

MINUTES

Development Advisory Committee

File: 360-20 (DAC)
Date: April 25, 2013
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Location: Planning Room 1,
Surrey City Hall

Members:

Andy Aadmi
Maginnis Cocivera
Steve Forrest
Deana Grinnell
Roger Jawanda
Chris Kay
Currane Labercane
Ron Marr
Gopal Sahota
Mark Sakai

City Staff:

Jaime Boan
Rémi Dubé
Bev Endersby
George Fujii
Nicholas Lai
Jean Lamontagne
Don Luymes
Fay Keng Wong

Regrets:

Jas Sandhu
Charan Sethi
Greg Sewell
Guy Young

1. Acceptance of Previous Minutes

The notes of the February 28, 2013 meeting were accepted as distributed.

2. Draft Changes to the RF and RF-9 Zones (Don Luymes, Manager, Community Planning)

a) RF Zone Review:

- Don Luymes provided an update on the RF Zone Review. A copy of his presentation is attached.
- The City has been working with an expert panel to discuss potential changes to the RF Zone to address issues that have emerged. DAC member Clarence Arychuk is a member of the expert panel.
- The RF Zone currently has a square footage cap of 3,550 sq. ft. on house size. There are a range of lot sizes within the zone, ranging up to 12,000 sq. ft., with most lots being either 6,000 sq. ft. or 7,200 sq. ft. in size. A lot of people who own these lots say that house size cap is not sufficient and would like to increase their house size.
- Currently, lot coverage is quite generous in the RF Zones (40%) and since covered decks and open-to-below areas do not count as floor area, large footprint homes with extensive covered decks and open-to-below areas are constructed.
- Covered decks and large volumes of open space inside the house are sometimes filled in illegally, which has been a significant issue for the City.
- In 2009 the City hosted a series of public meetings to get feedback. Although support was expressed for the proposals, there was a lack of consensus to proceed. So, Council asked to bring the RF Zone Review to an expert panel.
- The expert panel considered a number of options. Option 3 was selected.
- This preferred option includes:
 1. A sliding scale of density in place of the house size cap, allowing larger homes on larger lots;
 2. An increase in base density to 0.6 FAR on the first 6,000 sq. ft. of lot area, and 0.35 FAR on additional lot area;

3. Counting open-to-below areas as floorspace (except for 200 sq. ft. for entry & stairwells) and counting covered deck areas as floorspace (except for 10% of permitted floor area);
 4. A sliding scale of lot coverage, from 40% on 6,000 sq. ft. lots, reducing by 2% for every additional 1,000 sq. ft. of lot area to a minimum of 32%.
- The intent of the proposal is to reduce the bulk of houses in the RF Zone while permitting larger homes on larger lots.

Comments:

- Ron Marr asked if the City will enforce when the proposed changes have been made to the RF Zone. Jean Lamontagne responded that the City does enforce, although the court system is slow.
- Ron Marr asked if the proposed changes will affect the maximum height of a house. Don Luymes responded that the current height would be retained.
- Ron Marr commented that slope, as opposed to house size, has been a problem in other municipalities.
- Andy Aadmi suggested having a covenant registered on the land title which will have more legal weight, as in commercial, and that it would just need to be registered. Nicholas Lai commented that is what the building scheme is for. Don responded that these houses were built legally, but it is only after it is built that illegal construction occurs. It is easier to enforce at the permit stage than after final approval has been granted.
- Gopal Sahota asked if the proposed changes will be brought to Council along with other amendments, including the “sensitive infill study.” Don Luymes responded that the “infill study” is more of a long-term policy direction, but that the RF Zone Review will be part of a package with the RF-9 Zone Review, and will be introduced to Council by summer.
- Maginnis Cocivera asked whether manor houses are intended for new development or to address the multiple secondary suite problem. Don Luymes responded that a number of manor homes have been constructed in new developments, but that the potential also exists for infill in selected areas.
- Gopal Sahota commented that regarding the issue of monster houses beside small houses, Delta is an example that should be looked at. In Delta, there are large houses/lots being sold by people leaving the area which are selling for about \$100,000 less than smaller houses six blocks down. Although large homes form nice family areas, they have a reduced selling price.

b) RF-9 Zone Review:

- Don Luymes provided an update on the RF-9 Zone Review. A copy of his presentation is attached.
- City staff went to a Council shirtsleeve session to review proposed amendments for the RF-9 Zone. The amendments include providing a minimum of 3 parking spaces per lot, sufficient private yard space, wider lots, and wider/larger garages.
- The proposed new standards will prevent issues related to very tight setback, such as situations that make it very difficult for a car to enter a garage due to grade.
- Three options were presented for the new standard lot. The one chosen is a combination of sufficient width and depth and in case there is a coach house and secondary suite (3 units per dwelling has caused a parking problem in the RF-9 Zone).

- The current proposal is for a standard lot size of 9.7 m wide by 30 m deep, with a narrow/deep option of 9.0 m wide by 36 m deep. This narrow/deep option would include a 6 m rear setback for the garage off the lane.
- Clarence Arychuk has commented that the City should not make these lots so big that they become unaffordable, or that they are not distinct enough from RF-12 lots.

Comments:

- Roger Jawanda commented that if you have a steep road, a 1.2 m side yard setback might not be enough. Maybe have an increased setback after a certain grade. Ron Marr added that is a no-man's land – the larger it is, the uglier it becomes. Deana Grinnell commented that is a result of bad construction, bad backyard strategies, etc.
- Roger Jawanda commented that the problem with RF-9 is trying to retain a tree on the lot.
- Deana Grinnell commented that she sympathized with the challenges of the coach house (the "tunnel effect" on back lanes and livability), but when people choose to build to the maximum, that is what results. Roger Jawanda commented that the deep lots with the design of the coach houses, decks, etc. will be more attractive and prevent the "tunnel effect".
- Deana Grinnell commented that the marginal increase for the cost of land to go to a depth of 36 m is significant. It will make it hard for the low-end purchaser to purchase. Jean Lamontagne responded that for Council to be comfortable, it would have to work with a company it trusts to do a trial.
- Deana Grinnell commented that semi-detached homes are a good affordable option to single family homes and they are selling very quickly in Vancouver. Roger Jawanda added that they provide more affordability without the strata.

3. Biodiversity Conservation Strategy Policies (Don Luymes, Manager of Community Planning)

- Don Luymes, on behalf of Stephen Godwin, announced that there will be a Public Open House on April 30th to review draft mapping results of the City of Surrey biodiversity conservation strategy inventory and to obtain feedback on associated management strategies. A handout of the proposed biodiversity policies for Surrey was distributed to the DAC members. Stephen Godwin has asked that DAC members review the proposed policies/handout and submit comments to Stephen Godwin. DAC members are also welcome to attend the Open House.

Comments:

- Deana Grinnell is the DAC representative on the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) team. She noted that City staff consulted the BCS team over the course of 4 meetings. At their last meeting, they were shown a map showing habitat corridors and nodes. One of the points that she made at their meeting was that we do not have development permit areas, yet. The DAC is concerned about certainty. Don Luymes responded that environmental development permit areas are being proposed in the new OCP. Jean Lamontagne added that we might have Stephen Godwin at the next DAC meeting to address concerns and issues.
- Deana Grinnell asked if the OCP will have to wait for the completion of the BCS. Jean Lamontagne responded that the OCP does not have to wait for the completion of the BCS.

The OCP can be approved first and the BCS finished and added later on. The OCP is very important and has deadlines that should not be missed.

4. Comments on the Market (All Members)

- Maginnis Cocivera. Polygon is continuing to sell, but sales have softened a little such that they have had to offer a bit of a discount to sell. Not uniform in every market. Some decent sales in some areas, slow in others. Polygon has a development coming up in Surrey in June and is eager to start this.
- Ron Marr. Single family sales in the Fraser Valley are probably 40% lower than normal. The existing house sales are down about 28%. There has been a definite decline in prices in Richmond and Vancouver's West Side, but prices in the Fraser Valley are a little higher than 2 years ago. Affordability is not as much of an issue there. Price and income percentage have not changed much. Single family and new homes have been hit. The uncertainty over the HST has had an impact on some of the outlying areas even though the math is better with the HST. Mission, Chilliwack, etc. have been really hit by the introduction of HST. Strong areas are Cloverdale and Langley, as well as Coquitlam and White Rock. The inventory of new single family houses in Coquitlam's Burke Mountain area is in some ways higher than in 2009. The mid-wealthy are still coming, the very wealthy are selling. It has been a few years of slow sales in Mission and Chilliwack.
- Deana Grinnell. ParkLane has townhouses under construction in Guildford and Langley. Buyers' not being able to qualify for a mortgage has been a barrier to sales. Sales in Guildford are slow and steady. People want move-in ready homes. Land prices are too high, which has been a conundrum. It is hard to get a good deal. ParkLane is trying not to discount sales prices.
- Mark Sakai. No comment.
- Gopal Sahota. There are a pent-up number of buyers waiting for a crash in the market to buy. They are cautious. Landowners are not budging. Starting to see some faltering. If one large chunk of the market sells, it would boost the market again. Developers in Langley have been discounting the price of condos significantly. Some condos are in the \$100,000's.
- Chris Kay. Clayton Rise is going quite slowly because these homes have a higher price point. The completion date for The Grove is some time away, but Townline is very happy with 3 recent sales. The new mortgage regulations resulted in almost all of their potential deals falling through. Right now, a developer has to be extremely motivated to sell. The land side is really tough. Bankruptcies and foreclosures will have to happen before there is a correction in the market. Townline is in a relatively good position because it has relatively unique units that allow it to differentiate from others on the market. If anyone drops their price, it will have an impact.
- Andy Aadmi. Builds single family homes in Vancouver. Single family homes in Vancouver are selling for \$2.1 million, which is hard for even high income earners to purchase.
- Currane Labercane. It was great to have the Mayor speak at the recent UDI event, which was well attended by approximately 500 people.
- Steve Forrest. Anthem originally focused on concrete buildings and is now understanding the difficulties associated with building wood-frame. Anthem has a development in Fleetwood, where there was a spring bump in sales and discounts, but it is slow. For smaller units, many times, buyers are not able to qualify for a mortgage. Most of these are locals and first time buyers. Jean Lamontagne suggested that is perhaps something UDI can

look into (why people are not qualifying). Chris Kay added that we are starting to see projects that were originally marketed as strata units now selling as one rental building (e.g. in Vancouver).

5. Other Business

- Curranne Labercane or Jeff Fisher will be contacted regarding who will be the City of Surrey representatives for the UDI Subcommittee working on Letters of Credit and Bonding best practices.

6. Next Scheduled Meeting – May 23, 2013

- Curranne Labercane asked if the Community Energy Plan can be presented at a future meeting. Don Luymes responded that he will speak to Anna Mathewson, Sustainability Manager, about this.
- Meeting adjourned at 4:16 pm.