



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

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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INTERIM POLICY FOR ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH CHURCH USES

*Authority - Director of Planning
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1 Background

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide clarification on the activities which the Director of Planning will consider (on an interim basis) as being typically ancillary to, and forming a part of, a “Church” use on a particular site.

The Zoning and Development By-law lists Church as an Institutional Use, and defines it as: “the use of premises for religious worship, including, but not limited to a mosque, synagogue, temple, chapel, or religious meeting room.”

Churches that are able to meet the provisions contained in this bulletin will not be required to make application for additional land use approvals to carry on these activities “in association with an existing approved Church use”. Proposals for new Churches will be required to obtain development and building permits in accordance with all City by-laws.

2 Issue

In addition to the activities which constitute formal “worship” in any religious tradition, it is considered common practise for these organizations to provide a range of other programs and activities for members of the Church, or members of the general public.

These may include programs for children, youth, families and seniors, and also may include more specialized programs, including but not limited to:

- food pantries
- meal programs
- outreach to the homeless
- temporary shelter programs
- international relief programs
- community bazaars and fairs
- neighbourhood association meetings
- interfaith collaborations and/or meetings

- marriage counselling and retreats
- neighbourhood cleanups
- blood drives
- crime watch programs
- scout troop meetings and events
- choral groups
- recreational programs for children , teens, families, seniors

While the range of programs and activities differs from one religious organization to another, many religious organizations see activities which directly assist the marginalized in the community as a fundamental part of their religious practise. Assistance to these marginalized people is a fundamental tenet of all major religions and may take the form of various basic supports including food, clothing, and financial support.

3 Land Use Principles and Proposed INTERIM administration

When making decisions on land use matters, the Director of Planning must take into account the intent and principles behind the City’s land use policies as laid out in the Zoning and Development By-law and any accompanying Guidelines adopted by City Council. Potential impacts on surrounding properties and the nearby community must be part of that consideration. For Church operations, while it is understood that many associated programs and activities may be typical for Church operations, it is not clear at this time, whether the normal approach to limiting accessory uses (typically limited to 25-33.33 percent of the overall land use area) would be appropriate for all Church organizations, or in all city neighbourhoods. As a result, the Director of Planning is prepared to allow flexibility with regard to programs and activities associated with Church organizations for an INTERIM period (limited to 3 years) and will administer these operations in the following manner:

3.1 New Churches

- Where permitted in the Zoning and Development By-law, Church uses are generally “conditional” approval uses in the Zoning and Development By-law (Note: outright use in some HA and I zones). Where listed as a “conditional” use, the approval requires the special consideration of the Director of Planning, who will have regard to the regulations contained within the specific District Schedule that applies to the site, and also will consider the intent of the Council-adopted “Church Guidelines”. The objective of these guidelines is to provide location and design criteria that will ensure a reasonable compatibility with adjacent and nearby land uses and will enhance the quality of the development.
- In assessing proposals for new Churches in the City, the Director of Planning will also consider the submission of any advisory group, property owner, or tenant that may be affected by the proposal.
- For all new Church applications, the applicant will be required to submit, at the time of application, an Operational Plan that fully describes all proposed programs and activities planned for the new church operations, along with anticipated enrolments, hours of operation, and activity management protocols. This operational plan will be distributed along with the City’s notification letters, advising neighbours of the Church proposals and seeking input.

Over the next 3 years, staff will assess the programs associated with new Church proposals, and will also assess the impacts of these interim policies on the local communities surrounding Churches in the city.

3.2 Existing Churches

For an interim period of 3 years, the Director of Planning will permit existing Churches to continue to carry out their associated programs and activities (or to implement new ones) without the need for additional land use permits or approvals, subject to the following conditions:

- All associated programs taking place on Church premises should be fully contained within the Church buildings. External line-ups and activities will generally not be supported.
- Church activities that generate complaints or concerns from the surrounding area, that the Director of Planning considers reasonable, will result in Church operators being requested to meet with area representatives to resolve these concerns and to demonstrate an amicable resolution.
- For Church programs that include or propose activities not part of the original Church approvals, it will be the responsibility of the Church operators to ensure that their program areas are in compliance with applicable Vancouver Building By-law regulations, Fire Code regulations, and Provincial Health regulations. This may require a Special Inspection to be carried out by City and/or Coastal Health Authority staff, prior to commencing the program.

4 Additional Principle Uses/Additions to Church buildings

Proposals for additional “principle uses” on Church sites (Child-Day Care Facilities, Schools, Gymnasiums) or for “additions” to existing Church buildings will require additional development and building permits.

Note: The policies expressed in this bulletin only apply to sites approved as Church, as defined under the provisions of the Zoning and Development By-law. Social Service programs proposed on sites not approved for Church use will be required to go through regular Development and Building permit processes.