

**MINUTES OF THE
RENTERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 19, 2021**

YUKA KUROKAWA CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 5:03 P.M.

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

Councillors: Stephen Andrew, Sarah Potts

Staff Present: Hollie McKeil – Housing Planner
Robert Batallas – Senior Planner
Malcolm MacLean – Community Planner
Andrea Hudson – Assistant Director, Community Planning
Chloe Tunis – Tenant Planner
Ayla Conklin – Planning Secretary

1. NEW COUNCILLOR INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions between new Councillors, staff and RAC members.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Committee discussed:

- Request to discuss alternate times to conduct RAC meetings after the adoption of the minutes item.

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Alieda Blandford, that the January 19, 2021 Agenda be approved as amended to include a discussion on RAC meeting times.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

2. ADOPTION OF THE MEETING MINUTES

November 17, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Amy White that the November 17, 2020 Meeting Minutes be adopted as presented.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. RAC MEETING TIME DISCUSSION

Amended agenda item to discuss alternate meeting times for RAC to virtually meet.

The Committee discussed:

- Request for accommodation to alter RAC meeting times to support participation of a member. Recommendation for a 6:30 P.M. – 8:30 P.M. meeting time.
 - The meeting schedule is determined by Committee member availability. Staff are happy to review and accommodate and will forward an availability survey to review the time on Tuesday evenings.

4. TENANT ASSISTANCE PLANNER INTRODUCTION

Introduction of Chloe Tunis, the new Tenant Assistance Planner.

The Committee discussed:

- Will Chloe Tunis be a regular attendee?
 - Chloe Tunis will be taking over as staff liaison for Hollie McKeil, should RAC term receive the optional one year extension. Chloe Tunis will share her contact information with RAC.

5. PROPOSED RENTAL BUSINESS LICENSING BYLAW

Staff made a presentation, followed by a guided discussion on the proposed bylaw content, its goals, objectives as well as the approaches for engagement and implementation.

The Committee discussed:

- Tenants have unique needs and different tolerance levels for renovations. Recommendation that the necessity of moving the tenant be linked to the tenants needs rather than the scope of renovations. Are there provisions that describe who pays for the move when the tenant is moved to a new unit or relocated?
 - Staff will follow up to confirm who will be responsible for moving costs.
 - This bylaw will go above and beyond the expectations laid out by Residential Tenancy Branch regarding major renovations.
 - The bylaw is drafted in a way to require that the consent of the tenant is received. The goal would be for the landlord to offer alternative accommodations and that tenants agree to the relocation. A tenant may request that they be relocated during a renovation, when the landlord informs them about the proposed work.
- How can a tenant use the *Rental Property Standard of Maintenance Bylaw* and this bylaw to request renovations and be provided an alternative accommodation while maintenance is being completed?
 - If a landlord is renovating or repairing a rental unit, they will need to comply with both bylaws. The intended result is that a tenant would not be evicted and the renovation would bring the unit up to compliance.
- Are there provisions that define the alternative accommodation to ensure the tenant is placed in a similar unit?
 - Yes. The bylaw describes that alternative accommodation must be a comparable unit and defines what that means.
- Are there provisions that address a renovation that is being delayed longer than initially discussed?

- Staff will be following the file and ensuring compliance throughout. Enforcement measures are in place if the timeline is becoming unreasonable, however, the focus is on compliance.
- Are there protections for renovations that change the characteristics of the unit? For example: renovating a single three-bedroom unit to three one-bedroom units. There is potential for displacement because the unit that was previously occupied is no longer comparable.
 - In some instances, there will still be an alternative accommodation provided during the renovation. Most likely, these types of renovations may require additional approvals to convert a family sized unit to several smaller units. Staff will investigate this question further.
 - When building permits are being issued, housing staff will be alerted and able to support tenants throughout the process.
- Concerns regarding house conversions where apartments are downsized or stratified.
 - The City's Official Community Plan includes a Strata Conversion policy, in a building with 4 or more units, where conversions of rental units to stratified units is generally not supported when the vacancy rate is below 4% for two consecutive years.
- Question about how renters will be adequately represented in this early-engagement phase:
 - The current early engagement phase is seeking feedback from representatives from stakeholder groups, including the RAC, tenant advocates, landlords and the development industry. The public, including tenants will be invited to provide feedback during the forthcoming public consultation phase and efforts will be made to ensure that broad tenant feedback is received.
- Request for clarification on Section 1A of the bylaw: "entered into a new tenancy agreement with the tenant for the same or better term". Who would the agreement be "better" for?
 - The tenant.
- Which rental units require a business license? Any projected changes to this?
 - The City's *Licensing Bylaw* requires that any rental property with more than two rental rooms or suites, where a property owner does not live on the property is expected to have a license.
- Does the City have the same authority as New Westminster to enact this bylaw?
 - Yes.
- Recommendation to consult the Victoria Tenant Action Group.
 - This group is on the list for early consultation.
- Councillor Potts: In a house conversion – would there be a trigger for the *Tenant Assistance Policy* if a unit is being lost?
 - Only in cases where a rezoning or development permit application is submitted. In most cases, it wouldn't be triggered.
- Is there work on a demoviction bylaw?
 - The proposed *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw* does not apply to demolitions, and neither do the other similar bylaws which are in place in other municipalities in BC. This is due to enforcement limitations when requirements are tied to a license, which is no longer required when a building is demolished.
 - However other city policies would be triggered in the case of a demolition or redevelopment. This includes the *Tenant Assistance Policy*, would

come into once there is a proposed rezoning or development permit application at the property. There is also the Rental Replacement policy, in the OCP.

- Is the City considering Rental Tenure Zoning (RTZ)?
 - RTZ does not protect the building, it only applies to the tenure. The City's OCP Rental Replacement policy is achieving that purpose of replacing rental tenure when a redevelopment occurs.
 - Staff are exploring the use of this new tool in many new projects, including the Secured Rental Project which is currently on hold but is intended to recommence upon completion of the *Rental Business Licensing Bylaw*.

Guided discussion:

- Staff asked: What are strengths or opportunities for this draft bylaw?
 - Strengths and opportunities are clear.
 - *Rental Tenancy Act* allows landlords to apply for rent increases linked to renovations outside of the annual increase. Hopefully, there is still incentive to renovate older units while also protecting tenants.
 - City will be exploring more incentives for landlords to upgrade rental housing, including launching a pilot program to encourage renovations of older purpose-built rental apartments this year.
- Staff asked: Any weaknesses or threats?
 - Concern that the scope of a rental unit is much broader than what's specified in the bylaw. Unique rental units may not be included.
 - Landlords may not go through with a renovation due to the cost and steps involved and the tenant is forced into unsafe living conditions. Is there a way for a tenant to report repairs/maintenance?
 - This is covered under the *Standards of Maintenance Bylaw*. If no action is taken by the landlord after the *Standards of Maintenance Bylaw* is brought to their attention, the Tenant Planner can support the tenant through the arbitration process with the Province.
 - What position does it put the tenant in if they voice their concerns? Tenants may be afraid of losing their housing if they voice their concerns.
 - Any recommendations for enforcement?
- Staff asked: What should the City consider for enforcement? There is concern that the landlord and tenant will make a mutual agreement before renovations. We want to ensure tenants know their rights.
 - More details required for comments to be provided.
 - Enforcement will be triggered when an owner applies for a building permit. The bylaw's enforcement strategy still under development and requires internal consultation between multiple city departments. The enforcement of the bylaw is quite complex and resource intensive.
 - More information can become available to stakeholders at a later date.
- Staff asked: What are the most time efficient and effective methods of reaching renters, during the upcoming public consultation period before bylaw adoption?
 - Recommendation to use the same methods discussed in the *Standard of Maintenance Bylaw* sub-committee meeting and presenting both of these initiatives together. This communicates that tenants have new rights and involves them in the next steps.

- Bus stations, mail outs, inclusion of clear and concise language – ensuring that renters know that it applies to them.
- Newspaper and radio will capture older demographic in the community.
- Community centres.
- In-person print may be discouraged due to pandemic and provincial orders to stay home.
- Staff asked: Are there any final comments?
 - Request for more information about how this is tied to the *Standards of Maintenance Bylaw* and how can tenants get things going when a landlord is hesitant.
 - This information is forthcoming.
- The next step is to launch an online feedback campaign on the engagement portal, invited representatives from stakeholder groups to provide their feedback through a survey. Broader public consultation is to follow, once Council direction is received.
- There was interest in a sub-committee meeting from all members, therefore this topic will likely be brought a the next RAC meeting rather than hosting a separate sub-committee meeting.

6. MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING PROJECT

Staff provided a brief presentation to update RAC on the findings of preliminary economic analysis and summarize the existing Attached Residential Design Guidelines that form the basis for updated design guidelines that would apply city-wide for missing middle housing. Some follow-up questions will be provided to invite feedback on both topics.

The Committee discussed:

- Where is the potential for affordable rental units in these designs?
 - Subsidy would be required create affordable rental housing. These units would be geared towards strata ownership.
 - Concern that this is a priority for the RAC and the City when there is a clear housing and homelessness crisis.
 - The Missing Middle Housing project is reaching out to many advisory committees for feedback. RAC's feedback on this project is highly valued as they regularly discuss housing issues.
 - There is value that RAC could provide whether they would have any or no comments, including encouraging the inclusion of more affordability and rental tenure in the outcomes of this project.

Leslie Robinson left the meeting at 6:32 pm.

- Can the City do anything with sites that are sitting vacant (example 1114 Rockland Avenue)?
 - Limited tools due to private ownership. Zoning initiatives could be a great tool to encourage an owner to take action on a vacant site as this would change the potential of the property.

Final comments:

- Recommendation for co-housing to be explored further by the City.
 - There is an action on the Housing Strategy Phase Two, to consider ways to support co-housing.

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Alieda Blandford that the Renters' Advisory Committee meeting of January 19, 2021 be adjourned at 6:32 P.M.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY