

HOUSING

Richmond joins movement against 'monster homes'

Staff recommend bylaw changes to limit third-floor roofs, balconies

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VANCOUVER SUN

Richmond is the latest Metro Vancouver municipality to battle the rise of the monster home.

A staff report was expected to be presented to city council Monday night suggesting measures to plug a loophole in the municipal bylaws that have allowed three-storey mansions to crop up in older residential neighbourhoods, such as West Richmond, where zoning stipulates 2½ storeys.

"It's typically in neighbourhoods that are in transition," Coun. Linda McPhail, chair of Richmond's planning committee, said. "People are feeling these houses are large, high ... it doesn't give these neighbourhoods a consistent look."

The report notes homeowners are getting around a city bylaw that restricts the size of third-storey living space to 50 per cent of the area on the floor below.

The third storey is allowed as long as it's under a pitched roof, but homebuilders have been building flat, or barn, roofs instead, which lets them create an entire third floor without exceeding Richmond's nine-metre height restriction.

"This has resulted in roof design, house design and massing with an apparent three-storey character," the report states.

The city's planning committee is recommending changes to the bylaw, such as banning flat or barn roofs if the roof area is to contain habitable floor space. It also calls for the prohibition of balconies or decks on a third storey, which can reduce privacy in adjacent lots. Balconies or decks would be still be allowed on the first and second storeys.

If given first reading, the changes would be presented to the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association, the Urban Development Institute and the Richmond Small Builders Group, before going to a public hearing.



MARK VAN MANEN/PNG

Flat rooftops, such as this one on a Steveston home, help builders add third floors while staying below Richmond's nine-metre height limit.

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BOB DE WIT

CEO, GREATER VANCOUVER HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION

Bob de Wit, chief executive of the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association, said he doesn't think the proposed changes would have a significant effect on property values but are more about “look and feel.”

"It's reasonable that communities should have design guidelines," he said, noting it's important to respect the existing community when rebuilding. "You want to have a home that people want to buy, but if it sticks out too much, it's probably not to your advantage."

Richmond is the latest in a string of Metro Vancouver cities to wage war on so-called “monster houses,” which are credited with blocking views, destroying landscaping and changing the character in existing

neighbourhoods. De Wit noted Richmond's changes aren't as significant as those proposed in West Vancouver, where residents are balking against a plan by city officials to reduce the size of massive new homes, including a new 17,500-square-foot home being built in the Caulfield neighbourhood.

Residents argue the developments are being built to current regulation.

Coquitlam Mayor Richard Stewart said there has to be a balance between massive homes and the character in an existing community, but rising land prices are making such a compromise difficult.

His city has been proposing the idea of having homeowners subdivide some of their large properties, which would provide more affordable homes and help preserve the character of the city's neighbourhoods, but Stewart said many people are still hankering for a mansion of their own. "There is still demand for \$1.5 (million) and \$2 million homes in Coquitlam," he said.

In Delta, Mayor Lois Jackson noted her community limited the size of new North Delta homes to 3,552 square feet several years ago.

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