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City Of Victoria Passes Bylaw to Cut Wood Waste

VICTORIA, BC — Victoria has introduced a new bylaw designed to salvage valuable wood and other construction materials from homes being demolished in Victoria.

The new rules are expected to divert up to 3,000 tonnes from landfill each year. Victoria is the first community on Vancouver Island, and one of only three in Canada, to implement such a bylaw.

“Salvaging scarce and valuable resources that already exist in our buildings is a prime example of the circular economy in action,” said Mayor Lisa Helps. “By keeping these materials out of the waste stream, we can significantly extend the life of our landfill while also finding new value from old materials.”

Construction waste makes up more than one-third of all waste generated in the city. Each demolition under the new bylaw will recover more than five tonnes of old-growth lumber that would otherwise be sent to the landfill, in addition to 50 tonnes of recyclable building materials. City staff will work closely with industry to guide them through meeting the established salvage targets.

“This is the most progressive policy we have seen to date in Canada,” said Adam Corneil, Founder and CEO of Unbuilders. “This is not only good for the environment and community but is a way of preserving history despite the old houses coming down.”

The new regulations were developed in consultation with industry in order to create a bylaw that works for Victoria and the construction and demolition sector.

“We are happy to see the encouragement of new options for recycling and the reuse of local materials, all while creating local sustainable employment,” said Kerriann Coady, Executive Director of Canadian Home Builders Association Vancouver Island.

The new rules will be phased in to give industry time to prepare for the new requirements. The first phase will come into effect in September and will apply to demolition of single-family dwellings and duplexes built before 1960 that are being demolished to build another single-family dwelling or duplex.

The second phase, starting in May 2025, will apply to demolition of all single-family dwellings and duplexes built before 1960, including those being demolished to build multi-family housing.

After the bylaw has been in place for one year, a fee will be applied to permits that is fully refunded when builders meet the wood salvage targets set under the new regulations.

“We are especially proud to be involved as part of the solution to waste with the City of Victoria’s new Bylaw,” says Jeff Krafta, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity Mid-Vancouver Island. “Habitat for Humanity is ready to receive these salvaged materials and recirculate them back into our community. The recovered products will be sold in our Restores and may well be used in renovating or constructing new affordable homes for hardworking families.”

Reducing construction waste was one of the priority actions identified in Zero Waste Victoria approved by Council in December 2020. The plan guides Victoria’s transition to a future where products and materials are avoided, reduced and reused instead of disposed in the landfill.

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