

## FOR INFORMATION

**TO:** Committee of the Whole **MEETING DATE:** September 11, 2024  
**FROM:** Kevin Pearson, Senior Policy Planner  
**SUBJECT:** OCP Amendment Bylaw No. 492-35 – Development Density and Height Policy  
**FILE NO:** 3900-02 492-35

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### RECOMMENDATION

**That second reading of Official Community Plan Amendment Bylaw 492-35 be rescinded by Council; and  
That Council consider second reading of Official Community Plan Amendment Bylaw 492-35, as amended.**

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### PURPOSE

In an effort to reduce barriers to housing development in Sechelt, Official Community Plan (OCP) Amendment Bylaw No. 492-35 updates density / height policies to better align with recent, current and anticipated development proposals and trends. This report is intended to be received for information and discussion in advance of a Regular Council meeting.

### BACKGROUND

The proposed amendment considers the practice of using floor area ratio (FAR) as the sole density measurement tool for residential buildings and properties, as opposed to the units per hectare (UPH) measurement and FAR. The UPH measurement is more conducive for rural and neighbourhood planning of single family home development at a low density. Issues and inconsistencies continually emerge with blending UPH and FAR in the current OCP, which has prompted a number of site-specific OCP amendments. The main issue remains that the density and height policies are too low, based on 15 - 20 year old data and visioning.

Two iterations of the amendment bylaw have proceeded to second reading since November 25, 2023, when first reading was granted. Feedback during the consultation stage early this year, the Complete Communities Day forum on May 14, 2024, the two public hearings on March 20, 2024, and July 10, 2024, and a virtual / in-person public information session on July 2, 2024, have prompted staff to adjust the content of the amendment bylaw for a second time prior to a third reading.

For process, if the Committee of the Whole is amenable to the latest adjustment, the bylaw will be placed on an upcoming Council agenda. At that meeting, the amendment previously granted

second reading on June 19 would need to be rescinded, and the latest proposed amendment considered for second reading. A third public hearing would also need to be scheduled.

For better efficiency of new housing approvals, adoption of the amendment bylaw is needed this year, in advance of the comprehensive OCP review, particularly with a pending second application to the Housing Accelerator Fund. The context of recent, current and anticipated residential development trends within our serviced areas with a primary focus on the medium to higher density residential designated areas remains.

There are now seven significant development proposals consisting of 460 new residential units. Each has either gone through or is in the process of going through a lengthy OCP amendment application. All have proposed policy changes to increase density with some building height increases. Two of the seven amendment bylaws have been adopted with the remainder held at various stages of bylaw readings. The density policy deficit has been in the OCP for at least 10 years and it needs to be addressed in light of direction by the Province to streamline OCP residential policies by the end of 2025.

As an example, both of the recent Greenecourt developments have required amendments to the OCP for density. The need for OCP amendments creates a longer timeline for development approval, which extends wait time for seniors in need of affordable housing.

The Downtown Village area of Sechelt and serviced lands beyond are viewed to be the prime location for higher density residential development. This is noted in the present OCP with high level policies supporting increased densities closer to the core in a compact sustainable fashion, as well as along with various neighbourhood commercial nodes. Yet the density levels in all residential designations is too low for the reality of today and what is anticipated to the future. The proposed amendment would apply mostly to this historical core area of Sechelt, which staff consider having far too many residential designations assigned to that 13 km<sup>2</sup> (+/-) land base.

Furthermore, a recent land analysis has calculated that less than 3 km<sup>2</sup> of serviced land (approximately 6% of Sechelt's entire land base) has potential for development. This small area is fragmented throughout the core area, West Sechelt, West Porpoise Bay, and small pockets of Davis Bay and Wilson Creek. The District's latest Housing Needs Report (2024) that was required by the Province states that 2,890 residential units must be accommodated in Sechelt by 2041 with 726 of those units constructed over the short term. Hence, the need to allow residential development with higher FARs and building heights in all serviced neighbourhoods. The above noted land analysis was conducted in August 2024 using our Geographical Information System. It counted 860 lots with the following criteria:

- Lot area > 750 m<sup>2</sup> with potential for SSMUH development
- Lots currently designated and zoned residential
- Lots within 50 m of SCR D water and District sewer systems
- Lots with road frontage
- Land with < 20% slopes discounted
- Riparian and streamside protection and enhancement areas discounted

- Building areas on lots discounted

Currently the following considerations are reviewed at the development permit, building permit and subdivisions stages:

- Fire flow pressure
- Water supply
- Sewage capacity
- Sub-surface, geotechnical and archeological conditions
- Potential for flooding and sea level rise
- Aquatic and terrestrial environmental values
- Road building, transportation and infrastructure limitations, etc.

The above are all ideal considerations for designating land in an OCP, however detailed analysis for all of these considerations is outside the scope of most OCPs.

## **PROPOSED AMENDMENT**

Along with a revised Figure 17, the latest version of OCP Bylaw Amendment No. 492-35 has been expanded to include a text inclusion as follows:

### **Part 4 – Land Use Policies, Section 5. Residential and Special Infill Areas:**

1. Add “General” as a sub-heading above the first paragraph (page 37).
2. Add the following text to sub-section General:

*“Numerical references in this section and elsewhere pertaining to development density and building height are superseded by a revised Figure 17. The revisions to Figure 17 on (date of adoption) was deemed necessary to support recent development trends, and anticipated housing needs. All references in Figure 17 are intended as flexible policy guidelines, and therefore all regulatory requirements remain in the Zoning Bylaw.*

*Policy statements in Section 5.14 referring to non-support for lot consolidation and apartment development are no longer valid.*

*The granting of density and height increases for developments in exchange for amenities may be still considered via the rezoning process when and where the District deems appropriate, and by legislative means guided by the Local Government Act.”*

The above text attempts to clarify the new intent and partially untangle the web of confusing policy statements laden throughout Part 4 - Section 5 and other sections.

The latest proposed Figure 17 (next page) has revised headings, and the column “Typical Building Forms” has been added to identify housing types anticipated for each land use category. It was suggested at the last public hearing that this column remain. The suggested building typologies are not intended to be prescriptive and could be open to alternative forms of housing. The

Explanatory Notes to Figure 17 have been expanded for more clarification and each column of the table are explained with colour-coded comments in the summary section.

**Figure 17 – Building Forms, Density and Height**

Land Use Designations	Typical Building Forms	Floor Area Ratios	Height in Storeys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Density Residential</li> </ul>	Single-Family Dwellings Accessory Residential Units	Up to 0.4	Up to 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential</li> </ul>	Single-Family Dwellings Accessory Residential Units	Up to 0.4	Up to 2
	Duplex, Triplex, Townhomes	Up to 0.6	Up to 3
Special Infill Areas (SIA) 1 - 7, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waterfront SIA 2 &amp; 3</li> <li>• Village Residential Area</li> <li>• Transition Commercial</li> </ul>	Cluster Housing Duplex, Triplex, Townhomes Apartments / Condominiums	Up to 1.5	Up to 4
Neighbourhood Centre	Duplexes, Triplexes, Townhomes Apartments / Condominiums Upper Floor Units	Up to 1.7	Up to 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown Centre</li> <li>• Multi Family / Mixed Residential</li> </ul>	Apartments / Condominiums Upper Floor Units	Up to 2.4	Up to 6

### Figure 17 - Explanatory Notes

Figure 17 supersedes all references to floor area ratio throughout Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 492. References to “units per hectare” as a measurement for density are no longer valid.

Typical density and height benchmarks referred to in Figure 17 are guidelines for development and rezoning considerations. Building height policies referred to in Sections 6.13 and 6.14 may be considered for waterfront development when warranted. Modest variations to density and height policies may be considered by the District. Typical building forms may also vary, or include forms not presently envisioned.

Provision of community water and sanitary wastewater systems is required to achieve typical densities and heights within the land use designations noted above.

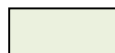
Floor Area Ratio = Gross Building Floor Area divided by Gross Lot Area\*


Building Height: 1 Storey typically = 3 - 4 metres\*

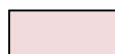
\* District of Sechelt Zoning Bylaw No. 580, as amended, is the source document for development regulations including but not limited to building height, unit densities and floor area ratios, definitions and measurements, and density bonus provisions in lieu of amenity contributions.

## SUMMARY

Other changes to Figure 17 are described below for each colour coded land use category.

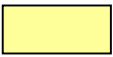
 Applies to “Low Density Residential” and “Residential” designations and zones limiting development to a single family dwelling and an accessory residential unit. No material changes are proposed, except the previous reference to a 0.35 FAR for larger lots is removed for practical reasons. In staff’s opinion there is no longer a logical need for two FARs with such minimal variation for that category.

 Also in the “Residential” designation, these policies for slightly higher FAR and Building Height and reference to multi-unit housing currently exist, yet they are unclear in the present Table 17. These existing policies are aligned with SSMUH and recent Zoning Bylaw updates to the R zones.

 The original amendment was to include the “Village” and “Transition Commercial” sub-designations in the same category as the “Downtown Centre” designation. The Village is presently referred to as being part of the “Special Infill Area” but not one of the 1 - 7 sub-categories, while the Waterfront is sub-category 2. Setting a policy limit of 2.4 FAR and 6-storey height for both of these categories was the initial intent, and staff believe that future development interests will target these areas. Height policies specifically for the waterfront are not proposed to change.



There are no material changes from the previous amendment to this category, except for reference to typical building typologies.



There are no material changes from the previous amendment to this category, except for reference to typical building typologies and shifting out the aforementioned sub-designations to lower FAR and height.

## **PUBLIC INPUT**

Attachment 1 contains the minutes and input from July 10, 2024 public hearing and related staff comments.

## **CONCLUSION**

Keeping the OCP density and height policies static may not be in the best interest of the community, in terms of growth trends, embracing future residential development opportunities along with the realities of Provincial expectations. Small-scale, multi-unit housing is needed to fill an increasing void of both market and rental duplexes, triplexes, townhomes and apartments.

To succeed, our limited developable land base needs to be tapped in all residential neighbourhoods. This amendment may not go far enough, but it would set a more realistic density and height framework for the current OCP.

Finally, the proposal is consistent with Council's Strategic Plan (2023 - 2026) to update the OCP with policies earmarked for effective and sustainable growth.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Pearson  
Senior Policy Planner

Attachment – 1 July 10, 2024 Public Hearing Minutes and Comments