



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

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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SENIORS SUPPORTIVE OR ASSISTED HOUSING GUIDELINES

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Contents

	Page
1	Application and Intent 1
2	General Design Considerations 1
2.1	Neighbourhood Compatibility 1
2.2	Site Selection 2
2.3	Building Characteristics 2
2.4	Access 2
3	Internal Design and Facilities 2
3.1	Unit Size and Design 2
3.2	Common Areas 3
3.2.1	Common Dining Room and Kitchen 3
3.2.2	Common Lounges/Rooms 3
3.2.3	Laundry 4
3.2.4	Reception/Administration 4
4	Bulk Storage Areas 4
5	Circulation 4
6	Safety Features 4
7	Open Space 5
8	Parking and Loading 5

Note: These guidelines are organized under standard headings. As a consequence, there are gaps in the numbering sequence where no guidelines apply.

1 Application and Intent

Seniors supportive or assisted housing is housing in which there are individual residential units (which could be sleeping, housekeeping or dwelling 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 an elderly population, and to accommodate aging in place. It features a package of non-medical services, typically including meals, house-keeping, laundry and activities. It does not include medical care. The City recognizes that seniors supportive or assisted housing is an important component of the continuum of housing choice for seniors, one which allows seniors to maintain and maximize their independence.

These guidelines are intended only for seniors supportive or assisted housing projects. Where projects fall under the Community Care Facilities Licensing Act, or are funded under the Province's Independent Living B.C. program these guidelines will not apply.

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 assisted housing. They are intended to provide direction primarily related to the livability and usability of seniors supportive or assisted housing. The guidelines address the issues of project location and siting, unit design and features, common space design, and safety features, to allow for aging in place. 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 their 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:

- (a) anticipated resident profile (target market);
- (b) proposed tenure of the units, i.e., rental, strata-title, or mix;
- (c) meals service;
- (d) other services provided on site;
- (e) how the common spaces will be used and programmed; and
- (f) staffing, in particular, how 24 hour on-site emergency response will be achieved.

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

- (a) support the dignity and independence of seniors, while providing the physical environment and services which maintain the quality of life for the senior, and allow for aging in place;
- (b) promote a sense of community within the development; and
- (c) be compatible with the surrounding neighbourhood.

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. Further, where at least a portion of the units are restricted to occupancy by residents 65 years of age or older, a parking relaxation may be considered.

2 General Design Considerations

2.1 Neighbourhood Compatibility

Objective: Seniors supportive or assisted housing should be compatible in density, scale, architectural character and operation with the surrounding neighbourhood.

- (a) Seniors supportive or assisted housing projects should contribute to the objectives outlined in approved area plans and policies, and should enhance the overall character of the neighbourhood; and

- (b) Traffic impacts, parking demands, and servicing requirements should not adversely affect the surrounding neighbourhood.

2.2 Site Selection

Objective: Seniors supportive or assisted housing should be located so that seniors can safely and independently access needed services, facilities and activities outside the project.

- (a) Sites selected for seniors supportive or assisted housing should have good access to public transit, shopping, and community services; and
- (b) The area surrounding the site should have a comfortable walking environment, e.g., sidewalks in good condition, crosswalks, walkways clearly marked and separated from vehicle traffic; areas with a steep slope should be avoided.

2.3 Building Characteristics

Objective: Seniors supportive or assisted housing should be designed to look, feel and function as a residential use for seniors of varying ages and abilities. The design should support aging in place without being institutional in appearance.

- (a) Aging in place design features should be incorporated throughout, such as wider doorways, wider hallways, handrails, appropriate door handles, lower window sills (to allow viewing when seated), lower light switches, raised electrical sockets, and appropriate washroom fixtures;
- (b) Natural light is important to the creation of suitable residential space; the project should be oriented to take advantage of direct sunlight;
- (c) Weather protection should be provided at all entrances;
- (d) The site and building design should take into consideration the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED); and
- (e) Site planning and building construction techniques should aim to ensure noise levels acceptable for a residential use.

2.4 Access

Objective: Seniors supportive or assisted housing should be designed to provide safe and easy access to its residents and visitors.

- (a) Parking for persons with disabilities should be provided near the main entrance. When provided at grade, there should be a covered drop-off area;
- (b) Pedestrian access to the project should be safe, well lit, and designed to accommodate people with disabilities; and
- (c) Security lighting should be provided outside the building to illuminate pathways and access to the street.

3 Internal Design and Facilities

3.1 Unit Size and Design

Objective: Residential unit size and design should provide for aging in place. Suitability for people using wheelchairs, walkers and other mobility aids should be demonstrated.

Note: Residential units of at least 28 m² (300 sq. ft.) are preferred but smaller units may be considered if they are functionally useable. Units must not be so tightly programmed that they can only be used in very restricted ways. Sleeping or housekeeping units may be provided if they include a three piece bathroom. Units which include cooking facilities must be of a suitable size to accommodate these facilities and an eating area.

- (a) The unit size and design should accommodate, as a minimum: a bed (not a Murphy bed or a sofa bed), a dresser, two chairs, desk, and space for personal furnishings;

- (b) The unit design should include closet space of adequate size to store clothing, including outerwear and seasonal wear, and miscellaneous household effects. Hanger rods and shelves should be adjustable. Adequate circulation space should be provided at the doors to permit access and manoeuvring. Bulk storage space within the unit is desirable (see Section 4 Bulk Storage Areas for details and FSR exclusions);
- (c) The unit should be of adequate size and design to allow for a support provider to enter the unit and carry out their work while the resident is in the unit;
- (d) The bathroom should be designed to accommodate mobility aids, and enable a support provider to assist the resident. Walls should be reinforced to allow for easy installation of grab bars;
- (e) Services should include jacks for TV cable, telephone, and emergency call system; and
- (f) Thermostats in individual rooms are encouraged.

3.2 Common Areas

Objective: Common areas should be designed to foster the social interaction and activities that are key to successful seniors supportive or assisted housing. They should be adequately sized to allow residents to move around comfortably, engage in activities, and provide space for guests and visitors.

- Note:**
- (1) The operating plan submitted with the seniors supportive or assisted housing proposal should include a plan for the use and function of all common areas, with attention to ease of access for residents.
 - (2) Common space of 4.0 m² (43 sq. ft.) per unit is not excludable from FSR calculations; common space provided in excess of that amount is excludable to a maximum of total of 10 percent of the total building floor area.

3.2.1 Common Dining Room and Kitchen

- (a) To accommodate one sitting of residents with mobility aids, and visitors, the size of the dining room should be 2 m² (21.5 sq. ft.) per unit. Requests for variation in this guideline should be accompanied by an operating plan, outlining the proposed meal services and demonstrating seating, access and circulation;
- (b) An area for the temporary storage/parking of walkers and other mobility aids should be provided in or near the dining room;
- (c) Fully wheelchair accessible washrooms should be located close to the dining room; and
- (d) The project should have an on-site kitchen, which could be shared in cases where seniors supportive or assisted housing is part of a larger complex. The kitchen size and design should be in accordance with the Vancouver Health By-law.

3.2.2 Common Lounges/Rooms

- (a) The project should provide at least 2 m² (21.5 sq. ft.) of common space per unit. One large space should be provided to accommodate large gatherings; it should be located on the same floor as the dining room. Smaller common areas and single purpose rooms should also be provided, such as a library or a billiards room, a computer room, a meeting room, a television room, a recreation room, and a chapel. Wherever possible, opportunities of linking indoor amenity areas with adjacent outdoor open space should be pursued;
- (b) Fully wheelchair accessible washrooms should be located near the activity areas. They may be shared with the dining area if located nearby;
- (c) Lounges should be provided on residential floors in projects with small units, or many units per floor. Lounges are best located near central circulation elements. They become more usable when they include a small kitchen, and built in storage space for games and crafts;
- (d) Where the residential floor includes sleeping units, the lounge space on that floor should be increased and common kitchen/eating areas should be provided; and
- (e) Lounges should have natural light.

3.2.3 Laundry

- (a) Laundry facilities should be provided for the use of the residents. They can be either ensuite or in common laundry rooms;
- (b) Provision of lounge space adjacent to laundry facilities is desirable, as is locating at several locations in the building rather than at one central location; and
- (c) There should be manoeuvring space for people with mobility aids in front of washers and dryers, and a work surface to accommodate people both sitting and standing.

3.2.4 Reception/Administration

- (a) A waiting/rest area, with seating, should be provided near the main entrance. In larger projects, a reception function should also be located here;
- (b) Project design should include adequate space for staff providing 24 hour emergency response assistance; and
- (c) Consideration should be given to providing space for a health office, where residents can be seen by visiting health professionals.

4 Bulk Storage Areas

Objective: To provide usable and accessible storage for large personal items.

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.

- (a) All bulk storage areas should be well lit, easy to access, and have electrical outlets. They should be configured to minimize reaching, lifting and bending;
- (b) When not provided within the unit, storage for large personal items and mobility aids should be available within the building. Access and security are improved when the storage space is provided on the same floor as the suites served; and
- (c) The provision of space for scooter storage and charging is encouraged. This is best provided in the suite, but an alternative place that allows for easy access by residents may also be acceptable.

5 Circulation

Objective: The seniors supportive or assisted housing project should be designed to accommodate movement of individuals including those with mobility, visual and hearing impairments.

- (a) Hallways should be at least 1.5 m wide (5 ft.), to comfortably accommodate two-way pedestrian traffic, allowing for residents using mobility aids. They should be well lit with clearly marked exits;
- (b) Travel distances from residential units to amenities should not be overly long, and within a comfortable walking range for an elderly person;
- (c) The project should be designed so that the circulation system is separate 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; and
- (d) Elevators should be designed to accommodate people with various disabilities. Floor lighting is beneficial.

6 Safety Features

Objective: The building's life safety systems should provide a safe environment for its residents, by taking into account the age of the residents and change over time in their mental and/or physical state.

Staff review will include, but may not be limited to, enhancements such as the following:

- (a) Provision of horizontal exiting by having two or more fire compartments within a floor area, to allow residents to remain on the floor in a safe compartment while awaiting evacuation assistance;

- (b) Provision of visual fire alarm signals in the units and the building, in addition to audible signals;
- (c) Provision of an emergency call system that is monitored 24 hours a day by on-site staff;
- (d) Provision of a fire safety plan that includes staff assistance to residents in case of emergency;
- (e) Provision of emergency power for a longer duration than a typical residential building;
- (f) Provision of adequate emergency lighting (100 lux); and
- (g) Provision of at least one elevator designed to fire fighters' specifications in buildings above three storeys, to assist with evacuation. Note: This will require installation of an emergency generator, as well as ongoing maintenance and monitoring.

7 Open Space

Objective: On-site open space should be designed and of adequate size to provide a variety of outdoor activities and experiences for seniors supportive or assisted housing residents.

- (a) Private open space for each unit is encouraged (balconies, patios). Where provided, it should be designed to maximize light into the unit;
- (b) Common outdoor space should be provided and designed for usability and safety/security, such as smooth walking surfaces with non-glare finishes, outdoor seating and rest areas. Approximately 25 percent of this space should be protected from sun, wind and rain. Wherever possible, outdoor common space should be provided adjacent to or immediately accessible from indoor common space;
- (c) On-site gardening using raised beds or other design accessible to people with limited mobility is encouraged; and
- (d) Existing trees and significant landscape features should be retained where possible. Landscaping should contribute to resident and pedestrian interest, and to screen and provide privacy for at-grade residential units.

8 Parking and Loading

Objective: Parking should be designed to be safely and easily used by seniors. The number of parking spaces provided on-site should be adequate to serve residents and employees of the project, as well as visitors.

Note: Specific requirements for parking, passenger loading and bicycle parking are in the Parking By-law. In addition, the following guidelines recognize the special needs of an elderly population.

- (a) Disability parking spaces should be provided in accordance with the Parking By-law;
- (b) The parking spaces should be designed to be of a width suitable for use by elderly residents. Small car spaces should be limited to 25 percent of total spaces but have standard car width. Reductions in aisle width may be considered in connection with widening spaces beyond the standard car width;
- (c) Where a bus or van is provided for outings, then a parking space for it should be provided in addition to the other requirements;
- (d) Electrical outlets should be provided in the Bicycle room to provide for scooter recharging; and
- (e) Relaxation of the off-street parking requirement may be considered in the following circumstances:
 - (i) where a Housing Agreement is in effect restricting a portion of the residents to being 65 years of age or older, or to being low and modest income renters; or
 - (ii) where the project is located close to frequent public transit, shopping and community services.

Where a relaxation is supported, the parking required should not be less than:

- (i) 1 space per 4 units, where the unit is less than 70 m² in size; and
- (ii) 1 space per 100 m² (1,076 sq. ft.) where the unit is 70 m² (754 + sq. ft.) in size or greater.

Further relaxations may be considered where heritage preservation is a factor.