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District of North Vancouver coach house bylaw gets first reading

District of N. Van looks to ease restrictions for laneway homes

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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Photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

One more North Shore municipality may be going coach.

The District of North Vancouver may ease up on the regulations governing coach houses after a bylaw governing detached dwellings breezed through first reading Monday.

Council's unanimous vote means the coach house bylaw will head to a public hearing, tentatively scheduled for Oct. 28.

"The importance of giving something first reading cannot be understated," said Coun. Alan Nixon, who added he's waited a long time to see coach houses get to the "starting line."

The district should expect between five and 25 coach house applications each year, according to a staff report. Those numbers may be conservative, according to Nixon.

"I know that staff are not predicting that there will be an onslaught of applications, but quite frankly I wouldn't be surprised because I think there is a pent-up demand for this alternative type of housing," he said.

Approximately 85 per cent of district residents supported consideration of coach houses, according to a district survey carried

out earlier this year.

Under current bylaws, property owners can apply to build a coach house but must go through a "potentially expensive, lengthy and uncertain process," according to a district staff report.

The new bylaw would expand the definition of secondary suites to include coach houses.

Any homeowner keen to investigate a coach house should be aware of the costs, which could include expenses like an extra sewerage connection, according to Coun. Mike Little.

"A standalone building is not more economically viable. It is not more environmentally viable. It makes a whole lot more sense from an energy perspective to upgrade your current house," Little said. "People assume they're going to be able to unlock this value. .. but I really think that within the requirements that we have laid out here, it's not going to make business sense. It may make sense for your family."

Generally, homeowners will save money by renovating or adding to their home, according to Little.

While coach houses could be an economic burden, they may be a boon for seniors looking to stay in their community, according to Little.

Coach houses will allow young families to live in neighbourhoods that would ordinarily be outside their price range, according to a district report. The detached dwellings will also usher in greater housing variety by allowing renters options beyond apartments, townhouses and large houses, according to a staff report.

Coach houses would only be permitted on lots that are 10,000 square feet or bigger. The cap for the coach house itself is 968 square feet.

The size of a coach house - when added to the primary home - cannot exceed the maximum allowable square footage for the house.

The privacy of neighbours and the character of nearby homes will also be taken into account when reviewing the design of the coach house.

Homeowners can add a secondary suite or a coach house but not both.

If district residents are supportive of coach houses, council could bring the motion back for final adoption in November.

The timing of final approval was a slight sticking point for Little, who pointed out the municipal election slated for Nov. 15.

Little said he didn't want the new council to vote on coach houses without being privy to all discussion. "The public hearing should be occurring after the election so that the new council gets to hear all the information."

The City of North Vancouver allows coach houses and the District of West Vancouver is in the midst of examining its policy on coach houses.

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