



May 30, 2019

Megan Squires
Planning Department
Saanich

Re: Response to Garden Suite Study

Dear Megan:

The Gordon Head Residents' Association would like to make it clear that we are not opposed to the construction of legal garden suites in our neighbourhood. We realize that our community is changing and will continue to evolve in the years ahead.

We appreciate the efforts of the Saanich Planning Department in providing opportunities for community consultation. We would like to direct our current response to the issues detailed in the most recent proposals.

Size:

We question the advisability of including RS6 and RS8 lots in the medium size category. These lots are the most prevalent in our area and the available space on these lots tends to be well utilized by residents. We feel that allowing garden suites up to 700 ft² on these already crowded lots is not advisable.

Setbacks:

We believe that the setbacks as proposed in the current proposal will result in dwellings that are much too close to neighbouring yards. The present 7.5 m rear lot line setbacks provide privacy and allow residents to use their back yards for various outdoor activities including play areas for children. Having living accommodation situated so close to the rear property line will restrict how parents allow their children to use backyard play areas. The rear lot line setbacks for garden suites should be at least 5 m on all lots.

Height:

We have some concerns about the proposed height for garden suites.

The present bylaws prevent excessive massing of auxiliary buildings and thus preserve sunlight, privacy and sightlines in residential backyards.

For small lots (and we include RS6 and RS8) the present 3.75 m height seems reasonable. However, if we allow 4.5 m heights for sloped rooflines, we will increase the actual height of the structures considerably – especially those constructed with a roof pitch of 9:12 or 9.5 to 12.

Site Coverage:

The proposed limits on site coverage appear to be reasonable. However we would suggest that given the need to manage rainwater run-off, there should be a limitation on the amount of impermeable ground cover on a lot. We are seeing more cases where lots are being paved over to allow for parking.

Given the increased importance of food security, we believe it would be advisable to retain a minimum area on each residential lot to support the potential for growing food.

Parking:

The parking of vehicles associated with suites, room rentals and occupied auxiliary buildings has become a serious problem in Gordon Head.

If garden suites are to be allowed, adequate on site parking must be a consideration. Based on our experience, we would suggest at least one off-street stall per bedroom should be required.

Owner Occupation and Use:

We are pleased to see support for continuing the provision that the owner of the property must reside on the site. The present bylaw needs to be enforced more rigorously.

We also feel that if Garden Suites were approved, it would be very important to retain the present bylaw regarding the number of unrelated individuals residing in a dwelling unit. In the case of small and medium sized lots, this number should be reduced to two.

We believe that defining short-term rentals as less than one month has the effect of removing dwellings from the supply of stable rental housing. The minimum rental term should be longer.

Design Guidelines:

We are pleased to see that consideration will be given to the design of garden suites. It would be nice to see some specifics as to what may be expected in the final document.

In relation to roof form, we would strongly advocate for restricting the pitch of the roof to prevent undue massing of these structures.

It should be noted that many of the homes in Gordon Head were constructed with a single car garage and have one narrow driveway. We would hope that the guidelines on parking and access would address this condition.

Approval Process:

The Gordon Head Residents' Association would support an initial period of approval by Development Variance Permit. This would give council an opportunity to see how the guidelines and regulation are being interpreted, deal with issues as they arise and make any required adjustments to the bylaws. When the process is running smoothly, a shift to approval by development permit could be considered.

Regulation:

The report from Planning mentions the development of suitable regulations. We fully support reasonable regulations as an essential part of the bylaw governing Garden Suites.

Effective control of the construction and use of Garden Suites will be the key to introducing this form

of accommodation without losing the sense of community and neighbourhood ambiance that our residents now enjoy.

Once the regulations on garden suites are approved, attention should be given to the many such buildings that are presently in existence.

Our residents have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the enforcement of the regulations that we have in place now.

Today there are new houses with both secondary suites and separate garden suites under construction in RS 6 zones. This is happening in spite of repeated requests by the Gordon Head Residents Association for covenants, as a condition of approvals, that would permit a secondary suite or a garden suite, but not both, in addition to the principal dwelling unit.

We fully support the recommendation that additional resources be provided for bylaw and parking enforcement to ensure that the addition of garden suites to our community is indeed a positive step forward.

Chris Poirier-Skelton, Chair
Gordon Head Residents' Association

Cc: Mayor and Council