

Supplementary Report - Growing Space for Trees and Minor Variance Requests for Soft Landscaping for Multiplexes

Date: January 6, 2026

To: Planning and Housing Committee

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to a request at the December 3, 2025 Planning and Housing Committee for a supplementary report as part of its consideration of "Growing Space for Trees: Protecting and Enhancing the Tree Canopy While Supporting Infill Housing and Addressing Concerns with Iceberg Homes - Recommendation Report" regarding information on variances to the City-wide Zoning By-law 569-2013 for landscaping, and specifically soft landscaping variances that permit permeable pavement as a condition of approval by the Committee of Adjustment, associated with multiplexes.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

City Planning confirms that there are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in this report in the current budget year or in future years. Staffing resources and expertise needed to advance the due diligence required, and to support enabling work of any of the proposed strategies outlined in the report will be accommodated within the existing approved budgets for relevant City Divisions.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

On December 3, 2025, Planning and Housing Committee considered Item 2025.PH26.2 "Growing Space for Trees: Protecting and Enhancing the Tree Canopy While Supporting Infill Housing and Addressing Concerns with Iceberg Homes - Recommendation Report" and adjourned the statutory public meeting until the January 22, 2026 meeting of the Planning and Housing Committee. In adjourning the statutory

meeting, the Committee requested the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning provide a supplementary report with information on minor variance requests for landscaping variances, and specifically variances related to soft landscaping that provides permeable area, associated with multiplexes and the frequency of conditions of approval for such variances related to permeable pavement since Council's adoption of the multiplex zoning by-law.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.PH26.2>

COMMENTS

Zoning Regulations for Landscaping and Soft Landscaping

The City-wide Zoning By-law defines "landscaping" as "an area used for trees, plants, decorative stonework, retaining walls, walkways, or other landscape or architectural elements. Driveways and areas for loading, parking or storing of vehicles are not landscaping". Soft landscaping is defined as "landscaping excluding hard-surfaced areas such as decorative stonework, retaining walls, walkways, or other hard-surfaced landscape-architectural elements".

The City-wide Zoning By-law's requirements regarding soft landscaping are intended to ensure provision of growing space for a healthy tree canopy and other vegetation. Trees and vegetation, and the associated growing space, help absorb stormwater at source, reduce the urban heat island effect, support biodiversity by providing refuge, habitat and foraging areas for insects, birds and small animals, and provide aesthetic and health benefits.

In the Residential Zone category, where multiplexes and other low-rise residential buildings (e.g. detached houses) are permitted, the City-wide Zoning By-law requires a minimum percentage of each yard (e.g. front, rear, and side) on a lot to be landscaping and/or soft landscaping.

Multiplex Building Permits and Monitoring

As part of the Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) initiative, City Council adopted Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments in 2023 to permit multiplexes city-wide and directed staff to monitor the implementation of multiplexes and report back on potential revisions to improve implementation. Multiplexes were defined as a low-rise form of housing with two, three, or four dwelling units in a single building.

Between May 12, 2023, and November 4, 2024, the City received 750 building permit applications for multi-unit buildings (two to four units). Of those applications, 452 multiplex building permits were issued.

In [February 2025](#), City Council adopted Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments to permit fiveplexes and sixplexes in detached residential buildings in Ward 23. This permission was further geographically expanded in June 2025 when Council extended permission for fiveplexes and sixplexes in the Toronto and East York District.

City Council adopted the Multiplex Monitoring report in June 2025. The monitoring report provided a summary of key trends from the detailed review of the initial 222 building permits issued for multiplexes between May 2023 and July 2024. Seven of the 222 initial permits analyzed had received minor variance approval for a soft landscaping reduction. As this represents just 3.1% of building permits issued, the monitoring report did not identify soft landscaping as a significant issue in implementation of multiplexes and staff did not make any recommendations to modify the zoning standard for soft landscaping.

Minor Variance Requests Associated with Multiplexes Related to Landscaping and Soft Landscaping

While early multiplex applications largely proceeded as-of-right, later proposals showed more minor variance activity. With that, it was found that the most common variances were related to the following (in order of most frequency):

- Setbacks
- Encroachments (platforms) often directly related to the setback variance
- Soft landscaping
- Main Wall height
- Building height.

Over the longer 19-month period of May 2023 to November 2024, there were 216 minor variance applications related to multiplexes. Of those, 81 minor variance applications requested a soft landscaping variance amongst other variances, of which 74 were approved. In the same period, the City issued 452 multiplex building permits which is indicative that many multiplex permits can be implemented without reductions in soft landscaping.

Frequency of Conditions of Approval for Variances Related to Permeable Pavement since Council's Adoption of the Multiplex Zoning By-law

Of the 81 multiplex applications seeking a soft landscaping variance between May 2023 and November 2024:

- 22 (approximately 27%) included permeable pavement on application plans submitted; and
- 21 applications (approximately 26%) were subject to a condition of approval by the Committee of Adjustment to provide permeable pavers or tied the approval to plans in which permeable pavement were provided on the application plans submitted.

Although the Committee of Adjustment has issued conditions of approval to provide permeable pavers, permeable pavement is not defined in the City-wide Zoning By-law, as the By-law does not regulate the materiality of construction products. Permeable pavers are often designed intentionally to look like non-permeable pavers, and technical testing or documentation would be needed to confirm compliance with a minor variance condition. Zoning examiners cannot verify if permeable pavements are used versus a different material, nor whether they are properly installed and providing for infiltration. Building inspectors and by-law enforcement officers have no practical way to verify that

the pavers have been installed in accordance with the product specifications. For example, if an installer uses a product like polymeric sand, which does not allow water infiltration, between the precast pavers, the paving will not be permeable.

Parking for Multiplexes

City Council adopted new zoning regulations for parking in 2021, removing minimum parking requirements for new residential development. This allows the individual property owner to determine how much parking to provide on-site.

Current trends demonstrate that multiplex developments are providing parking. The data from the June 2025 Multiplex Monitoring Study showed that 67% of multiplex building permits included between one and four parking spaces, and 32% of multiplex permits had zero parking spaces. The data did not show a substantial number of on-street or off-street parking permits associated with multiplex sites.

The Multiplex Monitoring Study also found a strong correlation between the location of the multiplex and proximity to transit, particularly when a multiplex is providing no parking spaces on site. Specifically, the data showed that the majority of multiplex sites with no parking spaces are located within 800 metres of higher order transit stations and others are often close to streetcar lines. It is likely that sites further away from higher order transit would provide some parking.

Next Steps

Staff continue to monitor variance activity as it relates to the City's multiplex zoning. The next multiplex monitoring report is scheduled for Q2 2027. As with past monitoring reports, staff may also consider recommending additional zoning amendments at that time.

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SIGNATURE

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