

Guidelines

Seniors Housing, Community Care Facility and Group
Residence Guidelines

Approved by Council July 23, 2024



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1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Vancouver's Seniors Housing, Community Care Facility and Group Residence Guidelines support the development of housing options for older adults and other populations that is available within their neighborhood of choice and appropriate for their care needs. The guidelines will be applied to a range of housing types that reflect a hierarchy of care supports offered to older adults as they age, and other populations according to their needs. Applications for new development, renovations or change of use are subject to adherence to these guidelines as they relate to resident needs, suitability of location, siting, form of development and any other relevant City policies or planning objectives that may apply.

Community Care and Assisted Living uses are regulated by the Provincial Community Care and Assisted Living Act (CCALA). It is the responsibility of the design team (architects, engineers and builders) engaged by an applicant to design and build projects meeting current standards, relevant legislation and codes, including the British Columbia Community Care and Assisted Living Act, Residential Care Regulation, Assisted Living Regulation and BC Bill of Rights. Where conflicts exist between the requirements of these guidelines and legislations enacted by the federal or provincial government, the highest level of requirements will apply.

2 INTENT

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with a district schedule of the Zoning and Development By-law or with an official development plan by-law for conditional approval of the following uses:

- Community Care Facility - Class B
- Seniors Supportive or Assisted Housing
- Group Residence

The above uses are defined in the Zoning and Development By-law. These guidelines will also be used in assessing rezoning applications that involve these uses and are outlined in two parts:

- Part A: Community Care and Group Residence Guidelines applies to a building or portion of a building used as a community care facility (i.e., long-term care), licensed under the Provincial CCALA, or as a group residence.
- Part B: Seniors Supportive or Assisted Housing and Assisted Living Guidelines applies to a building or portion of the building used as seniors supportive or assisted housing, or as assisted living, whether registered or unregistered under the CCALA.

In buildings with both community care (i.e., long-term care) and seniors supportive or independent housing or assisted living uses, the relevant guidelines should be used for each portion of the building dedicated to that use.

When designing for long-term care, applicants are encouraged to also review Vancouver Coastal Health's most recent Long Term Care Design Guidelines for additional design considerations.

3 PART A: COMMUNITY CARE AND GROUP RESIDENCES

The intent of these guidelines is to promote design that fosters independent, equitable and dignified care and access to activities of daily living for older adults and other residents with varying levels of ability and individual needs. The guidelines also support the integration of community care (i.e., long-term care) and group residences throughout the city by providing a framework for assessing applications. This framework considers the needs of residents, suitability of location, siting and building form, and any relevant City policies or planning objectives that may apply to a given site.

The guidelines outline factors that the Director of Planning, the General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services, and other relevant Civic Departments will take into consideration in assessing rezoning applications for a community care facility or group residence or a development permit application for these uses.

The purpose of these guidelines is to:

- Promote optimal quality of life and health outcomes for building residents;
- Support design of appropriate built form solutions for community care and group residences; and
- Support design and construction alternatives when necessitated by site conditions, building programming or other considerations.

In assessing a rezoning or development application for a community care or group residence, the Director of Planning, in consultation with the General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services will:

- Review the information provided by the applicant regarding number of residents, programming, length of stay, funding, traffic, parking, and any other relevant features;
- Consider any features of the proposed facility or its operation which require coordination with adjacent properties; and
- Review the applicant's proposal for communicating with neighbours and responding to queries/concerns.

3.1 General Design Considerations

The community care or group residence development should be designed with a welcoming residential character and consider long-range policies and anticipated future area changes.

3.1.1 Site Selection

Sites should be selected that allow for aging in community, accessible circulation and adequate daylight, including:

- Locating larger buildings in close proximity to transit and other complimentary uses such as community centres, where possible, to improve ease of access for staff and visitors while allowing more options for older adults to age in their community;
- Avoiding steeply sloping sites where possible, which are less desirable due to the complexity of site circulation, as ramps often have significant spatial requirements that are better allocated to usable outdoor space. Level paths not requiring ramps are preferred due to ease of use by those with mobility aids or limited endurance;
- Where the development is located on a sloping site, it is recommended to incorporate landscape transitions to natural grade at the property lines, which may require additional space for stepping and terraces. Extensive exposed retaining walls are discouraged in the setback areas;
- Carefully site buildings on sloping sites to ensure units have adequate daylight access. Access to natural light is important at all times of the year; and
- Appropriately site and screen service spaces such as loading, recycling, and garbage areas to provide high quality streetscapes and interfaces with adjacent properties.

3.1.2 Building Form

To assess the appropriateness of proposed built form, consideration will be given to:

- Any Council-approved plans or guidelines for the area, including long range policies anticipating future changes to the area, recognizing that community care facilities and group residences should contribute to City objectives in approved area plans and policies; and
- Building form and massing which minimizes shadowing on surrounding public spaces, school grounds and parks.
- Tree retention to screen larger buildings, which is especially desirable on local streets.

3.1.3 Architectural Design

The building should be designed to have high-quality architectural design and a welcoming residential character. To assess the appropriateness of proposed design, consideration will be given to:

- Visual interest created through façade composition, high quality materials, and detailing is especially important to break down the scale of larger buildings, which may appear more institutional due to their size. Strategies should break up long frontages including façade articulation, massing changes, colour and materials treatments, and integration of significant landscaped nodes along facades;
- Maximum building widths of up to 45.7 m (150 ft.) are generally recommended to improve compatibility with adjacent lower-scale buildings, increase permeability, and allow better cross-ventilation and access to natural light. Projects with larger frontages can be articulated with inset bridge element(s) set back from the building face or with a visually lighter material treatment to suggest two or more distinct building forms;
- Typical clear ceiling heights of 2.9 m (9.5 ft.) are expected for residential uses. However, in some buildings, ceiling heights must be increased to meet programmatic and operational requirements as required in the Community Care and Assisted Living Act: Residential Care Regulation. Community care buildings providing the highest levels of care require specialized mechanical, air handling equipment and gases in ceiling spaces, which are likely to require increased ceiling heights;
- Massing changes and step backs at upper floors should be considered to reduce vertical scale and improve transition to lower buildings nearby. Significant landscaped nodes along long facades are also effective to reduce apparent scale, in combination with architectural treatments such as use of colour and materials;
- The primary building entry should be well marked and visually obvious from the street(s);
- Weather protection should be provided at all entrances; and
- Seating should be provided at the main entrance and at key pedestrian nodes within the site wherever possible, to facilitate socialization for residents and visitors, and serve as resting places for those with limited mobility and physical endurance.

3.2 Internal Design

3.2.1 Resident Centred Design

The community care or group residence development should be designed so that it centres the health and well-being of residents, including:

- Provision of ground-level community space (e.g., community garden plots, children’s playground, coffee shop and seating areas) where the broader community (people from outside the building) can come in and interact with the community care residents on a regular basis to encourage multigenerational connections. For group residence, community space is recommended as appropriate to the resident populations;
- Provision of resident amenity space of varying sizes for events and gatherings, such as an art studio, exercise studio, sacred space, town hall, salon, and small seating nodes in circulation spaces to encourage social interaction;
- Provision of spaces that consider the diversity of residents with regard to culture, ethnicity and gender, such as providing space for religious and cultural practices, ceremonies and events, and providing gender neutral washrooms;
- Ensuring clear sightlines wherever possible to help staff quickly monitor residents, and to assist residents (especially those with dementia or memory loss) to find familiar places; and
- Implementing a comprehensive wayfinding strategy based on a simple, logical layout, with signage supporting those with differing visual and auditory needs. Signs should also accommodate non-English speakers.

Applicants are encouraged to also review Vancouver Coastal Health’s current Long Term Care Design Guidelines for additional resident centred design considerations.

3.2.2 Unit Design

For projects targeting older adults, design units/rooms to accommodate additional space needed for mobility devices. Unit layouts must provide sufficient space for a support provider to enter the unit and carry out their work. In some cases, a resident may require a two-person assist, requiring additional space within the unit. Some residents require a variety of medical equipment, such as oxygen tanks and multiple mobility aids, which are used frequently enough to require being kept within the unit.

3.3 Circulation

3.3.1 The community care or group residence development should be designed so that circulation spaces are accessible and effective to accommodate resident needs, including consideration of:

- Provision of an accessible path of travel from the public sidewalk to all accessible building entrances, throughout common areas, and to parking areas and passenger loading zones for persons with limited mobility.
- Provision of sufficient space for parking of mobility devices such as three wheeled bikes and power scooters near the building entry and on site.

- Natural light in corridors wherever possible, while mitigating glare.

3.4 Open Space

3.4.1 The community care or group residence development should be designed so that open spaces are usable, promote connection with the natural environment and allow for freedom of movement. Consideration should be given to:

- Design quality outdoor space around the building at grade, the upper floors and roof.
- Applications targeting older adults are encouraged to provide accessible outdoor walking loops (e.g., with smooth walking surfaces and handrails), with meaningful destinations and intermittent seating opportunities wherever possible.
- The open space design should provide meaningful space for interactions with staff, visitors, and family including children, within the site and throughout the building, including upper-level outdoor spaces.
- Provide usable private open space such as accessible balconies near each household¹ or grouping of units where practical.
- Wheelchair accessible units should have an outdoor space that accommodates required turning movements for use of wheeled mobility devices including larger power chairs.
- Common outdoor space in combination with an indoor amenity room is encouraged and should be located at grade and/or at the rooftop where practical.
- Roof access is encouraged to provide outdoor amenity space for residents and visitors. Projections above the roof line for roof deck access should be well integrated with the architectural design.

¹ A household is a grouping of units typically found in community care facilities. Households are typically up to 12 - 14 residents and includes all the spaces required to support day to day living (e.g., meals, personal care).

3.5 Parking and Loading

3.5.1 The community care or group residence development should be designed with adequate and accessible parking, loading, bicycle, and passenger spaces.

- Provide parking spaces in accordance with the [Parking By-law](#). The Parking By-law outlines requirements for parking, accessible stalls, loading, bicycle spaces, and passenger loading. A [Transportation Demand Management](#) (TDM) Plan may also be required.
- Access to parking, loading, bicycle spaces, and passenger loading should be designed to allow for privacy for funeral care with minimum impacts on neighbouring uses and traffic circulation.

4 PART B: SENIORS SUPPORTIVE OR INDEPENDENT HOUSING AND ASSISTED LIVING

Seniors supportive housing, seniors independent housing and assisted living are housing in which there are individual residential units and large common areas, including a large communal dining room and common areas for activities and socializing. It is designed to meet the needs of older adults (55+) and facilitate aging in place. It features a package of services, typically including meals, house-keeping, laundry and activities. Registered assisted living residences may provide some medical services as regulated by the Community Care and Assisted Living Act. Seniors supportive housing, independent housing and assisted living are important components of the continuum of housing choice for seniors, one which allows seniors to maintain and maximize their independence.

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with a district schedule of the Zoning and Development By-law, and official development plan by-laws for development permit applications for seniors supportive or independent housing or assisted living. They are intended to provide direction primarily related to the livability and usability of seniors supportive or independent housing or assisted living. In zoning districts where design guidelines exist, these too should be consulted.

The guidelines are to assist applicants in their planning and design, and City staff in evaluation. All applications should be accompanied by an operating plan, which should include, but may not be limited to information on details such as the following:

- anticipated resident profile (target market);
- proposed tenure of the units, i.e., subsidized, rental, strata-title, or mix;
- meals service;
- other services provided on site; and

- how the common spaces will be used and programmed.

While there is room for variety and creativity in the design of the components of seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living, the total package should:

- support the dignity and independence of seniors, while providing the physical environment and services which maintain quality of life and allow aging in place; and
- promote a sense of community within the development.

The City, at its discretion, may consider exemptions in the application of guidelines when a Housing Agreement is entered into between the owner and the City where at least a portion of the units are restricted to occupancy by residents of low and modest incomes.

4.1 General Design Considerations

4.1.1 Site Selection

Seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living should be located to facilitate older adults to safely and independently access services, facilities and activities outside the project, with consideration to:

- Select sites that have good access to public transit, shopping, and community services;
- The area surrounding the site should have a comfortable walking environment, with sidewalks in good condition, crosswalks, and clearly marked walkways separated from vehicular traffic;
- Avoid steeply sloping sites where possible, which are less desirable due to complexity of site circulation, as ramps often have significant spatial requirements that are better allocated to usable outdoor space. Level paths not requiring ramps are preferred due to ease of use by those with mobility aids or limited endurance; and
- Where a development is located on a sloping site, it is recommended to incorporate landscape transitions to natural grade at the property lines, which may require additional space for ramps, stepping and terraces. Extensive exposed retaining walls are discouraged in the setback areas.

4.1.2 Building Characteristics

Seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living should look, feel and function as a residential use for older adults of varying ages and abilities. The design should support aging in place without an institutional character, with consideration given to:

- Incorporate aging in place features throughout the building, such as wider doors and hallways, handrails, lever door handles, lower window sills (to allow viewing when seated), lower light switches, raised electrical sockets, and washroom fixtures as appropriate;
- Orient the project to take advantage of direct sunlight, as natural light is important to the creation of liveable residential space;
- Encourage natural light in corridors wherever possible;
- Provide weather protection at all entrances;
- Provide seating inside and outside the main entrances wherever possible; and
- Consider the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in the site and building design.

4.1.3 Architectural Design

The building should be designed to have high-quality architectural design and a welcoming residential character. To assess the appropriateness of proposed design, consideration will be given to:

- Visual interest created through façade composition, high quality materials and detailing is especially important to break down the scale of larger buildings, which may appear institutional due to overall size. Strategies should break up long frontages include façade articulation, massing changes, colour and materials treatments, and integration of significant landscaped nodes along facades;
- Maximum building widths of up to 45.7 m (150 ft.) are generally recommended to improve compatibility with adjacent lower-scale buildings, increase permeability, and allow better cross-ventilation and access to natural light. Projects with larger frontages can be articulated with inset bridge element(s) set back from the building face or with a visually lighter material treatment to suggest two or more distinct building forms;
- Typical clear ceiling heights of 2.9 m (9.5 ft) are generally expected for residential uses. However, in some buildings, ceiling heights may be increased to meet programmatic and operational requirements;
- Massing changes and step backs at upper floors help should be considered to reduce vertical scale and improve transition to lower buildings nearby. Significant landscaped nodes along long facades are also effective to reduce apparent scale, in combination with architectural treatments such as use of colour and materials;
- The primary building entry should be well marked and visually obvious from the street(s);
- Weather protection should be provided at all entrances; and

- Provide seating at the main entrance and at key pedestrian nodes within the site wherever possible, to facilitate socialization for residents and visitors, and serve as resting places for those with limited mobility and physical endurance.

4.1.4 Building Access

Seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living should be designed to provide safe and easy access to its residents and visitors, including:

- Promote access to the project by designing safe, well lit pedestrian access that is generous and accommodates people with disabilities;
- Include non-glare pedestrian scale security lighting to illuminate outdoor pathways and access to the street where appropriate; and
- Provide an accessible path of travel with appropriate signage for wayfinding from the public sidewalk to all accessible building entrances, throughout common areas, and to parking areas and passenger loading zones for persons with limited mobility.

4.2 Internal Design

4.2.1 Resident-Centred Design

Seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living should be designed so that it centres the health and well-being of residents through:

- Provision of ground-level community space (e.g., community garden plots, children's playground, coffee shop, and seating areas) where the broader community (people from outside the building) can come in and interact with residents on a regular basis to encourage multigenerational connections;
- Provision of resident amenity space of varying sizes for events and gatherings, such as an art studio, exercise studio, sacred space, town hall, salon, and small seating nodes in circulation spaces to encourage social interactions; and
- Provision of spaces that consider the diversity of residents with regard to culture, ethnicity and gender, such as providing space for religious and cultural practices, ceremonies and events, and providing gender neutral washrooms.

4.2.2 Unit Design

Units should be designed to accommodate aging in place and demonstrate suitability for people using wheelchairs, walkers and other mobility aids. Unit layouts should provide sufficient space for a support provider to enter the unit and carry out their work. In some cases, a resident may require a two-person

assist, requiring additional space within the unit. Some residents require a variety of medical equipment, such as oxygen tanks and multiple mobility aids, which are used frequently enough to require being kept within the unit. Dwelling units must meet the Vancouver Building By-Law's adaptable dwelling unit standards.

4.3 Common Areas

Common areas should be designed to foster social interaction and accommodate activities key to successful seniors supportive or independent housing or assisted living. Sufficient space should be provided for residents of all levels of mobility to move around comfortably and engage in activities. Space should also be provided for guests, visitors, staff, and medical equipment.

The operating plan submitted with the seniors supportive or independent housing or assisted living proposal should include a plan for use and function of all common areas, with special care for ease of access for residents.

4.3.1 Common Dining Room and Kitchen

The common dining room should be designed to accommodate one sitting of residents with mobility aids, and visitors. The combined size of the dining room or dining spaces should be 2 m² (21.5 sq. ft.) per unit. Requests for variation in these guidelines should be accompanied by an operating plan, outlining the proposed meal services and demonstrating seating, access and circulation. Projects should:

- Include an area for the temporary storage/parking of walkers and other mobility aids in or near the dining room;
- Locate fully wheelchair accessible washrooms close to the dining room; and
- Provide an on-site kitchen, which could be shared in cases where seniors supportive or independent housing or assisted living is part of a larger complex.

4.3.2 Common Lounges and Rooms

The project should provide at least 2 m² (21.5 sq. ft.) of common space per unit. Larger common spaces should be centrally located, adjacent to outdoor common space and ideally located at grade level. It is desirable to cluster the amenity space with other common facilities. Smaller common areas and single purpose rooms should also be provided, such as a library or a billiards room, a meeting room, a television room, a recreation room, or a place of worship. Consideration should be given to:

- Locate fully wheelchair accessible washrooms near activity areas. They may be shared with the dining area if located nearby;

- Provide lounges on residential floors in projects with small units, or many units per floor. Lounges are best located near central circulation elements and should consider including small kitchen and built-in storage for games and crafts, which makes them more usable; and
- Locate lounges to maximize natural light.

4.3.3 Laundry

Laundry facilities should be provided for residential use, with consideration for:

- Provision of lounge space adjacent to laundry facilities is desirable, as is locating laundry facilities at several locations instead of one central location;
- Include manoeuvring space for people with mobility aids in front of washers and dryers, and a work surface to accommodate people both sitting and standing where possible; and
- These facilities can be either ensuite or in common laundry rooms.

4.3.4 Reception/Administration

A functional reception or administration space should be included with consideration for:

- Provision of a waiting/rest area with seating near the main entrance. In larger projects, a reception area should also be provided;
- Provision of adequate space for staff providing 24-hour emergency response assistance; and
- Consideration of a health office space to facilitate resident appointments with visiting professionals.

4.3.5 Bulk Storage Areas

The development should be designed to provide usable and accessible storage for large personal items, including:

- Bulk storage areas should be well lit, easy to access, and have electrical outlets. They should be designed and configured to minimize reaching, lifting and bending;
- Storage for large personal items and mobility aids should be available within the building, ideally within the unit or on the same floor for improved access and security; and
- Provision of scooter storage and charging space is recommended. This is best provided in the suite, but an alternative place that allows for easy access by residents such as a Bike Room may also be acceptable.

Note: Residential bulk storage space can be excluded in the computation of the floor space ratio, as outlined in the District Schedules of the Zoning and Development By-law.

4.4 Circulation

4.4.1 The seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living development should be designed to accommodate movement of individuals including those with mobility, visual and hearing impairments.

- Hallways should comfortably accommodate two-way pedestrian traffic and multiple residents using mobility aids.
- Travel distances from residential units to amenities should be minimized and within a comfortable walking range for an elderly person.
- The circulation system should be designed as separate and distinct from activity areas. For example, direct travel routes from the main entrance to the elevator should not cut through the dining room or other common areas.
- Elevators should be designed to accommodate people with differing accessibility needs.

4.5 Open Space

4.5.1 On site open space should be of an adequate size and designed to accommodate a variety of outdoor activities and experiences for residents, their families, and visitors.

- Common outdoor space should be provided and designed for ease of use, safety and security, such as even walking surfaces, non-slip and non-glare finishes, with a variety of outdoor seating and rest areas. Approximately 25 percent should be protected from sun, wind and rain.
- Wherever possible, indoor and outdoor common spaces should be co-located and adjacent.
- Access to the rooftop to provide outdoor amenity space is desirable where practical. Projections above the roof line for roof deck access should be well integrated with the architectural design.
- Accessible outdoor walking loops are strongly encouraged, incorporating meaningful destinations and seating opportunities at strategic locations.
- Private open space for each unit is encouraged (accessible balconies and patios) and should be designed to maximize light into units.
- On-site gardening using raised beds or other accessible design is encouraged.

- The open space design should provide meaningful space for interactions with staff, visitors, and family including children, within the site and throughout the building including upper-level outdoor spaces.
- Existing trees and significant landscape features should be retained where possible, to provide privacy for ground floor units as well as visual interest for residents and passers-by.

4.6 Parking and Loading

4.6.1 The seniors supportive or independent housing and assisted living development should be designed with adequate and accessible parking, loading, bicycle, and passenger spaces.

- Provide parking spaces in accordance with the [Parking By-law](#). The Parking By-law outlines requirements for parking, accessible stalls, loading, bicycle spaces, and passenger loading. A [Transportation Demand Management](#) (TDM) Plan may also be required.