

**NOTES FOR SUBMISSION TO CITY OF RICHMOND PUBLIC HEARING, SEPT. 8, 2015**

**RE: BYLAW 9280**

My name is John Montgomery, and I live at 5880 Sandpiper Court

I have been following this process since April, when you initially identified the serious problem of the impact on neighbourhoods of "monster houses" - very tall houses with very large footprints, built right to the edges of the lot.

We have heard from a number of people, and their views fall into two well defined camps.

I'm a member of the group that wants the issue addressed. We are largely existing homeowners living in the established neighbourhoods. We're worried about the destructive impact of these homes on the character of our neighbourhoods, and we're worried about our loss of sunlight, and the invasion of our privacy, to the point that we can't enjoy our back yards.

The other group, builders, along with several realtors and home owners, like what they are doing, and want the freedom to continue doing it.

What I have found interesting throughout this process is that there is no disputing of the facts. Homeowners say these large structures are destroying the neighbourhoods, that they block sunlight, and see their privacy invaded to the point they can't enjoy their backyards. The builders and buyers of these homes don't deny this. Builders say they are meeting a market demand, and the buyers like their big, bright houses, but they don't deny any of the impacts they are having on neighbours and neighbourhoods. It seems they just don't care, and in spite of these negative impacts, they build these houses anyway. Why? - because the bylaws allow them to. They don't do it in Vancouver, Burnaby or Surrey, but in Richmond the bylaws say it's OK to build massive houses that destroy the neighbourhood, that block the neighbour's sunlight, and invade the neighbour's privacy.

So, nobody is denying the problem exists - one group wants to deal with it, and one group doesn't.

Council in April recognized the problem, wanted to fix it, and directed staff to develop bylaws that would correct the issues.

Staff recently presented two options - one which was recommended by staff and the Advisory Design Panel, and a second that incorporated the wishes of the builders.

Council has moved quite quickly, endorsing the "builders' version", and including a couple of builder friendly amendments. That is the bylaw being considered here today.. How effective will these changes be? Will they address the problem? Ivan Krpan, a builder who has addressed you on several occasions, in his letter to the Richmond News, refers to "upcoming insignificant changes in the local bylaws". Bob Ransford, an urban land use consultant wrote an op-ed piece in the Vancouver Sun on August 29, commenting on Richmond Council's efforts to control monster houses. He states "The City of Richmond is proposing some minor changes to design regulations in single family neighbourhoods aimed at limiting the impact of building height and massing".

So here we are - proposing minor, insignificant changes to address an acknowledged serious problem.

Is this really what you want - bylaws that encourage neighbourhood destroying architecture, structures that invade privacy, block sunlight, and render neighbour's yards unenjoyable.

Is this the kind of "bad neighbour policy" the City should be encouraging?

I don't understand you, and I'm very frustrated with you.

You are proposing a bylaw that completely ignores the wishes of a great many established Richmond residents, a bylaw that does virtually nothing to address the problem you identified last April, and a bylaw that is quite inconsistent with the official Community Plan.

What is so frustrating is you are not giving any rationale or explanation for this position - you are just doing it. You are saying - just carry on, carry on destroying our neighbourhoods, carry on invading neighbour's privacy, carry on blocking their light, and never mind they can't enjoy their back yards any more.

None of you were taking such an uncaring position last Fall, when you were looking for our votes. You all spoke in support of the City's declared objective of protecting the character of our existing neighbourhoods. I'm sorry, but you cannot square your position today with the position you took last Fall, nor can it be squared with the City's Official Community Plan. As a reminder, OCP Section 3.2, Neighbourhood Character and Sense of Place, Objective 1, Neighbourliness and Character Retention Policy, bullet point two - "work to ensure that new single family housing complements established single-family neighbourhoods using zoning or other appropriate regulations".

I understand this is the final phase - the Public Hearing. If you are hearing, please get us back on the track of solving the problem at hand. Minor, insignificant changes will not solve your problem.

The solution is brutally simple - it's very simple arithmetic. Massing is determined by multiplying the footprint area by the building height. Big footprint times tall building equals massive house. Height you control height by lowering the maximum allowable height. Footprint you control by lowering the maximum ceiling height allowed before double counting the area.

Please, reconsider your positions, and amend the bylaws to provide for a maximum structure height of 9 meters for all residential buildings, and a maximum ceiling height of 3.7m before double counting. That's what they do in Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey, and their real estate markets are holding up very well!