



Memorandum

DATE: March 10, 2022

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, Community Development Department.

RE: March 21 workshop review of Housing Code Updates project

CC: Eric Holmes, City Manager

Executive Summary

The Housing Code Updates project contains eight zoning code updates and one permit processing change intended to increase the range of housing types available citywide, particularly smaller housing units of various types that are affordable to more community members. The project is a further step in City efforts to implement the recommendations of the 2016 Affordable Housing Task Force, and to update local regulations to help address the ongoing regional affordable housing crisis through incremental changes in the types and sizes of housing available. This project is one step in a continuum of efforts to address code barriers to new housing types, which will be continued through the forthcoming Comprehensive Plan Update process.

The nine components of the Housing Code Updates projects were originally identified in 2020, and last reviewed by the City Council at a September 20, 2021 [workshop](#). Since that time specific zoning code language has been developed by staff and reviewed by the Planning Commission, most recently at workshops on [February 22 and March 8](#). A Planning Commission public hearing is scheduled for April 12.

The proposed amendments are modest to moderate changes to city standards. Many would allow housing types currently allowed in other jurisdictions in Clark County as well as statewide. Others modify housing types already allowed in Vancouver. Some as noted would require at least one public hearing or administrative review with notice to be developed. Some are required by state law.

Not included on the list are allowances for greater flexibility in existing single family zones to develop duplexes, triplexes or fourplexes where appropriate. These were the subject of discussion at the September 20, 2021 City Council workshop, and will require more extensive public outreach and analysis. These will be addressed comprehensively in the forthcoming Comprehensive Plan Update process.

Project Components

The proposed Housing Code Updates components are summarized at a high level in the enclosed table. Specific zoning code language is included in the [February 22 Planning Commission staff report](#). Some zoning code sections implement multiple project components, as indicated, and no zoning code language is provided for the proposed building permit processing adjustments to incentivize aging-in-place features, since no changes to Title 20 are involved, and Planning Commission review on this item will consist of general advice.

Housing Code Updates – General Summary. Significant new changes to recommendations noted.

Proposal	Key features	General Feedback
1. New R-17 single-family zoning district standards allowing 2,000 to 5,000 square foot lots, subject to access and streetfront requirements	Requires rezone approval and hearings to implement. Allows duplexes and triplexes as well as SFR. Limits garage widths, requires adjacent homefronts to vary, and facilitates alley loading, in R-9 and R-6 districts in addition to R-17. New – requires compliance with existing city narrow lot standards, including provisions for utilities, parking, alley incentives New – alleys required unless unfeasible for lots below 3,000 square feet, encouraged otherwise New – Home fronts required to vary between adjacent two homes only, not those across a street	General public acceptance of need for smaller homes, but concerns about parking and access, potential for rezoning of individual nearby small lots or existing homes sites. Developer support, with concerns about garage width limitations and alley requirement
2. New multi-family zoning district standards allowing up to 50 units per acre with 1 parking space per unit minimum	Requires rezoning to implement. Lowers minimum parking requirement from 1.5 to 1 space per unit for R-50 and other MFR zones, to rectify inconsistency with SFR standard, recognize MFR per unit traffic generation is less than SFR per unit, and to align with emerging legal mandates.	General public acceptance, concerns about parking and rezoning
3. State mandated reductions in minimum parking requirements for various housing types near frequent transit	Requires site plan review to implement. Allows long term low-income affordable housing projects or portions of projects to provide 0.75 spaces per unit citywide Allows senior and disabled persons housing to provide no parking citywide for residents, but requires staff and guest parking.	General public acceptance, with questions about determining transit frequency

	New - Allows market rate apartments within ¼ mile of transit lines running every 35 minutes, or anywhere in CX zone, to provide 0.75 parking spaces per unit.	
4. State mandated density bonus for long term affordable housing	Allows density bonuses varying by zoning district (less in SFR zones, more in MFR zones) for long term low-income affordable housing, defined in this case by statute as 80% AMI or below. Does not allow apartments in SFR homes	General acceptance. Developer request led to expansion of eligibility from state mandated religious organizations to any party
5. New cluster cottage standards	Requires subdivision hearing or Type II administrative review with notice to implement Allowed in SFR zones, with more but smaller and shorter homes than normally permitted, with cottage features, near common open space Can be divided into individual lots typically for ownership, or maintained as a single property with rental units	Generally supportive public comment with questions about affordability. Developer requests to allow larger units and garages, and generally more flexibility
6. Updated setback and buffering requirements for new apartments next to existing homes	New – Maintains currently required 5-foot setback for first 35 feet, with one-foot additional setback for each additional 3 feet of proposed height, up to maximum 15 foot setback	General public concern about apartments and interest in larger setbacks
7. Micro-housing - Updated apartment standards to allow shared bathroom and kitchens	Allows shared bathrooms and kitchens in non-medical multi-family housing without staff	Limited feedback
8. Updated ADU standards to allow garages with non-conforming setbacks to apply	Allows legally existing garages located within side and rear yard setbacks to apply for conversion or replacement to ADUs if building and planning standards met New – limits height within setback to 15 feet	General public support for ADUs although concern about short term rentals. Questions about height of ADUs in setbacks
9. New building permit processing incentives for aging-in-place home features	Building Department envisions reduction in review from potentially 14 to 10 days, resource materials to assist applicants, and designated staff contact person	Limited feedback, general support

Community and Stakeholder Outreach

Initial outreach prior to the pandemic consisted of Planning Commission and City Council workshops as noted, and research and consultation with comparable jurisdictions, local residential developers, a presentation at a joint meeting of the Hough and Carter Park Neighborhood Associations, and a presentation at an October 2019 quarterly meeting of citywide neighborhood leaders.

Project work was initially suspended with the onset of the pandemic, and outreach limited to virtual and on-line. Staff has been gathering community input through an online survey available on [Be Heard Vancouver](#) since April 2020. Approximately 90 community members have commented on the descriptions of the project and its components, with comments both in support and opposition. See February 22 public comments link at bottom right of the Be Heard Vancouver page.

Outreach efforts resumed in the summer of 2021, with Commission and Council workshops. In early 2022, the below targeted small group virtual meetings were held:

- January 6th, 2022: Single-family and multifamily developers roundtable
- January 12th, 2022: Vancouver Neighborhood Alliance meeting
- January 18th, 2022: General public open house
- February 1st, 2022: Fircrest neighborhood association meeting
- February 2nd, 2022: Harney Heights neighborhood association meeting
- February 3rd, 2022: Clark County Development Engineering and Advisory Board
- February 10th, 2022: Arnada neighborhood association meeting
- February 16th, 2022: Affordable housing agency and advocates roundtable

Some of the major themes and comments heard from these meetings:

- Suggestion to consult Ridgefield garage standards and Bend cottage cluster standards
- Concerns about shared water infiltration systems under R-17
- Concerns about site clearance of existing historic garages
- Concerns about length and difficulty of rezone process for R-17 and R-50
- Concerns about street front R-17 requirements adding to cost
- Concerns about R-17 standards preventing shared driveways and garages
- Desire to expand parking reduction near transit beyond highest frequency transit
- Concerns around parking, traffic, and ability for firetrucks to reach homes
- Desire to consider cluster or other lots without street access
- Desire for more flexibility for larger and taller cluster homes
- Desire to preserve neighborhoods character and community feel
- Desire to allow ADUs to locate on lots with small existing homes
- Concern that requiring architectural standards for R-17 could raise the cost
- Desire for more design standards for single family homes
- Questions around how the new zones would get mapped and whether this could represent illegal spot zoning

- Question on whether prohibitions against repetitive housing increase price
- Support for expanding density bonus from faith based affordable housing developers to any non-profit affordable housing developer
- Support for having parking reduction near transit stops to include area near the transit line rather than just stops
- Support for aging in place incentives
- Concern front entry design requirements could increase building costs
- Concern alleys could create spaces that are not activated and therefore them unsafe
- Dislike of limiting garage width to less than 50% of front façade, comment that the market demand is for two car garages
- Comment to ban new developments having cul-de-sacs
- Concern cottage cluster design facing courtyard could create poor walkability conditions on the exterior of the cluster
- Question about historic neighborhoods and R-17
- Question about management of cluster common open space
- Question if parking reductions could be retroactively applied to existing properties that could rezone to R-50 or are near transit, allowing for removal of existing parking spaces
- Questions about compliance with parking reductions near transit over time as transit routes and frequencies change
- Concern rezoning properties to R-50 could remove some naturally occurring affordable housing
- Concern cottage cluster standards may not result in a more affordable housing choice
- Comment to allow off street parking lot in R-17 subdivision development
- Comment that alleys would create more impervious surface
- Question if it would be possible to create a new home and convert existing home on the lot to an ADU
- Comment to continue thinking of ways to ensure ADUs are affordable
- Concern allowing more ADUs could result in more short-term rental units
- Comment that staff should consider displacement and gentrification as a result from the proposed code changes
- Recommendation for staff to speak to property managers when determining parking requirements for senior housing near transit

Next Steps

The March 21 Council workshop is intended to review work to date, answer questions, and support Council feedback and discussion. The Planning Commission public hearing is scheduled for April 12. City Council hearing dates and if needed further workshops have not yet been scheduled.