

NEWSLETTER: Residential Infill Fast Tracked

September 9, 2015

"Ready for a laneway house on both sides of your backyard?"

Dear Neighbours:

The main focus of Council's five-year Financial and Strategic Plan is Infill Residential. Infill Residential is described in the new Community Plan as: basement suites, laneway houses, garden suites, triplexes, lot subdivisions, duplexes etc.

To permit this type of major development, Council has arbitrarily changed the designation of single-family neighbourhoods to "established neighbourhoods" in the OCP (new Official Community Plan), effectively changing all of Oak Bay into a multi-family area. This was done without consulting the Community. Our previous Community Plan provided development control, allowing multi-family dwellings in designated areas only.

Council was able to accomplish a moderate level of Community agreement for this infill housing by committing to slow, gradual, sustainable growth and a 0.5% annual (projected) population increase. What was also assured, presumably to get agreement, was the key issues of: noise, traffic, nuisance, upgraded and expanded infrastructure requirements, illegal dwellings, tree protection etc., would be addressed. However, the "how to" to live up to these commitments has been noticeably missing from any discussion to date. What has been missing also is Council's informing residents of all the implications these proposed major land use and zoning changes will bring about. It is one thing to set policy and regulations - it is quite another to make them work. Research shows no BC Community has successfully dealt with the adverse impacts of these types of developments.

Problems caused by inappropriate densification are simply referred to as "challenges" and go unresolved. For these reasons Oak Bay Watch is also concerned that other communities' experiences with these unresolved issues have not been, and will not be, considered by Council or by Council advisors, or staff. This is disturbing because there is ample valid research and information available. Oak Bay Watch has a collection of data on how other BC communities are struggling with infill impacts. For example, other communities have found regulation and neighbour-complaint programs are costly. It is not possible to legally prevent absentee landlords or limit the number of residents to one or two in small additional infill dwellings. Paving over lots for additional parking causes run off problems, many trees are cut down, and it has not been possible to stop increased demolitions.

In the past, multi-family dwellings with limited space housed mainly single occupants or couples. Now, smaller infill developments, promoted as affordable housing, are occupied by whole families or groups of students. Infill Residential, also referred to as "intensification", has been promoted with the objectives of developers in mind under the guise of affordable housing and housing options. These objectives have had the opposite effect and have driven up housing

prices while reducing services in order to offset increases in property taxes. However in the meantime, real estate investors and speculative developers have prospered.

This infill housing policy has also resulted in congested single-family areas, user fees, more commuter traffic and street parking problems, neighbourhood noise, nuisance complaints, and more illegal dwellings. These issues that have plagued communities throughout BC and Canada are reported in the press on a daily basis. (visit our website for examples)

It is unfortunate that, out of all the many objectives in the Community Plan, Council has chosen "Infill Residential" as the priority strategy and is dedicating a significant amount of the municipality's resources, staff time and tax dollars towards this goal. It should also be noted that no other housing options were prioritized in this way.

Oak Bay Watch is not against sustainable development but the rights of developers and individual property owners must be balanced with the rights of all existing community residents who should have the edge. Land use changes that help only the few and cause livability problems and expense for the many cannot be endorsed.

We urge you to attend meetings on these planned and newly introduced land use and zoning changes. We also urge that you to strongly object to any major land use change, made or recommended, before a clear explanation is forthcoming from Council. They must explain how their many slow-growth and low-impact commitments are going to be satisfied, and how they will deal with the complex problems that will result. If these questions are not answered in a forthright manner, the "Marketing" of Oak Bay for the benefit of others will become a reality.

Please visit our website at www.oakbaywatch.com to learn more about this and other issues facing our community. Feel free to contact us to share your thoughts, concerns and ideas.

Regards,

The Oak Bay Watch Team