

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: December 11, 2023

From: Jackie Teed, Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development
File: Doc#2372444

Item #: 2023-796

Subject: Report on Options to Support Cohousing

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with the results of a study on municipal options to support co-housing as previously requested.

BACKGROUND

On November 15, 2021 past Council directed staff to issue a Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) to pursue one cohousing pilot project, with the intent to identify the appropriate balance of community and private benefits such that long-term City policy on cohousing can be drafted for Council's future consideration.

Upon receiving Council direction, staff released a Cohousing REOI in 2022 seeking groups to participate in such a study. There were three respondents to the REOI. Although none identified a specific pilot site, it was considered beneficial to work with all of the respondents and to focus on potential policy approaches to support future pilot sites. The selected participants were New West Cohousing Society, Cohousing Options Canada, and Roots to Roofs Community Development Society.

To enable this study, Gary Penway Consulting was retained to lead the process, working under the guidance of the Climate Action, Planning and Development Department. Cohousing Development Consulting (CDC) was retained as a sub consultant to assist with researching existing cohousing communities in B.C.

Cohousing communities are an intentional community of private ownership units clustered around shared spaces, such as large kitchens, dining areas, and recreational areas. In cohousing communities residents regularly collaborate on tasks such as managing and maintaining shared spaces, preparing communal meals, creating community policies, and resolving issues together. The private ownership model of cohousing differs considerably from co-op housing which is run under an independent organization, typically a non-profit, and follows the *Cooperative Association Act*. Co-op members acquire shares to become owners of the co-op and elect directors to govern the housing and implement rules and occupancy agreements. Consequently, this arrangement distinguishes co-op members from both landlords and tenants, as they are required to pay housing charges rather than rent.

DISCUSSION

Gary Penway Consulting prepared the report 'Municipal Options to Support Cohousing in the City of New Westminster' in May 2023 (Attachment 1). The objectives of the report are to present the concept of cohousing, the different methods for delivering cohousing, identifying existing barriers to cohousing, identifying how barriers may be removed, and identifying actions that New Westminster could consider that would support cohousing projects.

Staff have evaluated the report, which provides a comprehensive overview of cohousing. While some of the suggested initiatives are considered outside the scope of Council's current Strategic Plan, staff consider one of the recommendations to be feasible with current staff resources and priorities.

- Pursue a zoning amendment to the New Westminster Zoning Bylaw that could permit additional common areas to be exempt from FAR calculations. This can expand both the amount and range of uses needed to support cohousing developments and to promote social interactions and connectivity.

Given that staff consider updates to the Zoning Bylaw through regular housekeeping amendments, this initiative could be considered in the next review of the Bylaw.

A number of the other recommendations in the report focus on removing uncertainty from the development process for cohousing projects. Work to facilitate a more streamlined development process more generally is now ongoing through initiatives such as the Development Application Process Review (DAPR) and the review of Inclusionary Housing and Infill Housing as well as recent provincial legislation. The findings of this report may help to inform and further streamline process and reviews through these ongoing initiatives.

Staff would continue to consider future Cohousing pilot projects that would be informed by the report findings and aligned with Council's current 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

OPTIONS

The following options are available for Council's consideration:

1. That Council receive the 'Municipal Options to Support Cohousing in the City of New Westminster' report for information.
2. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Municipal Options to Support Cohousing in the City of New Westminster

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Anji Rana, Affordable Housing Planning Analyst

This report was reviewed by:
Demian Rueter, Acting Senior Manager, Planning

This report was approved by:
Jackie Teed, Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer