

REPORT

Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: May 13, 2024

From: Jackie Teed
Director, Planning and Development
File: Doc#2474369

Item #: 2024-290

Subject: Family Friendly Housing Policy Update Work Plan

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to proceed with the proposed Family Friendly Housing Policy update work plan, as outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

To seek Council endorsement for the proposed work plan for the Family Friendly Housing Policy update.

SUMMARY

In 2016, the Family Friendly Housing Policy was implemented by the City for all multi-unit residential projects with 10 units or more, including townhouses and apartment buildings. The Policy was implemented through a Zoning Bylaw amendment to require minimum percentages of two- and three-bedroom units in new multi-unit market ownership and rental projects. The Policy also includes design guidelines regarding bedroom design and size, and unit location. Staff are proposing to revisit the Policy and consider increasing the required number of family friendly units. Additionally, the City will review other opportunities to ensure housing is delivered in ways that meet families' housing needs. This report outlines a work plan for undertaking this process.

BACKGROUND

Need for Family Friendly Housing

Families face challenges with availability, affordability and suitability in the non-market, market rental and ownership parts of the housing continuum. The City's Housing Needs Report states that there are few rental units that are big enough for large families in the private market and few vacancies (0.5% vacancy rate for three plus bedrooms). Single parent families represent the second largest demographic paying over 30% of their income for shelter (40% of households with affordability issues) and 645 single parent renters were considered in core housing need in 2016 (35.9% of all single parent renters). Low-income families are the second largest group of clients on the BC Housing waitlist for non-market housing in New Westminster (2000). In a survey conducted in the preparation of the City's current Family Friendly Housing Policy, of the New Westminster parents who completed the survey, 50.7% reported that their current housing situation somewhat (36.4%) or did not (14.3%) meet their family's needs.

Family Friendly Housing Policy

The City's [Family Friendly Housing Policy](#) and related Zoning Bylaw regulations came into effect on January 1, 2016, with the City becoming the first municipality in British Columbia to require a minimum percentage of three-bedroom units in new multi-family projects. The Policy applies to all multi-unit residential projects with more than 10 units, including townhouses and apartment buildings.

This Policy was developed through of a coordinated effort with the Society for Children and Youth of BC (SCY) development of a Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy, which included extensive community consultation. The City conducted a supply analysis, with an emphasis on ground oriented and three-bedroom units, and retained a consultant to assess the financial viability of constructing two-and three-bedroom units in multi-unit projects. Additionally, the City conducted an extensive literature review of academic journals, municipal documents, and other relevant studies related to family friendly housing policy and design guidelines.

As a result of this work and acknowledging the demand for family friendly housing to meet the community's diverse needs, Council adopted an amendment to the Zoning Bylaw that currently requires market ownership projects to include a minimum of 30% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 10% being three-bedrooms or more. Rental projects are currently required to include a minimum of 25% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 5% being three-bedrooms or more. At the time these rates were set, they were modest and generally aligned with the market's ability to deliver family friendly units.

The Policy also includes design guidelines regarding bedroom design and size, and unit location.

Preliminary Municipal Scan

A preliminary municipal scan indicates that, since the implementation of New Westminster’s Family Friendly Housing Policy, six other Metro Vancouver municipalities have since adopted family friendly housing policies, while others have regulations or design guidelines aimed at promoting family friendly units or design. Of these, only the City of Vancouver and the City of White Rock require higher mandatory minimum percentages (i.e. 35%) of two-and three-bedroom units in multi-unit strata projects than New Westminster. The City of Richmond requires a minimum of 40% of units with two or more bedrooms in market-rental and purpose built rental projects. More information of the municipal scan is available in Attachment 1.

This Policy update would also consider the best practice set by other jurisdictions, such as the City of Toronto’s comprehensive urban design guidelines for planning for children in what they refer to as vertical communities. Building and unit design guidelines aim to action best practices for child friendly design without being overly prescriptive. Key elements that are critical to families in multi-unit residential developments (e.g. target unit sizes and common amenity programming) are well rationalized and intended to inform developments for the better, rather than impose additional requirements.

Housing Needs Report

The City’s [Housing Needs Report \(2021-2031\)](#) provides insight into the New Westminster’s unique housing situation. The Report, which identifies existing and projected housing needs, was prepared using data analysis, and feedback from residents, businesses and key housing informants. The report states an estimated need for an additional 858 units between 2026, and a total of 2,043 by 2031 (total 2,901 additional units). Towards this target, a total of 529 family friendly units have been constructed (165 two-bedroom units and 364 three-bedroom plus units) between 2021 and 2023.

ANALYSIS

Policy Implementation Findings

A total of 2,749 family friendly units have been created since the City began implementing the Family Friendly policy in 2015 and tracking the creation of units. This includes 1,767 two-bedroom units and 982 three bedroom plus units (as of February 2024). Of all multi-units created, 52.5% had two or more bedrooms (33.7% two-bedroom units, and 18.8% three plus bedroom units). Of the three bedroom plus units created, 60% were townhouses (either in a townhouse project, or as a townhouse style unit at the base of a multi-unit residential building).

Since implementation, buildings have not been designed with two- and three-bedroom units generally located in lower, less expensive, storeys of the building as encouraged by the Policy, as the same floorplate is repeated throughout the building. Staff have also

found that the size of units, amenity spaces, and storage lockers are often minimized in order to optimise the total number of units, which can reduce the functionality of units and buildings for families.

Housing Data

Analysis of Census 2016 to 2021 data (which generally aligns with the timeline of the Family Friendly Housing Policy) found:

- A slight increase in the percentage of three bedroom plus units in apartment buildings with less than five storeys (6.0% to 7.2%) and in apartment buildings with five more storeys (6.2% to 6.3%). The shortage of three bedroom plus purpose built rental units remains acute in both New Westminster and Metro Vancouver.
- No change in the percentage of two-bedrooms units in apartment buildings with less than five storeys (40.9% to 40.9%) and a decrease in apartment buildings with five more storeys (52.3% to 47.6%). This aligns with the Policy's intended goal of not wanting to lose ground on two bedroom units.
- Low percentages of family friendly purpose built market rental units in New Westminster (29.4%) and Metro Vancouver (29.6%) compared to Canada (60.3%) and other major metro areas. The reasons for this disparity are not known at this time. This would be explored through this process.

More information regarding housing statistics is available in Attachment 2.

DISCUSSION

Proposed Work Plan

This project proposes to review the Family Friendly Housing Policy to explore the feasibility and impacts of increasing the number of family friendly units required and/or incentivized. Following the City of Toronto, staff will explore other design guidelines and regulations set by other jurisdictions that optimize the livability of the family friendly units delivered, such as best practices for child friendly designs.

Key Tasks and Timeline

1. *Background Research (Spring 2024)*
This step includes an assessment of the current context, existing Policy implementation, new policies to support social connectedness, and approaches taken in other municipalities (including the findings of a municipal scan, summarized in Attachment 3).

- 2. *Economic Analysis (Spring 2024 - Summer 2024)*
This step would include retaining a consultant to conduct an assessment of the economic viability of the program. An assessment was conducted in 2014, as part of the initial policy process. This work would be updated to reflect current market conditions.
- 3. *Consultation (Spring 2024 – Summer 2024)*
This step would include creating a project information page on Be Heard New West, where community members can learn about the project, ask questions, and provide input. Consultation will also be undertaken with community groups, partners, and the development community through the Urban Development Institute (UDI).
- 4. *Revising Guidelines and Regulations (Fall 2024)*
Revisions would be made to the Family Friendly Housing Policy and Zoning Bylaw regulations based on findings from the tasks above.
- 5. *Approval Process (Fall 2024)*
Staff would present the revised Policy and Bylaw amendments to Council for consideration.

Building Social Connectedness Project

In July 2023, the City undertook a project with the Hey Neighbour Collective, Happy Cities, Simon Fraser University, and six Metro Vancouver municipalities to co-create new design policies to support social connectedness, aging in the right place, and wellbeing for residents in multi-unit housing, as there is currently little guidance on how to design multi-unit buildings from a social wellbeing lens. This project is co-creating a Building Social Connections policy and design toolkit, building on evidence-based social well-being principles, which will in part focus on updating existing policies that support wellbeing in multi-unit housing, to be released in June 2024. This policy and toolkit will inform the update to the Family Friendly Housing Policy. More information regarding the Social Connections Project is available in Attachment 3.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff estimate the cost will be less than \$50,000. This project will be paid for through the CAPD department’s operating budget. Staff are actively working to pursue grant funding to offset the cost of the work.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from Climate Action, Economic Development and Engineering would be consulted during this process.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council endorse the proposed work plan for the Family Friendly Housing Policy update, as outlined in this report.
2. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Municipal Scan Findings

Attachment 2: Family Friendly Housing Policy Statistics

Attachment 3: Social Connectedness Guidelines Summary

APPROVALS

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