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Presented by: Barb Dupuis, Planner, Planning and Development

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**TAMRMS#: B09**

### Front-Back Residential Combined Units and Other Planning Topics

Presented by: Barb Dupuis, Planner, Planning and Development

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That Community Growth & Infrastructure Standing Committee recommend to Council that Bylaw 21/2020, being amendment 170 to the Land Use Bylaw, be brought forward to the first Council meeting in December, 2020.
2. That Administration continue to investigate new housing products, and prepare, where determined to diversify residential built form and improve housing affordability, regulations to present back to the Community Growth and Infrastructure Committee by the end of Q2 2021.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report responds to the Council request to bring forward proposed amendments to the Land Use Bylaw (LUB) to allow front-back residential combined access units. Administration does not recommend the proposed amendments, for reasons identified within the body of this report.

### ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITY

While the front-back combined residential units could be seen as falling within strategic priority #5, enhanced housing options, semi-detached products already exist within the LUB. Therefore, the addition of front/back housing does not increase the variety of housing types available.

The other topics, including shallow-wide subdivided lots, suites in multi-family product, tiny homes, zero lot line for single-detached homes, and back-to-back fee simple townhomes would fall within strategic priority #5.

## *City of St. Albert Council Strategic Plan 2018-2021*

Strategic Priority #5: Housing: Enhance housing options.

Facilitate an increase in the variety of housing types in St. Albert to respond to market demands and accommodate the diverse needs of residents.

## *Corporate Business Plan 2018-2021*

Administration Activity 5.1

Modify Land Use Bylaw to encourage diversity in residential built forms.

Administration Activity 5.3

Work with regional partners to explore the creation of additional housing options to address issues of affordability and accessibility.

## **ALIGNMENT TO SERVICE DELIVERY**

N/A

## **ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL (OR COMMITTEE) DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION**

On April 1, 2019 Council passed the following motion:

*CM-19-014*

*That by the June 2020, Governance, Priorities and Finance Committee Meeting, Administration present changes to the Land Use Bylaw to allow front-back combined residential units.*

The Governance, Priorities and Finance Committee was replaced in 2020 with the Community Growth and Infrastructure Standing Committee.

## **BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**

When updating the Land Use Bylaw in 2018, Administration evaluated front/back housing options, and specifically did not include front-back semi-detached housing product regulations. The addition of lane-serviced housing product in the 2018 update was a large step for the community. The value of the increased cost of developing with lanes was the improvement to the public-facing streetscape, which was identified by Administration as necessary due to continued demand for narrower lots, and the resulting increasing issues being experienced in new neighborhoods with ability to accommodate on-street parking, snow storage, and needed street utilities (e.g. power junction boxes, fire hydrants). The lane housing approved by Council in 2018 was proposed in order to provide greater opportunities for street trees, utilities, and on-street parking; an improved pedestrian environment by removing curb cuts and driveways from the front of lots; and, moving vehicle access to lanes accessing the rear of the lots.

Front/back housing was determined by Administration to cause issues that did not align with the intent of other proposed districts (namely the improved and unfettered streetscape associated with newly approved lane housing), and in addition, would add to the capital and operating costs of new lane development, while actually negating the improvements to the streetscape associated with lane housing product. Issues previously raised with front/back housing off of lanes include:

1. Reduction of on-street parking by increasing curb cuts / driveways;
2. Reduction of opportunity for street trees;
3. Reduction of opportunity for needed street utilities (e.g. power boxes, hydrants);
4. Decrease in pedestrian safety by increasing collision opportunities by introducing driveways to an area that would otherwise not have them;
5. Increase in long-term operational costs for the City, while negating the benefits of the infrastructure (examples include garbage collection and additional assets to maintain); and
6. Achieving the look/design of a single detached house (for a semi-detached product) can occur without having a driveway in the front.

A benefit of adding the option for front/back access lane housing product includes:

1. The option to offer a slightly different building form of duplex or semi-detached housing product within the same block.

Following Council's motion, Administration attempted to mitigate some of the issues previously raised, while developing the requested regulations. Administration specifically attempted to mitigate concerns related to items (1), and (4). As such, a new district regulation has been drafted, entitled Residential Front Back (RFB) District, pursuant to Council's direction. The district allows the original intent of the Residential Lane (RXL) District to be preserved, retaining uninterrupted boulevards with maximum street parking and no disruption to the pedestrian environment. The new district also allows Administration to compare the Residential Front Back (RFB) District and Residential Lane (RXL) Districts upon their implementation, to evaluate the costs and benefits associated with each.

As part of the research of the council requested front-back combined residential unit regulations, and as a follow-up to the 2017/18 Land Use Bylaw amendments related to housing type, Administration also researched other residential housing products which were not included within the 2018 LUB update. The following housing product types were explored:

- Shallow/wide lots,
- suites in multi-family product,
- tiny homes,
- zero lot line for single-detached homes, and
- back-to-back fee-simple townhomes.

Research was conducted related to the aforementioned in order to identify potential new regulatory tools to facilitate a broader range of housing forms, densities, building sizes, and combined uses within the Land Use Bylaw to promote affordability, in new and existing neighbourhoods. This research complements other Administrative initiatives, specifically related to efforts to improve housing affordability and accessibility.

While regulations have not been devised for these products, the initial investigation finds that these products can improve housing diversification and affordability (see attachment 2).

### *Policy Development*

To evaluate and inform the proposed regulations for the requested housing product, examples from Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan were used. Neither the Edmonton Zoning Bylaw No. 12800 or Fort Saskatchewan Land Use Bylaw C10-13 had a definition for these units, so St. Albert Administration has not proposed one. The units fall under the definition of “dwelling, semi-detached” in St. Albert Land Use Bylaw 9/2005.

The resulting requested product requires both a street and a lane. As such, the proposed Residential Front Back (RFB) District is limited to greenfield development. Regulations regarding lot widths, lot depths, lot coverage, and setbacks are in keeping with the existing RXL District. For the product to be successfully implemented, this new District will need clauses to permit mixed vehicular access. The builders have the option of coming off the lane, or alternating coming off the public road and lane.

Based upon examples of constructed product found where garages and curb cuts were not grouped (in Edmonton on Evans Wynd, as shown on Figure 1 on page 5), Administration recommends that the garages be grouped if this housing type is approved. Grouping the garages will reduce the impact of the curb cuts on parking, street trees, and the pedestrian environment. This regulation builds upon existing regulations within the Land Use Bylaw for lots less than 12.2 m wide. This helps to consolidate areas for on-street parking. Through discussions with Industry, rationale for both ends of the block to be rear-detached garage product, with a transition in the middle of the block. is necessary to ensure adequate driveway setbacks from the intersection. As such, Administration has included provision within the proposed regulation for these transitions to happen.

*Figure 1: Front-Back Semi-Detached Block Pattern on Evans Wynd, Edmonton*

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As stated before, Administration does not believe that this product is suitable for infill areas. Administration does not want to change the existing character of any mature neighbourhood and existing street by removing street trees or adding new curb cuts where they did not previously exist.

Proposed changes to Land Use Bylaw 9/2005 and their rationale are included in Table 1 on page 6. There may be modification to the draft regulations between this presentation and the time it is presented to Council.

*Table 1: Proposed Changes*

| Proposed LUB Change | Rationale |
|---------------------|-----------|
|---------------------|-----------|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Add a new low-density district for product that has vehicles access from both the front street and rear lane, called Residential Front Back (RFB) District. | A new district was chosen (instead of making changes to the RXL District) because the purpose of the RXL district was to provide improved streetscapes, including boulevards with no curb cuts that is pedestrian friendly and offers better on-street parking. Administration did not want to negate the intended purpose of the RXL District by allowing curb cuts where there shouldn't be any, so a new district, Residential Front Back (RFB) District, was created. The RFB District is similar to RXL in terms of floor area, lot widths, lot area, lot coverage, building height, side yard setback. The RFB District differs from RXL in terms of vehicle access, and front yard setbacks. The setback has been increased to 6.0 meters for front-attached garage product to enable parking on the driveway. Currently, the RFB District includes both single detached and semi-detached dwellings. This means there could also be mixed access for single family homes. A new district will also allow Administration to study both the RXL and RFB District implementation individually first to learn about the advantages and disadvantages of each type of product; however, any comparison would not be anticipated to occur for a number of years. |
| Add two new figures to show driveway grouping on the product.   | The current Land Use Bylaw groups driveways on lots less than 12.2 m wide to maximize on street parking - the parameters are within Part 8, Section 8.21. This grouping is more specific however, as industry has provided feedback that they prefer that each end of the block have a rear detached garage product. The proposed diagrams show that driveways for these types of units should be grouped as well. It also highlights that if single-car garages are to be used, administration prefers these be on the front street to reduce the width of the curb cuts in the pedestrian realm.   |
| Add a clause that requires that vehicular access for these units be provided from a lane or public roadway, and shall be hard surfaced.                     | Units will require access from the street and the lane. A clause has been proposed that will allow this product to use both the street and lane for access.  |
| Adding new parameters regarding pedestrian access from a public road for addressing purposes.   | Currently, addressing is based on the entryway to the front street. The City doesn't accommodate addressing off a lane. Administration wants to ensure these units have a door facing a street that can be used for pedestrian access, addressing, and ease of emergency access.   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Require triple car garages to access off the lane in RFB District.  | To minimize the curb cuts that are going to occur with dual access, and to provide more space for on-street parking, Administration has proposed that if triple car garages or larger are proposed, they must access off the lane. Single-car or double-car garages can access off either the front street or rear lane.   |
| Allow for closer front yard setback to the street if the product has a rear detached garage (within RFB District only). | To reduce the prominence of front attached garages on the street, Administration is proposing a lessened front yard setback for product with rear garages. The dwelling will be allowed to be 4.5 m or more from the front property line. Product with front attached garages must remain setback 6.0 m from the front property line to permit a driveway that can allow for mid-sized trucks to park. |

## STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

Feedback from industry was given at the April 1, 2019 Council meeting by the Chair of the Urban Development Institute (UDI) regarding the front/back combined access product. Additional information was also provided as a letter and handout by Rohit Communities.

An online workshop was held on March 27, 2020 via Zoom meeting with members of the Urban Development Institute of St. Albert. Opportunities and concerns of all topics were presented by the City, and followed up with a discussion session between all parties. The video of the presentation was posted on the City website for those who couldn't attend, and is available for public viewing at <https://stalbert.ca/dev/planning/initiatives/residential-forms/>. Comment cards were emailed out so that industry could provide any further feedback.

One piece of industry feedback regarding the front/back units was providing regulations from Strathcona County for how they have implemented the units. Some of the feedback for the front/back combined access units was incorporated into the proposed draft of the regulations attached with this report.

Both Planning and Development staff were involved in the drafting of the proposed regulations. If the drafted bylaw proceeds to Council, then the public will be consulted through the public hearing process.

Additionally, industry feedback specific to each product is included in the attachment. Overall, the feedback from developers emphasized flexibility in regulation - with the reasoning being that the larger the variety of product the City allows, the more opportunity developers and builders have to meet the needs of buyers and have choice of product that meets their price point. As noted previously in the report, duplex and semi-detached product are already allowed uses within several of the residential land use districts. The requested regulation only allows a different access than already exists within lane-serviced areas.

## IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial:



Adoption of the provided regulations enabling front/back access lane housing will result in increased development and servicing costs over either front-only access or rear-only access housing. The requested product will require both a street and a lane to service it, resulting in more road/lane being built to accommodate a housing type (duplex/semi-detached) that is already accommodated within the LUB. The City must take over the roads and lanes, and has more assets to maintain over the long term.

Furthermore, in terms of garbage and recycling collection, there are two options:

1. Administration can collect from both the lane and public street, assuming residents will store the carts by the garage of each dwelling unit. This is more time consuming, and therefore the more expensive option.
2. Mandate collection from either the lane or the front street. In this scenario, some households will be inconvenienced. This option would not increase garbage removal operation costs to the City and would be a standard level of service as to other neighbourhoods.

The City of Edmonton uses Option 1 for these dual access units.

Legal / Risk:

None at this time.

Program or Service:

None at this time.

Organizational:

None at this time.

## **ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED**

If the CGISC does not wish to support the recommendations, the following alternatives could be considered:

1. CGISC may choose to direct Administration that no further work be completed on front/back housing.
2. CGISC may choose to direct Administration to proceed with only some or none of the recommendations provided or may provide specific alternative direction for Administration to incorporate.
3. CGISC may choose to not direct Administration at this time.

Report Date: June 9, 2020

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Report Date: June 9, 2020

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