

Bulletin

Retention and Renovation of a Character House – Scope and Documentation

Effective March 22, 2017

Last amended October 19, 2023

Authority: Director of Planning

1 REGULATORY REFERENCES

- Zoning and Development By-law

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This Bulletin provides direction on the general scope of retention and documentation necessary for projects requesting conditional provisions or zoning incentives by proposing the retention of a character house.

Projects seeking incentives through a Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA) or involving heritage designation will require a higher level of retention and documentation than described below.

3 SCOPE OF RETENTION

The intent of retention is to keep and/or restore the character of the existing house as being evaluated. Over the years, the building code has increased performance requirements to meet national, provincial and city objectives. Due to the extent of upgrades and replacement materials, it is recognized that the original house structure, cladding, and windows may not be retained at the highest level. To qualify for zoning incentives and relaxations, approximately 40% of the primary structure (i.e. exterior framing and sheathing) of the existing house should be retained. In general, street-facing walls, the original roofline, and distinctive architecture features on the exterior are expected to be retained.

4 RETENTION DOCUMENTATION

At the project enquiry stage, the drawings should reflect the scope of retention to identify the proposed extent and method of retention. Plans, sections, and elevations should clearly identify all parts of the existing building that will be retained in place (in black, solid lines); will be temporarily removed for later reinstallation (in green, solid lines); and will be demolished (in red, dashed lines).

The retention drawings are to be annotated to indicate that:

- *All parts of the building shown as being retained will be retained in place;*
 - *“retained wall” means the retention of the existing studs and sheathing;*
 - *“retained floor” means the retention of the existing floor joists and sub-floor; and*
 - *“retained roof” means the retention of the existing roof rafters and sheathing.*
- *All parts of the building shown as being temporarily removed will be reinstalled; and*

- *Sequence of construction must confirm scope of retention, salvage, demolition and reconstruction are carried out in a manner that protects the building on site at all times.*

At the time of Development Permit application, the drawing set must include the annotated colour-coded retention drawings from a Registered Architect or Engineer to confirm that the portions of the existing structure and features shown as being retained can in fact be retained.

A copy of the approved retention drawings will form part of any subsequent permit applications, including approved Building Permit drawings, noting that the Registered Architect or Engineer is responsible for field reviews as per Schedule B (Assurance of Professional Design and Commitment for Field Review) and must inform the City in a timely manner if a component to be retained cannot be retained or is removed, and cease work until the development Permit is amended.

5 BUILDING BY-LAW CONSIDERATIONS

Homeowners are recommended to investigate building requirements and associated costs when considering a retention project.

Where extensive renovation is classified as reconstruction under building code, a full building upgrade as well as water/sewer connection upgrade would be required. As per Notes to Part 11 of the Vancouver Building By-law, a reconstruction project typically includes:

- extensive renovations throughout the entire building and the building is gutted,
- removal of the majority of drywall and plaster from the interior walls,
- the removal of the majority of drywall, plaster, insulation and exterior cladding from the exterior walls, or
- the removal of floor and roof membranes and coverings.

If the work involves raising the whole house above grade, temporary bracing, and excavating to add new basement foundation/slab, it is considered “relocation” under the Vancouver Building By-law, therefore, building upgrade will be required.

If the parcel is stratified (strata multiple conversion dwelling and/or infill), a full building upgrade will be required as per the Strata Property Act. This includes the upgrading of the single detached character house when a strata infill is added to the site.