

Re: Report PED22154, Amendments to Expand the Permitted Uses in the Low Density Residential Zones... August 3, 2022

Dear Chair and Members of the Planning Committee

I regret that I am unable to attend today's meeting but offer this written submission instead. I write to support the recommendations of PED22154, for all of the reasons cited in the report, including allowing for greater population density in single-family areas that will help sustain existing amenities in those neighbourhoods; efficient use of existing infrastructure; meeting provincial population growth targets; and housing affordability.

My specific concern is with housing affordability. I believe the recommendations in PED 22154 will help temper upward pressures on housing prices and rent. I am concerned, however, that they may not produce truly affordable homes, owned or rented, defining affordable as housing costs that are less than 30 per cent of gross household income.

Therefore, while I support approval of the recommendations, I would urge the Planning Committee to do two further things.

The first is to arrange for a research project to determine what happens when these recommendations take effect, so that the city can know whether and how well this initiative works. This would require at least three measures. One would be simply how many properties are developed under these new provisions. A second would be a comparison of sale prices of properties that take advantage of the additional units permitted by these recommendations compared to properties that do not (to determine if up-zoning drives up land prices). That would likely require data from the Building Department linked to data at the Real Estate Association of Hamilton-Burlington. A third would be to determine the rent charged for rental units created by these policies, so the city would know how many, if any, affordable units are actually created.

Second, my preference would be for the city to make up-zonings in single-family residential zones contingent on the additional units created actually being affordable, ideally forever, subject only to rent increase guidelines. If there is no legal means for the city to require that, I would encourage the city to use its borrowing power to borrow money that could be lent out to property owners to build secondary or other additional units, subject to strict rent limits in place for long periods. As the lender, the city could set those conditions and even require them to be registered on title if necessary. The carrot would be loans at lower rates than the property owner would get at the bank; the stick would be the city calling the loan if the property owner failed to provide required proof of rent levels.

There is much else that is needed to overcome the city's housing affordability crisis, from implementation of inclusionary zoning wherever permitted, to renovation prevention measures like New Westminster's, to fast tracking applications for deeply affordable housing projects, to building affordable housing into the LRT Community Benefits Agreement, and enhanced city investments to maximize possible investments from the federal or provincial governments. Today's proposed recommendations is another good step.

I hope the committee supports recommendations and the additional proposals made above.

*Bill Johnston*