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Mayor Lisa Helps
Councillors City of Victoria

Mayor & Council   January 12, 2016

#1 Centennial Square

Victoria, BC

V8W 1P6

RE: R1A Bylaw Amendment

My name is Melanie Smith (Melanie Smith Developments). I'm a small – medium boutique style property developer. I have completed several residential and multi-family projects over the past decade within the City of Victoria in neighbourhoods such as James Bay, Fairfield and Vic West. I currently own property in the Fernwood and Rockland area.

I have several concerns regarding the proposed amendment to the R1A zone. I feel a thorough and comprehensive understanding prior to adoption of this amendment is paramount:

1.   It does not represent a "minor housekeeping" change:

 This amendment is referenced in the Planning and Land Use Committee report to Council prepared by Jonathan Tinney for the Nov 12, 2015 meeting as "minor" and "housekeeping". Whether or not the bylaw is returning to pre 2011 language/intent the fact remains that this is a significant change in policy.

EXAMPLE:

Current R1A policy

A 5400m2 (1.33acres) property with an existing dwelling converted into nine rental suites pre 1970 would allow for an additional three units of densification with nothing more than a Development Permit

Proposed R1A policy

Would not allow for ANY densification. For the same three additional units to be constructed under the new density criteria the lot would require an additional 4,620m2 of land, almost doubling the existing land size requirement. A re-zone would be necessary, however unlikely to be supported given the excessive overage in density and the fact it would require overturning in effect a new bylaw.

2.   The population in the Rockland Neighbourhood is decreasing:

This is in spite of the current more permissive bylaw/interpretation being in effect for the past 6 years. Does it make sense from a planning perspective to further limit density and housing potential in an area where population is on the decline? Available statistics from 2013 show a total of 7 units added to Rockland area (2 SF, 4 secondary suites and 1 garden suite) under the current R1A zone. I'm hard pressed to see this as a zone that needs to be tightened up.

3.   Rockland character preservation long term:

Many of Rocklands large character homes are over 100 years old. They require an enormous financial commitment year after year to remain viable. A majority of these homes have been converted to revenue generating rental units, B&B's and/or infill on the large parcels of land for this reason. Specifically restricting the development ability to these vulnerable estates under the proposed amendment will impact their long term sustainability.

4.   Rental pool reduction:

In an attempt to achieve additional infill density, owners may be tempted to reduce the number of rental units to allow for more profitable infill to sustain their buildings. In light of the James Bay renoviction issue the last thing the City needs is rental strains in another neighbourhood.

5.   Neighbourhood notification was inadequate:

The notice of bylaw amendment was passed along to the RNA in October and accordingly it would be up to them to disburse this information to the neighbourhood. They did not notify me as an owner, eventhough we have been in discussions for the past 7 months about proposed development. I would then assume that none of the owners of large converted character homes were notified about how this amendment would impact their properties. Disbursement of information by the RNA should not be discretionary and it seems it was in this case. Furthermore City staff did not inform me formally or informally at any point about this until December 17th well after first/second reading.

I urge Council to table this amendment until a balanced and careful examination of the full impact of this bylaw can be explored and proper and complete notification of the Rockland property owners is attempted.

Sincerely

Melanie Smith