

R4 Zoning Review

Révision de la zone R4

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Proximate Trigger: We're still getting "bunkhouses"

- "Bunkhouse" = small number of units (duplex, triplex, 4-unit) with 6, 8, or 12 bedrooms each.
- Rented (directly or indirectly), by the bedroom –functionally closer to a rooming house than a dwelling unit.
- Especially prevalent near universities; mostly but not exclusively in areas zoned R4
- Continue to exploit procedural and zoning loopholes e.g. No site plan control, no provision for garbage storage despite 20-24 occupants
- Continuing sore spot with the community
- Issue was not addressed in Infill 1, Infill 2 or Residential Conversions; we are generally not revisiting matters covered by these studies e.g. height, rear yards.

“Obvious” solutions:

- Limit bedroom counts through zoning (e.g. Define “dwelling unit” to have no more than 4 bedrooms.)
- Revise/clarify zoning distinction between “dwelling unit” and “rooming house” (currently flawed, hard to enforce, out of line with court precedent)
- Establish zoning rules for indoor garbage storage in larger (i.e. bunkhouse-sized) buildings regardless of typology.
- However, there are no magic bullets! Bunkhouses are just a symptom of a deeper problem.
- **“Obvious” solutions to the immediate problem will not work in isolation.**

The Root Cause: Current rules make it easier to do a bunkhouse than a proper apartment building!

- R4/multiple-unit zoning is largely inherited from decades-old zoning, with outdated assumptions.
- Does not respond well to today's economics, pressures and land costs.
- For example:
 - Some R4's limit you to four units... assumed typical 1-2 bedroom units. Reasonable back when urban lots were \$150-\$200k
 - But four 2-bedroom units @\$1400/month is a **money loser** on an \$600k lot.
 - But 4 x 6 bedrooms @\$700/month/bedroom is **very profitable!**

Solution:

Combination of moves to align economic incentives with the best planning outcome.

- Limit bedroom counts, tighten up rooming house definition to **make bunkhouses unlawful or classify and regulate them as rooming houses** under zoning
- But also slightly loosen R4 rules **to make it easier to build a proper low-rise apartment building** of e.g. 8-12 units, go through site plan control, manage garbage etc.
- Make it easier to get your 24 x \$700/month in a more adaptable, acceptable and manageable form (e.g. 12 x 2-bedroom or 8 x 3-bedroom units) than to skirt the intent of the rules and play the bunkhouse game.
- **A strategic, pragmatic solution to a change in the underlying economic forces.**

Some related moves:

- ***Review of Site Plan Control:***
 - Ensure that large singles, duplexes and triplexes go through SPC for basic design review.
 - Common tactic: build out a triplex to the final envelope, then apply to turn it into a low-rise apartment... after it's too late to influence the design or site plan.
- ***Committee of Adjustment***
 - **Better coordination with C of A** to ensure that information asymmetry does not enable abuse of the variance process
 - e.g. sequential variances and/or variances followed by amended building permits

Progress to date

- Extensive discussions with Community Associations **have been very constructive and informative for all involved.**
- GOHBA Infill Council **is supportive**
- Working **in parallel with Site Plan Control** review team
- Coordinating with Committee of Adjustment to address **misuse of variance process**
- Issues with Development Charges (incentive to build fewer, larger units) communicated to that group **for consideration in next review**
- **No silos.** There is no such thing as a pure zoning problem!

Next Steps

Date	Milestone
September 2016	Project start
November 2016	Posted first Discussion Paper on project website
Winter 2016-2017	Comment period on first Discussion Paper
March 2017	Posted second Discussion Paper/Draft Recommendations
To April 19, 2017	Comment on Draft Recommendations
Summer 2017	Circulate final recommendations
September 2017	Report to Planning Committee, By-law to Council