

Re: July 21, 2026 Public Hearing
Backyard Suites should be a Discretionary Use

Mayor Farkas and Members of Council,

My name is Jo Anne Atkins and I am the Civic Affairs Director for the Varsity Community Association. My written submission is on Pages 55 to 62 of the agenda with photos on 56 to 62.

Before I start I want to note that Varsity in 60 years has never opposed secondary suites. We have not opposed any backyard suites but we will if they cause harm.

We are in favour of making secondary suites a permitted use but we are opposed to changing backyard suites from a discretionary to a permitted use. Secondary suites are invisible as they are located within an existing dwelling unit so their impact is primarily parking congestion and increased waste and recycling. This impact is similar to shared accommodation and is usually manageable.

Backyard suites have a significant impact on neighbours and the community through massing, overshadowing, overlooking, and reduced soft landscaping. Note that the impact of a backyard suite on a laneless parcel is even more significant than on a laned parcel.

It is essential they remain a discretionary use to ensure affected neighbours and community associations are notified and to allow the right to appeal developments that don't fit the local context and create a negative impact.

One of the subtle benefits that isn't covered by statistics is the fact that a discretionary use creates an incentive to consult with the neighbours and address any concerns to avoid an appeal.

I served for 4 years on SDAB and I want to remind everyone that the Board can vary approvals in an effort to mitigate the issues. If a backyard suite is appealed they can add conditions of approval and tweak the plans. The Board can take into account the context and weigh the evidence. It can result in a better project.

We note Administration is proposing to increase the footprint of backyard suites which could increase the negative impact neighbouring properties experience. **We strongly oppose this increase.** If the square footage is increased, it will simply result in requests for a 10% relaxation to this new maximum.

You will see from the photos on pages 56 to 62 that backyard suites are not like accessory residential buildings such as an art studio, pool house, or greenhouse. They have a significantly larger building envelope and because they are occupied dwellings, there is overlooking and a higher increase in intensity of use resulting in increased noise.

Depending on how many individuals live on the property it can exceed the capacity of waste and recycling resulting in overflowing bins. Where this has been a problem in Varsity, it has driven the neighbours crazy.

We agree there should be one parking stall for each unit – the main dwelling and the backyard suite. The reality is most people own a vehicle or two even if they are close to public transit. Because the availability of on-street parking varies from street to street, it makes sense to provide on-site parking. This is crucial where you have laneless parcels at the end of a cul-de-sac as shown in my presentation on page 60. There is very little space to park in between driveways on a concave road.

We have three approved backyard suites in Varsity, two of which have been constructed. The locations for these suites were appropriate and not appealed by the neighbours but they still have a significant visual impact on the community. The photographs are on pages 55-62.

Context is crucially important to determine whether a backyard suite is appropriate. Size matters, height matters, overlooking matters, overshadowing matters. Had these backyard suites been located on a regular, rectangular lot, they likely would have been appealed.

Making backyard suites discretionary doesn't prevent them from being built. It just makes them better.

Backyard suites should remain a discretionary use.

Special thanks to Council and the staff for being welcoming and listening.