

Schedule 74 to the Minutes of  
the Public Hearing meeting of  
Richmond City Council held on  
Tuesday, September 8, 2015.

**MayorandCouncillors**

**From:** Moira Langley <Moira.Langley@kpu.ca>  
**Sent:** Monday, 7 September 2015 19:03  
**To:** MayorandCouncillors  
**Subject:** Letter to Council regarding large houses in Richmond  
**Attachments:** Letter to Richmond City Council.doc

**Categories:** 12-8060-20-9280

To Public Hearing	
Date:	SEPT. 8 2015
Item #	6
Re:	BYLAWS 9280 +
	9281

Please see attached letter regarding the building of large houses in Richmond. I hope this letter is pertinent to Tuesday's public hearing on the matter. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Moira Langley  
3820 Richmond St  
Richmond, BC



September 7, 2015

To Public Hearing
Date: <u>SEPT. 8 2015</u>
Item # <u>6</u>
Re: <u>BYLAWS 9280+</u>
<u>9281</u>

Richmond City Council:

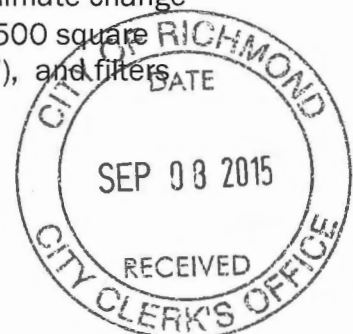
I'm writing to voice my strong opposition to the building of so-called "monster houses" in Richmond. I understand there is a public hearing on this issue on Tuesday, September 8, and I want to have my opinion counted.

I'm sure you are familiar with the common arguments against monster houses: that new building footprints in Richmond's established neighbourhoods are destroying mature trees, pushing 20-foot walls to the property lines, towering above the neighbour's back yard and stealing their privacy and sunlight; that protecting back yards, trees, mature landscaping, privacy, and access to sunlight are important; that all this rebuilding is driving up the average cost of the housing stock to the point where ordinary working people cannot afford to buy; that larger houses do not guarantee increased density, as often they do not have more people living in them than the older, smaller houses did; that the character of neighbourhoods is being rapidly and dramatically altered, to the dissatisfaction of many who live there; that all that building material being disposed of is a terrible waste and an environmental black mark, even if some of it is recycled; that a relatively small number of developers and realtors are making vast amounts of cash from all this to the detriment of the many. I think these are all excellent arguments. I agree with them all, and I am sure you are considering them.

But recently, I've been thinking about another issue too, one that I haven't heard so much about. Because the newer houses are much bigger and take up more of the lot than the older houses they replace, we are losing an enormous amount of green space in Richmond. I estimate approximately a 60% loss of lawn area every time a 1950's split is knocked down and replaced with a monster house. I have been thinking about the environmental and social effects of losing all that green space – the gardens – that surrounded the older houses.

An interview on CBC Radio on August 10, 2015 discussed the environmental benefits of lawns. According to Alan White, the "Ontario representative for the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association," healthy lawns benefit our social, urban, and global environment in a number of ways:

- Most notably (according to White), healthy lawns help to neutralize carbon emissions from cars (one average lawn can "offset the carbon of about 600 kilometres of driving")
- Lawns can "moderate [temperature] as much as 10 to 20 degrees," a significant factor as cities become more densified and contain more and more heat-absorbing concrete, and as we face hotter summers and worry about global climate change
- Turf grass (obviously) turns carbon dioxide into oxygen ("an average 2500 square foot lawn [ . . . ] produces enough oxygen for about 4 people every day"), and filters our air



- Lawns can “mitigate stormwater runoff [and] redirect it back into the landscape” instead of it flooding. They can also act as a “filter of that water going back to our aquifers and back to our streams and rivers” and ultimately, our oceans.
- I include the link to the CBC interview with Alan White here:  
<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/popup/audio/player.html?autoPlay=true&clipIds=2673268866> and I summarize his key points at the end of my letter.

Please consider Mr. White's points carefully, because I think we make a mistake if we allow the footprint of new houses to take up such a large percentage of the lot, and thus diminish urban green space.

I happen to think that lawns, gardens, and green space have social benefits too, most notably that children and young people need an outside to play in so they have an alternative to sitting inside playing computer games. I also believe that contact with nature/green space restores the human body and mind, and in this time of high-stress lifestyles, automation, and alienation from the natural world, having grass, green space, gardens outside our front doors and surrounding our houses is important for our mental, physical, and spiritual health.

Please don't allow builders to demolish older houses and replace them with other materials such as heat-absorbing concrete, paving stones, driveways, and houses with larger footprints and smaller gardens. Please stop allowing developers to tear down older houses for the sole reason that they can make private profit by doing so. And if older houses are genuinely ready to be torn down, please don't allow such huge new houses to replace them, homes built right out to the lot line, usually with virtually no garden, houses which dwarf their neighbours, eliminate privacy, and make high fences the necessary norm. Stop allowing newbuilds to have larger footprints than the houses they replace. Surely The City of Richmond has the power to do this if it so chooses.

Please put first what's good for the whole community and for the environment, and don't let money, private profit, developers' agendas, and the short-sighted desire for “new new new” houses be the major considerations. I've lived in Richmond for 14 years, and been a homeowner here for 11. When I moved here in 2001, it was a wonderful, spacious, green community. Let's work to preserve what is left of that.

Sincerely,

Moir Langley  
 3820 Richmond St  
 Richmond, BC

Appendix: Below is a transcript of some of the key points of Alan White's August 10, 2015 CBC interview which I have referenced in my letter above.

White: Grass . . . when it's growing is actually sequestering carbon . . . cooling our

environment in a really significant way and filtering our air. So those are all contributing factors when we hear of heat indexes going up, and air quality starts to decrease with those heat increases. Turf grass can play a significant role in that urban green infrastructure to help moderate that.

Interviewer: We all know the benefits of trees when it comes to sequestering carbon and increasing oxygen production. How big would a lawn have to be to match those properties of a tree?

White: . . . . . [A lawn] actually has about ten times the benefit of a tree, primarily because of its density and its rate of growth. So an average 2500 square foot lawn – that produces enough oxygen for about 4 people every day, and it offsets the carbon of about 600 kilometres of driving. But more importantly, it does the work equivalency of about 80 trees. A lot of it has to do with its immediate benefit. It doesn't take very long to establish turf grass . . . a tree typically takes about 30 years to get to that same contributing factor.

Interviewer: And what about when it comes to cooling cities, and the heat that cities capture?

White: We're seeing turf grass can moderate it as much as 10 to 20 degrees. So when we hear about global warming – well they're talking numbers of a single digit to two degrees. So when we can moderate the climate in a city that dramatically, that has a significant impact on the surrounding areas. Bob Sandford at the United Nations University here at McMaster University in Ontario, he's commented that probably one of the largest global threats right now is this "urban heat island" effect, where the extremes between our inner urban cities as they grow is becoming very disproportionate from the surrounding suburbs. And those extremes are helping to contribute to what we are seeing as far as the global trend to larger drought periods, floods, winters, areas that are typically dry being wet and areas that are typically wet being dry. So if we can do things in our cities that are smarter about our green infrastructure, and look at our hardscapes and those areas that are absorbing heat, and find ways to moderate them, or use soccer fields, city boulevards, golf courses – and if people can understand their own back yard is something that would actually cool the surrounding environment in a significant way, I think it would go a long way to helping our cities . . .

. . . so it's super important in our large urban cities – as our cities become larger and larger and we see more and more concrete and asphalt – it's important to find areas that can stabilize that carbon, so as the heat increases, we're not releasing carbon back into our atmosphere.

. . . while we've been on a race to find a better smokestack, a better filter, a better mechanical way of managing our cities, our cars, our production by-products of city life, we've forgotten that plants will do it naturally for us. And our infrastructure was never built for that. The plant . . . nobody's ever included a soccer field as part of the green equation in the city; nobody's ever thought of a boulevard as a way to mitigate stormwater runoff. . . . When I look at the landscape, I see an incredible opportunity in looking at stormwater events, all this water that's coming back to our oceans, that's coming as a by-product of our cities, and if we could slow that down, recapture

it, redirect it back into the landscape and literally use the green component of our landscape as a filter – the secondary or primary filter of that water going back to our aquifers and back to our streams and rivers, then ultimately lead to our oceans, that would be a massive benefit to our cities. Oxygen cooling and water management – stormwater management – ultimately can be managed by the landscape.

. . . [most people think of a yard for pleasure.] Most people don't see their landscape as a filter in their back yard, the lungs of their environment, so it's very easy with no value, or intrinsic value other than beauty [to think it's ok to get rid of lawns]

. . . Ultimately, we hurt the community more if everyone starts ripping out their landscape.