



# City of Vancouver *Planning - By-law Administration Bulletins*

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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## **BALCONY ENCLOSURE FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS**

*Authority - Director of Planning*

*Effective - July 1996*

*Amended November 14, 2022*

In January 1996, Council amended the Floor Space Ratio (FSR) regulations of those District Schedules which contain FSR exclusions for enclosed balconies. In that amendment Council decided to limit the amount of FSR excludable under the regulations, to a maximum amount of 50% of the approved balcony area in any building. Also in January 1996 Council amended the “Balcony Enclosure Guidelines”, which were originally adopted in April 1985, to further deal with design issues raised by the enclosing of balconies on both new and existing buildings.

One of the main ideas discussed in the amended Guidelines is the importance of an ordered and sensitive approach to the enclosing of balconies on existing buildings, and especially on high-rise towers. To encourage such an approach, section 3.1.1(b) of the Guidelines encourages the applicant to consult with “the original designer of the existing building if possible, or another architect, to assess the design compatibility of the proposed balcony enclosures with the existing building facade”. The Submission Requirements, found in the Appendix to the Guidelines, recommend a preliminary development application to arrive at a comprehensive scheme for the enclosing of balconies on existing buildings. Such schemes are intended “to establish a comprehensive idea of the future appearance of the building” before any individual enclosures are approved.

Since the amendments to the regulations and Guidelines, the Planning Department has received a number of Development Applications for the enclosure of individual balconies in existing high-rise residential buildings. Evaluating these applications has proved difficult in most cases, since there is no way for staff to determine the ultimate number or location of all potential enclosures. At the same time, it is likely that over time most buildings will gradually achieve the maximum of 50% enclosure permitted in many districts. The final result could therefore well be a random and inarticulate pattern of enclosures, detrimental to the appearance of individual buildings and to the general urban environment.

As a result, applicants intending to apply for balcony enclosures should be aware that the Submission Requirements contained in the Appendix to the Balcony Enclosure Guidelines will be administered by staff as written. A preliminary development application to establish a comprehensive enclosure scheme for the entire building may be required before any individual enclosure applications are processed. This may apply even if some enclosures have already been approved in the past.

To determine whether or not a preliminary development application is required, applicants should contact the Development Services Centre to schedule a review of the building by a Facilitator. Photographs of the building and general building statistics (see section 1 of the Submission Requirements) may be required to make the determination.

There may be some buildings and situations for which a preliminary development application will not be required. These situations might include low-rise buildings (up to 4 storeys), or the lower floors of high-rise buildings where it might be reasonably assumed that the balconies in question would be included in a future comprehensive enclosure scheme. These applications must still, however, include the building statistics listed in section 1 of the Submission Requirements.

If a preliminary development application is required, applicants will be encouraged to work with their building's Strata Council to engage the original building designer, or other architect, to prepare a comprehensive scheme according to the principles discussed in the Balcony Enclosure Guidelines. Once a preliminary development application for the comprehensive scheme has been approved, enclosure applications from individual suite owners (whose balcony enclosures are among those approved as part of the comprehensive scheme, and who then wish to enclose them) will be processed through a combined Development and Building Permit process. Applications for the enclosure of balconies which were not part of the comprehensive scheme will likely not be approved.