

21 July 2015

Chair Linda McPhail and Members of Planning Committee

My name is Mark Sakai, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association. Our organization represents some 830 member companies; in 2014 home construction generated some 42,600 jobs in the Lower Mainland alone.

First off, let me commend this committee, your colleagues on Council and especially your staff in the manner in which you have handled this very challenging issue. You heard the concerns of Richmond residents, directed staff to come up with solutions and, perhaps most importantly to our industry, embarked upon a constructive path of consultation prior to the implementation of new policy and regulations.

I would say that we are "almost there", in terms of finding a good compromise situation. The professional builders of Richmond have always been willing to discuss any concerns about our work, even if those concerns are the result of some poor quality builders who, unfortunately taint the excellent work of the vast majority of the residential construction industry.

In my opinion, virtually all of the elements of the proposals put forward by staff are reasonable. There are, however, a few lingering issues which I would like to discuss.

Regarding the interior height issue, I would recommend that the Committee adopt Bylaw 9280. The massing issue is addressed by a combination of the overall height reduction, the definition/calculation of the ceiling height, and the previously passed bylaw related to the 2 ½ storey buildings. As mentioned by Mr. Erceg, the definition and clarification will, regardless of the option chosen, create a more enforceable bylaw.

Second, I think we can all agree that the vast majority of the concerns raised by residents involve houses on large lots. Therefore, amend the building envelope for houses on lots over 18m, and leave the rest alone. There is a mandated one-year monitoring period, so if there is a need to expand the inclusion of the bylaw or reconsider the envelope, it can be done then. For the time being, limit the impact of the bylaw to the areas where the complaints have originated, as covered in Bylaw 9282.

Third, I also believe that we can agree that this is not a city-wide issue. Clearly, there are several neighbourhoods where “the ship has already sailed”. There are some neighbourhoods in the city where the “historic fabric” has already changed, from bungalows and splits to larger redeveloped homes. Does it make sense to apply a different set of rules to a lot which may be located between and across the street from new houses built under current rules? Would it not be an ironic outcome that, in these cases, the new rules will “change the existing fabric of the neighbourhood”?

Finally, I believe that the City should take a closer look at its existing Good Neighbour Guidelines, as well as the new Neighbourhood Feedback Policy recently implemented in Port Moody, and see if our current guidelines can be modified to improve dialogue amongst builders and residents. I strongly believe that honest and constructive communication can go a long way towards dealing with many issues which arise in our city, and that the implementation of regulatory instruments without seeking to improve dialogue is a recipe for failure. If we truly wish to deal with conflict between diametrically-opposed elements in the city on a long-term basis, then improved communication must be part of the solution.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Mark Sakai  
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