

## City council ends duplex suite ban

### Split council prefers legalization to eviction of illegal suite tenants

BY BRENT RICHTER, NORTH SHORE NEWS    APRIL 10, 2013



City of North Vancouver council has voted to allow secondary suites in duplexes.

**Photograph by:** file photo, North Shore News

DUPLEX owners in the City of North Vancouver will soon be allowed to build secondary suites, turning every duplex into a potential four-plex.

Council voted Monday night to allow secondary suites in duplexes after acknowledging there are least 100 already known in city, and there is no way to bring them up to safety code if city bylaws ban them outright.

The city has had a moratorium on enforcing illegal suite bylaws on the city's 900-plus duplexes while it

tries to sort out a path forward.

In order for the secondary suites to be legal, they must meet a number of specific building and design requirements, including additional on-site parking, firewalls separating units or a sprinkler system in the building.

The city faced a similar conundrum in the late 1980s when it became apparent the city was rife with illegal suites built into single-family homes. Council ultimately decided to take the legalization route in 1991.

Monday's debate about whether the city should permit the duplex mortgage helpers initially centred around how it would affect the people living in the already existing suites.

"The fact of the matter is people are living there and if the city wants to go down the road of saying 'Let's start evicting people,' I think we're going to have revolution on our hands - and well so, because this provides all sorts of good, decent housing," said Coun. Craig Keating.

Taking a baby-step in the direction of full legalization was preferable to putting people out on the street to punish their landlords, Coun. Rod Clark added, comparing the situation to when he spoke with people facing eviction if the city started enforcing the bylaw on single-family homes in the early '90s.

"People were very desperate. They were desperate to keep accommodation, which they had for some time, which was affordable to them, which they had come to enjoy and get to know their neighbours and become part of the community, and they were threatened. Even now, I think that's the case," he said.

The motion carried 4-3 with Couns. Don Bell, Pam Bookham and Guy Heywood opposed.

Bookham urged council to agree to an amendment that would end the moratorium on enforcement and direct staff to begin inspecting the known illegal suites for minimum life and safety standards.

"If they are not inspected, people can be living in situations where electrical fires can happen, where sewage can back up, where mould can grow, where there's little light, simply because they are poor," she said.

But the mayor defended the existing practice of enforcing bylaws on a complaint basis, citing the gargantuan task of sending staff to inspect every secondary suite in the city.

"We don't need suite police in the City of North Vancouver," Darrell Mussatto said. "I think 90 per cent of the suites in single-family homes have not been inspected. If we're going to start somewhere, I think we should start there and then we would open the flood gates to huge challenges for housing in our city, and I don't think that's the way we need to go."

**Bookham's** motion failed to pass, which Bookham called astounding. "To suggest that the amount of work it would entail would be too onerous, I think, is really a question of priorities," she said.

**"The idea is not to put people out of their homes but to ensure they are safe.** Children should not grow up in mouldy apartments, children should not be growing up where there's a risk of an electrical fire because somebody went on the Internet and thought he could be an electrician and wired a suite."

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