

BYLAW 21474

Building Height Amendments to Zoning Bylaw 20001 - Small Scale Residential Zone

Purpose

To amend Zoning Bylaw 20001 to reduce the maximum building height of the RS - Small Scale Residential Zone from 10.5 metres to 9.5 metres.

Readings

Bylaw 21474 is ready for three readings after the public hearing has been held. If Council wishes to give three readings during a single meeting, Council must unanimously agree that Bylaw 21474 be considered for third reading.

Advertising and Signing

This Bylaw was advertised in the Edmonton Journal on March 20, 2026, and March 28, 2026. The Bylaw can be passed following third reading.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the February 17, 2026, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration prepare amendments to the Zoning Bylaw, Section 2.10 RS - Small Scale Residential Zone to reduce the maximum building height (Section 4.1.6) to 9.5 metres and return to a future City Council Public Hearing.

REPORT

Background

At the February 9, 2026, Urban Planning Committee meeting, as part of the Urban Planning and Economy report UPE03291, Options for Amendments to the RS Zone and Maintenance of Private Trees, Administration presented options to reduce the impact of height on adjacent properties in the RS - Small Scale Residential Zone.

Following the discussion at Committee, City Council approved a motion at the February 17, 2026, City Council meeting directing Administration to bring forward draft amendments to

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reduce the maximum building height in the RS Zone from 10.5 metres to 9.5 metres to address the overall size and scale of new developments in the RS Zone.

The proposed changes to height are intended to encourage better design outcomes in combination with other recent amendments made to the RS Zone. At the June 30, 2025, City Council Public Hearing, Council approved amendments to reduce the maximum building length for development on midblock lots and improve design regulations for front facades and articulation requirements that apply to row housing and multi-unit housing.

Current Maximum Building Height

The maximum 10.5 m height in the RS Zone was an increase compared to equivalent zones under Zoning Bylaw 12800. For areas within the previous Mature Neighbourhood Overlay (MNO), the maximum height was 8.9 m, and for areas outside the MNO, the maximum height was 10 m. The additional height was intended to support a modest increase in development potential to better accommodate three-storey developments and address building design as well as shallow utility depth considerations.

In addition to regulating maximum height, the RS Zone has other regulations that help reduce the overall scale and perception of massing, including reduced maximum building lengths for midblock lots and the articulation of front and side walls of row housing and multi-unit housing, regardless of wall length. Articulation regulations ensure new development incorporates design techniques to reduce the perception of massing, eliminate large blank walls and provide visual interest.

Summary of Building Height Analysis and Jurisdiction Scan

Based on an analysis of development permits issued in 2024 and 2025 under the RS Zone, approximately 80 per cent of single detached, semi-detached and row housing developments were approved with a height of 9.5 m or less.

A review of row housing and multi-unit housing developments approved under the RS Zone between January 1, 2024 and November 28, 2025, indicated three-storey row houses and multi-unit houses tend to be greater than 10 m in height, suggesting that lowering the maximum height to less than 10 m could have a greater impact on three-storey developments.

Based on a jurisdiction scan of zones comparable to the RS Zone in other municipalities, it was found that maximum building heights ranged from 8.5 m to 12 m. Cities regulate building height through various regulations, such as setting floor area limits for upper floors (Vancouver), using maximum wall heights and minimum stepbacks (Toronto), applying angular plane height limits when sites are adjacent to certain zones (Calgary), or allowing height increases near transit hubs (Saskatoon). Ottawa, which currently uses height limits based on sub-zones and building types, is proposing a simplified maximum height of 11 metres in its draft Zoning Bylaw. See Attachment 3, Building Height Analysis, for additional details.

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Summary of Proposed Amendments

Administration supports reducing the maximum building height of the RS Zone from 10.5 metres to 9.5 metres.

The proposed 9.5 m height would reduce the overall massing of new developments while continuing to enable three-storey developments with basement windows slightly above grade. The anticipated benefits of this approach include:

- Reducing the overall building height and mass.
- Simplifying implementation of the regulation change.
- Flexibility to construct smaller three-storey developments with basement windows slightly above grade.

Lowering the maximum building height limit will cause existing buildings that exceed the new regulations to become legally non-conforming. To minimize impacts to developments that have been approved with height greater than 9.5 m, a new regulation is proposed in Bylaw 21474 to allow development planners to grant a variance for additions, enlargements or exterior alterations to existing buildings that do not comply with the new proposed maximum building height. This change could apply to any non-conforming building citywide but is likely to only affect a limited number of buildings.

Implementation

If the changes are approved by Council, a delayed effectiveness date of August 1, 2026 is proposed to allow time for current applications to work through the review process, develop communications for community and industry associations, notify permit applicants, update the City's websites and self-serve portal and include information in the Building Edmonton Newsletter.

Community Insight

Administration conducted targeted meetings with industry and community groups from November to December 2025 as part of the February 9, 2026, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE03291, Options for Amendments to the RS Zone and Maintenance of Private Trees and posted a feedback form from January 12 to 29, 2026 to provide Edmontonians the opportunity to review potential changes in advance of the discussion at the February 9, 2026, Urban Planning Committee meeting. The feedback form was viewed by over 11,000 people and over 3,600 responses were received.

Comments specific to the RS Zone indicated a preference for more restrictive infill regulations than those proposed in UPE03291 such as a further reduction in the unit count or a decrease in building height. Others wanted the current RS Zone regulations to remain the same to enable more diverse housing options and to support a stable tax base.

Overall, comments aligned with key themes that have previously been presented before Council, which include:

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- Parking and traffic concerns
- Maintaining neighbourhood character
- Access to sunlight
- Privacy and overlook
- Building length and massing
- Desire to focus infill in specific locations
- Concerns with waste and utility management

Similar feedback and concerns were shared at the February 9, 2026, Urban Planning Committee meeting.

Legal Implications

Reducing the maximum building height of the RS Zone will result in existing structures that exceed the new limit becoming legally non-conforming. Administration is proposing to introduce a variance clause to Section 7.100, which would apply to all zones. The new clause would allow the development planner to vary the maximum height for enlargements, alterations or additions to non-conforming buildings with a valid development permit so long as the variance does not exceed the maximum height in the originally approved development permit.

Attachments

1. Bylaw 21474
2. Mark-up and Rationale of Proposed Amendments
3. Building Height Analysis

Others Reviewing the Report

- M. Gunther, Acting City Solicitor