

An article from SHPOA member Dr. Peter Brutton

Character Home Zoning Review

Age is not “ Character “ •

Old wooden homes, no matter how well maintained or even improved, pose a HEALTH HAZARD. Over time wood deteriorates and harbours MOULD and SPORES. Evidence of this is found by the prevalence of respiratory disorders throughout the City and the presence of noxious odours emanating from older homes. These smells are most noteworthy when the house has been closed up while its occupants have been vacationing. Upon return the smell can be overwhelming. Also these odours are most obvious when passing a demolition site, where all the old timber is exposed to the atmosphere.

No-one, or government should have the right to compel an owner to continue to live in such an unhealthy environment and certainly no penalty should obtain when an owner chooses to improve his situation by rebuilding.

The proposals to encourage the retention of decaying homes (even those that LOOK beautiful and have been carefully “ restored ” •) by granting favours while at the same time penalising those who choose demolition is blatantly unfair. Far more sensible and equitable would be to exact strict design guidelines such as exist under RS5, which have worked spectacularly well in 2nd Shaughnessy. From the outside, the new homes are indistinguishable in character from older style homes yet exhibit all the desirable characteristics within, of 21st century living, such as open floor plans, higher ceilings, better and more efficient HVAC, larger rooms etc.

No one disputes the unaffordability crisis that exists in Vancouver, but surely the solution lies with supply, yet this must not come at the expense of livability. It is said that 60% of Vancouver's developable land is occupied by single family dwellings. Isn't this what makes our City so desirable and has led to its designation of one of the best places on earth to live? Yet somehow we all think we have the right to the Rockwellian dream of a detached home with a white picket fence in the heart of such a World renowned Metropolis. Subdivision, partitioning and infill will only harm the once treasured neighbourhoods that have made our City so great. Planning should

focus on high-rise development and densification only in appropriate locations sparing our precious resource of family neighbourhoods.

The sad fact is that property values have risen so much, particularly on the West side, that punitive restrictions and bye-laws will have NO impact on affordability but will seriously affect property values of innocent homeowners, many of whom have relied on their equity to finance their retirement.

One of the worst penalties proposed is to limit the square footage of a new home on a “larger” lot to 0.4 FSR, while encouraging retention of old houses with the allowance to expand to as much as 0.65 FSR together with the addition of an ancillary structure. Ironically that would lead to a complete distortion of balance and proportionality; the very concept of which the City claims to want to control!

I sincerely believe the City is altruistic in its intent, but seriously misguided. Government involvement in the free marketplace has been repeatedly shown to be ill advised. By all means legislate design but allow homeowners their right to a compatible home commensurate with their huge investment. RS5 is a model that has worked and resulted in a superb upgrade to our neighbourhood and it should be preserved and encouraged.

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