

**MINUTES OF THE
RENTERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 17, 2020**

YUKA KUROKAWA CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 5:04 P.M.

Committee Members Present: Alieda Blandford, Vanessa Hammond, Amy White, Yuka Kurokawa (Chair),

Councillors: Jeremy Loveday, Sharmarke Dubow

Staff Present: Hollie McKeil – Housing Planner
Marc Cittance – Senior Planner
Malcolm MacLean – Community Planner
Margot Thomaidis – Planning Assistant
Ayla Conklin – Planning Secretary

Observers: Abi Michel – Victoria Health Co-operative

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Committee discussed:

- Request to insert agenda item 'Motion to Prevent Demovictions and Renovictions' before 'Villages and Corridors Planning Discussion'.

Motion:

It was moved by Alieda Blandford, seconded by Amy White that the November 17, 2020 Agenda be amended to add agenda item 'Motion to Prevent Demovictions and Renovictions' after item number 6.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

2. ADOPTION OF THE MEETING MINUTES

October 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Amy White that the October 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes be adopted as presented.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Staff provided the Committee with the following updates:

- *Rental Property Standards of Maintenance Bylaw* has been forwarded to Council for ratification this Thursday, November 26, 2020.
- Tenant Assistance Planner position is in recruitment stage and expected to be in place in January 2021.

4. MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

Malcolm McLean, Community Planner made a presentation on the Missing Middle Housing Project. Feedback for this project will be gathered through <https://engage.victoria.ca/missing-middle-housing>.

The Committee discussed:

- How can the site area for housing be fully utilized while also addressing food security and providing green and outdoor space?
 - Updates to design guidelines can address these issues. These guidelines are expected to be applied city-wide to encourage the use of open sit space, greenery and planting.
- How is access to amenities being addressed while moving towards a car-lite lifestyle?
 - Surveys have showed that proximity to grocery stores is critical.
 - Staff asked: Are there any comments on the Draft Missing Middle Housing Typologies Under Consideration designs. Do you find they fit in with the City? What changes would you propose if this does not meet housing needs?
- How does the minimum lot size translate to the size of a unit?
 - The size of units is dependent on the number of units in the building. A houseplex on 550 metres squared. If carved into 5 units, each unit could be 900-1300 square feet per unit with variables of how many bedrooms per unit. There is opportunity to specify minimum and/or maximum unit sizes in the zoning.
- While smaller units increase density, it is important to recognize that more space offers a higher quality of life and flexibility for families.
 - Townhouse forms of development deliver those 3-bedroom units suitable for families. Houseplex forms of development often deliver more apartment style units.
- Is the houseplex proposal targeted towards heritage designated homes or heritage homes that are not yet designated?
 - House conversion regulations are a way to retain character buildings that are not designated. This project is considering additional infill potential in undeveloped portions of lots for designated properties to balance incentives for heritage conservation. Urban forest objectives are driving exploration of protecting a minimum portion of the rear yard in non – heritage designated properties as a part of this initiative.
- This initiative could provide incentive to designate heritage buildings that may otherwise be sold and re-developed.
- There are limitations for green space within these draft missing middle housing forms. Recommendation for rooftop gardens.
- Will there be another update as this project progresses and future opportunities for feedback?
 - Yes. Broad engagement will commence after it is brought to Council. If time permits, hope to reconnect with RAC after the economic analysis.
- Interest in hosting a sub-committee or a special meeting in December or in the future on this topic. Would the sub-committee/special meeting be related to the design guidelines?
 - Yes – open to discuss design guidelines. Economic analysis is planned to be finalized at the end of this month which will solidify uncertainties.

Once it is finalized, discussion about the feasibility of creating these for rentals can commence.

5. RAC TERM

The RAC Terms of Reference state a two-year term, which has been clarified to begin after the first meeting in April 2019 and end in March 2021 inclusive, with the possibility of up to a one-year extension.

The Committee discussed:

- Unanimous feedback that there are no capacity concerns for the final few meetings of the term.

6. RENTAL BUSINESS LICENSING BYLAW TIMELINE UPDATE

Hollie McKeil, Housing Planner, provided RAC with a brief timeline update on the development of the bylaw. The bylaw is currently a high priority Housing Strategy action, and several other projects have been put on hold in order to move this forward as expeditiously as possible. Staff are currently developing the draft content, scope and operation of the bylaw and will bring this item to RAC and other stakeholders for feedback as soon as possible. The January 2021 RAC meeting is targeted at this time, as early engagement with stakeholder groups will begin in early 2021.

The Committee discussed:

- Expectation that this policy will protect tenants and improve enforcement.
- Would the *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw* interact with the *Rental Property Standards of Maintenance Bylaw* (RPSOM) through enforcement at the municipal level?
 - RPSOM and its enforcement plan has already been approved by Council. This same enforcement plan is not within the scope for the *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw*. One of several reasons that the enforcement for the RPSOM is being conducted by the Province is to reduce the risk of evictions and to consider the City's capacity and enforcement limitations.
- Landlords with basement suites will not have a business license. Could the *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw* interact with RPSOM for commercially run buildings? For example: if a landlord didn't abide by RPSOM then a means of enforcement would be to seize their business license?
 - The *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw* would apply to all rental properties which require a license in the City of Victoria. Basement suites which are rented, and an owner does not live on the property, are expected to be licensed, although sometimes are not licensed.
 - There are interactions between the RPSOM and the *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw*, in that there are risks of evictions upon their enforcement.
 - Using the *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw* to enforce the RPSOM is currently not within the scope of the project.
 - This item can be discussed in more depth once the draft bylaw is developed and brought to RAC for feedback in early 2021.

7. MOTION TO PREVENT DEMOVICTIONS AND RENOVATIONS

Committee discussed:

- This motion is inspired by the work being done in New Westminster and Burnaby.

Motion:

It was moved by Alieda Blandford that City council bring forward a strong renovation and demoviction policy in 2021 modelled after the policies employed in New Westminster* and Burnaby; specifying that a property owner must provide tenants with: alternative accommodation while renovation work is being carried out, at the same or lower rent; and a written offer to return to the renovated unit or another rental unit at the same rent as currently paid, subject to any rent increase permitted under the *Residential Tenancy Act* and its regulations. **And that this policy be enforceable.

(*In February 2019, New Westminster was the first BC municipality to introduce a strict renovation bylaw. It was challenged in court and ultimately upheld by the BC Supreme Court in February 2020. ** The residential tenancy regulation (s. 23) allows for additional rent increases following significant repairs or renovations.)

DEFEATED (3 to 1)

The Committee discussed:

- All members expressed interest in having a full discussion on this topic before making a motion to Council for consideration.
 - Staff clarified that Burnaby does not have a renovation bylaw, only the cities of Port Coquitlam and New Westminster currently have these bylaws in place.
 - It is recommended that RAC wait until the draft bylaw content is ready for feedback in early 2021, since the bylaw is currently under development, and motions that take place now are not responding to the most up to date or accurate information.
- Request that instead of discussing the Missing Middle Housing Project in December that RAC discuss this matter.
 - Staff are hoping to bring this this matter forward as soon as it's ready to be discussed. The draft of this bylaw is not yet finished, and legal limitations are not yet known.

The Committee discussed during recess:

- A condo building at 200 Douglas Street where owners are allowed pets and renters are not. This is discriminatory during a pandemic as many people are facing isolation. There are specific tenants that need advocacy. Is it possible for RAC to advocate on this?
- Issue may be a tenant contract issue rather than municipal issue.
 - This is under provincial jurisdiction with lease agreements. Staff are here to support and provide referrals to organizations that can assist.
 - When new developments are proposed, through rezoning, the City can enter into a legal agreement and consider language to reduce pet restrictions. This is not a high priority on the workplan but is hoped to be initiated within the next two years. City of Vancouver has also received similar direction.

8. VILLAGES AND CORRIDORS PLANNING DISCUSSION

Marc Cittone, Senior Planner, will facilitate a discussion on planning ideas for North Park, Fernwood and Hillside Quadra areas. This process focuses on making room for diverse housing choices, supporting welcoming public space, safe and sustainable mobility and resilient urban villages.

The Committee discussed:

- Staff asked: In many locations, four to five storey buildings near or above *Official Community Plan* densities, with reduced parking are required to support market rental housing without public financing.
 - What are your thoughts on on-corridor or off-corridor options?
 - What are your thoughts on the scale of housing for on and off corridor options?
 - Prefer to see off-corridor housing. Example of Fernwood and North Park Villages. It's near schools, transportation and stores. These are the types of places people will most want to live. The scale must accommodate growing families while also creating more density. This balance is challenging.
 - Mixed appearance rather than the same type of construction. If ICBC made it possible for people to share vehicles when they are not part of the same household, may reduce the use of cars.
 - Preference of off-corridor options which will promote a neighbourhood culture.
 - Are there statistics about demographics of people who live on corridors versus off corridors?
 - None known. Potential to consult with building managers to understand this further.
 - Are there demographics that are forced to reside on corridors due to affordability?
 - Economic analysis advised that the distance from Downtown is related to rent cost. There are likely some effects but couldn't be quantified.
- Staff discussed: What is put on corridors if we are putting density further into neighbourhoods? This up for discussion as engagement continues.
 - What do we put on the corridors if we don't have large scale housing there? Potential for more commercial and office spaces on corridors and moving housing into the smaller streets.
- Staff asked: Some stakeholders feel suites and house conversions should be the priority. Some feel market-rate rentals housing and condos are not affordable and therefore should be limited. What are RAC's thoughts on these two opinions?
 - House conversions and suites create more housing but are not tailored to some lifestyles. Developers that are creating this type of housing are prioritizing profits over all other factors. It may create more missing middle ownership and not support renters.
 - House conversions must have tenant protections in place before conversions commence. Market rate rental housing is not affordable, and conversions could displace more tenants.

- Importance of striking the balance between density and affordable housing while not displacing existing tenants. Through these discussions, the City and RAC are working on protections and the implementation of effective enforcement.
 - When staff asked if market-rate rentals and condos should be limited, is that in lieu of a different option?
 - This opinion is often brought forward by single detached homeowners. They are likely comparing a new condo value to their older property value. Brand new rental housing is more expensive than older rental housing.
 - Market-rate rental housing and condos are not affordable. The trickle-down effect of building unaffordable rental housing will eventually be affordable is not addressing the issue of the vacancy rates and homelessness. Housing types that aren't affordable should be limited.
 - Developers may defer to building rental housing if their luxury condo projects aren't permitted. Impression that many condos are sitting empty and are viewed as investments rather than homes. Residents can't compete with a corporation that's focus is profit. The City needs to intervene and discipline the real estate market.
 - It is known that most condos are occupied by residents (owner or renter) but not specified by whom.
- Hollie McKeil discussed that the largest issue the City is facing is the very little investments in non-market housing in the last 30 years from the provincial and federal government. Historic investments have been made recently which will take consistent funding to meet the needs of residents. Another concern is the price gap between older rental stock and newer rental stock. The City is cherishing older large buildings that are offering high rental security at below market rates. Working with senior government to get subsidized rental housing in place, preserving the existing below market rate rental stock and making room for new market rental apartment buildings. There is positive action being taken at the provincial level. The city is growing so rapidly, and the diversity of housing stock is important. No easy solution for speculation at the municipal level.
- Suggestion that the RAC review the (now released) ["Housing Futures" document](#) as a topic for a future meeting. This report talks about what is being built, what is needed now and projected to be needed in the future, and what different income households can afford in our market?
- Staff asked: How can we best increase participation by renters?
 - It is difficult to reach tenants in apartment buildings to engage on proposed developments.
 - Suggestion for local print newspapers (Times Colonist) and radio media (CFAX).
 - Any specific medium to specific neighbourhoods? Podcasts?
 - Personal experience that older demographics in Cook Street Village are tuned into CFAX radio and actively viewing the Times Colonist Newspaper.
 - What are creative ways to connect with people? How do people gather news and radio? It can be difficult to trace where renters are.

- The City will be posting posters in public spaces and they have been effective. If any suggestions come up in the future, please bring them forward.
 - The public is actively watching the news due to the pandemic. If we can confirm how they are getting their news, the City can then capitalize on that.
- Engagement will be running through at least January 2021 and second round of engagement in Spring 2021.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Amy White that the Renters' Advisory Committee meeting of November 17, 2020 be adjourned at 7:17 P.M.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY