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ACT Solutions

Density Bonus Transfer Information Benefits Vancouver Property Owners and Developers

Issue

The City of Vancouver often grants a density bonus when property owners agree to preserve and repair heritage buildings that they own.

However, the owner may not be able to use the added density on the heritage site itself. In this case, the city allows the density to be transferred to another property, provided both the donor and receiving sites are within City Council's approved list of areas.

If the heritage site owner does not have another project or property where the density bonus can be used, it can be sold to another eligible property owner. This, in turn, generates revenue that can be used to rehabilitate the heritage property.

Since 1993, the Transfer of Density policy has been used to rehabilitate 40 major heritage buildings, and created more than 750 residential units. The policy has re-

talized historic areas of Vancouver and created housing for all ranges of household income.

Over time, changes to the transfer policy and related procedures have resulted in a complex process. Vancouver retained a consultant who urged the city to develop a clear set of guidelines and instructions for municipal staff and property owners.

Activities

Vancouver received an ACT grant to hire a planning consultant to develop a procedural manual for staff, a detailed promotional brochure for the development industry and information for the city's website. The project's objectives were to:

1. Reduce time spent by Heritage Group and Legal Services staff on explaining the transfer process.
2. Ensure consistent and efficient processing of applications.



The Flack Block in Vancouver was renovated through density bonus transfer

Source: City of Vancouver

3. Promote take-up by developers, leading to increased residential development.
4. Provide information to the general public and other municipalities.

Program Partners:

FCM



Canadian Home Builders' Association
Association canadienne des constructeurs d'habitations



Project team

City of Vancouver Heritage Group,
Urban Development Institute, B.C.
Housing Development Services,
Vancouver Heritage Commission

Results

The consultant wrote a guide for property owners and developers, as well as a staff protocol. The guide includes frequently asked questions, describes the transfer process and identifies the municipal departments involved.

The consultant also developed a new item in the city's "How To" series — *How to Buy and Sell Transferable Heritage Density* — for use by property owners.

New staff process protocols describe heritage density bonus transfer procedures and the civic administrative agencies that participate in the process. Flow charts and sample process documents are included, and the protocols are posted on a staff intranet site.

The consultant also recommended administrative improvements to make the system work better and to suggest how density transfer could be made more attractive to developers and property owners.

Property owners with density for sale have applauded the new guide and are using it as a reference.

Since the guide's introduction, the city has reviewed its Transfer of Density program and the density bank. This review has led to

recommended measures to maintain the density bank viability, such as placing a hold on creating new density for transfer until the density bank balance is at equilibrium (an amount equal to but no greater than three previous years of absorption).

In addition, the city is actively pursuing opportunities to increase density transfers. Future density creation will be matched to absorption rates to maintain the viability of the program.

Additional resources

Description of Transfer of Density Program:

<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/heritage/densitytransfer.htm>

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