



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Planning Committee
From: Joshua Reis
Director, Development

Date: October 21, 2025
File: 08-4430-03-01

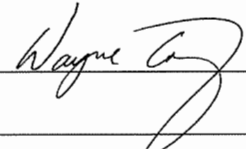
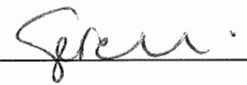
Re: Zoning Amendments Relating to Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing

Staff Recommendation

That Richmond Zoning Bylaw 8500, Amendment Bylaw 10716, to clarify setback provisions associated with Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing and amend the definition of principal dwelling unit, be given first, second and third reading.

Joshua Reis, MCIP, RPP, AICP
Director, Development
(604-247-4625)

JR:an
Att. 1

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Building Approvals	☒	
Policy Planning	☒	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO 

Staff Report

Origin

On June 24, 2024, Council amended zoning for nearly 27,000 single-family and duplex lots throughout the city to permit Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH) in compliance with the Province's Bill 44 legislation.

As part of staff's regular monitoring of the implementation of SSMUH development in the Richmond context, and through feedback from homeowners, builders and designers, the following changes to the provisions of the Zoning Bylaw are proposed:

- Establishing the same minimum interior and exterior side yard setback requirements for single-family (or single-family with a secondary suite) and SSMUH development; and
- That a secondary suite is not considered a principal dwelling unit.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #2 Strategic and Sustainable Community Growth:

Strategic and sustainable growth that supports long-term community needs and a well-planned and prosperous city.

2.2 Develop and implement innovative and proactive solutions that encourage a range of housing options and prioritize affordability.

Background

In June 2024, the City amended Zoning Bylaw 8500 to permit SSMUH development. Those changes generally included:

- A new zoning district, "Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (RSM)", and amendments to duplex zones to permit up to three, four and six units on eligible lots, subject to lot size and location criteria; and
- Removing residential parking minimums for development on lots where up to six units are permitted (e.g., areas within 400 m of a frequent transit service bus stop that provides bus service every 15 minutes during the day).

Table 1 below identifies the total number of Building Permits (BP) that have been received for new development on RSM zoned lots between July 2024 and September 2025.

Table 1 – Building Permits Received on RSM Lots (July 2024-September 2025)

Dwelling Type	BPs Received
Single Family Dwelling (with/without secondary suite)	92 (40%)
New Secondary Suite in an Existing Building	51 (22%)
2–4 Unit Development	86 (37%)
4+ Unit Development	2 (1%)
Total	231 (100%)
Total Dwelling Units (including Secondary Suites)	380 units

Approximately 37 per cent of building permits received on RSM zoned lots are comprised of two to four dwelling units, while only a small proportion of applications propose the maximum permitted density of up to four and six dwelling units. A total of 40 per cent of new development is comprised of single-family dwellings (with or without a secondary suite), while 22 per cent of permits seek to add a secondary suite to an existing building. This indicates that the development objectives of homeowners, builders and designers on RSM zoned lots are varied and that design flexibility is important.

Since June 24, 2024, the City has received seven Development Permit (DP) and Development Variance Permit (DVP) applications for SSMUH development. Three of the applications have been endorsed by the DP Panel, and four are currently under review.

Through the review and processing of DP, DVP and BP applications, staff have received feedback from homeowners, builders and designers about the common design and viability challenges they face when contemplating SSMUH development in the City. These include:

- Delivering market acceptable interior floor plans; and
- Meeting minimum side yard setbacks on different sized and shaped lots, or those lots accessed via a rear lane.

This report identifies targeted zoning amendments that address the feedback received, while balancing housing delivery, design viability and local character considerations that:

- Simplify zoning provisions to support ease of use and application;
- Enhance site planning and building design flexibility while respecting local character; and
- Reduce time and costs to developers and builders associated with variance requests.

Public Consultation

The proposed amendments are a result of feedback and discussion from homeowners, builders and designers. Bill 44 prohibits a local government from holding a Public Hearing on zoning bylaws and amendments tied to the implementation of SSMUH and where the changes are consistent with the OCP. Accordingly, City Council may not hold a Public Hearing on the proposed amendments. Notice of Council's consideration of First Reading is to be provided in accordance with the Local Government Act.

Analysis

1. Align minimum interior side yard setback requirements for single-family (or single-family with a secondary suite) and SSMUH development.

The RSM zone has different interior side yard setback requirements based on whether a single-family building (with or without a secondary suite) or a SSMUH building is proposed. Table 2 below outlines the current interior side yard setback requirements in the RSM zone, while Table 3 shows what is proposed through this amendment. In addition, Attachment 1 includes building envelopes comparing the existing and proposed interior side yard setback requirements for different development types within the RSM zone.

Table 2 – Existing Interior Side Yard Setback Requirements in the RSM Zone

Development Type	Existing Interior Side Yard Setback Requirement	
Single-Family (with or without a secondary suite)	• 2.0 m for lots with width 20.0 m or greater • 1.8 m for lots with width 18.0 m or greater, but less than 20.0 m • 1.2 m for lots with width less than 18.0 m	
SSMUH	• On lots with a width of 14.9 m or less	• 1.2 m on both sides
	• On lots with a width of 15.0 m or more	• 1.2 m on one side and 4.0 m on other side

Table 3 – Proposed Interior Side Yard Setback Requirements in the RSM Zone

Development Type	Proposed Interior Side Yard Setback Requirement
All Development	• 2.0 m for lots with width 20.0 m or greater • 1.8 m for lots with width 18.0 m or greater, but less than 20.0 m • 1.2 m for lots with width less than 18.0 m

The current required 4.0 m interior side yard setback on one side of a lot with a width of 15.0 m or greater, accommodates internal driveways that connect the front of the lot to parking spaces in the rear, where required, or to provide opportunities for enhanced pedestrian connectivity, building separation and landscaping. It was considered that wider lots have more capacity to accommodate these design objectives.

Feedback from homeowners, builders and designers has noted that accommodating the 4.0 m setback is unnecessary and an inefficient use of outdoor space on lots, where parking and access is provided from a rear lane and where an internal driveway is not required. Three of the seven DPs received by the City have proposed side yard setback variances and have access from a rear lane. For lots where this applies, the requirement results in building mass being pushed to upper floors and internal floor plan inefficiencies.

Staff have observed that reducing the 4.0 m interior side yard setback is the most requested variance, particularly for lots marginally wider than 15.0 m.

The proposed amendment removes the 4.0 m setback provision for SSMUH development on lots wider than 15.0 m and establishes a common setback requirement applicable to all development in the RSM zone. The proposed interior side yard setback is based on the existing single-family dwelling (or single-family and secondary suite) requirements in the RSM zone, as shown in Table 2. Establishing a common setback requirement as proposed means that character and adjacency considerations are generally consistent for all lots, while it provides greater flexibility for homeowners, builders and designers to address the spatial and viability aspects presented by different sized and shaped lots.

The amendment acknowledges the original intent of the interior side yard setback requirements in the RSM zone as it relates to internal driveways, pedestrian connectivity, landscaping and building siting, while seeking to balance this with homeowner, builder and designer feedback relating to design and viability, including common variance requests.

Zoning Bylaw 8500 requires that SSMUH development on lots with a width of 15.0 m or greater, and that provide three or more units, must provide parking in the rear of the lot. Accordingly, the building must be setback at least 4.0 m from one property line to accommodate an internal driveway access from the fronting street. Regardless of the minimum setbacks in the Zoning Bylaw, the parking provisions of the zone require the homeowner, builder and designer to setback the building to accommodate the driveway.

For a two-unit SSMUH development on lots with a width of 15.0 m or greater, the required parking may be accommodated in garages in the front of the building and does not need driveway access to the rear of the property. In addition, for SSMUH development on lots greater than 15.0 m and where the lot is accessed via a lane, additional side yard setbacks are not required to facilitate a driveway. In these situations, permitting a smaller side yard setback would provide for greater design flexibility. The proposed changes to the interior side yard setback would not reduce the amount of live on-site landscaping or outdoor amenity space required.

For a two-unit SSMUH development where an internal driveway is not required or proposed, the proposed amendments provide greater design flexibility and building siting, which may result in greater setbacks to the rear of the lot, enhancing landscape and on-site outdoor amenity provision. The amendment does not preclude SSMUH development from providing a 4.0 m interior side yard setback in support of enhanced pedestrian connectivity and building separation.

The amendment is proposed for the following reasons:

- It provides a consistent design standard for all development on RSM zoned lots;
- The minimum side yard setbacks and resulting adjacency and character considerations are consistent with those currently permitted for SSMUH development on lots that are less than 15.0 m in width;
- Where an internal driveway is proposed, a setback of 4.0 m along one side of the lot is already commonly provided. This provides design flexibility where one is not proposed;

- It provides greater design flexibility, particularly important for lots with a width less than 18.0 m, where design and viability challenges are typically more acute; and
- It addresses a common variance request which has previously received support.

2. Align minimum exterior side yard setback requirements for single-family (or single-family with a secondary suite) and SSMUH development.

The RSM zone has different exterior side yard setback requirements based on whether a single-family building (with or without a secondary suite) or a SSMUH building is proposed. Table 4 below outlines the current exterior side yard setback requirements in the RSM zone, while Table 5 shows what is proposed through this amendment. In addition, Attachment 1 includes diagrams comparing the existing and proposed exterior side yard setback requirements.

Table 4 – Existing Exterior Side Yard Setback Requirements in the RSM Zone

Development Type	Existing Exterior Side Yard Setback Requirement	
Single-Family (with or without a secondary suite)	• 3.0 m	
SSMUH	• On lots with a width of 14.9 m or less	• 3.0 m
	• On lots with a width of 15.0 m or more	• 4.0 m

Table 5 – Proposed Exterior Side Yard Setback Requirements in the RSM Zone

Development Type	Proposed Exterior Side Yard Setback Requirement
All Development	• 3.0 m

The intent of the additional 1.0 m setback for lots with a width of 15.0 m or greater was to support attractive frontages for SSMUH development facing the exterior side yard and flanking street, to allow for increased landscaping complementary to adjacent 6.0 m deep front yards and to accommodate parking accessed from the exterior side yard. It was also considered that larger lots have more capacity to accommodate these design objectives.

Feedback from homeowners, builders and designers has indicated that the additional 1.0 m requirement, in addition to the existing 6.0 m front and rear yard setback requirements, is resulting in building mass on upper floors and internal floor plan inefficiencies.

The proposed amendment establishes a common exterior side yard standard for all development in the RSM zone that is based on the existing requirement for single-family (with/without a secondary suite), and SSMUH development on lots with a width less than 15.0 m.

The same design principles that apply to these lots can be achieved on lots with a width greater than 15.0 m. The proposed amendment provides greater design flexibility for homeowners, builders and designers to respond to different lot sizes and shapes. The proposed changes to the exterior side yard setback would not reduce the amount of live on-site landscaping or outdoor amenity space required.

The amendment is proposed for the following reasons:

- It provides a consistent standard for all development on RSM zoned lots; and
- It supports greater design flexibility, particularly important for lots with a width less than 18.0 m where design and viability challenges are typically more acute.

3. Clarifies in the Zoning Bylaw definitions section that a secondary suite is not a principal dwelling unit.

The City's current Zoning Bylaw definition for a principal dwelling unit does not reference a secondary suite. Given SSMUH development may include a secondary suite, this proposed amendment updates the definition of principal dwelling unit to make clear that a secondary suite is not considered a principal dwelling unit. This amendment is consistent with the BC Building Code and other sections of the City's Zoning Bylaw which only permit one secondary suite per principal dwelling unit and do not permit a secondary suite to be stratified. The proposed amendment and clarification do not impact the overall number of units permitted on an RSM zoned lot.

The proposed amendment provides further clarity for all homeowners, builders and designers.

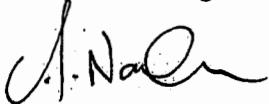
Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Amendment Bylaw 10716 responds to feedback received from homeowners, builders and designers and clarifications identified by staff through the regular monitoring of SSMUH development in the City. The proposed amendments are targeted and address interior and exterior side yard setbacks, and the definition of a principal dwelling unit. They balance housing delivery, design flexibility and local character considerations.

It is recommended that Richmond Zoning Bylaw No. 8500, Amendment Bylaw 10716, be introduced and given first, second and third reading.



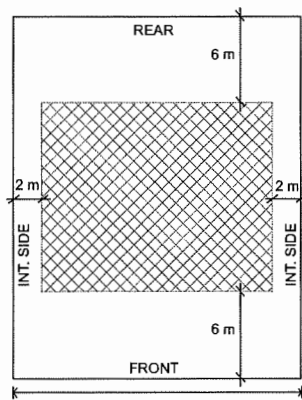
Andrew Norton, BA, MSc, MRTPI
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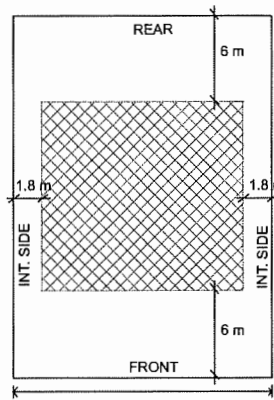
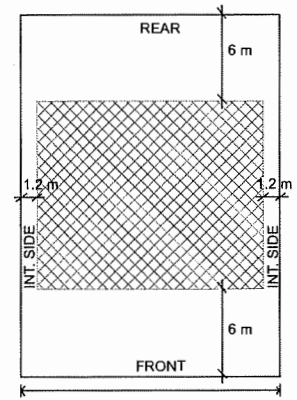
Att. 1. Comparison of Existing and Proposed Setbacks for RSM Development

EXISTING INTERIOR SIDE YARD SETBACKS

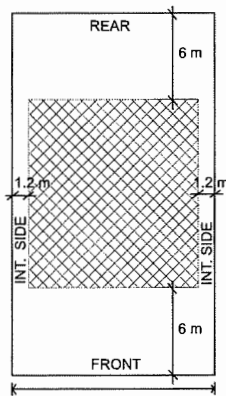
Single Family (With/ Without Secondary Suite)



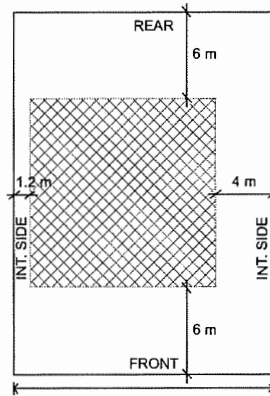
20 m or greater

18 m or greater but
less than 20 m

Less than 18 m

Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH)

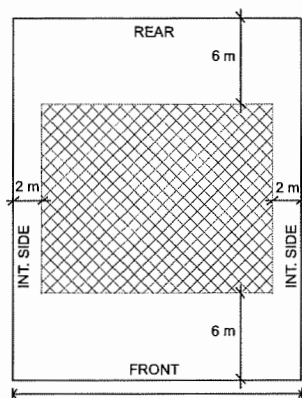
Less than 15 m



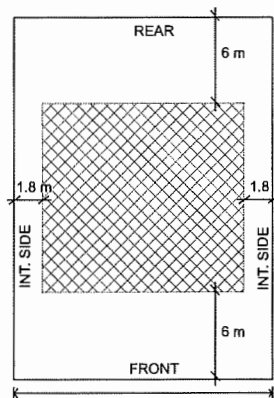
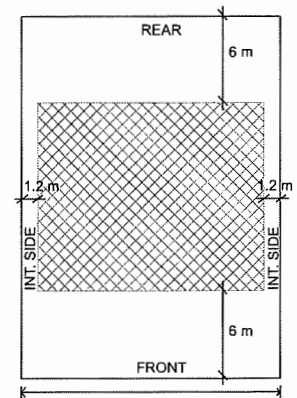
15 m or greater

PROPOSED INTERIOR SIDE YARD SETBACKS

Single Family (With/ Without Secondary Suite) & SSMUH



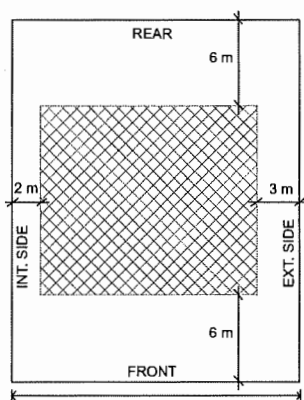
20 m or greater

18 m or greater but
less than 20 m

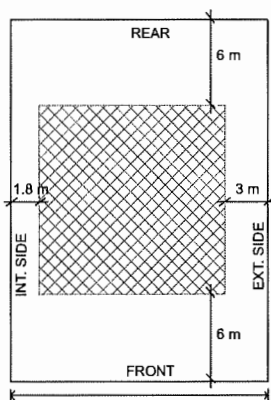
Less than 18 m

EXISTING EXTERIOR SIDE YARD SETBACKS (CORNER LOTS)

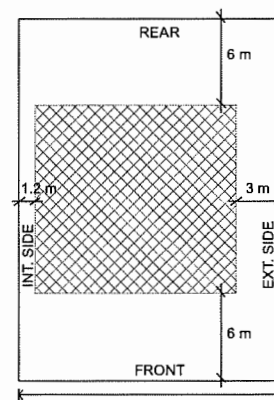
Single Family (With/ Without Secondary Suite)



20 m or greater

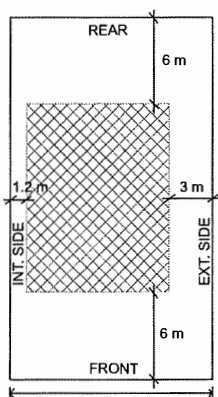


18 m or greater but
less than 20 m

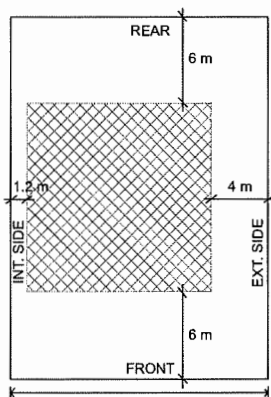


Less than 18 m

Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH)



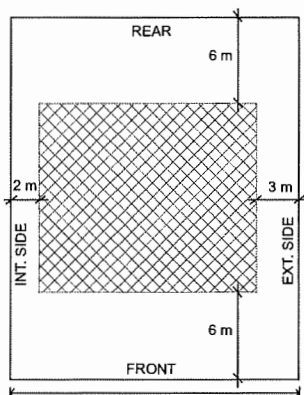
Less than 15 m



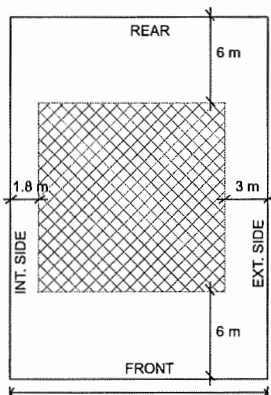
15 m or greater

PROPOSED EXTERIOR SIDE YARD SETBACKS (CORNER LOTS)

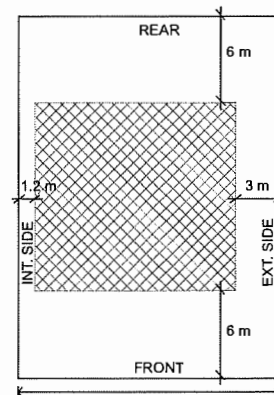
Single Family (With/ Without Secondary Suite) & SSMUH



20 m or greater



18 m or greater but
less than 20 m



Less than 18 m



**Richmond Zoning Bylaw 8500
Amendment Bylaw 10716
(Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing)**

The Council of the City of Richmond, in open meeting assembled, enacts as follows:

1. Richmond Zoning Bylaw 8500, as amended, is further amended in Section 3.4 Use and Term Definitions by replacing the definition of “Dwelling unit, principal” with the following:

“Dwelling unit, principal means either a **dwelling unit** for which a building permit was issued prior to any other **dwelling unit** on a **site** or a **dwelling unit** which occupies the entirety of a **building** or a larger **gross floor area** than another **dwelling unit** in the same **building**. A **secondary suite** is not a **principal dwelling unit**.”

2. Richmond Zoning Bylaw 8500, as amended, is further amended in Section 8.19 Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (RSM/S, RSM/M, RSM/L, RSM/XL) by

2.1. Replacing Section 8.19.7.2 with the following:

“2. The minimum **interior side yard** for **development** involving one **dwelling unit**, or two **dwelling units** where one **dwelling unit** is a **secondary suite**, or **development** involving **small-scale multi-unit housing**, is:

- i) 2.0 m for **lots** with a **lot width** of 20.0 m or greater;
- ii) 1.8 m for **lots** with a **lot width** of 18.0 m or greater, but less than 20.0 m; or
- iii) 1.2 m for **lots** with a **lot width** of less than 18.0 m.”

2.2 Replacing Section 8.19.7.3 with the following:

“3. The minimum **exterior side yard** for **development** involving one **dwelling unit**, or two **dwelling units** where one **dwelling unit** is a **secondary suite**, or **development** involving **small-scale multi-unit housing**, is 3.0 m.”

2. This Bylaw may be cited as “**Richmond Zoning Bylaw 8500, Amendment Bylaw 10716**”.

FIRST READING

SECOND READING

THIRD READING

ADOPTED

MAYOR

CORPORATE OFFICER

CITY OF RICHMOND
APPROVED by AN
APPROVED by Director or Solicitor 