

Garage & Garden Suite Buildability What We Heard Report

BACKGROUND

On December 7, 2015, Council's Executive Committee asked City staff to pull together information on the buildability of garage and gardens suites.

As part of this information gathering stage, we reached out to stakeholders in a variety of ways:

- A meeting with Infill Development in Edmonton Association on March 1, 2016, with 5 representatives in attendance.
- A public meeting with Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) on March 14, 2016, with 15 representatives in attendance.
- A meeting with Urban Development Institute and Canadian Home Builders Association on March 16 with 18 representatives in attendance.
- A survey sent out to 32 people who had built, designed, or applied for a development permit for a Garage or Garden Suite.
- 10 one-on-one meetings with individuals who wished to share their feedback.

The following table summarizes the key themes and feedback we received. In some instances, we heard similar comments from a range of stakeholders. In other instances, we heard opposing viewpoints expressed.

Thank you to everyone who provided their input into this process. This summary of your feedback will be provided to Executive Committee and used to inform the report presented on September 13, 2016.

NEXT STEPS

City staff will be preparing a series of recommendations for consideration at Executive Committee on September 13, 2016. These recommendations will be informed by your input, technical reviews, and City policy. There will be additional opportunities for engagement before recommendations are presented to Executive Committee. We look forward to your continued involvement as the project moves forward.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MOTION

At the December 7, 2015, Executive Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration conduct some high level analysis and consult with the builders on the buildability of garage suites, including but not limited to:

- height of flat roof buildings versus sloped roofs
- whether there ought to be building articulation requirements to deal with large blank walls
- the tethering of floor area to the principal residences' floor area

and bring back a report to Executive Committee.

CONTACT

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GARAGE & GARDEN SUITE BUILDABILITY

DESIGN & ARTICULATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Garage and garden suites should reflect existing styles in the neighbourhood · Design can be subjective and neighbourhood character difficult to identify · Unclear why garage and garden suites should be held to a higher design standard than houses · Rigid design regulations can decrease innovation and quality · Second storey setbacks can increase cost and reduce livable area · Dictating finishes can reduce affordability · Only street or lane facing façades should require articulation · Articulation is important and should be required · Sheer walls create perception of greater height · List of articulation options can provide needed flexibility
ROOF PITCH AND HEIGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Current height restrictions for both flat and pitched roof dwellings create a barrier to building garage and garden suites · Unclear why there are different height limits for garage and garden suites · Unclear why height is linked to the existing height of the main house as it may be redeveloped in the future · Sloped roofs lead to less usable space in the dwelling · Regulations should be flexible to allow for more livable spaces · Unclear why grade is calculated using the four corners of the site as garage and garden suites are located at the rear of the site only
USE CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Unclear why there are separate definitions for garage and garden suites · Definitions reduce flexibility and lead to less innovative designs · Unclear why garage and garden suites are discretionary if there are no locational criteria · Garage and garden suites should be a permitted use · Garage and garden suites should be discretionary in some neighbourhoods but not others
FLOOR AREA DEFINITIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Method of calculating floor area means higher insulation is penalized and stairwells are often located outdoors · Removing staircases, storage, and balconies from floor area calculations would facilitate development and create safer and more livable units · Floor area should only be restricted at the second storey
SITE COVERAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Allowing more site coverage would provide flexibility for better design · If the main house is under the site coverage allowance, the difference should be allowed to go to the garage or garden suite · Remove site coverage restrictions altogether · More opportunities for at-grade living spaces preferable even if lot coverage increases

GARAGE & GARDEN SUITE BUILDABILITY

LOT SIZES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Greater flexibility for lot sizes should be provided as many lots do not meet the minimum requirements · There is a strong demand for garage suites in new neighbourhoods but site size regulations restrict this from happening
SETBACKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Suites should be allowed to locate closer to the main house if desired · Adequate separation space should be provided between the main house and the garage or garden suite · Required side setbacks on corner lots reduce usable space
CONSTRUCTION COSTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Sprinklers for mid-block units creates a challenge · Fire rating is expensive · Utility servicing is expensive
ENFORCEMENT OF REGULATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · There is a need for better enforcement of regulations · Greater flexibility in regulations is needed
APPLICATION PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Too much information is required for the development permit · The application process is lengthy and has uncertain outcomes · Different interpretation of regulations leads to unpredictable results, making it more challenging to take on a project · The discretionary nature and frequent need for variances increases the lack of certainty at the appeal stage
UNCERTAINTY FOR NEIGHBOURS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Neighbours do not know how the final building will look and what the quality will be. This leads to appeals · Additional information, such as coloured elevation drawings, should be provided · Greater communication with neighbours is encouraged · Pre-approved designs could be fast-tracked through the system
SHADOWING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Shadow impacts are minimal · Solar access for neighbours should not be compromised. · Year-round solar access must be considered

GARAGE & GARDEN SUITE BUILDABILITY

PRIVACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Full privacy is not a realistic expectation in an urban area and windows from garage or garden suites do not necessarily create less privacy for adjacent yards than back windows of existing houses. · Privacy is important for adjacent properties · Privacy regulations should be related to angle and distance · Neighbours should be notified of window locations and work with applicant to determine appropriate window placement rather than having rigid requirements · Restricting windows to facing the laneway only creates poor views for residents of the garage or garden suite
LANEWAY CHARACTER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Potential for laneways to become secondary streets · Heavy vehicle traffic, lighting and mail delivery need to be considered · Eyes on the street improve laneway and neighbourhood safety · Access for emergency vehicles must be ensured
PARKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Requiring three spaces reduces design quality, leads to over-developed lots and encourages large three car garages · Parking requirements prevent garage or garden suites from locating in new neighbourhoods · Space could be better used for amenity area or at-grade living space · Residents park in the street instead of their parking space. Parking permits could address this · More flexibility should be provided in parking requirements · Parking maximums may be appropriate in some neighbourhoods · Parking reductions could be linked to proximity to transit · Parking requirements should not be reduced
LANDSCAPING AND AMENITY AREA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Landscaping and amenity area should be required · Green roofs should be allowed · Lot grading should not impact adjacent properties · Existing trees should be maintained where possible and could be incentivized by allowing variances · Greenery or green walls could help reduce appearance of massing
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Community consultation with neighbours is important · Consultation can slow down the process and create uncertainty · Suites should only be located where they are truly wanted by the community · The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board should be more sensitive to community wishes at hearings
EDUCATION AND AWARENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · More educational materials to explain regulations and the development process should be provided to both applicants and neighbours · Examples of good quality design should be shared