



Saanich Council to bring controversial housing bylaw to public forum

Campus Local News

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👉 Josh Kozelj

City councillors voted down idea of treating unrelated and related people the same, promised to discuss raising limit back from four to six



Image via Google Maps

Last month, Saanich Council voted down a motion that would remove the restrictions imposed by a controversial housing bylaw that caps the number of unrelated people

living together, but promised to bring the matter to a public forum.

In a four-hour meeting on Jan. 20, Council discussed the restrictions of section 5.20, “Limitation of Residential Occupancy by Unrelated Persons,” in Saanich’s zoning bylaws that prevents more than four people from living together in the same dwelling.

After Saanich Council unanimously voted in favour of a recommendation from Mayor Fred Haynes and Councillor Zac de Vries last February to look at options to alter the bylaw, Council received a report on Dec. 31, 2019 from Brent Reems, Director of Building, Bylaw, Licensing, and Legal Services, with various alternatives for the bylaw.

Among the different options, Reems suggested Council raise the limit from four to five, maintain the current rule, or remove all restrictions.

Also in the report, Reems outlined how the bylaw was introduced in 1992 in order to define the rules of “family” and occupancy within single-family homes — which allows for cities to differentiate between single- and multi-family housing in instances involving either community planning or building purposes.

He also cited how other cities such as Esquimalt, Langford, and Sidney limit the maximum number of unrelated people living together to four. Victoria, View Royal, and the Highlands have no restrictions.

Councillor de Vries, a proponent of ending the restrictions in the bylaw, asked Saanich Council to consider treating unrelated and related people the same way. However, Council voted down that motion six to three, and instead offered to take the issue of raising unrelated occupancy from four to six to a public hearing. The bylaw was initially passed in 1988 with a cap of six unrelated people living together.

The issue has divided students and homeowners in the city, and received [national attention](#) last winter after seven UVic students were evicted from their seven-bedroom Gordon Head home.

Emma Edmonds, one of the seven UVic students who was evicted last year, was in attendance at the Jan. 20 meeting and said she was disappointed Council didn’t vote on

ending all restrictions. However, she said the idea of increasing the occupancy limit for unrelated people is a step in the right direction.

“While six is an improvement over four for sure,” said Edmonds in a phone interview with the *Martlet*, “there are many households in Saanich that have more than six [unrelated people living together], and a lot of councillors who were on our side said it’s a human rights violation to discriminate against people based on their family relations.”

The University of Victoria Students’ Society (UVSS) sent a letter to Saanich council on Jan. 19 in support of removing all restrictions. Edmonds said she was grateful for the UVSS’s support, and for the 23 students that showed up at the meeting to advocate for change.

“They wrote a letter to Council, but really they came and showed their face[s],” said Edmonds, who added the UVSS emphasized the “classist” and “elitist” mentality between landlords and renters in the area.

Saanich Council is slated to discuss the bylaw further at a meeting on Feb. 3 at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers at Saanich Municipal Hall.

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Trevor Barry 4 Saanich

In addition to asking counsel to hold the public hearing somewhere on or near UVic- I keep reminding them and others that I strongly believe there is no legislative authority for the bylaw whatsoever. [#UltraVires](#) to the delegated authority under provincial statute such as the local government act— municipalities are not granted the power to discriminate land-uses based on the human relationships of the land users