

The background features several overlapping circles in various shades of green and blue, creating a layered, organic effect. The circles are semi-transparent, allowing the colors to blend where they overlap. The overall composition is clean and modern.

# Garden Suite Study

## Technical Workshop Summary Report

June 7, 2018

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2017 Saanich Council approved a [Terms of Reference](#) for a study to explore regulatory changes to permit garden suites in Saanich. Included in the scope of work for the study is a public engagement process to investigate support, and test different ideas for potential regulations.

On June 7, 2018 the District of Saanich hosted a workshop for industry stakeholders with specific knowledge and expertise in the areas of home building and design (architecture/design, construction, engineering, permitting) and real estate. The stakeholders were engaged in a focused discussion on key aspects of potential regulations for garden suites.

This summary report documents the discussions that took place at the workshop. The information is organized by topic area and table. A total of 17 participants, sitting at four different tables were asked to respond to a series of discussion questions on the topics of size, location, design, and lessons learned.

## 2. DISCUSSION ON SIZE

- a. What are the implications of a garden suite being a certain size and height?
- b. How will regulations for size and height impact the cost of construction of a garden suite?
- c. How will regulations for size and height impact the current regulations for accessory buildings?

### Blue Table

- 10% is small for downsizers/owners at 500-650 sq.ft.
- Need height to compensate for small footprint (12ft or 3.75m)
- Think about objectives that will work for the target population (not just size)
- Allow for second floor within the roofline
- Parallel with regulations for accessory buildings
- Different regulations based on lot area
- More height allows for more tree protection (tradeoff for smaller lots)
- 5-5.5m heights across the board
- Better to relate garden suite size to size of lot (not to the principal home)
- 10% looks ok/close depending on where we go with parking (parking, private space, trees)
- Smaller footprint would mean less money (\$200-\$250 per sq.ft.) to construct
- \$242,000 to build 968 sq. ft. garden suite - wow!
- Financing? Will banks finance these?

### Green Table

- Integration with tree bylaw or new environmental regulations
- Housing as a priority
- Compact footprint
- Footprint less than house

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- No second storey on properties with one storey homes. Garden suites should be accessory to the principal house.
- Existing house height shouldn't matter
- Existing Garage - could be a coach house (2 storeys)
- Should be 10% [of lot area] maximum
- Treat like a second suite (968 sq.ft. max)
- Accessibility benefits to 1 storey
- Accommodation for family members (more flexibility)
- Need reasonable size (more than 1 bedroom for young families)
- 1.5 storey could be a reasonable compromise
- Step code could impact affordability
- Smaller homes can be harder to achieve energy efficiency
- Challenging to implement
- Cost may be more closely linked to design
- Site prep is a major cost
- 2-3 bedroom = higher rent
- Somewhat cheaper for higher vs. wider

#### Red Table

- Building size and height will have implications for neighbours – impacts on neighbours
- Relate building size to lot size
- 10% lot coverage
- 2 bedrooms – suitable for more people (969 sq.ft.)
- Single storey- will protect neighbourhood/character
- There may be impacts when more than 1 garden suite is built in a neighbourhood
- Two storey- the issue of overlook
- 1 storey- apply a simplified process, with fewer permits, and no neighbour input
- Cost goes up when building a garden suite compared to accessory building
- Pre-designed “package” for property owners to choose e.g. with a certain lot size you can build options x, y, or z. The benefits of this are a simplified process
- Service requirements will be costly, especially when there are unique conditions
- No difference in cost if 1 or 2 storey
- Height/compliance with regulations - people will push the bar. This is known.
- Penalty for non-compliance. Different enforcement process (look at Oak Bay)

#### Yellow Table

- Want a minimum amount of rear yard space retained (multiple criteria that must work together)
- Ratio relative to size will take care of itself in terms of allowing different sizes
- Must be viewed as 2<sup>nd</sup> dwelling to regulate under building code
- 2 storey dwellings require increased ventilation requirements, which can cost more
- Most applicable to smaller lots (still keep max 10% lot coverage)
- Encourage passive house, if you can do it affordably
- \$120,000 for current accessory house (home office) - affordable since land is free.

- Single storey, otherwise gets into more complex building code requirements
- Keep it simple= lower cost
- Fewer complaints- more “invisible density”
- Seismic easier- huge extra cost for engineer to do seismic over 1 storey
- Shading
- Easier to keep it as a 1 family (less illegal splitting)
- Maybe 1.5 storey with loft max
- Think about number of bedrooms, but keep it small (1-2 bedrooms)
- Above 600 sq. ft., people should renovate the main house [group members revised the size to 1,000 sq. ft. See question #3]
- Can go larger with lanes - different context than Vancouver
- If too small (500 sq. ft.) will limit people who actually build a garden suite (aging in place)

### 3. DISCUSSION ON LOCATION

- a. Are lot characteristics such as size or location within Saanich important considerations? Why and How?
  - i. Corner lot
  - ii. Lot size
  - iii. Other
- b. Should the size and/or height of the garden suite change depending on the location (within Saanich)? Explain.

#### Blue Table

- Should be another set of standards for larger lots (e.g. more floor area, extra height)
- Build this in from the beginning
- Consider Board of Variance (BOV) route - don't encourage this route unless very unusual situations
- Don't wimp out or get cold feet so everyone goes to BOV!
- Flexibility for front yard siting. Lots of reasons why (better streetscape and safety)
- Minimum available lot area in the front yard (a minimum to qualify) or a percentage (i.e. 10%) of the available front yard
- More height for corner lots- in line with the principle dwelling (5.5 m - 6.5 m)
- Allow 2-unit garden suites
- No base on lot size or allow for corner lot subdivision

#### Green Table

- Location vs. affordability
- All SF areas of Saanich should be permitted
- Corner lots - no need to differentiate max size (more infill opportunities, benefit to own frontage and address)
- UCB? Need more pro-housing policy inside UCB
- Keep to backyard (maybe)
- Should be some flexibility for front yard with houses set back further
- More flexibility with set backs

**Red Table**

- Regulate 10% to max size of X
- Think about building separation and total density of structures on the lot
- Issue with Technical Safety BC – they require electrical to be installed
- No need to offer special considers for corner lots. Incentive built into 10% and max height regulations
- Required parking based on building size e.g. bigger building = more parking
- Off street parking – regulation with a good neighbour policy
- Offer education to applicants on how to be a good neighbour when they are issued their permits
- Permit enforcement is important, but difficult
- Owner occupation may help if garden suites are for affordability reasons. It could be onerous for some owners who are interested in building density
- Setbacks 5 feet minimum (allows for windows/opening, choice of cladding)
- Building step back for second storey

**Yellow Table**

- Implementation difficult if regulation is too nuanced
- Could be based on zoning
- Access to building as important as siting
- Where possible, want front door visible from the street (not supported for Saanich)
- Should be a defined entry/access/gate, but not have stipulation about where in backyard - too restrictive
- 10% to a maximum of 1000 sq.ft. Yes!
- Simple is the way to go. Set regulations based on/responsive to lot size (e.g. % lot coverage up to max), but don't base it on amenities, corner lots, etc.
- Aim for few variances

**4. DISCUSSION ABOUT DESIGN**

- If Saanich were to implement design guidelines for Garden suites, what elements of design could be included to improve livability and neighbourhood fit?**
- How will the design review process impact the cost for construction of a garden suite?**

**Blue Table**

- Materials, architecture/roofline, outdoor living space, lighting
- No to design guidelines
- Don't believe in matching (matchy matchy!)
- Shouldn't be disharmonious either
- Too subjective
- Adds to the process
- Should reflect current era or not have to reflect the era of the principal home
- Adds to flavour and variety
- How to protect against crap?

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- City's small lot subdivision design guidelines are general, but require 75% neighbour approval
- Want good/thoughtful site planning and design
- Want some sort of design control
- Don't want garbage
- Don't want subjective process
- No neighbour weigh- in
- Not to council
- Clear guidelines
- Pre-application consultation process that is used in Colwood is very helpful
- Checklist
- Window placements
- Sketches/renderings
- Build into process the need to hire/use a professional designer
- Cost of doing business (grow up!)
- Money well spent

#### Green Table

- Design integration with existing home
- Have pictures of designs/styles that work
- Flexible siting (options for building envelop)
- Don't dictate style
- Existing house may be torn down- don't want to match style in all cases
- If design guidelines, no design review panel
- Design professionals will ensure design issues are addressed

#### Red Table

- Allow applicants to apply for DP and BP at the same time
- Building Code covers the following: access (grade), stairs, lighting over entry, addressing (for emergency access)
- No roof top patios
- Owner decides aesthetic
- Not necessary for coordination with main house
- Historical duplex issue in Victoria - driveway design down side of building between two properties was a concern for residents.
- 1 storey (least impact on neighbours, least amount of process, simple and cost effective)
- 1.5 Storey (more desirable/livable/flexible, impact on neighbour and more of a process for the owner)
- No landscaping requirements
- Amount of pavement- max amount (maintain permeable)
- Width of driveway
- Shading/landscaping
- Incorporate design requirements into zoning - no design review
- Design review will add cost in form of required plans - sometimes multiple versions
- Current application for prayer houses are high quality

- Screening between properties (5 feet setbacks will work)

#### Yellow Table

- Flexibility in height to protect trees (objective of regulations)
- Needs greater setback from house than current accessory building requirements
- Fire should be consulted
- Shouldn't regulate designs (life/safety a priority)
- Massing for 1.5 storey- but not necessarily needed through design guidelines
- Stay out of design requirements, allow creativity
- Diversity looks nice!
- Landscaping is important
- Privacy screening
- Access and ID pathway from front sidewalk, clear definition
- Defined outdoor space for the suite
- Garden suite or secondary suite, not both, so parking requirements can stay the same (2 for house, 1 for suite)
- Underground hydro lines
- Differentiate between accessory building and garden suite
- Allow building code to regulate setback from main house

## 5. LESSONS LEARNED/ADVICE

- a. From your work in other jurisdictions, what advice do you have for the District of Saanich regarding the approval process for garden suites (i.e. required permits)?
- b. If you could recommend one key thing with the District of Saanich about regulations for garden suites, what would it be?

#### Blue Table

- Educate - goals/objectives and state vision for program
- Clear rules on design, tips, FAQ's available 24/7 on website/handout
- Rules/objectives for each "zone"
- Keep it simple. Learn other local governments
- Keep regulatory minimal
- We are trying to encourage these, right??!!
- Align process to the goal of encouraging garden suites
- Keep standards clear, risk low
- Inviting process

#### Green Table

- Don't follow Victoria's example
- Different process for qualified designers? (licensed builders vs home owner builder)
- Don't go through Council
- Make process easy
- What is appropriate size and where (which areas?)
- Are staff given authority to approve?

**Red Table**

- Use zoning and building permit to regulate (e.g. Colwood, Sidney, Vernon)
- Allow secondary suites on the same site
- City process is faster with delegated DP
- Reasonable parking required e.g. 1 is enough
- Learn from removal of permit requirements in other cities
- 400 sq.ft. is too small as a max

**Yellow Table**

- Fewer regulations
- Only require building permit if you meet zoning - no DP
- The simpler you keep it, the more people will proceed legally and take the opportunity
- Access/addressing captured by fire regulations and enforced by inspections
- Develop set of guidelines to capture things like landscaping
- Learning from Victoria - flawed process, none built
- Lessons learned from other municipalities (concerned about the process)
- Guidelines seem to change/be subjective in Victoria
- Concerns over cost increases, would limit pre-fab options