New Westminster

Family Friendly Housing Policy and Design Guidelines

CREATING HOUSING OPTIONS FOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN | NOVEMBER 2024



New Westminster

Adoption Date: November 18, 2024
Bylaw: Zoning Amendment Bylaw (Family Friendly Housing) No.8486, 2024

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Executive Summary

Family friendly housing is residential housing specifically designed to meet the needs of households with children. This type of housing is typically larger with multiple bedrooms and features that support the well-being, development and safety of children, and functional needs of families. Since the Policy's implementation, a large portion of the city's family friendly units being developed are townhouses and single detached dwellings, which are increasingly becoming too expensive. As a result, more families are seeking less expensive units, such as in multi-unit rental and condo buildings.

To ensure families are considered in the design of these multi-unit buildings, the City requires the following for developments comprising of 10 units or more:

Ownership projects are required to include a minimum of 40% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 15% of total units containing three- or more bedrooms.

Rental projects are required to include a minimum of 30% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 10% of total units containing three- or more bedrooms.

All new multi-unit development projects are required to comply with minimum unit size requirements as specified below:

2-Bedrooms	3-Bedrooms
Ownership: 753.5 square feet (70 square metres)	**Ownership:** 904.2 square feet (84 square metres)
Rental: 699.7 square feet (65 square metres)	**Rental:** 861.1 square feet (80 square metres)

A feasibility analysis conducted by the City confirmed that the minimum unit mix and size requirements outlined above are unlikely to deter development activity and will help increase the number of larger units available in the city.

Family friendly design guidelines are provided to encourage consideration of family functionality (e.g. bedroom layout, storage, common amenity). These design guidelines are applied in addition to any of the applicable Development Permit Area Design Guidelines contained in the Official Community Plan (OCP).

Affordable (e.g. below-market or non-market), supportive and/or transitional rental housing projects that are government or non-profit owned and operated are excluded from these requirements as they will generally have unit mixes and sizes specific to the needs of those they serve.

Introduction

Purpose

The Family Friendly Housing Policy was developed to ensure the development of diverse housing types are created that meet the needs of families with children.

This Policy promotes a balance of unit mix and sizes through regulatory measures, ensuring that apartment developments include sufficient homes for families. The Policy is further supported by a set of design guidelines that serve as a companion to the regulatory measures, offering strategies to guide the successful implementation of family friendly housing.

Background

Housing choice supports diverse and intergenerational neighbourhoods by encouraging a variety of tenures and unit sizes that meet the needs of different ages, family types, incomes and abilities; a key goal of *New Westminster's Official Community Plan* (OCP) (2017). As family dynamics change through different life stages, such as wishing to grow or accommodate children, the need for family friendly housing becomes critical. Unfortunately, the supply of family friendly units in New Westminster has not kept on pace with demand, posing challenges for households with children.

New Westminster's Family Friendly Housing Policy and Zoning Regulations were initially adopted in 2016 and reviewed in 2024 to align with evolving community needs, changing economic conditions and new Provincial housing legislation.

The 2024 review identified an ongoing lack of housing for households with children, resulting in the City increasing requirements for two- and three-bedroom units in multi-unit residential developments.

The updated policy includes more comprehensive unit design guidelines and building best practices intended to provide resources for creating socially connected, multi-unit residential developments. Though targeted to families needs, the regulations, policy and guidelines will also increase housing choices for other household arrangements, such as multi-generational families and individuals seeking shared living agreements.



What is Family Friendly Housing? Why is it Important?

Family friendly housing is residential housing specifically designed to meet the needs of households with children. This type of housing is typically larger with multiple bedrooms and design features (i.e. indoor and outdoor amenity spaces) that support the well-being, development and safety of children, and functional needs of families. As denser housing forms become more common, they should be designed to support community well-being, connections and inclusion for everyone, including households with children. Families are an important part of the community and housing that is functional should be provided so families can find suitable housing in New Westminster.


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Family Friendly Zoning Bylaw Requirements

Zoning Amendment Bylaw (Family Friendly Housing) No.8486, 2024 came into effect on **November 18, 2024**.

After this date, development applications, for multi-unit developments must conform to the regulations below.

This includes applications for:

- Rezonings
- Heritage Revitalization Agreements
- Development Permits
- Building Permits

Minimum Percentage of Family Friendly Units

- **Ownership projects** with 10 units or more are required to include a minimum of 40% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 15% of total units containing three- or more bedrooms.
- **Rental projects** with 10 units or more are required to include a minimum of 30% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 10% of total units containing three- or more bedrooms.

Ownership and rental projects may increase the percentage of three- or more bedroom units with a corresponding decrease in two-bedroom units and be considered compliant with the regulations.

Two-year Transition Period for Rental Projects

Effective November 18, 2026, multi-unit rental projects will be required to include a minimum of 35% two- and three-bedroom units, with at least 10% of total units containing three- or more bedrooms.

Minimum Unit Size of Family Friendly Units

All new multi-unit development projects must comply with the below minimum unit size requirements:

2-Bedrooms	3-Bedrooms
Ownership: 753.5 square feet (70 square metres)	**Ownership:** 904.2 square feet (84 square metres)
Rental: 699.7 square feet (65 square metres)	**Rental:** 861.1 square feet (80 square metres)

In-Stream Projects

Projects that were in-stream at the time of adoption of Zoning Amendment Bylaw No. 8486, 2024 will not be required to comply with the 2024 Policy requirements. An in-stream application is defined as an existing Rezoning, Heritage Revitalization Agreement, Development Permit or Building Permit application in which application fees were paid prior to adoption of the Bylaw.

Projects that are in-stream under a Master Planning process are required to comply with the 2024 Policy requirements.

Special Considerations

Housing Attainability

For ownership housing projects, two- and three-bedroom units are encouraged to be located on lower storeys, where the price per square foot is typically less than upper storeys (commonly referred to as penthouse units) of the building where views may increase unit prices.

Development Variance Permit Considerations

The family friendly housing Zoning Bylaw regulations (i.e. minimum bedroom and unit size requirements) may be varied for the below project types, provided that a sufficient rationale is given:

- **Projects that address other Council Strategic Priorities.** The provided rationale should clearly indicate why the regulations preclude delivery of the project.
- **Heritage Revitalization Agreement Projects.** The provided rationale should clearly indicate why the regulations preclude delivery of the project and detail alternative community benefits to be provided.

Existing Multi-Unit Residential Buildings

Existing multi-unit residential buildings, constructed prior to the effective date of these regulations, are not required to retroactively comply with regulations and guidelines. Where units are proposed to be added to existing multi-unit residential buildings the regulations below apply.

- Only the new units are required to comply with these regulations.
- The regulations apply when units are proposed through conversion of additional floor space or through reallocation of existing floor space.
- Projects proposing fewer than 10 additional units are exempt from these regulations, until more than 10 units are proposed through cumulative applications.

Policy Exemptions

The following projects will not be required to comply with family friendly housing guidelines or Zoning Bylaw regulations:

1. **Ground-oriented infill and townhouse projects**, due to their inherent compliance with bedroom composition requirements.
2. Projects proposing fewer than 10 residential units, to prevent barriers to **infill development**.
3. Projects proposing to add fewer than 10 residential units to **existing multi-unit residential development**.
4. **Affordable** (e.g. below-market or non-market rental), **supportive and/or transitional housing projects** that are government or non-profit owned and operated, to enable those projects to tailor units to the needs of those they serve.

Family Friendly Design Guidelines

How to Use the Design Guidelines

The Family Friendly Design Guidelines are intended to serve as a resource in the development of residential and mixed-use multi-unit buildings. Created to support the current and evolving needs of households with children, the guidelines draw widely on best practice research and community consultation, and are complementary to the Development Permit Area (DPA) Design Guidelines contained in the OCP.

> Project designers are encouraged to consider these guidelines and integrate them into residential and mixed-use multi-unit projects as feasible, while still meeting zoning requirements for family friendly units.

Design guidelines were also sought from *Building Social Connections Policy and Design Toolkit* (2024), a project co-led by the Hey Neighbour Collective and Happy Cities. The project focused on multi-unit building designs and programming strategies to inform inclusive, 'sociable' housing policies at the municipal level. The initiative involved collaboration with Simon Fraser University and six Metro Vancouver jurisdictions, including New Westminster. The City encourages use of the Toolkit to inform the design of new multi-unit housing projects.

Guiding Principles

These design guidelines are intended to offer design best practices in support of comfort, functionality and livability through the following design principles:



PRINCIPLE 1

Consider the functional needs of households with children in building and unit design



PRINCIPLE 2

Explore integration of creative storage solutions in building and unit design



PRINCIPLE 3

Consider how to support the needs of children of all ages through design of common amenity spaces



Entrance and Storage

Intent: Encourage design of unit entrances that accommodate the spatial needs of households with children, providing storage space and space for movement.

A. Explore entryway design that allows for movement of people and large items, such as strollers, toys, and wheelchairs.

B. Study how to provide efficient storage solutions that can house seasonal items.

C. Consider use of durable materials in unit design.

Bedrooms

Intent: Encourage bedroom design that prioritizes functionality, comfort, and privacy in order to enhance the quality of life for caregivers, children, and teenagers.

A. Locate bedroom doors so that they are able to open a full 90 degrees when the room is furnished.

B. Allow full access to the foot of the bed and at least one other side (excluding the head of the bed), except for the smallest bedroom in units with three or more bedrooms, which must allow full access to at least one side of the bed (excluding the foot and the head of the bed).

C. Provide sufficient room for storage of clothes and avoid conflict between access to clothes storage and the placement of beds.

D. Provide a window directly to outside, except for the smallest bedroom in units with three or more bedrooms, which must have indirect natural light from at least two sources (e.g. glass wall, light tube or well), one of which may be the doorway.

E. Where inboard bedrooms are proposed, a clear rationale should be provided that demonstrates how the proposed light sources allow for sufficient natural light infiltration into the bedroom.

F. Avoid designs that locate beds under upper-storey functional windows.

G. At least one bedroom should be large enough to accommodate a standard queen-sized bed while meeting the general bedroom guidelines above. All other bedrooms should be large enough to accommodate a standard single bed while meeting the general bedroom guidelines above.

H. In units with three or more bedrooms, the smallest bedroom must be no smaller than 70 square feet (6.5 square metres) with no dimension smaller than 7 feet (2.1 metres).

Common Amenity Spaces

Intent: Encourage the design of indoor and outdoor common amenity spaces that allow families to play, celebrate, and connect with their neighbours, while also meeting families' functional needs.

A. Strive to provide well-used indoor and outdoor shared common amenity spaces with natural light access, to help supplement private space.

B. Consider providing multi-purpose spaces suitable for hosting celebrations and programs (e.g. birthday parties, storytelling), and how adjacent storage areas can support this goal.

C. Strive to reduce opportunities for conflict when considering the siting of common amenity spaces in relation to dwelling units.

D. Explore how buildings can accommodate out-of-town visitors for families, such as in guest suites.

E. Consider opportunities for shade (e.g. structures and trees), as well as seating that allow for more comfortable use during the summer, especially on rooftop amenity areas.

F. Consider including toddler-, child- and youth-friendly amenities, such as play structures and access to nature (e.g. shared garden beds), in common amenity spaces.

G. Consider how children and other pedestrians will access amenities, keeping travel paths separate from vehicle circulation routes and loading areas.

H. Consider the storage needs of families, and study how the building could accommodate out-of-suite storage for larger seasonal items or sports gear.

I. Consider the long-term maintenance costs of building amenities, and their impact of housing attainability.

Additional Zoning Bylaw floor area exemptions to support the delivery of common amenity areas are included in the New Westminster Zoning Bylaw No.6680, 2001.



Resources

- Hey Neighbour Collective and Happy Cities (2024) Building Social Connections Policy and Design Toolkit heyneighbourcollective.ca
- **City of Toronto** (2020) Planning for Children in Vertical Communities
- **City of North Vancouver** (2015) Active Design Guidelines
- **City of Vancouver** (2022, 3rd edition) High-Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines
- **City of Vancouver** (2017) HEY NEIGHBOUR! Exploring sociability in multi-unit buildings across Vancouver
- **City of Victoria** (2024) Advisory Design Guidelines for Family Friendly Buildings + Spaces

Context of Family Friendly Housing in the City

Family Friendly Housing Supply

Analysis of Census 2016 to 2021 data (which generally aligns with the timeline of the Family Friendly Housing Policy adoption) found:

- There was a **slight increase** in the percentage of three-bedroom plus units in apartment buildings with less than five storeys (6.0% to 7.2%) and in apartment buildings with five or more storeys (6.2% to 6.3%).
- There was **no change** in the percentage of two-bedroom units in apartment buildings with less than five storeys (40.9% to 40.9%) and a **decrease** in apartment buildings with five or more storeys (52.3% to 47.6%).
- A total of 59.6% of three-bedroom units or more were created as townhouses, either in a townhouse project or as a townhouse-style unit at the base of a multi-unit residential building, with 33.7% of townhome units having two bedrooms.

A large portion of the city's family friendly units being created or provided are townhouses and single detached dwellings, which are largely out of reach for most families. As a result, more families are electing to live in more attainable units, such as in apartment buildings.

As of 2021, **nearly half (46.1%) of the city's child and youth population (0 – 14 years) lived in apartment buildings**, the highest rate out of the 22 Metro Vancouver municipalities. Further, the city has the highest percentage of dwelling units as apartment buildings (69.5%) in the region.

The City ranked last out of 22 Metro Vancouver municipalities with regards to the proportion of ground-oriented units and three or more bedroom units in the total housing stock.

Proportion of Ground-Oriented Units in the Housing Stock (2021)

New Westminster: 30.5% < Metro Vancouver: 58.6%

Proportion of Three or More Bedroom Units in the Housing Stock (2021)

New Westminster: 26.2% < Metro Vancouver: 47.8%

Family Friendly Housing Needs

In 2024, the Province of British Columbia issued a Housing Target Order for New Westminster. The Housing Target Order encourages the City to meet targets related to housing units distributed based on number of bedrooms, rental, below market and supportive units over five years from August 1, 2024 to July 31, 2029. Housing bedroom targets include 832 two-bedroom units and 1,176 threebedroom units.

The City further identified in 2023 that there are few rental units large enough for families in the market, with a **0.8% vacancy rate** for three-bedroom or more units, well below a typical healthy vacancy rate of between 3 - 4%.



Family Friendly Housing Community Consultation

Prior to adopting the Family Friendly Policy in 2016, the City conducted extensive community consultation alongside the Society for Children and Youth of BC (SCY) as they developed a Child and Youth Friendly Community Strategy, 2016. Given the close association between the two initiatives, a decision was made in 2014 to complete the policies in tandem, with SCY taking the lead on the Strategy and the City taking the lead on the Policy.

During this time, 840 parents, youth, and children were consulted, including:

- 320 parents who completed a survey;
- 156 children (6 to 12 years) who completed a school-based assignment or survey;
- 228 youth (13 to 17 years) who completed a survey; and
- 136 parents, children, and youth who completed a "dotmocracy" exercise on Family Day.

Participants were asked a number of questions, including "if their current housing situation met their family's needs." Participants also commented on housing as part of other questions, including about the family, child and youth friendliness of their neighbourhood and the city, and what they would like to see done to improve the city for families, children and youth.

Of the 320 parents who completed the survey, **50.7% reported that their current housing situation somewhat (36.4%) or did not (14.3%) meet their family's needs.**

In 2024, additional community consultation continued to highlight support for the delivery of more family friendly units, given the limited availability of two and three plus bedroom units in New Westminster. Community members also shared concerns about the lack of family-friendly building features and designs, such as common amenity spaces and outdoor spaces. Two focus group sessions with local community organizations that provide services for families and children further reiterated the need for family friendly housing and building design features.





Family Friendly Housing Policy Research

Family Friendly Housing Feasibility Study

In 2014, the City retained a consultant through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to undertake a Family Friendly Housing Feasibility Study, which led to the successful launch of the program in 2016.

In 2024, the City retained an economic consultant to undertake an updated Family Friendly Housing Feasibility Study to reflect current market conditions and community needs. The City and consultant team presented to the Urban Development Institute (UDI) to highlight the findings of the feasibility study and shared policy considerations. Based on feedback from UDI and follow-up consultation, the consultant team revised and finalized the feasibility study.

The feasibility study concluded:

- Minimum family friendly unit mix requirements are unlikely to deter development activity and could help increase the number of larger units available in the city.
- Increasing the City's current minimum family friendly unit requirements should not deter development activity as its impact on financial feasibility is negligible.

- The introduction of minimum unit sizes does not impact financial feasibility negatively and may be a favourable solution to adding family friendly units to developments.
- Current market conditions (e.g. high interest rates and hard costs) are challenging to both ownership and rental projects. However, ownership development models perform better than rental scenarios. The availability of low interest government financing for rental projects could improve rental project viability.

Family Friendly Housing Literature Review

At the time of the Policy's adoption in 2016, the City conducted a comprehensive literature review of academic journals, municipal documentation and relevant studies.

In total, 68 municipalities were studied, with an emphasis on Canada. Other countries included:

- Australia
- Britain
- Ireland
- New Zealand
- United States

In 2024, the City completed a further literature review of Metro Vancouver municipalities that have adopted a Family Friendly Housing Policy since 2016. The City of Vancouver and City of White Rock family friendly policies both require higher mandatory percentages (i.e. 35%) of two- and threebedroom units in multi-unit strata projects than in New Westminster. The City of Richmond requires a minimum of 40% of units with two or more bedrooms in purpose-built market rental projects. A number of additional municipalities across Canada regulate the number of bedrooms per unit and common amenity space.

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