



City of Vancouver *Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines*

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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BRITANNIA/WOODLAND RM-4 AND RM-4N GUIDELINES

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1 Application and Intent

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the RM-4 and RM-4N Districts Schedule of the Zoning and Development By-law for developments in the Britannia and Woodland areas zoned RM-4 and RM-4N (Figure 1). The guidelines should be consulted in seeking approval for conditional approval dwelling uses or for the relaxation of regulations. They may also be helpful in designing developments involving outright approval. As well as assisting the applicant, the guidelines will be used by City staff in the evaluation of projects.

Part of the Britannia area (sub-area 1) was zoned RM-4 in 1983 and since that date an earlier version of these guidelines has been used to guide development. In November 1989 the balance of the area (sub-areas 2 and 3) was zoned RM-4 and RM-4N, and the guidelines have been amended and updated.

The intent of the earlier guidelines, to ensure that redevelopment was compatible with the traditional character of Britannia sub-area 1, has been successfully achieved in much of the new development, and is re-emphasized.

Figure 1. Britannia and Woodland RM-4 and RM-4N Zoning Districts



Sub-areas 2 and 3 contain older houses of various eras, and apartment development of a wide variety of styles. However, since much of the area is still developable it is still possible to create a unified character area. The intent of the guidelines in these sub-areas is to use sub-area 1 as a precedent and to encourage an extension of this character means of knitting the whole neighbourhood together. At the same time, development on specific sites in these areas may also need to respond to specific adjacent developments.

2 General Design Considerations

2.1 Neighbourhood Character

Sub-area 1 retains many original houses which have created a specific heritage neighbourhood character and provide a link to Vancouver's past.

New developments should:

- (a) Respect the existing streetscape and adjacent buildings by designing new buildings to complement their character.
- (b) Retain groupings of original houses to help maintain the existing streetscape character through infill and conversion schemes. Infill should be compatible in scale and character with the existing houses.
- (c) Respect existing buildings by renovating them in a manner which is sensitive to the architectural components which compose their character.

Sub-areas 2 and 3 have a mixture of old houses and apartment blocks of various ages and conditions. Because of this mixture the areas have a rather confused appearance, and there is no dominant existing pattern on which to build a future neighbourhood character.

New development in sub-areas 2 and 3 should:

- (d) Adopt the traditional Britannia character (sub-area 1) rather than attempting to use the adjacent development as a strong character precedent. In some cases where significant older buildings remain, (b) and (c) above may be applicable.

2.2 Orientation

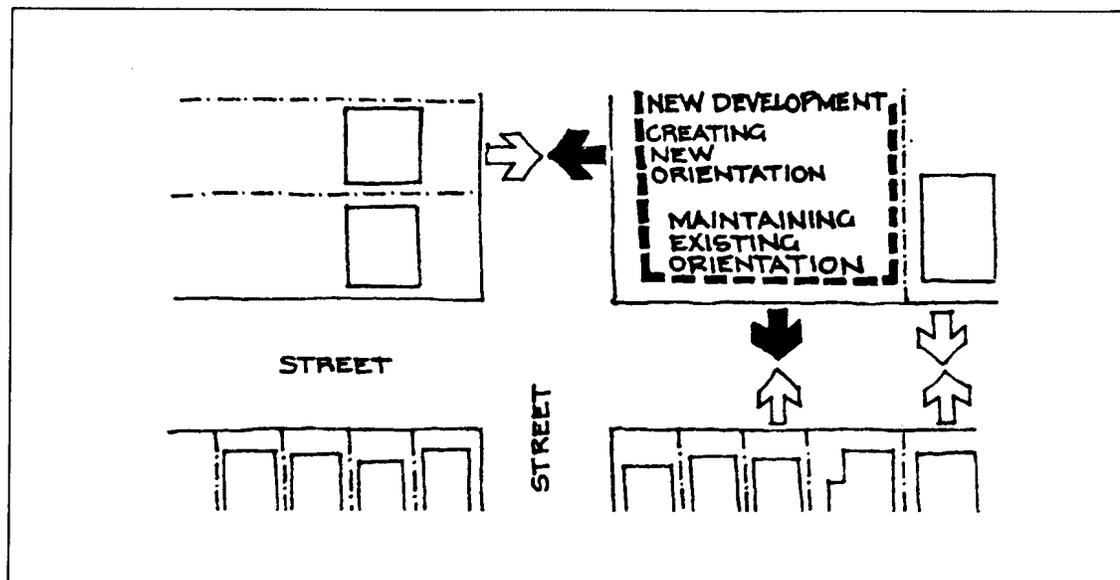
The original subdivision pattern includes lots that orient to side streets as well as the east-west streets. This results in the fronts of some buildings facing the sides of others, and can result in an disorganized street appearance.

East 1st Avenue and Commercial are arterial streets requiring mitigation of noise impacts for residential uses. However, the traditional pattern of having buildings "front" onto these streets should not be lost.

New development should:

- (a) Conform to the predominant orientation pattern.
- (b) Create a frontage character for all building walls facing the street (Figure 2).

Figure 2. New Development Establishing Frontage on Two Streets



2.3 Views

Distant views to the north shore mountains, downtown and False Creek are one of the area's best features. There are also pleasant close-up views of parks and historical streetscapes in many blocks. However, the foreground views immediately adjacent to the industrial areas are generally not desirable.

New development should:

- (a) Take advantage of potential private views while ensuring that private views of adjacent buildings are not unduly compromised.
- (b) Minimize impact of views to adjacent industrial uses wherever possible.

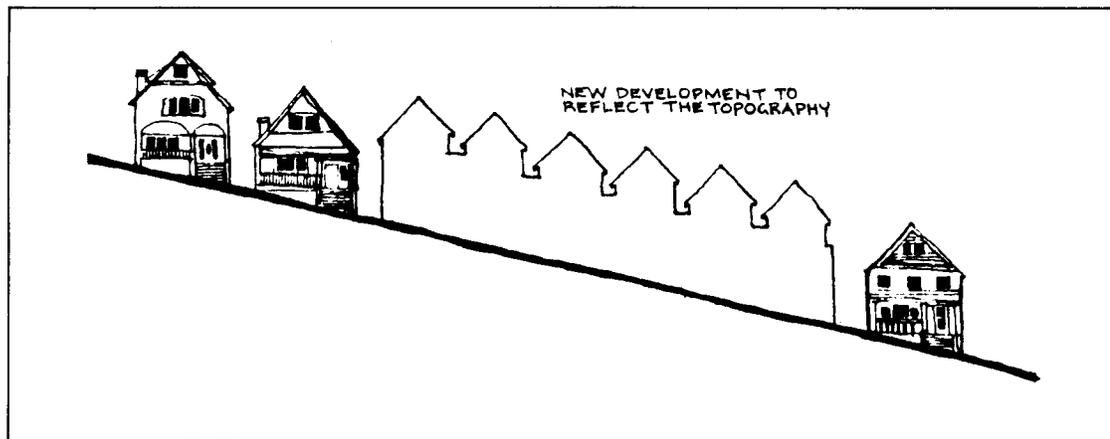
2.4 Topography

The area has a pronounced slope to the west. The scale of the older houses allows them to step down the hill in a manner which respects the topography and contributes to a recognizable area character.

New development should:

- (a) Respond to the topography by stepping the building massing down the hill (Figure 3).
- (b) Step foundations and parking structures to avoid retaining walls above grade.

Figure 3. New Development Responding to Topography



2.5 Noise

Sites adjacent to East 1st Avenue and Commercial Drive are affected by traffic noise. Noise standards are set out in Section 10.2 of the Zoning and Development By-law, and a qualified acoustic expert should be consulted.

New development should:

- (a) Use site planning which orients noise sensitive areas away from noise sources.
- (b) Use appropriate building techniques (e.g. triple glazing, acoustically insulating construction, enclosed balconies, alternative ventilation systems).
- (c) Use noise deflecting/absorbing landscaping (e.g. berms, solid fences).

2.6 Privacy

Apartment buildings can create privacy and overlook problems for adjacent smaller buildings as well as for their own units.

New development should:

- (a) Minimize overlook into adjacent private yards as much as possible.
- (b) Ensure visual privacy for units and unit open space within its own site.

2.7 Safety

Security is improved in areas where casual surveillance by passers-by and residents is possible.

New development should:

- (a) Allow visibility of the site and building from the sidewalk and units, without totally sacrificing privacy of grade level units and open space. This is particularly important for less-used common areas of the site.
- (b) Ensure that lobbies and entries are visible as they are approached.

2.8 Access and Circulation

The area is characterized by houses, infill and apartments which have unit access from grade.

New development should:

- (a) Provide individual access from grade for as many units as possible.

3 Guidelines Pertaining to the Regulations of the Zoning and Development By-law

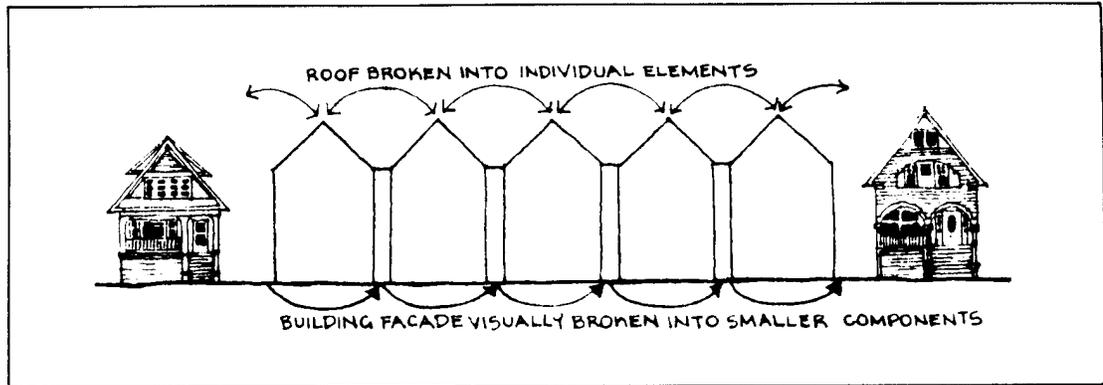
3.1 Frontage

The predominant lot width of 10.1 m in conjunction with the old houses creates a strong rhythm and unit identity. Some apartment development has disrupted this rhythm with building masses that have uninterrupted facades for four or five lots.

New development should:

- (a) Break the larger massing into smaller components to express strong unit identity and to relate to the characteristic subdivision of the area (Figure 4).
- (b) Use architectural treatment to emphasize unit identity.

Figure 4. New Development Creating Incremental Frontage



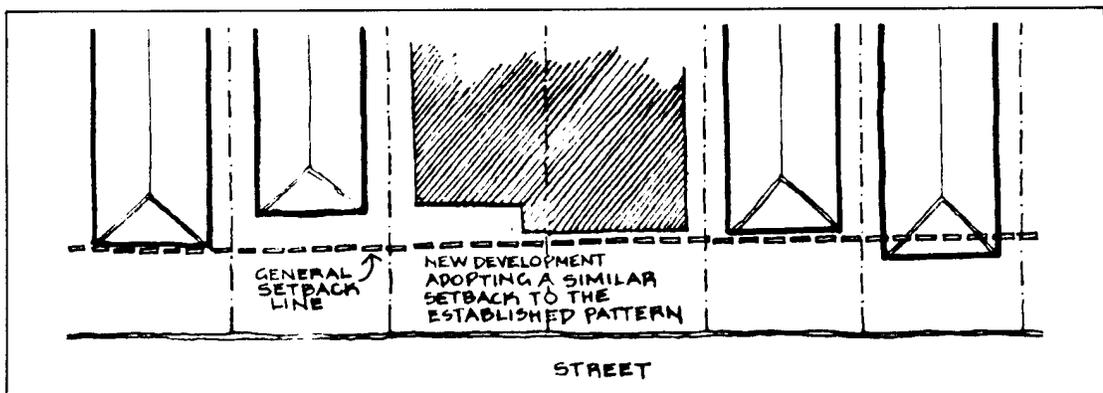
3.2 Front Yard

The front yard setbacks vary, with a consistent setback more apparent in some blocks than others. Where inconsistent setbacks exist, new buildings run the risk of exposing building sidewalls or blocking front views.

New development should:

- (a) Respect consistent setbacks where they exist by adopting a similar one.
- (b) Respond to inconsistent front yards by varying the setback so as to create a transition to existing buildings where appropriate (Figure 5).

Figure 5. New Development Responding to Existing Setbacks



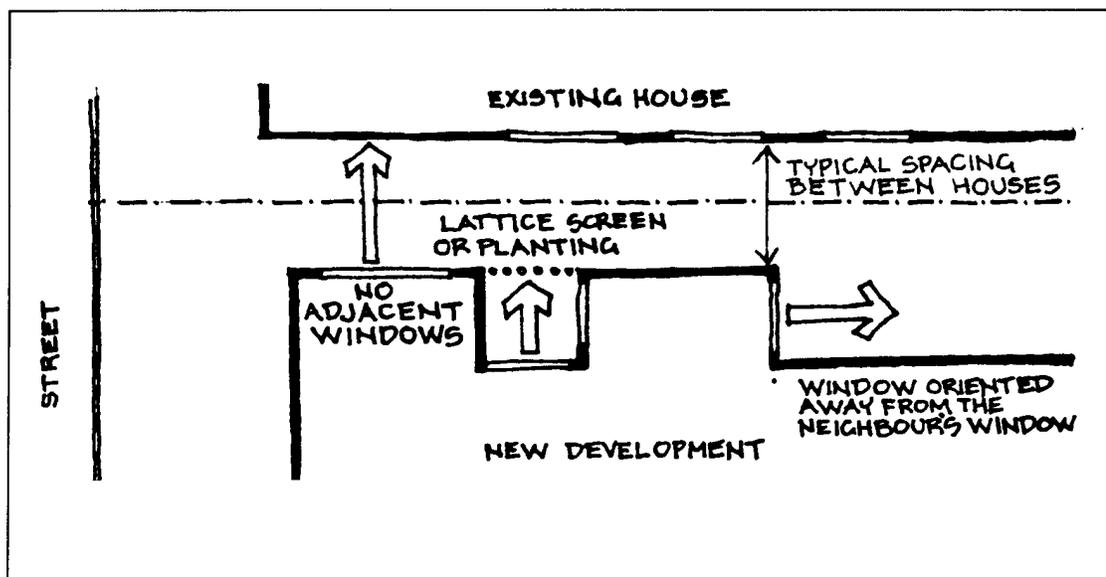
3.3 Side Yards

The spacing between existing houses created by their side yards is characteristic of the streetscape of the area. In addition, many older buildings have windows facing the side yards.

New development should:

- (a) Respond to the traditional spacing assuming a similar relationship, and avoid overly large side yards.
- (b) Respect the privacy of adjacent properties by locating or screening windows along the side yards so that they do not directly overlook adjacent windows, openings or private areas (Figure 6).

Figure 6. New Development Respecting Side Yard Privacy



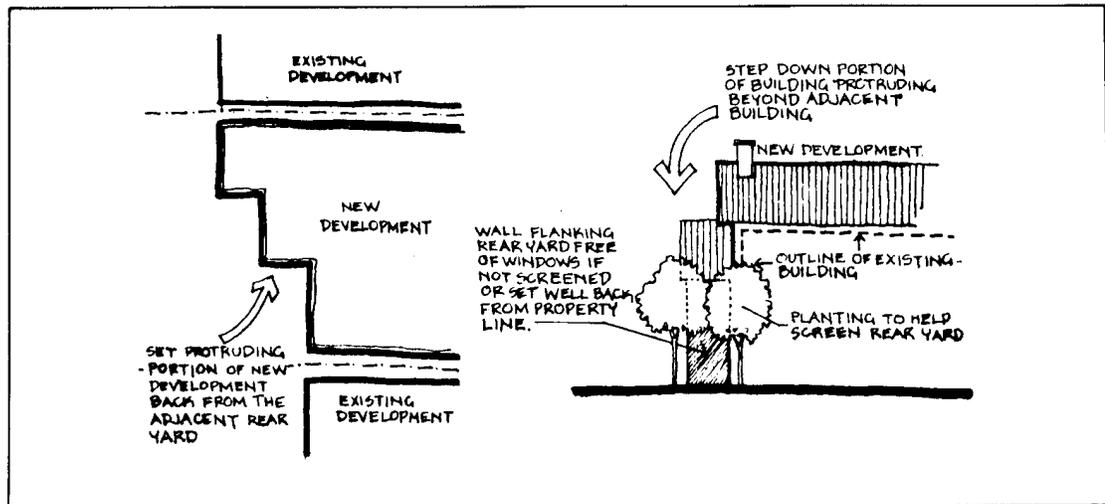
3.4 Rear Yard

New development at densities higher than existing houses may result in increased site coverage, particularly in the rear yard, with attendant impacts on sun and privacy.

New development should:

- (a) Minimize impacts on sun, views and scale of adjacent rear yards. This can be done through stepping back or reducing height of protruding portions of building.
- (b) Minimize impacts on privacy through orientation of windows and screening between yards (Figure 7).

Figure 7. New Development Respects Rear Yards



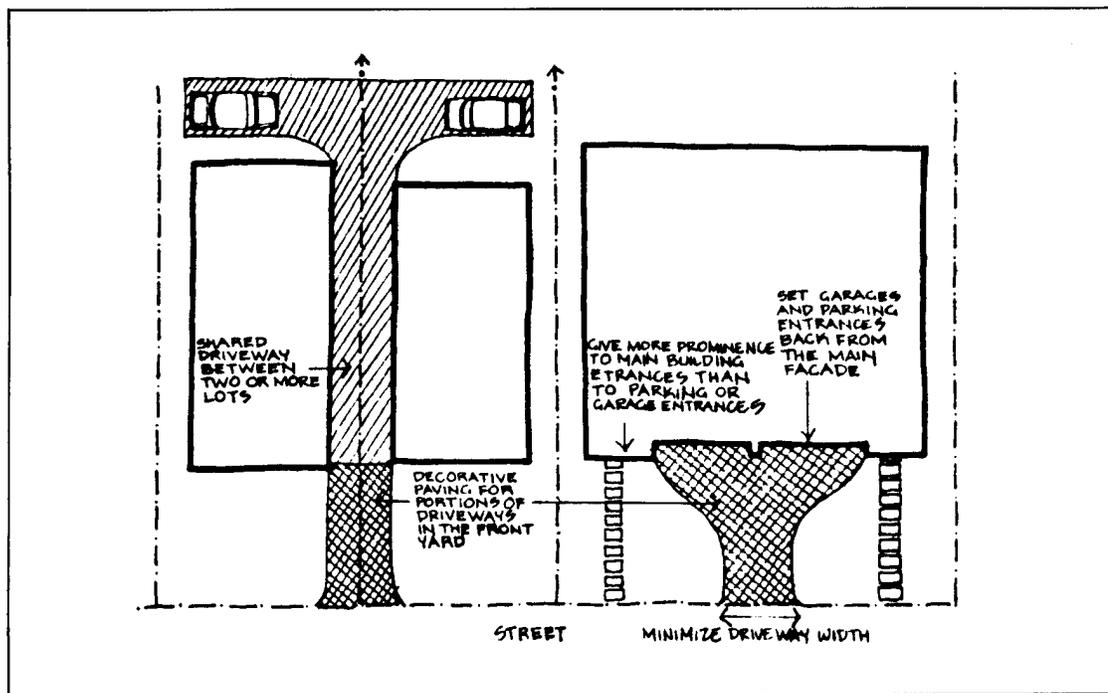
3.5 Off-Street Parking and Loading

Generally parking access should be from the lane and parking should be underground or in-structure. In blocks without lanes, parking access may be required from the street.

New development should:

- (a) Ensure all driveways, parking areas, and structures are designed and screened to be attractive, architecturally compatible with the development and as unobtrusive as possible.
- (b) Ensure that where parking access must be provided from the street that the driveway width is minimized and if possible that parking areas and structure are located to the rear of the main building.
- (c) If parking structures must be located at the front of the building, the garage entries should not dominate the facade.

Figure 8. Parking Treatment Where No Lane Exists



4 Architectural Components

4.1 Roofs

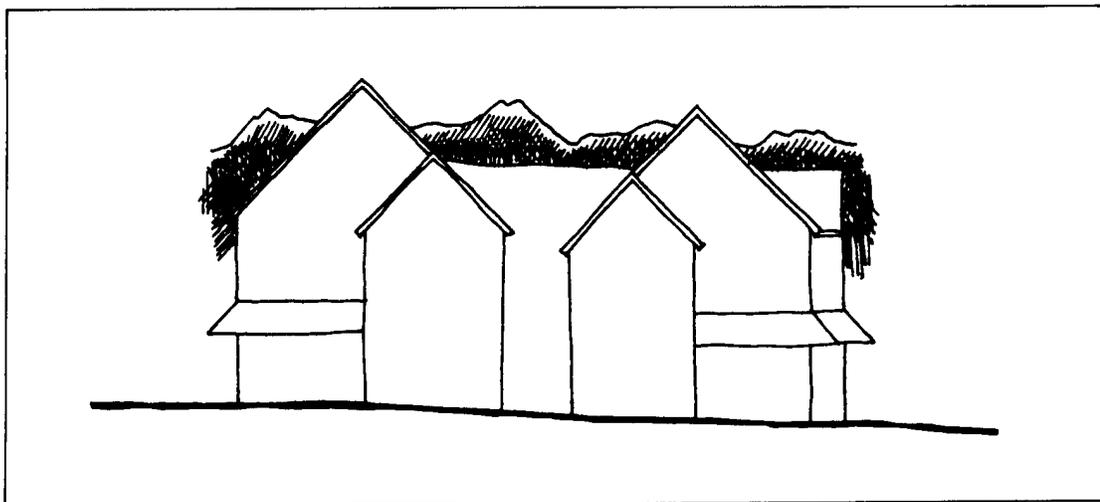
The traditional roof form in the area as evidenced in sub-area 1 is a steeply pitched roof with the peaks and valleys facing the street. An open view area exists between adjacent roof peaks. Secondary roof forms are common over porches, entries, dormers, and projecting bays. This pattern has been successfully adapted by new development.

The apartments and some of the houses in sub-areas 2 and 3 have developed with a variety of roof forms including flat roofs, "false-fronts" in various shapes, mansard roofs, etc. The resulting streetscape is confused and unattractive.

New development should:

- (a) Incorporate steeply pitched roofs with the gable end facing street.
- (b) Incorporate secondary roof forms over entries, porches, etc.

Figure 9. New Development with Pitched and Secondary Roofs



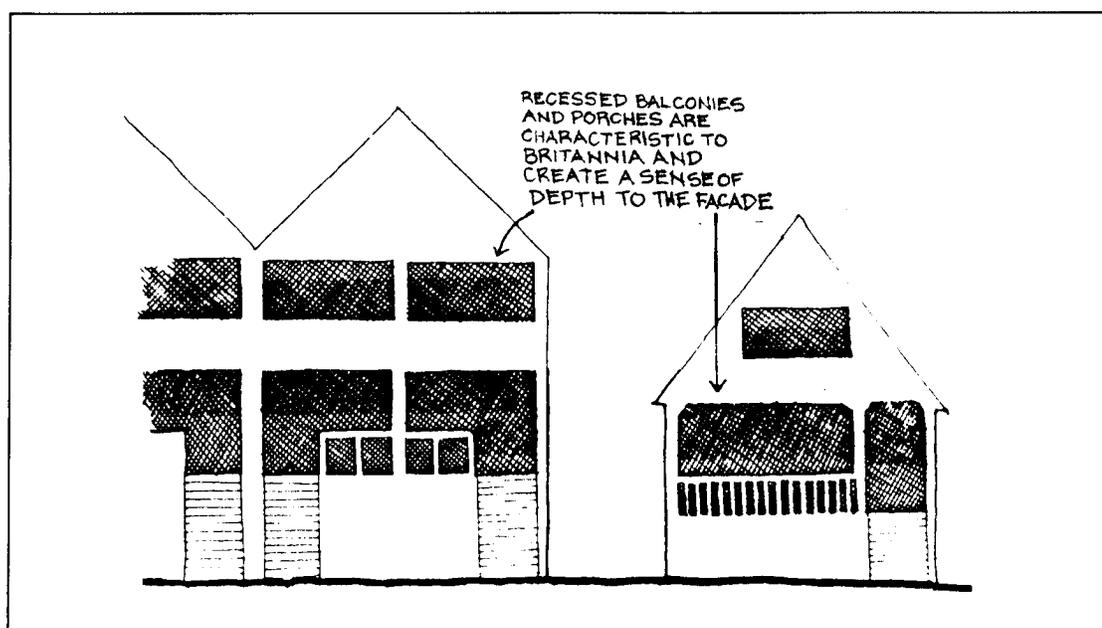
4.2 Entrances, Stairs and Porches

Robust porches and entrance stairs give the area much of its traditional character. Porches are usually located above ground level and recessed, creating a sense of depth and solidity in what is otherwise a flat facade. New developments will tend to have their entries at grade leading to a lobby.

New development should:

- (a) Define a prominent main entry. If stairs are used, ensure that they are solid and robust.
- (b) Incorporate recessed porches and balconies. (Figure 10)
- (c) Ensure that renovations maintain existing character of porches, entrances and stairs.

Figure 10. Characteristic Porches and Balconies



4.3 Balconies

Traditionally balconies in the old buildings were recessed rather than projected, creating a sense of depth for the facade. Balconies will be necessary for most units, to provide private open space.

New development should:

- (a) Design balconies to be inset and integrated into the facade rather than appearing "tacked-on".

- (b) Ensure balconies are at least 1.8 m deep to allow for usability.
- (c) Ensure balconies are designed to accommodate weight and drainage from the planters and pots which residents will place on them.

4.4 Exterior Walls and Finishing

Painted narrow horizontal wood siding and wood shingles with wood corner trims and window surrounds are the area's traditional character and can be seen in both the older houses and new developments in sub-area 1. (Newer developments often use vinyl-coated aluminum replications of the old materials.) Roofs are asphalt or wood shingle.

The variety of finishes found among buildings in sub-areas 2 and 3 creates a very confusing mixture. It is important to employ a more selective palette to create a consistent area character.

New development should:

- (a) Use narrow horizontal wood siding, wood shingles, corner trims and window trims. Good quality vinyl-coated aluminum reproductions of the traditional materials are acceptable.
- (b) Avoid the use of stucco on any large surfaces visible from the street or rear lane.
- (c) Use asphalt or wood shingles on roofs.
- (d) Generally limit the number of finishing materials to avoid an overly busy appearance.

5 Internal Design and Facilities

Facilities for storage and laundry are important to liveability of multiple dwellings. In addition, the area has traditionally been a family area, and it should continue to provide units suitable for families with children.

New development should:

- (a) Include adequate storage areas ensuite as well as in locker storage. In addition, the needs for secure bicycle and recreational equipment storage should be met.
- (b) Include laundry facilities either in common or ensuite. Common laundry rooms should have natural light, adequate ventilation, and some space for waiting.

- (c) Include in projects some features which will enhance their suitability for families with children including ground level access for some two (or more) bedroom units and observable play space. (For other ideas on accommodating families with children see High-Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines.)

6 Open Space

With the development of apartment buildings, the traditional pattern of a semi-private front yard as a visual contribution to the street and a private backyard for residents only, will change to a more complex arrangement.

New development should:

- (a) Continue to provide a significant portion of the front setback as a semi-private front yard contributing visually to the street.
- (b) Provide private, unit open space in the form of screened patios at grade, balconies, and/or decks.
- (c) Recognize that the rear setback (whether landscaped or parking area) will be much more of a semi-public space, looked down on by units in the building and in adjacent developments.
- (d) Ensure that there are areas where specific common open space needs can be met, e.g. play space for children; car washing area; barbecue/patio area related to indoor meeting or party room. Take into account the availability of sun and privacy impacts in selecting the locations for these activities.
- (e) Where infill development is to occur, ensure that both the infill and principal building have adequate access to outdoor space.

7 Landscaping

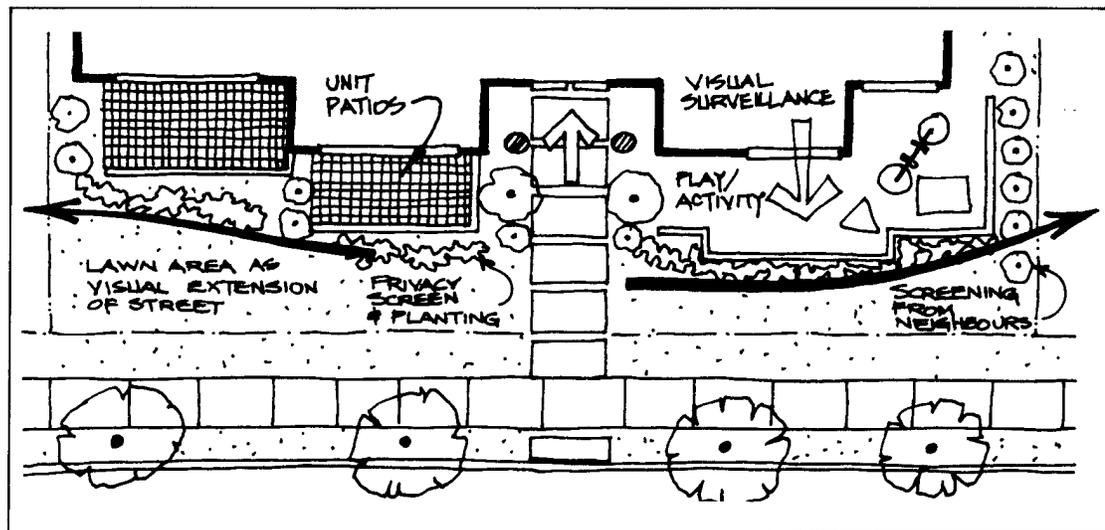
New development should maintain and improve the traditional landscape character of the area as much as possible, while allowing for the new demands created by apartment development.

New development should:

- (a) Maintain existing trees and landscape features (including stone walls, etc.) wherever possible.
- (b) Provide grassed front boulevard and lawn area adjacent to the sidewalk. Keep higher planting, fences and screening for ground level patios in from the front property line. Exception can be made for developments along East 1st Avenue or Commercial where noise mitigation justifies berms, fences or walls adjacent to the street. Such barrier should be attractively planted, however.

- (c) Use screening materials that allow views and light to penetrate. lattice-work, picket or slat fences are preferable to solid ones, except in noise areas. All fences or walls should be designed compatibly with the architecture of the building.
- (d) Ensure that the majority of the semi-private areas are treated in soft landscaping. Avoid expanses of concrete, gravel and bark mulch.
- (e) Where paved parking and driveways occur, use decorative pavers, contrasting edging, trellis screening and fencing planted with climbers to enhance the views of units looking out or down on these areas.
- (f) Use landscaping to screen unattractive areas and enhance near views for development along the industrial edge.

Figure 11. Open Space and Landscaping



Appendix

Submission Requirements

Applicants should refer to the information required for significant development permit applications contained in Brochure #3 - How To...Development Permits for Major Developments.