

CITY OF BURNABY
HOUSING COMMITTEE

B

HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS

RE: ADAPTABLE HOUSING POLICY REVIEW

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council approve the proposed process to review the City's adaptable housing policy, as outlined in this report.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Social Issues Committee.

REPORT

The Housing Committee, at its 'Open' meeting held on 2003 June 09, received and adopted the attached report proposing that a review of the City's adaptive housing policy be initiated. The review process would examine the following elements:

- current practices and successes in other local municipalities;
- Building Code issues;
- the merits of voluntary versus mandatory programs;
- adaptable elements to be included;
- the extent of the need for and market viability of accessible housing;
- possible locational guidelines; and
- systems for tracking and identifying accessible units to prospective buyers.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor C. Redman
Chair

Councillor D. Johnston
Vice Chair

Councillor C. Jordan
Member

:COPY - CITY MANAGER
- DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING
- DIRECTOR PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES
- DIRECTOR FINANCE

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
HOUSING COMMITTEE

2003 June 05

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

OUR FILE: 17.908.1

SUBJECT: ADAPTABLE HOUSING POLICY REVIEW

PURPOSE: To seek approval of the proposed process to review the City's adaptable housing policy, as outlined in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** the Committee recommend that Council approve the proposed process to review the City's adaptable housing policy, as outlined in this report.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Social Issues Committee.

REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND

In 2002 March and April, the then Community Issues & Social Planning and Community Planning & Housing Committees received a report providing an overview of elements of user-friendly homes and an update on the City's existing adaptable housing policy. The report also highlighted a trend in other jurisdictions towards requiring a basic level of accessibility in multi-family housing. Further, it proposed that, if so directed, staff would conduct a review of the City's existing adaptable housing policy with a view towards recommending adoption of a more contemporary policy, which would be accompanied by applicable design guidelines. The proposal was supported by the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee. The Community Planning & Housing Committee referred the report back to staff to provide a comparison of the City's draft adaptable/accessible housing policy and the user-friendly homes design concept.

In response to the Community Planning & Housing Committee's referral, this report provides background on the City's existing adaptable housing policy (adopted in 1989), the guidelines in the draft adaptable/accessible housing policy proposed in 1994. It also discusses approaches of other selected Lower Mainland municipalities concerning barrier free design concepts and provides information on user-friendly homes. Concluding that it would be timely to initiate a review of Burnaby's existing policy, the report proposes a process for such a review for the consideration of the Committee and Council.

2.0 EXISTING ADAPTABLE HOUSING POLICY

The City has long recognized the need for housing that is accessible to people with disabilities. In 1989, Council adopted a policy that authorizes staff to seek the voluntary provision, by developers, of five percent of units in multi-family developments in town centres as adaptable for persons with

disabilities. In 1993, Council approved the distribution of draft design guidelines for adaptable housing units to the development community, organizations representing persons with disabilities and other government regulators for review and comment. As a result, an adaptable/accessible¹ housing policy was proposed in 1994. The proposed policy was intended to authorize staff to seek the voluntary provision of accessible housing in multiple family Comprehensive Development (CD) rezonings in all areas in Burnaby. It proposed three progressive levels or categories of accessibility that developers could aim for, as described below.

Category I - Accessible Building

Developments in this category would seek to incorporate design features to ensure accessibility to and through the common areas of the building and grounds. Examples of features would include: designated parking, disabled access to common areas of the building, and appropriate areas of refuge. Agreement to construct an accessible building would be sought as a condition of CD rezonings for multi family developments.

Category II - Accessible Residential Unit

Developments in this category would incorporate design features that provide basic accessibility to and within the individual residential unit. In addition to those design features listed for accessible buildings (Category I), design features would include: minimum door widths, manoeuvring space in kitchens and bathrooms, and complete living areas on a common level. The number or percentage of accessible units to be provided would be determined as part of the rezoning process.

Category III - Adaptable Residential Unit

Development in this category would incorporate design features provided in both Category I and II. In addition, Category III would contain more detailed design elements that would allow the unit to be modified to suit the particular needs of persons over a range of disabilities. Examples of additional features include: manoeuvring space at doors, low thresholds, and controls within easy reach. The number or percentage of accessible units to be provided would be determined as part of the rezoning process.

(*Appendix I* contains a more detailed list of the requirements of the 1994 draft adaptable/accessible housing guidelines.)

The adaptable/accessible housing policy and guidelines proposed in 1994 were not adopted by Council. Adaptable units have continued to be provided in residential developments in Burnaby's town centres through implementation of the voluntary adaptable housing policy adopted in 1989.

¹ The terms "adaptable" and "accessible" are often used interchangeably. However, "accessible" is generally accepted as meaning a basic level of accessibility has been achieved through minimum door widths, wheelchair maneuvering space in kitchens and bathrooms, and complete living area on one level. "Adaptable" is generally accepted as meaning that, in addition to accessible design elements, more detailed elements which would allow the unit to be modified to suit a range of disabilities have been incorporated. Those elements include maneuvering space at doors, low thresholds, controls within easy reach, and removable or adjustable cabinets.

Through the policy, approximately 115 adaptable housing units have been provided in private sector developments² since 1989. Considering that this amounts to about eight units a year, it is the view of staff that take-up by the private sector on the City's informal voluntary policy has been fairly limited. Further, the following concerns have been identified with the City's current policy:

- *inconsistent application*: a need for guidelines or specifications to allow accessibility/adaptability requirements to be assessed in a consistent manner.
- *matching difficulties*: problems matching the limited number of adaptable units with people in need (i.e., the City has no control over whether people occupying the units are frail or have a disability).
- *limited scope*: the policy does not address difficulties faced by people with disabilities visiting people in other residences in the city.
- *new housing forms*: the policy does not address the prevalence of new housing forms such as stacked townhousing which, for design reason, are not always able to accommodate accessibility features.

3.0 APPROACHES OF SELECTED OTHER LOWER MAINLAND MUNICIPALITIES

Over the last five years, barrier-free design concepts, such as universal design and user-friendly homes, have gained popularity, along with the notion that all housing should be designed with a basic level of accessibility. Accessible design features are intended to promote aging in place, accommodate those who may suddenly become disabled through disease or accident, and allow people with disabilities to visit other people in their homes. Many of these features are largely invisible (e.g., reinforcement in walls next to toilets, tubs and showers to allow for the future installation of grab bars; lower thresholds; raised electrical and cable outlets). Nonetheless, the features address accessibility problems faced by seniors, people with disabilities and others with mobility challenges. Although they can be easily incorporated for little or no cost at the time of construction, the features could be costly if added after construction is complete.

In recognition of the housing needs of their aging populations, as well as the ease and minimal costs associated with accessible housing designs, the Cities of North Vancouver and Vancouver have implemented policies which require a basic level of accessibility in multi-family housing. The District of North Vancouver has recently adopted similar guidelines to the City of North Vancouver, implementing them on a voluntary basis for the first year, with a view to making them mandatory thereafter. Through the promotion of accessible housing designs, the aim of these municipalities will be to increase the amount and variety of housing that is available and readily adaptable to people as they age or their mobility changes. As a result, the demand for care facilities should decrease and, as seniors are allowed to age in place, their quality of life should improve.

² The City's adaptable housing policy is primarily geared to the private sector. The provision of a specific percentage of adaptable units was required by senior levels of government in non-market housing (non-profit and cooperative) projects which they funded. Depending on the program, the percentage ranged from 5 to 10 percent.

The City of North Vancouver has had the most experience with the implementation of a mandatory level of accessibility in multi-family buildings. Its adaptable design guidelines were adopted in 1998, and were recently revised to become more comprehensive. The guidelines have three levels of adaptability and apply only to medium and high density multi-family buildings (the guidelines do not apply to townhouse developments). Level 1 guidelines comprise basic adaptable design and fixtures (such as flush thresholds and lever door handles). In 1999, the City of North Vancouver amended its Zoning Bylaw to make it a requirement of all new medium and high density multi-family residential developments to meet the Level 1 guidelines. The more rigorous Level 2 and 3 guidelines are similar in scope to the Category II and III requirements of Burnaby's 1994 draft adaptable/accessible housing policy and are negotiated through the rezoning process. They include such features as wheelchair manoeuvring space in doorways, bathrooms and kitchens, adaptable plumbing features in bathrooms and kitchens, adjustable cabinets, and electrical controls within easy reach.

Staff at the City of North Vancouver state that the guidelines have been positively received by the development community. In most cases, 20 percent of the units in individual developments will meet Level 2 or Level 3 guidelines. However, in some developments geared to the empty nester market, 100 percent of the units have been built to Level 2 guidelines. The increased accessibility provisions are seen as a selling feature for these developments. Since 1998, over 200 units with Level 2 and 3 features have been constructed (approximately 20 percent of the multi-family housing stock built since 1998). A report is currently before the City's Council seeking to make it a requirement that 20 percent of all units in medium and high density residential development meet Level 2 guidelines.

4.0 USER-FRIENDLY HOMES

In its referral back to staff, the Community Planning and Housing Committee requested that the user-friendly design concept be compared with the City's draft adaptable/accessible housing policy. The user-friendly design concept was developed by a private company. The design concept was created to deal with successive life stages, accommodate wheelchairs, and ensure a home environment which is safe for the entire family. It is geared mainly to single family homes. However, as with other universal design concepts, it recognizes that accessibility features can be easily incorporated for little or no cost at the time of construction, but could be costly if added after construction is complete. According to the president of the company, user-friendly home requirements address approximately 70 percent of the accessibility problems faced by seniors, children and persons with disabilities. A list of the of user-friendly features suggested by the company is provided in *Appendix 2*. It should be noted that while some of the requirements are similar to the Category II and III guidelines of the draft adaptable/accessible housing policy proposed in 1994, the Category II and III draft guidelines are more extensive than those proposed under the user-friendly home concept. Common elements include: wider doorways, low exterior and interior thresholds, reinforcements in walls next to toilets, showers and tubs, and electrical controls within easy reach.

5.0 PROPOSED BURNABY REVIEW

In light of the shift towards basic levels of accessibility in multi-family units in other jurisdictions, and shortcomings identified with the City's existing adaptable housing policy, it is considered timely

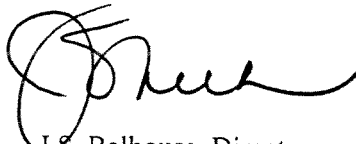
to initiate a review of the City's existing policy. The review process would examine the following elements:

- current practices and successes in other local municipalities;
- Building Code issues;
- the merits of voluntary versus mandatory programs;
- adaptable elements to be included;
- the extent of the need for and market viability of accessible housing;
- possible locational guidelines; and
- systems for tracking and identifying accessible units to prospective buyers (e.g., a list of accessible units that would be available to interested people, developers and sales representatives).

Based on an examination of the foregoing elements, the review would propose updated guidelines for the provision of accessible buildings and units in Burnaby. It is anticipated that an increasing scale of accessibility/adaptability would be proposed, with the potential recommendation (to be determined through the review process) that a basic level of accessibility be required for some or all types of multi-family housing. The guidelines would be circulated to the development community, organizations representing persons with disabilities and other government regulators for review and comment. The consultation would seek to ensure that any new policy meets the need of potential occupants and is accepted by the development community. If the proposed process is approved by Council, staff would submit a report with the results and recommendations of the review process to the Housing Committee in late 2003.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The City's existing adaptable housing policy has served to secure about 115 adaptable units in Burnaby town centres over the past 14 or so years. While these units have been a welcome addition to the City's housing stock, several shortcomings have been identified with the policy. In view of these concerns, and in recognition of the potential benefit that could accrue from a more widely applied accessible housing policy, it is recommended that a review of the City's adaptable housing policy be initiated, as outlined in section 5.0 of the report.



I.S. Belhouse, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

MM/sa
Attachments (2)

cc: City Manager
Chief Building Inspector

Appendix 1

1994 Draft Adaptable/Accessible Housing Guidelines

Category I - Accessible Residential Building

- Designated parking spaces
- Accessible path of travel from street or parking area to the front entrance
- Accessible entrance and exit doors to and from building
- Accessible path of travel from main entrance to all public parts of the building
- Public stairs and ramps built to Code specifications for public buildings
- Accessible public/common corridors
- Provision of elevators for changes in levels
- Accessible public/common washrooms
- Accessible public/common telephones
- Accessible public/common drinking fountains
- Areas of refuge

Category II - Accessible Residential Unit

- Accessible Building Requirements (Category I requirements)
- 3' minimum width for hallways inside unit
- 2' 8" clear width for all doorways inside unit
- 5' x 5' space in bathrooms to access toilet
- 4' minimum clearance between opposing counters in kitchens
- where possible, complete living area (e.g. kitchen, bathroom and bedroom) on one level

Category III - Adaptable Residential Unit

- Accessible Building Requirements (Category I requirements)
- 3' minimum width for hallways inside unit
- 2' 8" clear width for all doorways inside unit
- 12 to 24 inches of manoeuvring space at doors (depending on location of door hinge)
- minimum thresholds
- maximum force requirements for pushing or pulling open a door
- handles, pulls, latches and locks operable by one hand
- slip resistant floor surfaces
- electrical controls and outlets within easy reach of a person in a wheelchair and operable with one hand
- opening and locking mechanisms for windows within reach of a person in a wheelchair
- visual alarms provided for persons with hearing impairments
- 5' x 5' space in bathrooms to access toilet
- structural reinforcement in walls next to toilets, showers and bathtubs
- 4' minimum clearance between opposing counters in kitchens
- 30" x 48" of clear floor space in front of laundry facilities
- 5' x 5' of clear space for outdoor living areas (e.g. patios), where provided

Appendix 2

User-Friendly Home Requirements*

Features:

- flush exterior thresholds
- interior thresholds built to minimum code requirements
- offset bath and shower controls
- pressure/temperature control valves on faucets
- 2" x 12" blocking reinforcement in walls next to
- toilets, baths and showers
- waste pipe ingress in kitchen and bathroom sinks at 12 inch from floor
- easily removable bathroom cabinets
- 34 to 36 inch wide doors
- 42 in. stairway width
- light switches at 42 in. from floor to centre
- electrical and cable outlets at 18 in from floor to centre
- fourplex electrical outlet in master bedroom
- electrical outlet beside toilets
- electrical outlet above external doors
- pre-wiring for digital technology

* It should be noted that the User-Friendly Design Concept is geared mainly toward single family homes.