Bulletin

Residential Tower Floor Plates

Effective June 3, 2025
Authority: Director of Planning

CITY OF VANCOUVER

1 INTENT AND APPLICATION

The intent of this bulletin is to provide Director of Planning interpretive guidance on residential tower floor plate sizes and discretionary increases to be used as an interim document during the development of a city-wide approach through the City-wide Design and Development Guidelines (CDDG) planning project. It also serves to reinforce that these limits should be treated as tested benchmarks rather than firm requirements, especially in the context of large site rezoning applications. Where existing guidelines and policy are inconsistent, the guidance in this bulletin provides clarification until such time when other policies are brought into alignment.

2 BACKGROUND

Many North American cities regulate tower floor plates with varying degrees of discretion. In Vancouver, massing controls such as tower separations, setbacks, site size and frontage, towers per block, and podium heights result in more slender tower proportions. This approach has made Vancouver home to some of the densest and yet most liveable neighborhoods in North American while at the same time providing a degree of flexibility to respond to a variety of site-specific conditions such as accessible unit design, energy codes, and mass timber construction. Vancouver's residential tower floor plate benchmark sizes are therefore set out by various Council adopted policies and guidelines in ranges from 510 m^2 (5,500 sq. ft.) to 700 m^2 (7,500 sq. ft.), with 605 m^2 (6,500 sq. ft.) being the established norm. Increases to these floor plates are set out in Tables 2 and 3 below and described in Section 3.3 of this bulletin.

Table 1: Definitions

Term	Definition
Tower	Any part of a building higher than 18 m (60 ft.), unless otherwise specified in Council-approved policies and guidelines.
Tower Floor Plate	The total gross floor area of a single level of a building, excluding podium levels. It includes elevator cores, storage, stairs, etc., but excludes open cantilevered balconies, architectural projections, and similar appurtenances.
Tower Site	A parcel or assembly of parcels which meets the minimum site frontage or site area in Council-approved policies or by-laws to be considered for a tower development.
Non-Tower Site	A parcel or assembly of parcels which does not meet the minimum site frontage or site area in Council-approved policies or by-laws to be considered for a tower development.
Minimum Site Frontage	The minimum total length of an assembly of parcels required for consideration as a tower site without a discretionary decrease.

Term	Definition
Block Study	A diagrammatic study of the block surrounding a development parcel, measured from street-to-street, illustrating the likeliest future development pattern, including the proposed development.

3 RESIDENTIAL TOWER FLOOR PLATE LIMITS

The residential tower floor plate limits set out in Council-adopted policies and guidelines serve as general benchmarks appropriate to each context for application reviews. However, unique site conditions and evolving priorities, such as updated housing targets, energy efficiency standards, accessible design requirements, and the growing use of tower forms outside downtown, require a more flexible approach in evaluating proposals. This flexibility varies depending on the application type and stage, with greater adaptability allowed during rezoning compared to the development permit stage, as detailed below.

3.1 Rezoning Applications

Rezoning applications are shaped through an iterative process grounded in core city-building and urban design principles, such as tower separation. Tower floor plate limits largely depend on the size and location of the proposed development. For example, on large, multi-phase or master-planned sites, residential towers may have larger-than-typical floor plates while still meeting or exceeding minimum tower separation requirements. In contrast, rezonings in established blocks may face more constraints due to the proximity of existing or anticipated neighboring tower developments, which may limit the achievable tower floor plate. In such cases, the limits outlined in Table 2 and Table 3 below should be considered as general guidance.

Rezoning applicants are required to submit a Block Study to demonstrate that the proposed residential tower does not unduly constrain neighbouring tower development sites. Where undue constraints on neighbouring development parcels are identified that cannot be resolved through reasonable design development, the resulting form of development may only be supportable subject to Council consideration.

3.2 Development Permit Applications

Development permit (‘DP’) applications for residential towers that proceed under existing zoning district schedules, rather than through a rezoning process, are typically located in neighbourhoods with an established block structure. In these instances, significant deviations from tower floor plate limits may adversely impact the viability of tower developments on adjacent properties and hinder compliance with other development regulations. Achievable tower floor plate size depends on the location of the development site within the block, the frontage and depth of the development site, and the permitted development typologies of adjacent parcels.

Developments should comply with the limits outlined in Table 2: Tower Floor Plate Limits (Corner Development Sites) and Table 3: Tower Floor Plate Limits (Mid-block Sites). Applicants may be required to submit a Block Study to demonstrate that a proposed tower development does not unduly constrain neighbouring tower development sites.

Table 2: Tower Floor Plate Limits (Corner Development Sites)

Adjacent Parcel Development Typologies	Development Site Frontage			
	30 m (99 ft.)	40 m (132 ft.)	45 m (150 ft.)	50 m (165 ft.)
Non-Tower Site	510 m^2 (5,500 sq. ft.)	670 m^2 (7,200 sq. ft.)	670 m^2 (7,200 sq. ft.)	
Tower Site	370 m^2 (4,000 sq. ft.)	605 m^2 (6,500 sq. ft.)		

Table 3: Tower Floor Plate Limits (Mid-block Sites)

Adjacent Parcel Development Typologies	Development Site Frontage		
	45 m (150 ft.)	50 m (165 ft.)	60 m (200 ft.)
Two Non-Tower Sites	670 m^2 (7,200 sq. ft.)	670 m^2 (7,200 sq. ft.)	670 m^2 (7,200 sq. ft.)
One Tower Site & One Non-Tower Site	605 m^2 (6,500 s q. ft.)		
Two Tower Sites	510 m^2 (5,500 sq. ft.)	605 m^2 (6,500 sq. ft.)	

3.3 Mass Timber, 100% Social Housing & Towers Over 40 Storeys

Where residential towers are permitted by zoning, floor plates for mass timber towers and/or 100% social housing developments may be considered up to 745 m^2 (8,000 sq. ft.) on any of the development site frontages in Table 2 and Table 3 over 40 m (132 ft.) without requiring Council approval, despite potential for constraints on adjacent development parcels.

To meet technical requirements, such as additional elevators, tower floor plates up to 745 m^2 (8,000 sq. ft.) may also be considered for towers exceeding 40 storeys in height through the DP process. Approval

is contingent on the development aligning with urban design and liveability expectations and demonstrating that it does not negatively constrain adjacent development parcels.

Figure 1: Example tower development scenarios on a typical Vancouver block