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ACT Solutions

Developing Small Lot Zones

Surrey, British Columbia

Issue

To accommodate rapid growth, a limited supply of land and a growing market demand, the City of Surrey wanted to encourage small lot development. The City had approved a small lot pilot project, which proved to be popular with developers and the public. As a result, the City received several inquiries and applications to develop similar small lot developments and other forms of housing, such as cluster housing and row houses, that vary in terms of density, lot sizes, floor areas and building setbacks.

The City's zoning bylaw did not have any zones to accommodate such proposals. Instead, staff had to create project-specific Comprehensive Development Zones, which required lengthy negotiations. This also led to inconsistencies in zoning standards and approval processes, resulting in inefficient use of staff resources. The municipality decided it needed new zoning and development standards to accommodate and encourage innovative housing on small lots.

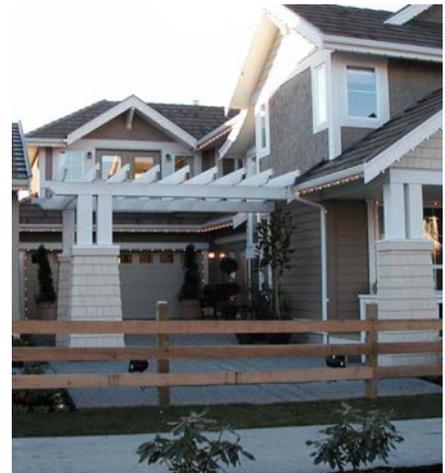
Plan

Surrey undertook to revise its zoning bylaws and development standards to meet the following objectives:

- ❑ increase consistency, efficiency and fairness in the approval process by standardizing policies and procedures for small lot housing;
- ❑ lower carrying costs and increase housing affordability by streamlining the approval process and reducing the time involved;
- ❑ encourage a diversity of housing forms and affordable housing choices by permitting more housing types outright; and
- ❑ encourage development that is responsive to market demands.

Project team

The project team included Surrey's senior planners and a consultant. They consulted with the City's task force previously struck to look at issues regarding innovative housing and to collect information



Small lot detached townhouse with courtyard

Source: Parklane Homes

on standards in other municipalities. The task force included senior planning staff and representatives from the local building and development industry.

Results

By all accounts the initiative was a resounding success. Not only were all four objectives fully realized, but Surrey also made advancements in related areas.

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The City's Planning and Development Department recommended to Council in January, 2000 the creation of four new zones that would "significantly reduce the need for Comprehensive Development zoning to accommodate" small lot" residential development.

Two of the four zones, RF-12 and RF-9, are for detached houses on lots as small as 270 m². A third zone, RF-SD, permits two side-by-side units within one semi-detached structure wherein each unit is located on a separate fee-simple lot. The fourth zone, RM-19 (now called RM-23), permits row housing wherein each unit within the row housing is located on a separate fee-simple lot.

The recommendation set out to "fix the goal posts" for both developers and staff by providing consistent standards for minimum lot size, increasing predictability and efficiency, and making the City's bylaws more responsive to the market.

According to Surrey's Senior Planner Bhargav Parghi, all four zones, with some modifications, have since been incorporated into the zoning bylaw.

The most popular of the four zones has been the RF-12 Zone, designated exclusively for detached single-family dwellings and allowing for lots that are a minimum of 12 m wide with a minimum area of 320 m². Mr. Parghi reports that the demand for RF-12 zoning has been quite high, which has led to a substantial increase in the number of small lot developments.

"Because of the smaller lots, the affordability seems to have increased," Mr. Parghi said. "At the same time, the smaller lots still allow for a reasonable house with a double garage."

There has been no substantial opposition to the new zoning bylaw provisions from any of the key stakeholders. Mr. Parghi credits the extensive consultation process and the City's communication strategy with helping to ease the change for staff, developers and the general public.

"The small lot zones have satisfied a need in the marketplace," said Parklane Homes General Manager Ben Teddei. "They seem to have become standardized."

According to Mr. Parghi, the work done on small lot residential development has "opened the door" to additional ideas and changes.

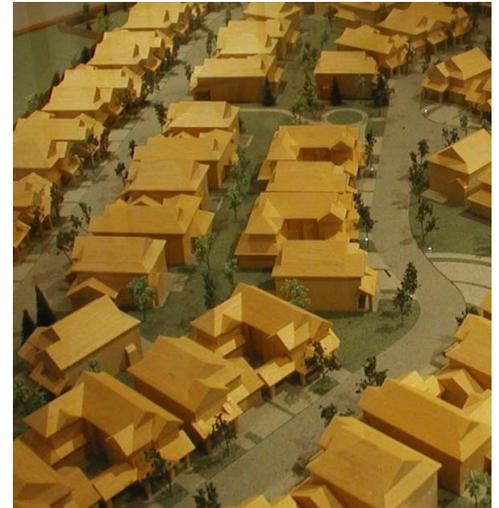
Related reports

Proposed Small Lot Residential Zones (City of Surrey, 2000)

This report is available from the ACT website. See "ACT projects & solutions".

Contact

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Paired detached units form courtyards on small lots

Source: Parklane Homes

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