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# Contenu archivé

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# RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION CASE STUDIES

## Municipal Initiatives

### SINGLE-FAMILY LOT SIZE POLICY PROCESS Richmond, British Columbia

#### SUMMARY

The process allows suburban lots to be split into two lots by setting an area-wide policy with considerable input from affected property owners.

**Date Implemented:** 1989

**Key Outcomes:** 522 new suburban lots have been created over the lifetime of the policy.

#### BACKGROUND

The City of Richmond is a rapidly growing municipality south of Vancouver within the GVRD. The city, which was characterized by low density suburban development, is gradually moving towards a more urban landscape with mainstreets and a higher-density, mixed-use core linked to rapid transit.

Many single-family suburban areas in Richmond were originally developed in the 1950s or 60s on large lots (60 to 70 foot frontages). In the 1980s, those houses were beginning to show their age and some owners were considering demolition. This, combined with demographic pressures and rising land values, triggered interest in subdividing existing suburban lots such that two new houses could replace the original structure. The City regularly received applications from property owners and small builders to subdivide single family properties into two or more smaller lots, but had no set procedure for dealing with them. Thus, the applications were dealt with on their own individual merits, which created the impression that change in the affected areas was haphazard. A more formal process was

needed to determine the appropriate lot size for each neighbourhood and to provide the neighbourhood with a degree of input and predictability as to how their built environment was going to change.

#### DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

The Single-Family Lot Size Process was introduced as section 702 of the City's Zoning and Development Bylaw, adopted in April 1989. The "702 Process" was meant to ensure that a fair and consistent approach is taken with applications seeking to introduce smaller lots through subdivision of existing lots in low-density residential neighbourhoods.

The policy applies to the low-density (single-family housing) areas outside of the City Centre and within the perimeters of major roads (but not to properties on the major roads themselves). When a rezoning application is made (typically by the current property owner or a small-scale speculative builder) to subdivide a single-family lot, Council may instruct planning staff to conduct a Lot Size Study for the surrounding area. The study area can be as small as a few lots or as large as 500 lots. Most study areas include less than 100 lots.

As part of the study process, the residents in the area are sent a letter inviting them to a public information meeting with planning department staff to discuss single-family lot sizes. A lot size preference survey is also distributed to households in the study area. A detailed technical analysis is also conducted to determine whether the existing physical and community services in the area can accommodate additional population.

Based on the community's preferences and the technical analysis, the planning department recommends a lot size policy for the study area. A public meeting and then a formal public hearing are held to debate and refine the recommendation and to attach any conditions to subdivision approval. The recommendations are submitted to Council, which votes to either adopt or reject the policy.

Figure 1 provides an example of a 702 policy area, showing the original zoning designations and the area where subdivision to 9 metre (29.5 foot) lots (R1/A) will be allowed. (Some lots on the map are already zoned R1A because of previous rezonings under older 702 policies and these cannot be further subdivided).

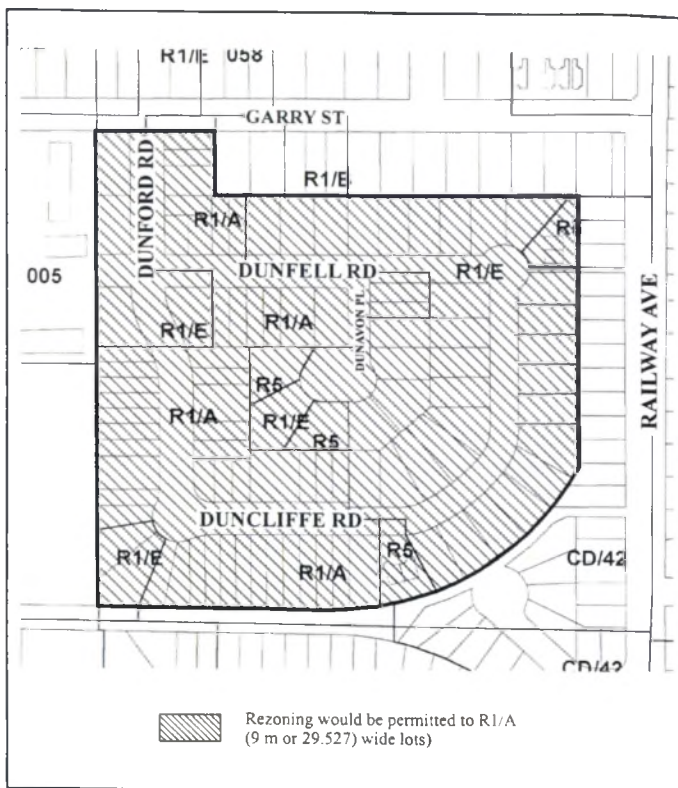


Figure 1: A 702 Policy area showing the lots where subdivision will be permitted.

Source: City of Richmond

Once adopted for an area, the Lot Size Policy guides Council in making decisions on future single-family rezoning applications in the area for a five-year period. Thus, in the areas with adopted policies, Council no longer needs to consider each rezoning application individually. If an application is made in an area where a policy is already in place, the rezoning is approved as long as the application is consistent with the policy.

If the application is contrary to the policy and the policy has been in effect for over five years, the policy can be reconsidered through a new study.

The first round of 702 policies was adopted in 1989 and the early 1990s. 702 policies have now been accepted in the majority of the areas zoned for single-family housing and in many neighbourhoods, the policies have been revised once or twice for subsequent five-year periods. In some cases, the originally defined policy areas are being broken down in order to apply more specific policies in smaller areas.

## COMPLEMENTARY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

About half of Richmond is within the provincially-regulated Agricultural Land Reserve, which prohibits non-farm development and limits the amount of land available to accommodate a growing population. In the late 1980s, a strategic planning exercise pointed to the need to allow moderate intensification of existing neighbourhoods but at a pace that would be controlled by the neighbourhoods themselves.

Originally the 702 Process applied both to residential areas inside blocks and to the arterial roads bounding the blocks. Over time, the City has been removing the arterial sections from the Lot Size Policies in order to provide a more consistent policy framework for those areas.

The City's Arterial Road Redevelopment Policy supports intensification of these arterial roads to varying degrees. Near neighbourhood centres, Council's policy is to encourage townhouses and low-rise apartments rather than single-family houses or duplexes. In locations further from neighbourhood centres, single-family lots are permitted but duplexing and higher density forms such as townhouses are encouraged.

This policy works in conjunction with a new initiative to retrofit arterial blocks to accommodate lanes, which will reduce the need for driveways and the problems associated with vehicles emerging from driveways onto busy arterial streets. The lane policy takes advantage of redevelopment proposals along arterial stretches to incorporate lane segments in the rear. When a block has been entirely redeveloped, the lane will run parallel to the arterial but exit onto perpendicular side streets with controlled access to the arterial.





Figure 2: An example of smaller lots within neighbourhoods resulting from Lot Size Policies.  
Source: City of Richmond

## STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE

The 702 Process was introduced in 1989 as part of a global revision and consolidation of the City's Zoning and Development Bylaw and attracted little attention from the general public at that time. However, the lot studies and rezonings that have taken place under the bylaw do tend to attract considerable public attention.

There is an extensive public consultation process with each 702 Process study and rezoning: property owners in the study area are given the opportunity to vote on their preferred lot size through a mail-in survey and are invited to attend a public information meeting led by City staff. Even in areas where a lot size policy has already been approved by Council, the Municipal Act requires that every rezoning application be subject to a public hearing and nearby property owners are invited to attend.

In most cases, Council follows the wishes of property owners as expressed through the above consultation mechanisms. In some cases, property owners have voted to maintain larger lots, generally within the more affluent established neighbourhoods. Opposition to allowing lot splitting usually comes from the surrounding property owners, and generally relates to the perception that smaller lots will reduce property values. Concerns about traffic, density and parking are

often raised as well. When resident opinion favours lot splitting, it is generally in neighbourhoods with a higher percentage of rental accommodation or where an applicant has done a successful job of persuading his or her neighbours to support lot splitting.

## IMPACT

To date, 55 Lot Size Policies have been approved by Council, covering about 65 per cent of the single-family residential areas of the city. Other areas have not been covered for a variety of reasons, e.g., the original lot sizes were too small to consider subdivision.

These policies have designated over 1000 suburban lots where a rezoning application for subdivision would be automatically approved. Of these, 522 new lots have actually been created to date and about 95 per cent of those new lots have had housing constructed on them. The only building form permitted under this process is single-detached housing. Figure 2 provides a typical example of the built form resulting from the lot splitting process.

## FINANCIAL ISSUES

When a Lot Size Policy is adopted that permits lot splitting, the result will be a gradual increase in densities in the affected area. The technical review

of proposed Lot Size Policies is meant in part to determine if lot splitting will require upgrades to City infrastructure (e.g., sewer, water). To date, no such infrastructure improvements have been triggered.

The major cost to the municipality is for staff time to prepare the household surveys, tally the results, conduct information meetings, coordinate technical reviews and write the recommendations to be sent to Council. Now that most areas in the city are already covered by a 702 policy, little staff time is required. However, during the first years of the policy process, a half-time staff position was needed to manage it. A City engineer also attends public meetings to answer questions about physical upgrades that can be expected in 702 neighbourhoods (curbs, gutters, lighting). At the height of the program, the engineer spent about .25 FTE on these meetings.

Some of the staff costs associated with the process are recovered through the rezoning application fee, which is \$3,000 for each pair of lots created through the 702 process.

Property owners making rezoning applications are also required to upgrade City amenities. For example, if the lot in question is on a road with a ditch, the property owner is required to pay for covering and culverting the ditch, adding a curb, street trees and street lighting. Owners may undertake the work themselves or pay into a City-managed Neighbourhood Improvement Fund (NIF). Such in-lieu charges usually amount to about \$11,000 per new lot. When 50 per cent or so of lots on a street have paid into the fund, the City will use the NIF money to undertake the needed work.

Other costs to property owners include a \$750 subdivision application fee, development cost charges of about \$13,000 for each new lot and a school site charge of \$369 per unit. Water connection charges for each unit are about \$2,850. The total fees and charges paid to City by a property owner who undertakes to split her or his lot can amount to almost \$60,000. This may seem like a hefty burden, but it should be kept in mind that the new lot may fetch up to \$300,000 when sold.

## EVALUATION

The Lot Size Policy process seems to be successful. It creates a framework for subdividing lots in an orderly way. It ensures that the City will take a consistent approach when a lot-splitting (rezoning)

application is made and provides affected neighbours with a mechanism for expressing their views and influencing outcomes. The lot size policies remain in effect for five years, a period that is long enough to help foster stability in a neighbourhood but short enough to give consideration to changes in property owners' lot size preferences over time.

From an intensification point of view, however, the process has been a double edge sword: local residents may be willing to accept changes to their neighbourhoods, or they may not. Thus, in some study areas, the process has resulted in a freezing of the process of neighbourhood change. It also limits housing forms to detached dwellings.

The Lot Size Policy process is easily transferable to other contexts where large lots are available for subdivision and where housing is ripe for replacement. The process can be implemented where, for whatever reason, an area plan has not been adopted. If an area plan is adopted after the Lot Size Policy has already resulted in the adoption of area-specific policies, these can be grandfathered into the area plan.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### CONTACT:

**Jenny Beran**  
Planner  
Policy Planning, Urban Development  
Richmond, BC  
Tel: (604) 276-4212  
Fax: (604) 276-4052  
E-mail: [jberan@city.richmond.bc.ca](mailto:jberan@city.richmond.bc.ca)

### REPORTS AND BROCHURES:

Single Family Lot Size Policy Manual. undated.  
City of Richmond.

Single Family Lot Size Options: What's it all About?  
City of Richmond.

Single Family Lot Size (702) & Rezoning Process.  
undated. City of Richmond.

### WEB SITES:

[www.city.richmond.bc.ca](http://www.city.richmond.bc.ca)  
(City of Richmond)

**OUR WEB SITE ADDRESS:** [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

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