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Bylaw motion tips off derelict housing debate

Nick Wells / North Shore News

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A motion at a District of North Vancouver council meeting Monday brought calls for a closer examination of nuisance bylaws that limit the municipality from going after derelict houses on subdividable lots.

Council was reviewing two proposals to amend zoning bylaws to allow properties at 3967 Hoskins Rd. and 2698 Violet St. to subdivide. This touched off a larger debate amongst councillors about the ineffective bylaws currently in place to battle both derelict houses and secondary suites.

"I have a few concerns about the continued subdivision of properties in single-family neighbourhoods," said Coun. Roger Bassam. "I'm not sure that's entirely what we want to do."

He added that subdivision creates density concerns that are a trigger point for other properties in the block.

The proposals sparked a discussion between Couns. Lisa Muri and Robin Hicks about the need for stricter enforcement of nuisance and zoning bylaws.

"Where there's an intention by a buyer to try to subdivide, et cetera, it's very often that the houses are just left to deteriorate over a period of time. It could be from six months to a year," said Hicks. "Is this a perfectly reasonable thing to expect?"

Hicks then asked how the district could protect against this from happening.

Muri cited a crumbling home in the Seymour area as an example of ineffective bylaw enforcement.

She says it's been empty for close to 30 years and has gone beyond the appearance of an unkempt house, with a crumbling exterior and overgrown lawn. With little in the way of bylaw enforcement the house has been left to rot without any intervention by the owner.

"The nuisance abatement bylaw is so weak, we can't even activate it to deal with these kinds of situations," she said. "I think we need to take that bylaw back and dissect it and find out why it's so difficult to get a house that has been vacated and find out why it can't be torn down."

Both subdivisions were approved and will move forward to a public hearing scheduled for Feb. 17.

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