

Proposed Amendments to Zoning Bylaw 8500
Height and Massing Controls for Single Family Houses in Richmond

Introduction

At the April 20, 2015 Public Hearing I made a presentation to Mayor and Council. I demonstrated that there is a pattern of over height rooms in most new houses stemming from the repeated use of partially dropped ceilings to meet the current storey height limit of 16.4ft. In reality, 21ft ceilings have become the new normal, and two storey grand rooms are appearing in both the front and back of many new houses. Continuing with my research I have analyzed the three proposed alternative amendments (9265, 9249, and 9266) to the Zoning Bylaw 8500 to control building height and massing.

Options

- Amendment Bylaw 9265 "12.1ft (3.7 m)" ceiling/storey (preferred)
- Amendment Bylaw 9249 "12.1ft (3.7 m)" ceiling/storey + 15m² of floor area (proposed by Staff)
- Amendment Bylaw 9266 "16.4ft (5.0m)" ceiling/storey

All Options Provide the following modifications to Zoning bylaw 8500:

1. The practice of using false dropped ceilings to measure the height is eliminated by introducing a "height, ceiling" definition to the top of the finished floor of a storey in the definition section of the bylaw.
2. The 34.5ft (10.5m) maximum height to the highest peak of a pitched roof allowance is removed and replaced with a 29.5ft (9m) maximum height to the highest peak for a 2 storey house, but not for a 2.5 storey house. The table below shows the heights for both 2 and 2.5 storey houses in neighboring municipalities.

Table 1: Heights - 2 and 2.5 Storey Houses in Metro Vancouver					
	Municipality	Max Overall Height to Roof Peak		Midpoint Height	
		Metre	Feet	Metre	Feet
1	Coquitlam	11	36.1		
2	New Westminster	10.7	35.0	7.6	25.0
3	Richmond	10.5	34.5	9.0	29.5
4	Surrey			9.0	29.5
5	Port Coquitlam			9.0	29.5
6	Vancouver	9.5	31.2		
7	Delta	9.5	31.2	8.1	26.5
8	North Vancouver (City of)	9.1	30.0		
9	Langley	9.0	29.5		
10	Burnaby	9.0	29.5		
11	White Rock	8.5	27.9		
12	West Vancouver			7.6	25.0

3. Richmond allows amongst the highest overall building height at 34.5ft (10.5 m). 2.5 storey houses have been permitted for the better part of the last century in most municipalities, and no other municipality differentiates between the height of a 2 and 2.5 storey house, so why should Richmond start now? Also, the FAR for a potential 2 or 2.5 storey house for a given lot is identical so why should their building heights and consequently envelopes differ?
4. Changes to controls on vertical lot width envelopes, resulting in envelopes differing between 2 and 2.5 storey houses.
5. Detached accessory buildings have been limited.
6. Reduction in the peak of the attached garage on the L-shaped "Richmond special" is imposed.

Amendment Bylaw 9265 allowing "12.1ft (3.7m)" ceilings/storey is the best option for improvement to the current Zoning Bylaw 8500.

The 16.4ft (5.0 m) ceiling/storey allowance is removed and replaced with a 12.1ft (3.7 m) ceiling/storey height in line with Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver, and which the Advisory Design Panel was supportive.

Amendment Bylaw 9249 allowing "12.1ft (3.7 m)" ceilings/storey + 15m² of floor area exemption (proposed by Staff) has the potential to create problems for Zoning bylaw 8500.

Amendment Bylaw 9249 reads: *"An additional maximum of 15m² of floor area with a ceiling height between 3.7 and 5m, provided the floor area is located at least 2.0m from the interior side yard and rear yard"*.

An existing exemption of 106 ft² (10m²) for the foyer/staircase is already allowed by the current bylaw. The foyer/staircase areas under the existing exemption currently reaches heights of 21 ft.

The **proposed** 161ft² (15m²), 16.4ft (5m) overheight area is not tied to a location or a purpose and can be incorporated anywhere. In addition, this option is unclear because the exterior expression measured from finished floor to the bottom of the eave, must be no higher than 12.1ft (3.7m), but the interior ceiling height can range between 12.1ft (3.7m) and 16.4ft (5.0m). Definitely adding to the complexity at the plan checking stage.

The 106 ft²m (10m²) exemption for the foyer/staircase is already generously interpreted. Adding, another liberally interpreted area at a height that is inconsistent with other neighbouring best practices would be a recipe for confusion in, plan checking and at inspection. City Staff have shown in their table - "Environmental Scan of Building Heights and Interior ceiling limitations - May 2015", attached to the report for this planning meeting, that the exempted areas if offered, are only for the foyer/staircase in neighboring municipalities and not for other random areas in houses. As shown in the table, Surrey, Burnaby and Delta currently have an exempted area for the foyer/staircase. On the other hand, the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, City of White Rock and City of New Westminister are not cited as having exemptions.

Amendment Bylaw allowing 9266 "16.4ft (5.0m)" ceilings/storey is the worst option for improvement to the current Zoning Bylaw 8500.

The proposed Amendment Bylaw 9266 retains the 16.4ft (5.0m) ceiling/storey allowance. The Advisory Design Panel found it too generous and supports a 12.1ft (3.7m) ceiling/storey height as already mentioned.

Proposed Considerations that need to be addressed now as opposed to in the future, and are omitted from all proposed Amendment Bylaws include:

1. Maximum Building Depth - inhabitable space measured in the direction of the front to rear yard will be 50% of the lot depth (as presented in Study on Massing by the City). Change was supported by Advisory Design Panel.
2. The second storey floor area will be a maximum of 80% of the first storey (as presented in Study on Massing by the City)
3. Projections into the 4ft side yard should be eliminated all together.
4. Differentiating between properties by lot size frontage alone is not sufficient. Lot area is also relevant and should be included because Richmond has many atypical shaped lots.
5. Minimum roof pitch

Conclusion:

1. Modify Amendment Bylaw 9265 (Attachment 5, PLN-219 to PLN-225), by lowering the maximum height for both 2 and 2.5 storey houses to 29.5ft (9.0 m)
2. Delete section 4.18.3(b) and 4.18.4(b) and add houses with 2.5 storeys to 4.18.3(a) and 4.18.4(a) of Amendment Bylaw 9265.
3. Put forth Amendment Bylaw 9265, in conjunction with changes that allow effective enforcement.

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