

**From:** [Rohan Walters](#)  
**To:** [councilmeeting](#)  
**Subject:** My comments for 2022.PH30.2 on February 2, 2022 City Council  
**Date:** Monday, January 31, 2022 5:47:11 PM  
**Attachments:** [Garden Suites item PH30.2a Commentary \(optimized\).pdf](#)  
[ATT00001.htm](#)

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To the City Clerk:

Please add my comments to the agenda for the February 2, 2022 City Council meeting on item 2022.PH30.2, Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods - Garden Suites - Final Report

I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comments: Please attach my PDF to the records for this item. Thank you.

Re: Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods Garden Suites Review: A reminder to Toronto City Councillors to support the approval of Garden Suites By-Law that staff has finally come to approve.

## **GARDEN SUITES IN TORONTO: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.**

### Garden Suites: **THE GOOD**.

- 1) The Garden Suite will increase one's opportunities for living a better, longer and healthier life.
- 2) The Garden Suite can assist in families present and future financial security by adding to the family income and wealth through increased equity through real estate with no impact on the existing public infrastructure.
- 3) The Garden Suite can aid families in paying for your children's college and university education.
- 4) The Garden Suite can aid individuals and families in affording private nursing and other health care professionals coming to your home to help you gracefully age-in-place in your own neighbourhood.
- 5) The Garden Suite will help individuals and families retain and renovate as is necessary, their existing property to make it more 'accessible' for persons with decreasing mobility issues. In other words, making the existing home more 'barrier free' for the family thereby, again, gracefully aging-in-place in a neighbourhood and community that they are already established in.
- 6) The Garden Suite will help financially, when the time comes, for the elder of the family to move into a nursing home or hospice care, that the income and equity from Garden Suite can aid in paying for that extended care.
- 7) The Garden Suite will help decrease the role of government in trying to accommodate the elderly by giving many more elderly and their families the opportunity to look after their own family members as long as they can in a healthier manner.
- 8) The Garden Suite will help the young adult children and family relatives of the existing property by allowing them more opportunity to establish themselves financially by giving them a place to grow as adults without having to leave the neighbourhood or the city for affordable housing.
- 9) The Garden Suite will, in all likelihood, improve the economic and cultural diversity of many neighbourhoods because the cost to rent those Garden Suites will often be lower from the simple fact that they are inherently smaller spaces to rent in already established neighbourhoods and make no real impact on the existing public infrastructure. This proposition is based on the fact that many new immigrants and recent college/university graduates will have less money than the established population and if given the chance would live in neighbourhoods near school or places of employment.
- 10) The Garden Suite will potentially allow tens of thousands, and more, people to be comfortably and equally distributed throughout our city while maintaining the essential fabric of our established neighbourhoods.
- 11) The Garden Suite will have little or no impact on our existing city infrastructure such as water, sewer, hydro and gas lines.

For almost 30 years in Toronto, Spaces By Rohan Inc. has been trying to assist varied and multiple families understand the potential benefits of Garden Suites and Lane Homes (a.k.a. Granny Flats). The previous points are derived from my experiential and analysis-based work.

Garden Suites: **THE BAD :**

**The Unintended Consequences of NOT Allowing Garden Suites (a.k.a. The Status Quo)**

**\*\*\* NONE OF OPTION #1 HAPPENED BECAUSE TORONTO CITY PLANNING WOULD NOT ALLOW GARDEN SUITES.\*\*\***

A true story about a real Toronto grandfather and the family who loved him.

The time frame is the early 1990s Etobicoke, Toronto; almost 30 years ago.

A wonderful family engaged me to investigate 'if' a new Garden Suite home in the backyard of their father who was living alone was possible legally and financially? Their father was in his mid-sixties with a lung condition and his mobility was declining. Nevertheless this man was mentally sharp and a long standing community member.

We determined the excellent benefits 'if' a Garden Suite could be built in the yard. This became their 1st option (Option #1).

- The Garden Suite was to be 'barrier free' (a.k.a. accessible) small approximately 50 square metre (540 s.f.). This would greatly extend his self-sufficiency in his new abode.
- The Garden Suite would allow the existing main home to accommodate the daughter, son-in-law and grand child with no renovation to the existing home being required.
- The Garden Suite was within 10 metres of main house which therefore meant NO travelling to visit dad or provide added care at a distance.
- The Garden Suite allowed his daughter and extended family to get 'free' child care from their grandfather.
- The Garden Suite and the existing main house would be easily maintained by daughter and son-in-law.
- The Garden Suite can be financed from a home equity line of credit, and or savings, and or pension, and or salaries of the daughter, son-in-law, and dad.
- The Garden Suite will financially assist the dad who will need extra physical assistance because the family has saved their financial resources which in turn help afford the extra in-home help because their money it is not being spent prematurely on nursing home costs.
- The Garden Suite helps if and when dad needs a nursing home, his family would rent the Garden Suite and that added income combined with his pension, savings and salaries would allow them to keep the home, keep the Garden Suite as well as pay for the nursing home.
- The Garden Suite continues to benefit the family after the father has died. The daughter would inherit the home, including the Garden Suite which effectively retains the value of the home asset in the family. In other words keeping the wealth in the family.

**\*\*\* NONE OF OPTION #1 HAPPENED BECAUSE TORONTO CITY PLANNING WOULD NOT ALLOW GARDEN SUITES.\*\*\***

NEXT OPTION #2: The family also entertained the option of renovating his existing home by expanding it as well as making it 'barrier' free. This had several problems.

- Where does dad go for a year while the complete house is expanded and renovated?
- Dad would have had to pull out all of the equity in the home as well as contributed a significant amount from his savings to pay for the new renovation. ... Which in turn meant that if his health declined he would have to sell the house to pay for a nursing home. The daughter and her husband could not afford the mortgage if they wanted to buy the house from her father to help him. Remember the sale of the house would be used to pay for the nursing home. All of this assumes the house could be completed before his health suffered.

Garden Suites: **THE UGLY – OPTION #3:**

**NOT Allowing Garden Suites (a.k.a. The Status Quo)**

**THIS IS ACTUALLY WHAT HAPPENED by denying a Garden Suite to this Family!**

This wonderful family was forced to sell their dad's home in order for him to afford an extended care facility or nursing home.

- No Garden Suite means: Proceeds from the necessitated and premature sale of the dad's house were used up to pay the nursing home or extended care facility.
- No Garden Suite means: The opportunity to age-in-place with grace, in his beautiful neighbourhood among people he has known for generations, had been completely lost to this man and his family.
- No Garden Suite means: The daughter, son-in-law, grand children and others needed to travel many kilometres to visit the father at the nursing home kilometres away.
- No Garden Suite means: The equity the father had built-up over time in his house was essentially lost to the family. In other words family income and wealth were impeded if not substantially diminished.
- No Garden Suite means: The rental continuity for other members of the family or neighbours to benefit from this lovely family and established neighbourhood are lost.
- No Garden Suite means: A grand child, a daughter and family is prematurely denied the opportunity to experience the care of a grandfather, a father and father-in-law.

\*\*\* THE UGLY \*\*\*

... And just so I'm clear, Garden Suites are also a public health issue. The psychological, economic and physical health of our city is affected by our planner's ability to adequately and wisely devise and administer good design policy solutions. Garden Suites would be part of that good public health solution.

There are many site configurations in the City of Toronto and GTA. I have shown only one of many possible examples on page 7 here. My goal is to illustrate very basic considerations that

**allow** for Garden Suites and Lane Homes to go forward. This brief is about the possibilities and NOT 'high' design detailed solutions. It is written aid to the concept of detached dwelling structures on the same lot and how they actually can work and simultaneously help the family, community and city.

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## Garden Suite Considerations into the future:

- 1) **Comfortable Accommodations:** The final building; the Garden Suite should comfortably accommodate two adults.
- 2) **Family Accommodations:** If a larger Garden Suite is possible it should accommodate a growing family. Two children and an adult. Or, two children and two adults. Or, two grandparents and a grand child. Or, two growing teenage/young adult siblings, etc.
- 3) **Parking Facility Options:** Car parking can also be bicycle parking or 'shared' car parking that is community affiliated or business affiliated such as CommuAuto, Zip Car and Enterprise Rent-A-Car.
- 4) **Where 'Barrier-Free' or 'Visitable' habitable spaces are required**, the car will take a secondary or tertiary priority to making a place for human beings to have dignified 'Accessible' design.
- 5) **Below Grade Space:** There are circumstances that can allow the Garden Suite to have a basement and or below grade outdoor space (see illustration) that can double as a water catchment. A water catchment in some circumstances will act as a water buffering spacial device in the event of an adverse weather event. This catchment can help reduce or alleviate the potential damage to a house as well as an area. Of course there would be two sump pumps, with at least one sump pump to be on battery backup.
- 6) **Below Grade Considerations continued:** Further, with regard to below grade or basement spaces, a.k.a. underground spaces; these below grade spaces can also connect to the existing main house and while allowing for their roofs to be planted or designed to be traditional rear yards while simultaneously being a roof to newly enclosed underground space (see illustration in: (A) configuration). In a highly developed area this option can be an excellent way to preserve the look of typical neighbourhood rear yards while also allowing for increased living space and usability options.
  - i. Below grade solutions can add 15 to 30 percent more livable volume to and existing site.

- 7) **Ambulance and fire access**, the unencumbered access width to the rear yard should be the minimum required doorway width in a barrier free access of travel. Similarly: **From the City of Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines 2003, “Controlled access points (e.g., turnstiles), should be designed to accommodate the free movement of wheelchairs or scooters via an adjacent gate at minimum 915 mm wide,” page 27.**
- 8) **A clear unencumbered overhead height**: A recommended 2100 mm (6’-10”), NOT “one-storey” as is being contemplated by planning at this time.
- 9) **Fire Hydrant and Fire Hose Access**: Lane houses and DDS that are greater than 45 m from a fire hydrant or street face where a fire truck can park, then the use of residential sprinklers should be required. In addition, ensuring a 1.0 hour fire-rated assembly is built (OBC). Note: Non-combustible construction should not be required if the project uses Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) methodology and presented through the ‘Compliance Alternative’ component of the OBC for non-combustible compliance at time of permit submission. FYI: CLT’s meet performance compliance standards for 1.0 hour and 2.0 hour fire-rated assembly when testing results are presented through the ‘Compliance Alternative’ mechanism of the OBC. Otherwise the normal OBC fire resistant wall assembly rating and methods will apply.
- 10) **Affording new fire hydrants** paid for by residents should be considered as an option In order to extend the range of possible sites; specifically those sites that would not qualify for Garden Suite because they are beyond the present OBC 45 metre distance for a fire truck or a fire hydrant. Additionally residents within the serviceable distance (45 metres assumed) from the new hydrant should share in the cost of that new fire hydrant when the new lane house does not opt for its own residential sprinklers. Note here the fire department has the option of extending the service range of the new fire hydrant in the future should technology change.
- 11) **Development Charges and Property taxes**. Like the City of Windsor recent attempts to spark re-investment in residential and commercial building in its downtown core; lane homes and DDS should be allowed with minimal to NO development charges. Minimal would be similar to Windsor’s Area #1, at about a 92% reduction in its normal development charge. Moreover, when in the future the OBC permits, as a ‘prescriptive solution,’ the lane home or DDS, the on-site ability to treat its own sewage, grey water and generate its own potable water, in combination with harnessing its own energy, then that Garden Suite should **NOT** be charged any development fees as the new structure is effectively a ‘net-zero’ house. Further it can and should be argued that a net zero Garden Suite should also

be given special reduced rate from property taxes. The argument being its existence is essentially carbon and energy neutral while also allowing people the opportunity to age-in-place and or use the additional funds to help them as they age, i.e., added health care costs associated with aging and thereby reducing the cost and responsibility of government to look after them. In addition, no added hard infrastructure is needed for the existence of this building.

12) **Avoiding unnecessary applications and delays at the Committee of Adjustment.** We need a broader and more inclusive policy that will allow more viable 'as-of-right' options for the Garden Suites. The present 12 month delay at the C. of A. is abhorrent to timely expectations. This cannot be made worse. The presently contemplated policy by city planning will, in my opinion, make this delay at C of A worse; much worse due to the fact that there are too many variations this present policy eliminates due to 'narrow' and unduly restrictive prescriptions.

13) **Severance:** Generally, any corner lot or end lot condition with lane access should be allowed a severance right now. Effectively such a lot has 3 (three) paved surfaces and two street fronts as opposed to the normal one street-front and two paved surfaces. Any other lot conditions should be assessed on the lot's overall length, width and topographic (sloped conditions).

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SEE ATTACHED ILLUSTRATION and PICTURES





Sample from early 1990s:

Solution for another family who anticipated their future options by allowing the new two car garage to be able to be converted to future Garden Suite. This solution does not and did NOT change character of this 'Established' Toronto neighbourhood at all.

The client understood Toronto planners, at the time, would object to their family trying to plan ahead for themselves and their children.

