

Planning Department - Current Planning Modifications to the RF Zone; Meeting with Community Associations

Present

Staff:

Facilitator: Dan Chow

- Area Planning
- George Fujii
- Area Planning
- Raul Allueva
- Area Planning
- Henry Herbstreit
- Building Division
- Christopher Atkins
- Area Planning

Surrey Assc. Of Sustainable Community - Representatives:

Mike Proskow

- Country Woods Residents Assc.
- Rosemary Zelinka
- Surrey Assc. Sustainable Communities
- Elgin Ratepayers
- Sandra Benz
- Southwestminster Ratepayers Assc.
- Barb Paton
- Semiahmoo Ratepayers Assc.
- Fred Weber
- Ocean Park Community Assc

Grant Rice

- Southwestminster Ratepayers Assc.
- George C. Davies
- Royal Heights Park Group
- Deb Jack
- Surrey Environmental Partners
- Liz Walker
- Surrey Environmental Partners/CRONIC
- Sonia Nazar
- Bridgeview In Motion

Executive Summary

The following meeting, held at the direction of Council, involved members of the Surrey Association of Sustainable Communities (SASC), an umbrella association representing approx. 20 community associations. The purpose of the meeting was to consult with, and receive feedback from, the SASC regarding Corporate Report C005. This report was presented to Council on May 25th, 2009 in response to the Surrey Ratepayer's Assc. (SRA) request for the proposed modifications to the RF Zone.

The SASC raised the following concerns:

1. A lack of public consultation prior to proceeding to Council with recommendations;
2. Inaccurate, misleading and incomplete information within the Corporate Report;
3. A lack of analysis as to the impacts of the proposed modification on the City;
4. A disregard for the environment and the principles within the Sustainability Charter;
5. The creation of a culture where compliance is ignored and rule-breaking is encouraged;
6. Inequitable treatment of citizenry, specifically this case vs. downzoning of St. Helen's;
7. Implications for an over-burdened infrastructure system, and inequitable taxation.

City staff committed to presenting the concerns raised by the SASC with City managers, and to take them into consideration when reviewing the options presented in the above-mentioned Corporate Report.

Meeting Minutes

- Staff briefly summarized the background and intent of this meeting.
 - Staff forwarded a report to Council (Corporate Report C005) on May 25th regarding Proposed modifications to the RF Zone, responding to request of the Surrey Ratepayers Assc.
 - Council received a letter from the Surrey Association of Sustainable Communities (SASC) expressing concern regarding the report and the lack of community consultation.
 - Council passed the following resolution: “4. Authorize the Planning & Development to move forward with public information meetings with the citizens of Surrey and then report back to Council”.
 - In this regard, staff have had a meeting with the Surrey Ratepayers Association and now wish to receive feedback from the SASC.

- Opening comments from Surrey Assc. of Sustainable Communities (SASC) :
 - At this time, SASC has not taken a position on proposed modifications – consider this meeting to be for “fact-finding.”
 - Grateful that Council ordered the consultation.

- SASC expressed two main concerns:
 - Process: there was no Public information meeting/consultation. there was no notification prior to this report proceeding to Council. If SASC member had not reviewed the Council Agenda, it is possible that there may not have been any opportunity to provide comment.
 - Content: the recommendations are not justified by the information in the report. More information is needed to support justifications.

- SASC notes that Council did approve a recommendation from the report (Option #2), and raised the questions as to whether there is a point to consultations with the public.
 - Staff responded that Council directed Staff to investigate the community associations’ concerns and consult with them. This may result in revising the options; there is no pre-judged outcome.

- SASC queried what public consultation will look like? Concerned that the early time of this meeting has meant that not every community assc. is able to attend, and is not truly capturing all the community groups. The public at large should also be involved.
 - Staff responded that the intent of this meeting is to serve as an overview of the matter with the SASC. Staff is happy to reconvene with a larger group.
 - Staff hope this meeting will provide guidance with respect to the type of consultation required. There is no pre-conceived notion of the process; it is recognized that a larger process may be required.

- Staff requested that the members present go around the table to raise any specific concerns they have with the proposal to modify the RF Zone, which will affect approximately 60,000 homes primarily in the Newton, Whalley, and Fleetwood neighbourhoods.

Round-table Comments:

- The issue of housing affordability and need is a valid issue, but this Corporate Report fails to address it.

- Report is not thorough, and lacks statistical support
 - Information and statistical data within the report is incomplete and misleading.

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- The proposed options will not result in the outcomes claimed in the report.
 - Lacks definitions of “single family home” and “secondary suites”.
 - Did not state percentage of people who signed in favour of proposal related to RF residents as a whole (City-wide).
 - No information as to how many live in these larger dwellings.
 - No way of knowing how many people live in secondary suites in Surrey. Does Surrey investigate the number of illegal suites during stop-work inspections?
 - Staff: no, City investigates only the matter directly related to the stop-work.
 - No concerns were raised regarding environmental sustainability.
 - How does proposal match up to Sustainability Checklist and Charter?
 - Front yards will be paved over for parking, eliminating permeable surfaces. This will have impact on climate change.
 - Forest canopy will be reduced; increased site coverage does not allow for trees.
 - Opportunity missed – report should have incorporated recommendations that larger houses be required to adopt environmental mitigation features, use less energy.
 - A comment was made that perhaps the Sustainability Charter should be written into law.
 - Report does not quantify the impact of proposed increase in house size.
 - No indication of how layout and massing/design implications would change.
 - No map indicating which neighbourhoods would be affected.
 - No assessment of the “tremendous” impact this would have on entire City.
 - Citizens of Surrey are not being treated equitably.
 - Downzone process for St. Helen’s neighbourhood was lengthy, with thorough and intensive requirements.
 - Surrey Ratepayers Association (SRA) appears to be receiving a greater level of assistance.
 - This process should be as rigid and regulated, not easier.
 - Examples of other municipalities not comparable.
 - Report and associated Table suggest that this process will bring Surrey in-line with other municipalities in terms of house size. In reality, proposal would put allowable floor area over and above others.
 - Richmond held up as a good example, but Richmond includes basements in floor area.
 - Surrey should include basements in floor area calculation.
 - Current zone allows for up to 5,500 sq.ft. including basement
 - Concerns raised regarding future legal implications for illegal construction.
 - Cities are based on principle of voluntary compliance. This principle is at risk.
 - Corporate Report suggests that a future Legal Services/Planning report with respect to properties with stop-work orders will recommend legalizing these properties.
 - This will set a precedent that laws can be broken, then become legal retroactively.
 - Retroactive legalization of illegal construction will be “slap-in-the-face” of every citizen who has complied.
 - All the work Surrey has done over the years (e.g. stop-work orders, other efforts to stop illegal construction) will be thrown out the window.
 - These are changes that will satisfy the petitioners (SRA), but not the rest of Surrey. Petitioners’ motivation is clemency from legal decisions, and Staff is going along with this.
 - If we allow this change now, what will prevent this situation (illegal construction followed by retroactive legalization) from re-occurring?

- Enforcement
 - Citizens notice lack of enforcement. Encourages a culture of deception, lack of compliance.
 - SASC requested an explanation of the inspection process. Staff provided details of process.
 - SASC queried whether enforcement is on hold for the duration of this modification/engagement process; i.e. will complaints still be received by the City, will stop-work orders be issued, will violations proceed to Court?
 - Staff responded that City will continue to receive complaints, issue stop-work orders but legal requirement, and Council resolution is that court proceedings/prosecutions cease.
- There is no proof that larger houses are required. SASC commented that there should be evidence of how much additional space is needed.
 - Staff responded that there are households that need the extra space to accommodate extended families.
 - SASC noted that SRA requested a lifting of the house size cap and queried why did the City recommend an increase floor area as well?
- SASC commented that much of the extra space will be used for secondary suites.
 - Secondary suites will not be used for extended families but for revenue suites.
 - Increased population resulting from suites will overload schools, public facilities, infrastructure, garbage services, street parking.
 - Parking – nowhere to park on local streets because of parking needs of basement suites.
- Concerns raised that Council did not pay enough attention to the report, did not read it thoroughly.
- Newton example
 - Extended families in area have 6 residents/families in household (unclear, to be clarified by SASC).
 - 6,000 sq.ft. house being built across street (possibly under under LUC), 3x larger than previous house on the site. What impact does this have on local environment? This should be assessed per project.
 - No room for trees, increased rainwater run-off.
- Entire process seems complaint driven (i.e. complaints raised by SRA), rather than being driven by staff and based upon staff-identified issues and concerns.
- Financial implications.
 - Infrastructure costs continue to rise.
 - Tax equity: with these large homes, presumably some households are not paying their share.
 - When storm system fails, who will pay?
- This is a major issue that concerns the entire City, not just a neighbourhood.
 - This matter should be put to a referendum

Final Comments and Questions:

- It is critical to deal with this issue properly, now; otherwise these “storms and battles” will continue.
- It was noted that the West Panorama Ridge Assc. was unable to attend but wants to record their opposition to any increase in allowable house size.

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- Is it possible to receive a copy of the original request and petition?
 - Staff response: some information, such as addresses and names, may be subject to FOI request. City will release whatever information it is permitted to release.

 - Now that the City has heard the concerns of SASC, what are next steps in public participation process?
 - Staff will meet with managers to summarize this meeting and to discuss the appropriate next steps.
 - The City will review and is open to reconsidering all the options within the report; will not pre-judge outcome.

 - SASC requested that they be provided a copy of the minutes.
 - Staff will provide them to Rosemary Zelinka, who will circulate them to other members.

 - Closing comments:
 - Staff thanked the members of the SASC for their input. Their comments will be taken into consideration when reviewing options.
 - Staff also offered their apologies for failing to adequately consult with the community associations and failing to adequately deal with this matter.

The meeting ended at 10:40 am.