

# Neighbourliness Guidelines For Duplexes

## WHY THESE GUIDELINES?

The purpose of these guidelines is to help individuals when building new or making additions to existing buildings. Where R-2 Zoning is already in place, their purpose is advisory only. They also provide guidance to Council, advisory bodies and staff when rezoning or development variance applications are being considered.

The prime intent is to foster and encourage a sense of neighbourliness and help make this relatively affordable form of housing more accepted. Neighbourliness means always considering the character of buildings and properties that are adjacent, as well as those on the same block and street.

### **These guidelines promote:**

- compatibility with the positive features of neighbouring buildings and the character of buildings on the street and block;
- a high quality of site planning and building appearance;
- a positive street presence with the orientation of windows, doors and porches of both units towards the street; a choice of building and landscaping materials.

A number of issues are addressed which have surrounded duplexes for years. These include:

- buildings out of character and scale with their neighbours
- intrusion into neighbours privacy areas
- street appearance dominated by garages and parking
- over-building to accommodate illegal suites

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the R-2, Two Family Dwelling District zoning. Where R-2 zoning is already in place, their purpose is advisory only. Where approval of rezoning or variances is required they also provide a basis on which City staff, advisory bodies and City Council may evaluate applications.

## WHO SHOULD BE CONSULTED?

It is important (and neighbourly) to consult the following people about plans to change an existing property or an existing building and to give them the opportunity to offer feedback and discuss options:

- Owners and occupiers of neighbouring property. (Neighbouring property means any property immediately adjacent or across the street), and
- Community Association (or Associations) where rezoning or variances are required. (A registry of community associations is available from the Planning Department.)

*Note: It is recognized that in some cases it will be difficult to contact persons or community associations. It may be accepted that a person or community association has no objection to the proposal if no response is received within a month.*

Council's policy is to forward an application to Public Hearing **after** consultation by the applicant with the neighbours and the community association. Duplex rezoning applications are not normally referred to the Advisory Design Panel.

**WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE LOT SIZE AND A LOCATION?**

**What if my lot is already zoned R-2 (Two Family Dwelling District)?**

To qualify for a duplex the size of the lot must be at least **277.5 m<sup>2</sup>** per dwelling unit. All zoning regulations regarding building size, setbacks and siting must be met.

To qualify to subdivide for a duplex on a panhandle lot, a minimum size of **700 m<sup>2</sup>** (excluding the area of the panhandle driveway) and a minimum width of **18m** is required.

**WHAT IF MY LOT IS NOT ZONED R-2 (TWO FAMILY DWELLING DISTRICT)?**

A rezoning is required. (For more information refer to the [Rezoning Procedures application/information package.](#)) To qualify for consideration your lot must meet the minimum R-2 zoning requirements of **15m** in width and at least **555m<sup>2</sup>** in area and have one or more of the following characteristics:

A corner lot or through block lot (those with frontages on two streets, including a lane or one street and a lane;)

A "double lot" where the existing house is centred on the property and subdivision is not possible;

An "interior site" (i.e. not a corner lot) having a width greater than **15m** and a site area in excess of **670m<sup>2</sup>**;

A "transitional lot" which is located between single family and other less restricted zones; e.g. apartments, town houses, commercial or institutional uses;

A lot occupied by a building of special merit which requires rehabilitation (e.g. a heritage registry or designated house);

A lot bordered by a park, school, cemetery or other public open space.

**WHAT BUILDING AND LOT FEATURES NEED TO BE CONSIDERED?**

**What Building Height Would be Neighbourly?**

The height and roof lines of adjacent buildings should be respected through sensitive design. The roof should relate in style and slope to those of the other houses on the street. Visual interest may be desirable and achieved by providing variations in building height but one principal roof form should be chosen for the main body of the duplex.

To reduce overshadowing of neighbouring properties a new duplex or building addition may be stepped in design with single storey portions closer to the property line and two storey portions confined to the central part.

**WHAT SIZE OF BUILDING WOULD BE NEIGHBOURLY?**

Neighbourliness occurs where new development appears to fit comfortably within the established scale of the street, or when a new building or addition does not appear to overwhelm its existing neighbours. New duplexes (and additions to create duplexes) should reinforce existing building proportions and shapes. Building patterns and rhythms of buildings and open space which are characteristic of a street and area should be respected.

When it is not possible to achieve similar size and shape, the front of the building could be broken into smaller parts creating an illusion of a smaller building in scale with its neighbours.

**WHAT SHOULD THE BUILDING DO FOR THE STREET?**

A positive street appearance includes features such as front doors (preferably with windows or window sidelights), porches and bay windows facing the street. Building materials, front yards, landscaping and paving also contribute to the street and should be in keeping with other houses and properties on the street. At least one but preferably both, duplex units should be oriented towards the street with entrances and windows facing it.

Parking (e.g. carports, garage doors and parking pads) should be a minor component of the view of the house from the street.

A covered porch or veranda could be incorporated into the front (street) entrance of each duplex unit, particularly where porches and verandas are common features of other houses on the street.

**WHAT ABOUT SUNLIGHT AND SHADOWING?**

The design of new duplexes and additions to create duplexes should take into consideration the orientation towards the sun and the effects of climate. While some shadowing may be inevitable, a building or an addition should be positioned and scaled to minimize the impact of shadows on neighbouring garden areas. A diagram showing sun and shade may be used to study and reduce impacts.

**HOW CAN INTRUSIONS TO PRIVACY AND PROBLEMS OF OVERLOOK BE MINIMIZED?**

Windows

The location of windows should be considered carefully in relation to overlook. (Note: Some measure of overlook may be welcomed by neighbours where security is an issue.) Window openings on the sidewall should be planned so that they do not directly align with those of adjacent houses. Privacy should also be considered when locating dormers and skylights. Neighbours should be consulted regarding the effects of window placement.

Decks

Some overlook of yards and decks between houses on adjoining lots is not unusual and may be unavoidable. Privacy for patios, porches, balconies and decks may be provided by inseting or screening with light lattice work or landscaping. This is a particularly important consideration for porches, balconies and decks located above grade.

**WHAT BUILDING LAYOUT WOULD BE MOST APPROPRIATE?**

Front to Back Units

A front to back duplex building format tends to work best for corner or double frontage lots only. Each duplex unit should be oriented towards a street with a front door facing the street. Adequate and functional private open space for both units will need to be provided as well. The location of such space on the front (street) side of building is discouraged due to the public nature of the street space.

Side-by-Side Units

For interior lots on blocks with an established pattern of front and rear yard building setbacks side-by-side duplex building layout is preferable. The "back yard" problems of excessive building depth, visual intrusion, overlook, shadowing and the lack of private green space are lessened in a side-by-side layout. This approach may also enhance building street presence and enable the provision of private open space for each unit at the rear.

**WHAT IS THE MOST ACCEPTABLE WAY TO LINK DUPLEX UNITS?**

A new duplex or an addition to create a duplex must maintain the impression of a single building on a single lot. The units must share a common wall (Note: this common wall could be between garages or carports) or an area of floor of one unit could be the ceiling of the other. The connection between units should be substantial and cannot be a trellis, deck, or breezeway. The link should not create a long wall or profile out of keeping with adjacent houses.

**HOW SHOULD PARKING BE HANDLED?**

Driveways and garages should have a minimum impact on a pedestrian's enjoyment of the street. In Victoria, where rear lanes are rare and access usually must be from the street, this is of particular importance. Driveways, manoeuvring areas, and garages should be designed and landscaped to be as attractive as possible. The use of brick, concrete pavers and textured concrete is encouraged.

A building's appearance from the street may be improved with a detached rear yard garage where lot depth and the orientation of adjacent buildings and lots permit. A garage that is incorporated into the main building should be integrated into its design. As a general rule, the street Appearance should be dominated by "people" features such as windows, doors & porches. Car features e.g. garage doors and carports should be minimized.

Wherever possible, at least one rear or side yard parking space should be provided for visitors.

**WHAT ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR MORE SUITES?**

Basements and adequate storage space are important features of any house. Plans for new duplexes and additions to create duplexes should clearly identify the proposed use of this space. The interior layout should not lend itself to the creation of additional suites. Conversion of such space for more units in a new duplex or an addition to create a duplex is not permitted.