I've worked real hard to make sure the (existing) floor area ratios are respected"

Race, ethnicity and nationality became a sidebar to the technical discussions.

One of many South Asian homebuilders defended the right of new homeowners who are, for the most part, believed to be new, wealthy mainland Chinese immigrants.

"There's a sleeping dragon here and they have a right too. ...In the 1960s houses were built for affordability. That's not the case in Richmond anymore; it's a luxury market now, people have money and they want houses that they can build out," he said.

The July 8 open house was predominantly older Caucasian residents and a minority of South Asian homebuilders; however, at least two ethnic Chinese people stood up to voice different opinions.

One man said he was a new immigrant from Hong Kong and liked big houses.

"If you control too much, do we go back to [the] old town? The city is developing. Some things, we need to change," he said.

Another Asian woman, stating she was a long time resident, made an impassioned plea stating she was "so sad" to see old residents (that she described as Caucasians) move away and new residents putting up gates and not speaking to her.

The July 9 "builders" meeting discussion was geared more toward technical bylaw discussions as opposed to how mega homes appear to be a symbol of the social impacts of gentrification, wealth migration, and as some suggested, a lack of political leadership to mend fences, both literally and figuratively (only councillors Chak Au and Alexa Loo attended both meetings).

Builder/real estate agent Raman Kooner maintained the need to look closely at compact lots differently than bigger lots.

"Are we trying to achieve affordable housing? Are we trying to maximize use of our land? Or are we sitting here trying to make the odd person who's not getting sunlight happy?" said Kooner, sparking an emotional response from resident Nita Sharma.

"I don't think we should trivialize the issue of sunlight because it is everybody's right," she said, accusing builders of "befuddling" the issue.

"You are creating hostility for these people who move into these huge homes that have not been thought through," she said.

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## **Letter: Richmondites expressed their feelings of loss**

Richmond News

July 15, 2015 06:38 PM

Dear Editor,

Last Wednesday, July 8, there was a feeling of unhappiness, frustration and even anger in the council chambers at city hall.

People wanted to be heard. They expressed their passion for and pride in their home of Richmond but were overcome with sadness for the direction in which it is going.

Among the details of setbacks, square footage, and height of new homes, the citizens in attendance were told that bylaws were in place, that they could be tweaked slightly, and that someone would examine them and report back to the public.

However, courageous leadership and a deep understanding of the source of the public angst were not there. This angst comes from a deep sense of loss in what community is, a place where individuals live together, knowing that the place is shared, where they are concerned for each other, trust each other and respect each other.

As individuals, we are rooted in the social context; our individuality is forged out of this context. True meaning in life is found in community. A genuine community is one in which individuals exemplify loyalty toward a worthy cause or an ideal and, in doing so, build a higher order, one that extends beyond their individual lives. It is this need for genuine community and the fear of its loss that was expressed yesterday. It truly hurt.

**N. Yurkovich**

**Richmond**



## Letter: Not hard to judge council's courage, cowardice

Richmond News

July 16, 2015 11:01 AM



2014-2018 Richmond City Council mayor Malcolm Brodie

Dear Editor,

There are many different kinds of cowardice and we can often see the manifestations of several types in the attitudes and behaviours of some politicians. A purposeful avoidance of conversations about important issues with concerned constituents is a form of cowardice, as is an inclination to show disrespect or contempt for those who voice their concerns and attempt to exercise their democratic rights by trying to engage their elected representatives in any kind of meaningful dialogue.

Wilfully forgetting the values and principles outlined in one's oath of office, especially those related to attending, with equal concern, to the welfare of every citizen in a community, is another form, as is conveniently forgetting that elected officials are responsible to the people who voted them into office and pay their salary, not the reverse.

It is not hard to assess and judge the levels of cowardice demonstrated by politicians. We only need to look at who they decide to spend more or less time

conversing with, which community meetings or functions they do or do not attend, to what extent they use misdirection, bafflegab, deflection, and avoidance when asked about important issues, and how much time they are willing to spend intermingling and interacting with average citizens within their constituency.

Using such criteria, how would we in Richmond rank the personal and civic levels of courage demonstrated by those we have elected to represent us at the federal, provincial, and, most particularly, civic levels?

Perhaps a glance at which local politicians did not attend the recent public forum on megahouse construction is a good starting point for conducting such an assessment.

## Letter: What if things changed for the better?

Richmond News

July 16, 2015 11:16 AM

Dear Editor,

My husband and I attended the public workshop on height and massing of new houses July 8 and the workshop for developers July 9. What became abundantly clear is the lagging interest of city council in the mega house issue, the slow response to not only enforce the existing home size restriction bylaws and close some loopholes surrounding the building of mega homes, but also the inaction over time to deal with the land use contracts.

So I started to think... what if.

What if city council actually demonstrated that they believed in the "Vision of a Sustainable Richmond."

What if builders and developers didn't have free reign to just build luxury homes and condos suitable to a specific market.

What if the character of single-family neighbourhoods was protected?

What if city planners did some planning for a diverse, vibrant community — not just culturally diverse but socioeconomically diverse?

What if in order to maintain that diversity, long time residents weren't told, if you don't like the changes "cash out and leave"?

What if work and the proximity to family, determine in part, the location of a residence?

What if Richmond is our home, and not just a residence of convenience and opportunism?

What if long-time residents were valued, contributing members of the community and their opinions mattered?

What if environmental sustainability was a priority, limiting the building of houses with five to seven bathrooms — and perhaps avoid them being rented out as hotel rooms?

What if every new mega house didn't have a wall around it that signals "keep out", atypical of a Canadian welcome?

What if a beautiful backyard garden buzzing with life was as important as a great room with 20-foot ceilings?

And what if there were stricter rules around recycling house demolition waste thus avoiding the tons of housing waste at the dump, while the rest of us recycle carrot peelings?

What if our tree protection bylaws were enforced and green space valued?

What if it wasn't so much about density and frenzied construction but also about aesthetics? The Richmond skyline is starting to look like box Communist blocks.

What if we didn't have people like Kerry Starchuk and Lynda ter Borg who care enough about Richmond to bring some of these concerns to the attention of city council?

What if realtors/developers actually reported large cash transactions to reduce money laundering?

What if we all looked the other way just so that we could max out on our property value?

What if we had a strong proactive civic leadership, that set "best practices, bylaws and policies" to work for a better Richmond for all?

What if it was about more than just money and greed and opportunism, and.. What if .....?

**N McDonald**

**Richmond**

### **Letter: City adrift from official plan**

Richmond News

July 22, 2015 02:45 PM

Dear Editor,

After attending Tuesday evening's planning committee meeting at Richmond City Hall. I find myself extremely disappointed by our elected decision-makers.

On the issue of mega house construction, councillors voted against city staff recommendations. Councillors voted against the professional advice of the city's own Advisory Design Panel (independent architects appointed to provide a sober second opinion and protect the public on issues affecting the built environment). And councillors voted against the concerns expressed by residents who participated in the July 8 public workshop. Instead, councillors sided with the interests of builders and proceeded to grant additional concessions to the development community beyond what was proposed. What was observed is simply business as usual at city hall.

I will continue to advocate for a greener, more progressive and more sustainable approach to neighbourhood planning. I will also advocate for better management of our resources and activities in ways that are forward looking and address the most pressing concern that faces our city — adapting to climate change.

It is proving to be very difficult to work with the people who have been elected to city council because their views on Richmond's future look nothing like the vision that is the City's Official Community Plan.

**John Terborg**

**Richmond**



### **Letter: Richmond's green space gone**

Richmond News  
July 22, 2015 02:46 PM

Dear Editor,

From what I see every day, I believe that Richmond is slowly becoming more and more polluted by the dust from construction.

From building town houses, to apartments, to plazas, there is no end to it.

I still remember the days when we could actually see large, spacious areas filled with fields of grass and trees. What happened to the beautiful, green landscape of Richmond?

Everywhere I go, all I see are trucks, bulldozers, and workers holding stop/slow signs. Not to mention how it is impossible to get anywhere on time due to construction being everywhere.

As a student who has to tutor and work after school, I find it absolutely irritating how we have to purposely choose to go a different route just to avoid traffic.

The scenery of what I used to think Richmond had is gradually disappearing as towering buildings take over the city. Is it really necessary to knock down old, but usable homes just to improve the outlook? I think it is time to limit the amount of construction we're having and focus more on the future of our environment and generation.

**Zoey Leung**

**Richmond**

### **Letter: Mega-home envy not the problem**

Richmond News  
July 22, 2015 02:42 PM



Participants at an open forum at Richmond City Hall for mega homes witnessed and displayed some palpable emotions. July 8, 2015

Dear Editor,

I have little patience with the simple-minded proposition that those who object to the proliferation of mega-houses in our community are motivated by some kind of jealousy of wealth. Such claims invariably come from those who are entirely uneducated about even the most basic principles involved in informed community planning, especially as regards those which are concerned with the ways in which architectural design and town-planning (or lack of it) affect the social and cultural dimensions of neighbourhoods and communities.

In the first instance, houses should be designed and built to satisfy the basic criteria of benefiting everyone on the street, -they should promote social interaction between neighbours and help in supporting or establishing a sense of belonging to a community sharing common values and priorities.

The mega-houses taking over our residential neighbourhoods, most of which remain unoccupied or are used as hotels with transient residents, are built for entirely opposite functions. They promote isolation between neighbours (when there are any), and therefore represent a total lack of interest in or

commitment to making a contribution to the greater social and cultural aspects of the communities they are placed in.

In the second instance these mega-houses are entirely out of place because their scale and architectural styles are more appropriate to much larger properties or urban settings. Any architect, urban planner, or sociologist will confirm that any given house, no matter what its style or scale, can be placed in either compatible and appropriate or incompatible and inappropriate contexts or surroundings.

Buildings (houses) are not just structures. They are physical embodiments of our values and priorities, and as such they make a clear statement about what a community's cultural and social heart and soul might be. The most welcoming, interactive, inviting, and inclusive neighbourhoods are invariably those in which governing bodies, developers, designers, and concerned citizens all work closely together to ensure new houses and developments are designed in a way that not only makes them appropriate to their general surroundings, but complements and enhances our senses of place and community rather than compromising or destroying them. To say that such collaborative processes are not occurring in the development of Richmond's residential neighbourhoods would be an understatement.

If each new house does not demonstrate a commitment to being socially and environmentally responsible to its neighbourhood and its inhabitants then there is no "neighbourhood" per se, only a collection of isolated, unrelated, individual edifices which represent the antithesis of what our species has come to celebrate as "community."

Jealous of wealth? Hardly! Offended and outraged by bad design and planning and by ignorance and greed? Most definitely!

**Ray Arnold**

## **Builders get concessions from councillors, mayor**

**Mega home bylaw set for city council meeting on Monday.**

[Graeme Wood](#) / Richmond News

July 22, 2015 02:59 PM

Updated: July 23, 2015 11:46 AM



A committee meeting on July 21 saw city councillors back away from staff recommendations for proposed residential zoning amendments.

Homebuilders walked away from a four-hour planning committee meeting Tuesday evening appearing content with amendments made to proposed residential zoning bylaws, by the committee, against the recommendation of city planners.

Following an extended round of public consultation, the committee had been presented with various options from city staff to solve alleged problems of building "massing," or volume, in mega homes.

Raman Kooner of Sutton Group told the committee that the proposed new setbacks for small, subdivided lots would hamper builders' ability to construct marketable homes.



As such the committee of Mayor Malcolm Brodie, and councillors Chak Au, Carol Day, Linda McPhail, Bill McNulty, and Harold Steves voted to change the parameters of new setbacks and building envelopes from 12.5-metre wide lots to 15-metre wide lots.

The report to council ([http://www.richmond.ca/agendafiles/Open\\_Planning\\_7-21-2015.pdf](http://www.richmond.ca/agendafiles/Open_Planning_7-21-2015.pdf)) states staff "are of the opinion that changes to the building envelope are warranted for lots wider than 12.5 m."

Essentially, with the committee's amendment, builders can construct homes closer (1.5 metres) to property lines on lots up to 15 metres wide.

Kooner said that the amendment was critical as many large lots he and other builders subdivide fall between the aforementioned parameters.

James Cooper, a licensed architect and the city's lead planner in the review process, previously stated that under the staff recommendations no home would lose square footage. Kooner said his concern was having enough ceiling space on the second floor.

Builders at the meeting also appeared pleased with the committee's decision to maintain 5-metre ceilings that would not count twice against their homes' total floor area.

Councillors Steves and Day opposed that compromise, in a 4-2 vote, stating they preferred staff's recommendation of 3.7-metre ceilings.

Even still, Joe Erceg, the city's deputy chief administrative officer, stated the proposals would result in smaller structures.

Notably, two-storey homes will be reduced by 1.5 metres in height, although two-and-a-half storey homes will remain at the same height of 10.5 metres.

At issue is how larger, new homes are projecting outwards on other properties with older homes. As well, the public has called into question the character and style of homes, namely the lack of green space and driveway gates.

At the meeting builder Ivan Krpan told the committee the problem wasn't in the existing bylaws but rather the home inspection process.

In its package to the committee the city is proposing new enforcement measures as it stated "there is a perception that many new homes are being altered after building permit inspections."

Some of the concerns involve builders installing false ceilings and filling in houses with illegal floor space.

The meeting was marred by several interruptions from builders cheering for those who supported not changing the original bylaw.

Many people, once again, raised the issue of ethnicity and culture, with some builders — from a Southeast Asian background — noting there are cultural preferences for large homes in their community as well as the Chinese community.

The packed meeting saw at least three people of Chinese ethnicity — claiming to be prospective homebuyers — state their opinion that large homes should not be reduced in size.

One speaker, using Au as a translator, cited his right to freedom and love for Canada.

Furthermore, Steves and Brodie dismissed the notion that the complaints over mega homes originate only from Caucasians or long-time residents.

Several builders accused the city of being favourably biased toward a small group of upset people, with some naming the Westwind Ratepayers' Association.

However, city staff has stated the complaints are wide spread and Erceg noted the issue has been ongoing for "decades."

The full report and committee recommendations will go to a council meeting on Monday where councillors Alexa Loo, Ken Johnston, Derek Dang will weigh in.

Following that the zoning proposals will head to an official public hearing this September.

**Correction:** In last week's edition the Richmond News erroneously stated Coun. Alexa Loo did not attend both public workshop meetings, when in fact she stated via Twitter she had done so (On Tuesday McNulty accused Loo and Au of breaking council policy by attending those workshops).

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## Letter: It's not me, Richmond, it's you

Richmond News

July 31, 2015 03:49 PM

Dear Editor,

We have been together for 30 plus years. You watched me grow up, buy my home, watched me get married, and was there when I found a great job. We've been through everything together. That is why I hate to tell you we need to break up.

Let's start with my job. I take the bus to work daily and have to walk roughly 10 minutes from the bus stop to my office. No big deal right?

Well now you are widening the road and not providing a sidewalk for me (and others) to safely get to work. Essentially we have to either walk an extra 30 minutes along train tracks or walk in the road just to access the street my office is on.

A few years ago you watched me buy my one bedroom condo (that was a great day wasn't it?). Now that I'm married my husband and I would like to upgrade to something a little bigger, but you're stopping us from doing that.

We can't afford a mega-home or even some of the condos out there. Even if we decided to sell and start renting a house we couldn't do that as you have made rental vacancies scarce and outrageously priced.

We would like to still be able to eat after paying the rent/mortgage.

I'm just trying to figure out what I did to make you dislike me so much. It's pretty clear that you'd rather be with others that can inflate your ego rather than with me who has stood by you for three decades.

It's sad really. This means we will have to move on from each other and I will have to find another community to start a meaningful relationship with.

We laughed, we cried, and we grew up together. I suppose it's inevitable that we'd grow apart, too. I just thought it would be amicably. At least we have memories.

Take care Richmond, I'll miss you.

Susan Letendre

Richmond (for now)

### Councillor calls mega home bylaw "half-assed"

Meanwhile realtors and developers warn council of lowering land values.

[Graeme Wood](#) / Richmond News

July 28, 2015 06:29 PM

Updated: July 29, 2015 12:18 PM



Participants at an open forum at Richmond City Hall for mega homes witnessed and displayed some palpable emotions. July 8, 2015

Richmond City Council has tentatively approved a new set of bylaws aimed at reducing the size of homes. However, the decision at city hall on Monday was met with opposition from some residents as well as two councillors, one of whom called the process "half-assed."

The amendment to the city's existing residential zoning bylaws will now go to a public hearing on Sep. 8. If approved, it will mean Richmond will still have the tallest homes in the Metro Vancouver region, as well as the most generous ceiling heights when it comes to calculating the size of homes and how they push up against existing properties.

Prior to discussion on the matter council approved the subdivision of a residential lot at 11811 Dunford Road in Steveston, in which Coun. Derek Dang, a developer, had to briefly remove himself from the chambers granted he owns the property.



Upon returning Dang joined Mayor Malcolm Brodie and fellow councillors Bill McNulty, Linda McPhail, Chak Au, Ken Johnston and Alexa Loo in voting for amendments that went against the advice of city planners.

Initially, at a planning committee meeting last week, councillors Harold Steves and Carol Day had tentatively voted in favour of relaxing the staff-proposed restrictions on side setbacks for medium sized lots, as suggested by builders and developers. However, at the council level they decided otherwise and voted for the greater setbacks, as recommended by staff. They also voted against allowing higher ceiling heights (Five metres as opposed to 3.7 metres) before the city counts the open space twice against the allowable size of a home.

Realtor Brianna Chu of Royal Pacific Realty explained in a statement to council that homes with higher ceilings sell better.

Furthermore, "Richmond is considered a higher end, prestige (sic) area for new immigrants. They like to invest here because of what we have — the restaurants, the convenience to the airport, the shopping malls."

Builder Samuel Yau, as well as builder and realtor Raman Kooner expressed similar concerns that restricting home sizes will result in lower home prices.

In reply to Day comparing various aspects of Richmond's bylaw to other cities, Kooner noted Richmond has lower allowable floor area ratios (FAR represents the size of a home's livable space compared to the size of a lot) than other municipalities in part because there are no basements.

Longtime resident John Roberts stated the issue at heart was how new homes are destroying green space and overshadowing older homes, not what is or is not allowable floor space.

Realtor Lyn Terborg, of the Westwind Ratepayers' Association, told council that she thought the changes would provide "no relief" to the "massing" of homes. She stated that the changes would only result in more three-storey homes, which would still be allowed to reach 10.5 metres in height.

Meanwhile fellow longtime resident Calvin Lee opined that he should be able to build his "dream house" and that if homes were restricted too much he would consider moving.

As if to cross-examine him, Day asked Lee where he would move granted other municipalities have tighter restrictions on various zoning aspects.

Au said he supported the higher ceilings because the option recommended by staff meant lower ceilings but with a 15 square-metre bonus ceiling, which would not count against a home's FAR. Au said that bonus would lead to massing, although a staff report noted its effects would be mitigated. However, there was another option on the table from staff — low ceilings (3.7 metres) and no bonus — that Au did not mention.

Meanwhile Day preferred staff's option with the bonus ceiling. She called on council to favour what city planners had recommended.

"It does not fix a broken leg, it puts a Band-Aid on it. And rather than make a half-assed effort to deal with (building) massing I would suggest we go with staff recommendations," said Day, further noting a planned one-year review of the changes would only add to the problem.

Gavin Woo, the city's senior manager of building approvals, estimated 80 per cent of the roughly 400 homes that are being torn down and rebuilt each year would likely use the higher ceilings.

As such Steves said he was convinced the city ought to lower them to come in line with other cities.

"The more I hear about the bylaw the more I'm concerned," said Steves, noting large homes show a "lack of respect" to existing residents.

"People aren't welcomed in their own neighbourhood and that's really what's happening."

After one builder, Ivan Krpan, noted existing bylaw infractions were the result of a minority of builders Steves told staff to start revoking business licenses.

Loo said she thought the bylaw amendments agreed to by the majority of council did bring massing down and she agreed with Steves on the need for better enforcement.

McPhail said it was evident that "boundaries have been pushed" by builders.

Last week McNulty, who tabled the motion against the staff recommendation at the committee level, said any decision was not going to please everyone and compromises must be made.

Dang and Johnston did not speak on the issue.

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**VOICES** Column

# Still not seeing the public's interest

**EVE EDMONDS***Editor*

EDITOR@RICHMOND-NEWS.COM

I keep looking for what I would consider a rational explanation as to why Richmond councillors are loath to curtail the size of homes in this city.

I'm not finding it.

I appreciate Coun. Chak Au's letter in Wednesday's paper, attempting to explain why he voted along side the majority of councillors (apart from Couns. Harold Steves and Carol Day) against the size limits recommended by city staff.

I still don't get it.

He says he has listened to many people in the community. I'm sure he has. And I accept that builders and mega home buyers may be less inclined to write letters to the editor, but his stance certainly doesn't reflect a balance among our readers.

He says the current proposal, which has passed through council and is now on to a public hearing, is an improvement over what is. Maybe, but given that what "is" is what Au describes as the exploitation of a loophole, that's not saying much.

He also says it would be unfair to owners of homes who are "almost built up" as they will be prevented from matching up with the

bigger houses next door.

Well, let's talk about not "matching up." What about the homes that have been radically dwarfed as a result of a mega home going up along side them?

I agree with Au's point that when it comes to housing, one size doesn't fit all and we need to attend to Richmond's diversity.

But it seems to me that diversity is exactly what we are losing with these mega homes.

When I first moved to Richmond, I rented part of a duplex that had been turned into a fourplex. It wasn't the prettiest thing, but it had a huge, shared backyard, and the cul de sac in front was action central for the kids. That duplex provided affordable housing for anywhere between 12-16 people. It's still standing, but I imagine not for long. The duplex next door has been knocked down and replaced with two mega homes, which house a total of six people between them.

And speaking of affordable housing, just last week, Coun. Bill McNulty also wrote a letter to the paper about the need to provide more of it. It was a commendable letter, yet he, too, voted in favour of this latest bylaw to allow Richmond to become home to the tallest homes in all of Metro Vancouver.

I realize these issues are complex and there are many stake-holders, but the word that comes to mind is excess.

I accept that developers want to earn a good living. I accept that people with the means want live in big homes, but we look to our civic leaders to balance that with the interests of all. Call me blind, but I'm not seeing it.



## Letter: Richmond, concrete City by Nature

Richmond News

August 6, 2015 04:51 PM

Dear Editor and Richmond City Council,

I attended the recent council meeting regarding the home size bylaw.

Thank you to Couns. Carol Day and Harold Steves for their progressive views in voting no to the proposed amendments.

I am tremendously disappointed at the disregard for the citizens' opinions about the megahomes, obviously favouring a niche of developers in passing the minimal amendments to the building bylaw, which does not address the severity of the issues presented at the community meetings.

You seemed to be surprised at the level of building permits that you issue a year — 400!

Most of which, I presume, to be for new homes.

At this current rate, we should start changing the label from Garden City to Concrete City, as it was obvious at the meeting that mega homes is what the market wants. Who is saying so?

Hmmmm, it seems to be a niche of developers and realtors that cater to a luxurious market.

It is disappointing that the city has proven to be inefficient in not monitoring the abuses regarding uncounted space, again favouring the developers.

As well, I am disappointed that you went against your own city planners in not following their recommendations.

It was not clear at the meeting what was your rationale for doing so.

What transpires is the siding with the developers. Hmmmm, I wonder why.

The city is grossly responsible for fermenting neighbourhood divide.

We should welcome new homes that will improve our communities, not fear them.

I hear many negative comments about the owners and builders of the new mega homes.

The anger should be directed at the city for not creating guidelines that attempt to preserve communities while allowing for change.

Someone's dream home should not be the neighbour's nightmare.

How can people be welcomed to neighbourhoods when their megahomes steal other people's privacy and sunshine?

I pick up garbage from the street and dispose it.

I compost and conserve water and take good care of my garden.

I came to love this city with its beautiful gardens and friendly neighbourhoods.

Yet, your management is responsible for the erosion of this very community that I am part of building and preserving.

**Elaine Beltran-Sellitti**

**Richmond**

## Letter: Enough is enough with the mega homes

Richmond News

August 28, 2015 10:51 AM



A brand new home awaits its new residents...

Dear Editor,

Re: "Flexibility is key to adding property value," Aug. 14.

I did not know anything about the Land Use Contracts (LUCs) until I read the letter. This is the first that I have heard about it in the 30 years I have lived in Richmond. Why is it an urgent concern?

Just come to my neighbourhood and see the mega house on Colonial Drive near Citadel Crescent. I never could have guessed that anyone would build such a large home on such a small lot.

Homes not far from my area with larger lots have been dropping like flies.

Letter-writer M. Ting, says she has been following the debate over cancelling the LUCs. This would possibly result in her losing thousands of dollars if she sold her home. She says she has concerns over the aesthetics of her neighbourhood.

It sounds to me like she is thinking of selling in a few years and wants to get the most profit out of her property. I don't think she is too worried about whether a developer may demolish the house and build a mega house that will not fit in with her neighbours.

We need to stop the land use contracts now! We need to send a message to council that neighbourhoods of modest homes don't want mega homes. We like our more affordable older homes, not mega buildings in the style of apartment blocks.

I've called Richmond my home for many years. I have seen a lot of changes over the years, but enough is enough.

**David Moralek**

**Richmond**



## Letter: City of Richmond is abandoning the public's concerns

Richmond News

September 4, 2015 11:24 AM



A brand new home awaits its new residents...

Dear Editor,

Why is the city so uncaring about our concerns?

The city organized two public meetings on July 8 and 9 and asked residents and developers to provide input on the issue of massive homes being built in the city. Many residents gave input about how these massive homes, which are often built within two to four feet of the property line, block the sun from a neighboring property, and tower above the neighbour's backyard.

After consultation with the public, the city's planning staff suggested one important way to reduce and scale down the size of massive homes was to reduce the double height calculation for a single storey from 16.4 feet to 12.1 feet. What this meant was you could still build high, but after 12.1 feet you would have to double count the built area. This reduced dimension would offer relief from massing and is in line with the direction that neighboring cities (Vancouver, Surrey, Burnaby) have adopted.

Contrary to input from Richmond residents and advice from city's own planning and design staff, all councillors other than Carol Day and Harold Steves voted to pass the bylaw amendment that retains the 16.4 feet height before double counting floor area.

I want to ask the council what has changed after this four to six-month period of consultation with the public and with the city's planning staff? What have you done to offer relief from massive homes?

The only thing that stands out in the bylaw amendment is that the overall height of the two-storey structure has been returned to 29.5 feet. However, most massive homes are not two-storeys high. They are at least 2.5 storeys tall and how will the height of this structure be tamed by the new amendment?

These massive homes pay much more attention to fitting a three-car garage on the lot than having a garden or trees. In the recent transit vote about 70 per cent of Richmond voted no. There may have been multiple reasons for not supporting the transit vote, but I am sure that having three or four cars per household would definitely pre-empt the need/desire for transit.

These mega homes may be "dream homes" for the builders/developers because they yield high turnover profits, but the developer only has a short-term connection with this structure. They buy the lot, demolish the old house and build a new one that is sold for much more money. The builders work hard during this process, but they seem uncaring about how this new structure impacts the neighbours. That is because it's not the builder/developer that lives around this new house but residents whose properties are adjacent to the new structure. They are the ones to suffer the consequences of unthinking plans that allow massive homes that are both too tall, too wide and seem to be bursting out of their lot to impose on the neighbors. These mega homes may be fine when offset by surrounding acreage, but they are a nightmare especially for small to medium residential lots.

It is the city that needs to lay down guidelines and bylaws that uphold the property rights of existing and new residents equally. It is the city that seems to have turned its back on the demands of the residents who suffer from being walled in by the massive new homes around them. I understand that some of us enjoy tall ceilings and big homes, but these should be built on large lots that allow surrounding neighbors room to breathe.

In the public meetings the developers tried to say that opposition to these mega homes comes from those who are not immigrant friendly and do not like the changing demographics of the city. I disagree with this comment. I think the massification of single family homes is significantly responsible for creating and exacerbating tensions between existing and new residents, regardless of their ethnicity.

The city should be building bridges between neighbors, not tall, unbreachable walls.

Unless the city takes the role of a good steward and invests more political will in listening to all its people, we are in danger of losing that essential ingredient of a robust community: Goodwill and care for each other.

Please come to the city hall public hearing (Sept. 8) on the massing and height bylaw to let your voice be heard.

Richmond

## Column: House bylaw's phoney height is a real waste

JIM WRIGHT / RICHMOND NEWS  
AUGUST 12, 2015 12:33 PM

There's a quick way to assess council action on development.

Just ask, "Does it help Richmond to be the Garden City?"

Yes = Pass. No = Fail.

The "half-assed house bylaw" fails. That nickname (from Coun. Carol Day) refers to proposed rule changes to alter how new houses affect their neighbours.

The future of our neighbourhoods depends on the house bylaw. If fixed, it can rescue hope. If not fixed, it can stifle the Garden City dream.

On council, only Carol Day and Harold Steves have looked ahead and cared, and we need them to keep it up. The rest are good people, too, and we need them to wake up or step down.

The worst flaw is easy to fix. Simply define house "height" in the obvious way. In bylaw terms, it's the vertical distance between finished site grade and the highest point.

The flaw came to light when a 2008 bylaw that was supposed to curb house height began to spawn taller houses, instead.

Citizens found that the bylaw had changed "height" to mean the distance to halfway up the roof. Mind-boggling!

With phoney height like that, houses are built 1.5 metres taller than their supposed height. Neighbours are robbed of their sunlight.

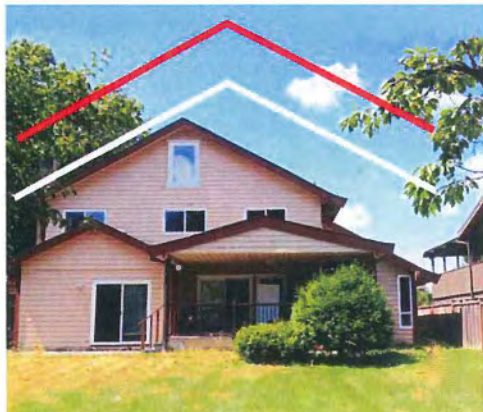
It seemed the 2015 house bylaw would finally measure Richmond house height to the top of the roof, as in the rest of the world. But no, the details reveal that phoney height still applies to "2.5-storey houses." That turns a low-waste concept into high waste.

The photo at right shows an older home of 2.5 storeys. The big window below the peak, along with a skylight, lets the small half-storey fill with natural light. It was designed as an art studio.

With half-storeys like that, builders create living space — within the height of a two-storey house — where there might have been attic voids.

The building may also have a smaller footprint, since the floor area is split among three floors. That leaves more of the lot area for nature and gardens.

The building may also have a smaller footprint, since the floor area is split among three floors. That leaves more of the lot area for nature and gardens.



A true, 2.5-storey house tends to be affordable and eco-friendly, taking less building material, upkeep and heating. By nature it suits medium-height ceilings, although the house I've shown has a high vaulted ceiling in the front.

I've added a white chevron to the image. It shows a roofline at the stated house height limit, nine metres. That's enough for 2.5-storey houses, but the bylaw adds an uncounted 1.5 metres.

The red chevron shows the effect. Besides being far higher than the stated limit, it puts the structure outside the concept of 2.5-storey houses.

But phoney 2.5-storey houses would excel as trophy houses, imposingly tall and self-indulgent. Sooner or later, they'd be looming above our neighbourhoods, and killing them.

We've pleaded with regressive council members to stop the phoniness. We've implored them to respect our homes, the Garden City and our quality of life.

It's high time to be heeded.

The public hearing on the house bylaw is on Sept. 8.



## Column: Make your voice heard at public hearing, earn that miracle

Jim Wright / Richmond News  
September 2, 2015 11:22 AM

Could the public be heeded at the next public hearing?

Yes, miracles can happen if we earn them.

On Tuesday, Sept. 8 at 7 p.m., council will hear the public on a new-house massing bylaw. The venue is the council chambers at Richmond City Hall.

At this point, the bylaw (which was supported by all councillors except Carol Day and Harold Steves) best serves the interests of developers and will lead to more mega homes.

The public hearing is a speed bump before the final rubber stamp. If you value neighbourhoods more than mega trophy houses, you will want the bylaw changed first.

For quick impact, go to the online form for public hearings and write "Please use the 3.7 metre ceiling height and the nine metre building height for all new houses."

Those ample heights (over 12 feet and almost 30 feet) were set, but then fudged. Applied firmly, they'd help put a collar on rampant problems.

If you value trophy houses most, you could write "Please pass the bylaw as is." I'd still respect you for taking part.

The rest of this column is a brief how-to manual for the public hearing. To check details, I discussed them with Richmond's manager of legislative services. Thank you, Michelle Jansson!

For a start, get to know the Richmond.ca website. Click your way from the "City Hall" tab to "City Council" to "Watch Meetings Online" or "Public Hearings."

On the "Send a Submission Online" form, use 9280 as the bylaw number. Or email MayorandCouncillors@Richmond.ca with "9280 Public Hearing" as the subject.

Submissions are accepted up to the meeting time, 7 p.m. next Tuesday, but send your message much sooner if you can.

You can speak at the public hearing for up to 10 minutes. That applies even if you've sent input, but do more than repeat it.

After everyone has spoken, you can speak for three more minutes — with new information.

Speaking well will influence people, even if you're brief. It's fine to simply state what's best in half a minute.

When you practise, visualize yourself at the speakers' desk. View some of the online video of the July 27 council meeting. You'll see citizens speak about the new-house massing bylaw in the "Committee of the Whole" part.

Then bring your speaking notes. That will help you recall your points, conserve time and have fun.

Come early. If need be, wait for seats to open up. The new-house bylaw is last on the agenda, and people who've come for earlier items will leave when they're finished.

There will be a handout to pick up as you enter. There may also be a speakers' list to sign.

Decorum is normal. It's tacky to shout out, clap or chat during a hearing.

You'll find more help on my blog. Just google "natural legacies versus waste" to get there.

After earning a miracle, sit back and see what happens.

*Jim Wright is president of the Garden City Conservation Society.*

**Letter: See you at Richmond City Hall to talk mega homes**

Richmond News

September 4, 2015 11:26 AM

Dear Editor,

Turn off the TV and get off the couch. The City of Richmond needs to hear from you.

In new houses, excessive 16.4 foot overheight spaces counted as one storey, will remain. This room height can accommodate a semi truck and trailer and provides more clearance than the George Massey Tunnel.

The proposed bylaw makes no change to this awkward dimension.

New building footprints in Richmond's established neighborhoods are destroying mature trees, pushing 20-foot walls to the property lines, and stealing privacy and sunlight from neighbours.

Future considerations to protect backyards are only that, unless you speak up.

City councillors need to hear from you.

They need to feel what you know, that protecting backyards, trees, mature landscaping, privacy, and access to sunlight are as important to them as they are to you.

See you at the public hearing at 7 p.m, Tuesday, Sept. 8 at city hall.

**John ter Borg**

**Richmond**