

CITY OF BURNABY

HOUSING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: Ground Oriented Multiple Family Housing

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council direct staff to facilitate the development of ground oriented medium density multiple family housing wherever appropriate by:
  - a) Preparing amendments to the schedules in the Zoning Bylaw that regulate the development of multiple family housing so that "urban townhouses" are a permitted use with appropriate regulations for this form of housing;
  - b) Using Comprehensive Development Zoning to ensure that where possible, ground orientation is considered as an important influence in the design of multiple family housing;
  - c) Preparing guidelines that would assist developers in the preparation and staff in the evaluation of proposals for medium density multiple family ground oriented housing;
  - d) Encouraging the retention of existing lanes and the opening of partial lanes where appropriate, in areas where urban townhouses will be constructed; and
  - e) Reviewing the regulations affecting the calculation of Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) to ensure that the method of calculating allowable floor area is relevant to urban townhouse type development.

<p>: COPY - CITY MANAGER - DIR. PLNG. &amp; BLDG. - CHIEF BUILDING INSPECTOR - CITY SOLICITOR</p>
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2. **THAT** a further report be submitted to the Housing Committee and Council recommending specific amendments as referred to in recommendation 1 above.

REPORT

The Housing Committee, at its meeting held on 1996 November 26, adopted the *attached* report proposing measures that would encourage the development of medium density multiple family housing with an increased ground orientation.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor L.A. Rankin  
Chairman

Councillor C. Redman  
Member

Councillor J. Young  
Member

TO: CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS 1996 NOVEMBER 22  
HOUSING COMMITTEE

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING OUR FILE: 12.000

SUBJECT: GROUND ORIENTED MULTIPLE FAMILY HOUSING

PURPOSE: To propose measures that would encourage the development of medium density multiple family housing with an increased ground orientation.

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## **R E P O R T**

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

The population of the metropolitan Vancouver region is projected to increase by 58 percent (1,212,600 people) over the next 25 years, from a 1996 population of 2,098,900 to 3,311,500 by 2021. Projections done in association with the Livable Region Strategic Plan indicate that net housing demand will increase by an average of 21,000 households per year from 1996 to 2021. The demographics associated with the projected population growth of the region show the largest increases in the 55 to 64 and 45 to 54 age groups which have the highest ground oriented maintainer rates and the amongst the lowest apartment maintainer rates. As a result of these projections, the majority of additional households are anticipated to live in ground oriented units, with an average of 13,400 households in ground oriented and 7,700 in apartment units each year.

In those communities within the GVRD's designated Compact Metropolitan Area (which includes Burnaby), there is an identified regional need to find locally appropriate ways that can respond to the need to provide more opportunities for medium density ground oriented housing. Providing medium density housing in the Region's more urban areas is seen as a key to preventing land consumptive sprawl in the outer areas. Simply put, if the appropriate housing is not provided in the inner areas of the Region that can be well served by transit and other essential services, then people will continue to choose to move up the valley, with the attendant economic and environmental costs associated with low density sprawl development. As part of the Regional Context Statement component of a reviewed Official Community Plan, the City will have to demonstrate how targets for the provision of medium density ground oriented housing are being met. Staff work to date indicates that the provision of non-ground oriented apartment opportunities is relatively easy. Providing for ground oriented opportunities therefore, is the greater challenge.

Through the review of various plans, such as the Edmonds and Lougheed Town Centre reviews and the Growth Management consultation, provision of more urban ground oriented housing options was identified as a desirable planning objective, especially in the context of some of the older commercial or apartment areas. Further, the recent report submitted by the Housing Committee to Council that outlines a framework for the establishment of community and neighbourhood village centres noted the key role that medium density urban townhousing and apartments could play in supporting older community and neighbourhood commercial centres and in creating a more lively and urbane streetscape character in these redeveloping areas.

Progress has already been made in the introduction of new forms of ground oriented housing in some single and two family areas through changes to regulations that affect semi-detached dwellings and the creation and application of the R12 District. This report proposes an approach that will help the City add to the stock of medium density ground oriented housing in the context of existing regulations and community plans.

## **2.0 CURRENT REGULATIONS**

The Zoning Bylaw contains several Districts that permit multiple family housing. Details of the regulations in each district are included in the table included as Attachment 1. RM1 (Multiple Family Residential District) permits conventional townhousing usually on larger sites at a maximum density of 0.6 FAR with underground parking. RM2 and RM3 (Multiple Family Residential District) permit the development of conventional two and three storey apartment buildings at densities of up to 0.9 FAR and 1.1 FAR with underground parking respectively.

The preamble to the RM1 in the Zoning Bylaw states "This District provides for low density multiple family development particularly designed for families with children." The RM1 District is generally used on larger comprehensively developed sites that typically have private internal roads and frequently have common facilities. The maximum FAR, therefore, includes these common roads and facilities.

The preamble for the RM2 District in the Zoning Bylaw states "This District provides for a medium density multiple family area, designed primarily for small families and married couples." The higher density RM3 District states "This District provides for a higher density of development largely for working couples (1 bedroom units) and single persons (bachelor units). Both of these Districts were created to provide for conventional low rise apartments and garden apartments that share the characteristics of generous setbacks from the front, rear and side and the building mass to be oriented to the centre of the site. Since most RM2 and RM3 development sites are located in serviced areas, the densities tend to be "net" not to include roads.

RM6 and RM7 (Hastings Village Multiple Family District) were specially created to permit the development of two and one half and three and one half storey townhouses respectively. The front, rear and side yard set backs (see Attachment 1) for these districts were selected to provide continuity with the existing single family or apartment development. This has resulted in a building massing that requires the building to be set back from the front and rear property lines, and has worked against the creation of townhouses with generous, private internal courtyards.

The R6 (Residential District) zone permits the development of row townhousing on narrow fee simple lots. While there are only three R6 developments in Burnaby, some developers have recently expressed interest in this form of housing. Row housing on fee simple lots is still considered unusual in western Canada but is common in Toronto and Montreal. The regulations pertaining to this District are also in need of review to ensure that they achieve the stated objective of encouraging urban row housing. Due to the lack of regulations affecting the bulk of buildings and development density in the R6 District, there is potential for the construction of very large (2,400 square feet plus a cellar) townhouse units that would be out of scale with existing development. This development density could be as high as 1.2 Floor Area Ratio, which is similar to a typical RM3 three story building.

### 3.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF GROUND ORIENTED MEDIUM DENSITY HOUSING

Staff have identified a need to expand our current ability to create more ground oriented medium density apartments and townhousing in an urban context. Characteristics of this form of housing are:

- ▶ strong relationship to the street and pedestrian environment.
- ▶ design emphasis on individual housing units with "doors on the street" rather than access off an interior corridor.
- ▶ reduced front yard setbacks, but with extra attention paid to landscaping treatment that is visible from the public domain.
- ▶ windows face street to improve passive surveillance.
- ▶ usable open space areas, in most cases off the front and back of each unit.
- ▶ building mass is more concentrated towards the edges of the site as compared to conventional apartments, often leaving a large internal courtyard area, that can be used for a combination of individual private yards and common space.
- ▶ two, three or four storey building form.
- ▶ underground parking oriented off lanes wherever possible.
- ▶ can be developed on sites as small as 6,000 square feet although sites of 10,000 square feet or larger preferable.
- ▶ larger "super block" development discouraged.

Urban townhouses respecting these objectives have been built and marketed successfully in many places in the Lower Mainland including the Lonsdale area of North Vancouver City, the Maillardville area of Coquitlam and at a higher density, in the Fairview Slopes area of Vancouver. In many cases, this form of housing is located close to a commercial centre in areas where urban services and lanes exist, and provides a transition between the higher density commercial development and single and two family development. The medium density urban townhouses are most often replacing aging single family housing stock.



*Urban Medium Density Townhouse, North Vancouver City*

The community receptiveness to medium density urban townhouses appears to be good, according to staff at North Vancouver City and Coquitlam. Particularly in North Vancouver, the units sell quickly and unit turnover appears to be slow.

Similarly, other municipalities have encouraged the development of a more traditional three or four storey wood frame apartment form where the first floor has a strong orientation to the ground and to the pedestrian streetscape. Typically in these cases, the bottom floor units have access to a very large private open space with a door that access directly from the private sidewalk. Some developments are also accessed from an internal corridors while others have both front doors to the street and back doors to private outdoor space in an internal open courtyard. Buildings of this type tend to have smaller front yard setbacks compared to traditional apartment development. In essence, public landscaped outdoor space is traded for more private outdoor space related to the individual unit and a more urbane presence on the street.

#### **4.0 SUGGESTED APPROACHES TO FACILITATE MEDIUM DENSITY GROUND ORIENTED HOUSING**

Two general approaches are suggested to foster the development of more ground oriented housing. The first approach involves amendments to the zoning schedules that permit multiple family housing so that the development of ground oriented townhousing is encouraged. The second approach revolves around our existing use of Comprehensive District zoning to vary such factors as setbacks and building height in cases where it is appropriate in relation to the neighbourhood.

#### **4.1 Suggested Changes to the Zoning Bylaw**

The density requirements inherent in the existing RM2/RM3 regulations are appropriate for the development of more ground oriented apartment type development. These Zoning Districts, however, were designed to promote a more suburban style of apartment development with large, landscaped setbacks with buildings oriented towards the centre of the lot. In many cases, this semi-public oriented landscaping is elaborate, leading to a sense of greenery and openness from the street versus the more urbane feeling of a building that is closer to the street.

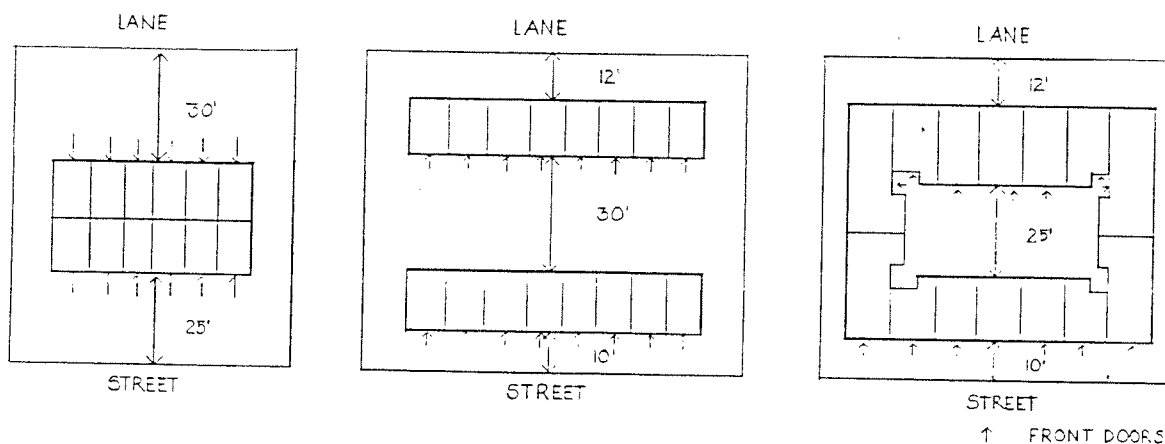
The large setbacks result in a reduced inner courtyard and private outdoor space. Private outdoor space for ground floor units tends to be minimal and rarely greater than the balconies above. In essence, the development is inward focussed with little relationship to the street. Access is usually entirely from an internal corridor. In a few cases, as part of the Comprehensive Development rezoning process, setbacks have been relaxed to reflect local conditions. Some developers in Burnaby have attempted to make the ground level more urban with the addition of separate walkways and entrances for ground units but the large setbacks to some extent have resulted in a suburban building form.

In order to more explicitly encourage the development of ground oriented housing, it is recommended that urban townhouses be listed as a permitted use in the RM1, RM2 and RM3 Districts. This would allow the development of regulations that are more acceptable and typical of this housing form such as reduced setbacks and the amount and arrangement of open space. Also, changes to setback requirements for conventional three storey townhouse structures should encourage the development of usable private outdoor space related to the bottom floor unit that encroaches into the required front yard setback. The term "urban townhouse" would also be defined in the bylaw. A distinguishing characteristic of urban townhouses is that each unit should have an easily identified separate entrance directly from the street.

It is also recommended that the requirements of the RM6/RM7 Districts (Hastings Village Multiple Family) be reviewed at this time to determine their effectiveness in delivering ground oriented housing. At the time the regulations for these two Districts were created to provide for the development of 2 ½ and 3 ½ storey ground oriented townhouses in the Hastings Street Area. However, in order to provide an orderly transition with the older single family development, the setbacks established for these Districts are the same as those for single family development, ie. about 25 feet for the front yard and 30 feet for the rear yard. This means that the bulk of the building is concentrated towards the centre of the site, limiting the ability to have internal courtyards that provide sunlight access and opportunities for generous outdoor space at the ground level.



In comparison, the urban townhouse guidelines in the City of North Vancouver provide for a minimum front yard of 10 feet and a rear yard of 10% of the lot depth (minimum 12 feet) for a building and 4 feet to a garage. The justification for the small front yard setback is that the traditional road system in North Vancouver City provided for wide 66 foot right-of-ways which provides for separated sidewalks and grassed boulevards, which visually adds to open space in front of the buildings. A similar situation exists in the Hastings area. The difference in building envelopes is shown below:



*Differences in Building Massing for Townhouse Developments*

Finally, it is recommended that a maximum Floor Area Ratio and building bulk regulations be added to the R6 District so that buildings in the R6 District are treated similarly to all other zoning districts. Further, it is appropriate that the other regulations affecting building siting be reviewed to ensure that the objective of creating ground oriented townhouses is achieved.

**4.2 Comprehensive Development District**

Through the use of Comprehensive Development Zoning, it is possible to vary aspects of the zoning bylaw (other than use or density) taking into account specific site considerations. As well, special attention can be given to items such as landscaping, the impact of the building design on the streetscape and public realm to ensure that any relaxations lead to an enhanced development plan.

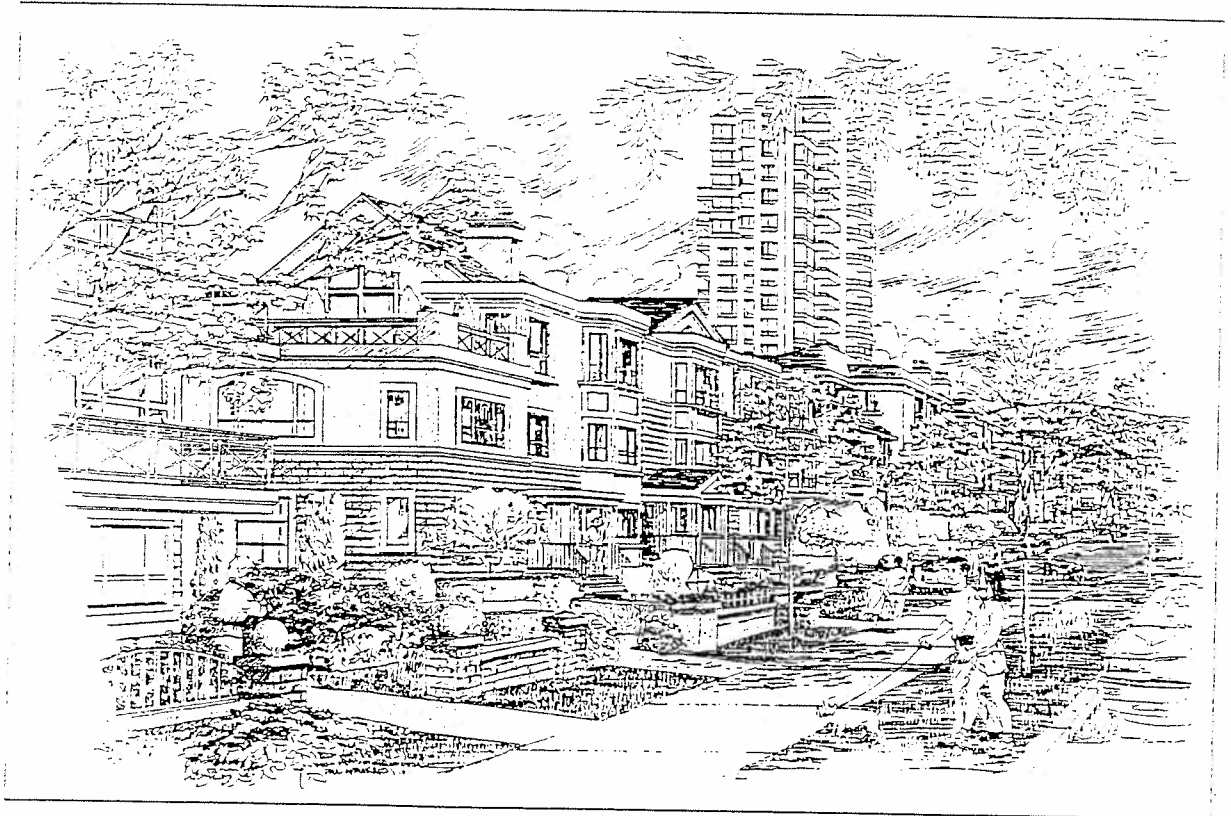
Specifically, through CD zoning, it is possible to vary the front, rear and side yard setbacks and to encourage a more ground oriented housing form. Care can be taken to ensure that items such as view preservation, privacy and usability of private open space are addressed in the proposed development. With CD zoning, it is possible to specify a policy direction to shape development so that it will meet the identified need to provide ground oriented housing.

CD Zoning has been used in some instances to relax setback requirements to encourage the development of ground oriented housing. For example, the development plan for the Powerhouse Creek development (former Weiser lock site) provides for the development of ground oriented townhouses using CD zoning based on RM1 and RM2 guidelines. The development guidelines for the site permit a relaxation of the front yard setback for townhouses on most streets from 25 feet to 16.4 feet. The following sketch from the Powerhouse Creek Development Plan shows a typical streetscape.



*Townhouse Development, Powerhouse Creek Development Plan*

CD zoning has also been used to develop a combination of high-rise RM4/RM5 development with RM1 townhouses on the same site. Two examples of mixing high-rise apartments with street-oriented townhousing are City Club on the Park at Kingsway and Griffiths and Royal Oak Estates at the old Burnaby South school site. In both of these cases, street oriented townhouses were built on the perimeter of the high rise development site rather than focusing all of the building form in a high-rise on a podium with generous setbacks with landscaping. The Brentwood Town Centre Plan provides an example of this type of development below.



*Mixed Medium Density Townhouse and High Density  
High Rise Development, Brentwood Town Centre Development Plan*

Since the Hastings Area is rezoned, rezoning of individual sites is not required prior to application for a Building Permit. CD zoning is used occasionally, however, when a situation such as the preservation of a Heritage House on site necessitates the relaxation of some of the regulations of the RM6/RM7 District schedules.

## **5.0 DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

It is emphasized that the relaxation in current zoning requirements, whether in the RM1/RM2/RM3 District Schedules or the Hastings Village Districts or thorough Comprehensive Development Zoning should not result in a lowering of the standard of the public realm. While the front yard setback may be reduced, the quality and richness of the landscaping should be emphasized as a trade-off for achieving larger private open space areas. The City must ensure that the loss of semi-public green space is compensated by good urban design that enhances the public urban streetscape. Ground floor units should be designed to relate to the street and also take advantage of the open space adjacent to the unit. It would be appropriate to prepare design guidelines that clearly address these issues and provide guidance to developers in preparing building plans.

The guidelines could address:

- ▶ setbacks
- ▶ building height
- ▶ separation between buildings, especially in courtyard situations.
- ▶ solar orientation
- ▶ parking arrangements
- ▶ orientation to the street, including location of doors and treatment of publicly oriented landscaped areas, including fencing and access walks.
  
- ▶ treatment of private open space and play areas
- ▶ treatment of lanescape
- ▶ building articulation.

## **6.0 OTHER ITEMS TO FOSTER DEVELOPMENT OF GROUND ORIENTED HOUSING**

Two other actions have been identified that could help foster development of medium density ground oriented housing that fits a more urban context.

In the past, lanes were viewed as being functionally unnecessary in apartment areas. Access was taken from the street and the closure of the lane resulted in larger site consolidations, leading to homogenous, comprehensively developed projects. Often these developments are viewed as communities within themselves with elaborate fences and

developed areas with an existing grid road pattern. Therefore, the retention of existing lanes in areas that are appropriate for urban townhouses is viewed to help create more livable neighbourhoods. The retention of lanes achieves the following:

- ▶ parking to underground structures is obtained off the lane (where possible) rather than from the street where the streetscape is impacted;
- ▶ retention of lanes means that large, expensive land consolidations are not required,
- ▶ smaller development sites means a greater diversity in development size and design, leading to more vitality in the streetscape,
- ▶ lanes provide a discrete way to deal with issues such as garbage disposal, deliveries, access to accessory buildings and other disruptive uses and activities.

It is suggested that in areas that are redeveloping to urban townhouse forms that lanes be retained as part of the organizing framework for the neighbourhoods and that where partial lanes exist, effort be taken to open up the balance of the laneway through redevelopment.

Finally, there is a need to update provisions in the Zoning Bylaw that regulate the calculation of floor area for multiple family dwellings. Regulations in the bylaw were written with the situation of conventional apartment type buildings in mind, and do not count floor area used for laundries, recreation facilities and storage facilities that are located in the basement and cellar. This exclusion from the maximum Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) was designed to encourage communal recreation, laundry and storage space in apartment buildings. With the advent of townhouses, however, these exclusions have been applicable to individual units, in some cases, creating units where a significant proportion of floor space was not included in the calculation for the maximum F.A.R. This has tended to create bigger, more expensive units than what would otherwise have been built.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

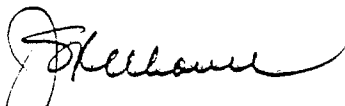
In order for Burnaby to make its contribution towards the identified regional need to provide more ground oriented housing opportunities, we must ensure that the City's land use policies and zoning regulations explicitly foster, rather than create unintended barriers, to the development of medium density multiple family ground oriented housing. Work by staff to date has indicated that there will be a challenge to ensure that there is adequate development potential for ground oriented units as part of the City's response to the GVRD's Livable Region Strategic Plan.

Two forms of medium density ground oriented housing have been discussed in this report. The first involves the creation of a more urbane form of townhouse that is appropriate in some redeveloping areas of the City, especially those related to a neighbourhood urban centre or village, or where a traditional "grid" development form already exists. This form of housing can be provided at a density similar to a conventional three storey apartment building. The second form of ground oriented housing involves the encouragement of a greater ground orientation for the first floor of an apartment building by, for example, providing individual accesses from the street to each unit on a ground level and provision of a useable outdoor area for each unit that may encroach on the usual front yard setback area.

To date, the City has made progress in developing regulations to foster the development of medium density multiple family ground oriented housing, through, for example, the guidelines included in the Powerhouse Park Development Plan and the creation of the R12 District.

The achievement of a greater focus on ground oriented units will involve amendments to the RM1, RM2, RM3 and R6 schedules to the Zoning District that allow multiple family housing so that they explicitly permit ground oriented "urban" townhouses and ground oriented apartment units. This will also involve changes to the RM6/RM7 Districts (Hastings Village Multiple Family) so that the vision of achieving urban townhouses in these areas can be better realized. Also, through the use of CD zoning, developers should be encouraged to provide where possible and appropriate, a greater ground orientation in housing developments.

Finally, it is suggested that wherever appropriate, lanes be retained to help create a more pedestrian friendly urban fabric in medium density ground oriented housing areas, and that the method of calculating density as contained in the Zoning Bylaw be reviewed so that it remains suitable for townhouse type development.

  
D.G. Stenson, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

  
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Attachment

cc: City Manager  
Chief Building Inspector  
City Solicitor

## Zoning Districts that Permit Ground Oriented Multiple Family Housing

District	Maximum F.A.R (x lot area)	Minimum Lot Area	Minimum Front Yard	Minimum Rear Yard	Minimum Side Yard	Maximum Height
RM1	.45/.60*	14,424 sq.ft.	24.61 ft.	34.45 ft.	19.69 ft.	29.53 ft. 2 storeys
RM2	.7/.9*	9,580 sq. ft. for 2 storeys, 11,948 sq. ft. for 3 storeys	24.61 ft.	34.45 ft.	14.76 ft to 19.69 ft.	39.37 ft. 3 storeys
RM3	.9/1.1*	11,948 sq.ft. for 2 storeys, 17,976 sq. ft. for 3 storeys	24.61 ft.	34.45 ft.	14.76 ft to 19.69 ft.	39.37 ft. 3 storeys
RM6	.7	6,674 sq. ft.	19.69 feet	34.45 ft.	4.92 to 9.84 ft.	29.5 ft. for sloping roof 24.3 ft. for flat roof & 2.5 storeys
RM7	.9/1.1*	13,348 sq ft.	24.61 ft.	29.53 ft.	19.69 ft.	39.37 ft. & 3.5 storeys
R6	none ( max lot coverage is 35-40% of lot area)	2,368 sq. ft. for inside unit and 3,552 sq.ft. for end unit	24.61 ft.	34,45 ft.	11.48 to 19.69 ft.	39.53 ft. & 2 storeys

\* F.A.R. means floor area ratio, or maximum floor area permitted. Where a range is given, the higher number refers to cases where all required parking is underground.

