

14 April 2021

Re: Laneway Housing+SDUs

Dear City Councillors;

Thank you for considering the proposed changes and next steps for the zoning by-law regarding Secondary Dwelling Units for Residential Zones. By now you will have heard many passionate arguments for, among other things relaxing some of the restrictions, expanding the geography and in general continuing with the Laneway Housing movement as the city continues to find ways to grow and densify. I won't reiterate these here except to add my voice of support for the promotion of SDUs.

As someone who frequently deals with zoning in my work as an architect, I appreciate the effort it takes to understand the zoning by law and debate its inner workings. Cities are infinitely complex organisms, and it may seem appropriate zoning by laws have traditionally come across as equally complicated and daunting works to understand. But they needn't be.

Cities may be complex, but they are also organic in the way they grow and evolve, reflecting the collective will and desires of their inhabitants. Zoning rules and regulations are of course necessary to guide and direct that growth in desirable ways-no glue factories beside nursing homes, thanks-, but zoning by laws should never be mistaken for urban design. They may be the necessary 'rules of the game', but they are not 'the game'. Zoning by laws need to be both proactive-anticipating and preparing for change-but also reactive, since organic growth in all its messy and imperfect intricacies can never be perfectly for seen. SDU rules are a good example of 'reactive' zoning.

Laneway housing is a perfect example of a movement, of a desire by the citizens to intensify neighbourhoods without macro, 'whole block at a time' redevelopment or wholesale change of character. Laneway dwellings were not likely even contemplated when the zoning by laws were written in the last half of the 20thC, and were hardly on the radar even in the first decade of the 21st. But they re here now as, when done carefully and thoughtfully a sensible way to bring vitality and viability back to older neighbourhoods; neighbourhoods whose once large families have moved on, and whose new occupants and (typically) smaller families are looking for affordable homes.

There is a tendency for urban planners, when faced with changes they may not have seen coming, to quell the movement with a lot of restrictions and regulations, perhaps to buy time in order to set out a more comprehensive and all encompassing approach, or 'vision'. They might even go so far as to call it Urban Design. In effect, slowing down what wants-and needs- to happen sooner than will otherwise be much, much later. But if Hamilton is to seize the spirit and energy in the enthusiasm for secondary dwellings in established neighbourhoods, a better approach is to step back-a bit- from the urge to control, and see what creativity comes from this organic movement. Yes, ensure everyone stays safe, plays fair and the dwellings recognize the balance of rights between newcomers and those already there. Community, privacy and amenity in the right measures, please. But the real potential will never be prescribed by simply enacting onerous rules, without encouraging vision.

Sincerely,



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