Height-Based Development Framework

Summary of Zoning Regulations | July 2026



The Burnaby Zoning Bylaw 2026 carries forward and refines Burnaby's height-based development framework, replacing the former floor area ratio (FAR)-based approach with clearer regulations based on building height, form, and design guidance.

Background

In November 2023, the Province of BC introduced legislation requiring municipalities to take a new approach to non-market housing, density bonus incentives, and development in transit-oriented areas. In response, the City of Burnaby adopted a new development framework that implements provincial changes while meeting additional City objectives.

In alignment with the Burnaby 2050 Official Community Plan, the City introduced a new height-based development framework in 2025. This included new multifamily residential and commercial zoning districts and new inclusionary rental and community benefit bonus housing requirements. The Burnaby Zoning Bylaw 2026 adds further to this framework with additional height-based zoning districts, new building form regulations, and new guidance on building design.

Why a new approach?

Burnaby's previous FAR-based framework determined the development potential, or permitted density, of a given property. However, FAR presented challenges, including that it:

- was difficult for the public and applicants to navigate
- resulted in unpredictable building heights and forms
- was complex for staff to administer

The new height-based framework simplifies the development process by focusing on building height and form rather than complex density calculations. This provides clearer expectations for what can be built on a property, increasing transparency and predictability for applicants and the community.

The framework is complemented by new Development Permit Area Guidelines that provide further direction on building design and character.

Objectives

- **Simplify regulations and approvals process**
- **Increase transparency on building height and form**
- **Allow greater flexibility and mixing of land uses**
- **Enhance urban design standards**
- **Maintain opportunities for affordable housing**
- **Align with Burnaby 2050 Official Community Plan**

New height-based districts

The following new height-based zoning districts were adopted and added to the Burnaby Zoning Bylaw in two phases in June 2025 and March 2026:

- **R2** Townhouse
- **R3** Low-Rise Apartment 1
- **R4** Low-Rise Apartment 2
- **R5** Mid-Rise Apartment 1
- **R6** Mid-Rise Apartment 2
- **R7** High-Rise Apartment 1
- **R8** High-Rise Apartment 2
- **C1** Neighbourhood Commercial
- **C2** General Commercial
- **E1** Employment
- **I1** Industrial
- **P1** Parks, Open Spaces and Natural Areas
- **P2** Institutional

How is height measured?

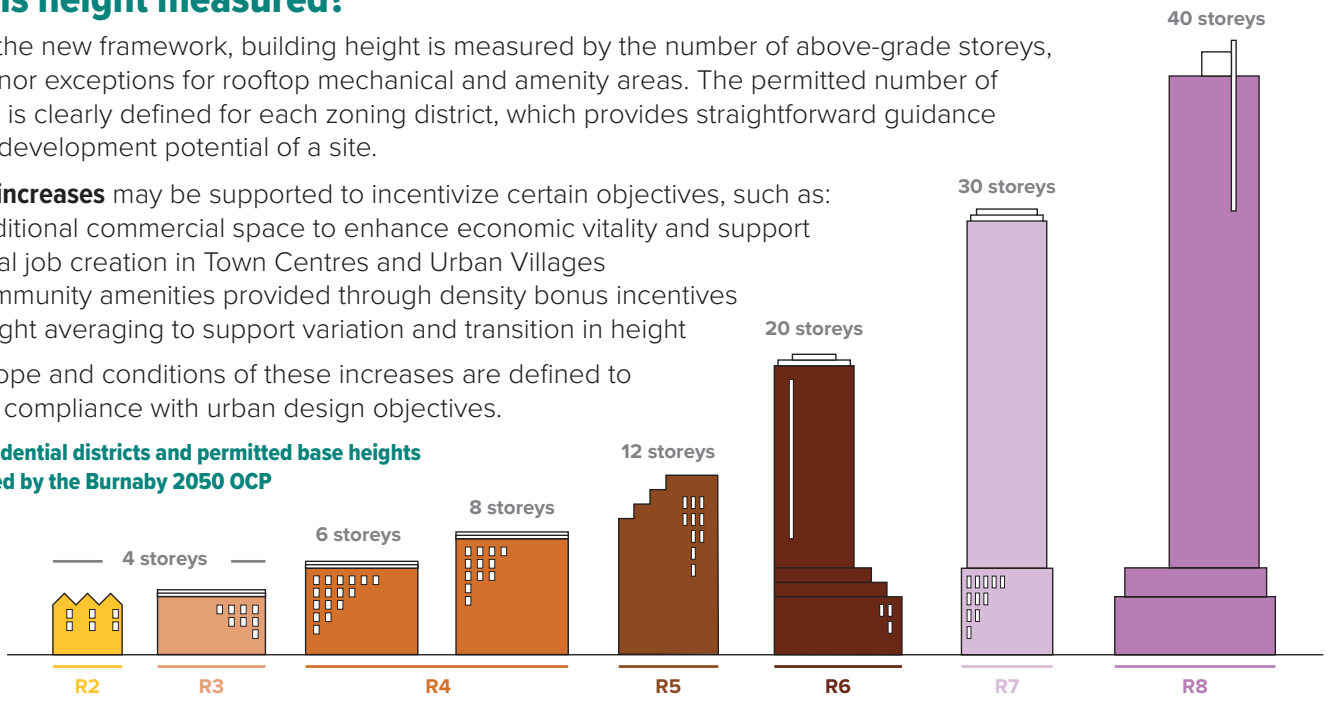
Under the new framework, building height is measured by the number of above-grade storeys, with minor exceptions for rooftop mechanical and amenity areas. The permitted number of storeys is clearly defined for each zoning district, which provides straightforward guidance on the development potential of a site.

Height increases may be supported to incentivize certain objectives, such as:

- additional commercial space to enhance economic vitality and support local job creation in Town Centres and Urban Villages
- community amenities provided through density bonus incentives
- height averaging to support variation and transition in height

The scope and conditions of these increases are defined to ensure compliance with urban design objectives.

New residential districts and permitted base heights supported by the Burnaby 2050 OCP



Key changes

The Burnaby Zoning Bylaw 2026 fully repeals the City's former FAR-based zoning districts and carries forward the new height-based zoning districts, which include:

- reduced and simplified sub-districts
- no FAR requirements—permitted heights, setbacks, maximum floorplate sizes, and maximum building separations define buildable area
- no min. or max. lot areas, lot widths, or lot coverage
- reduced building setback minimums
- support for live-work and lock-off dwelling units
- more flexible, simplified permitted use categories
- "secondary uses" to support mixed-use development

Development Permit Area (DPA) Guidelines

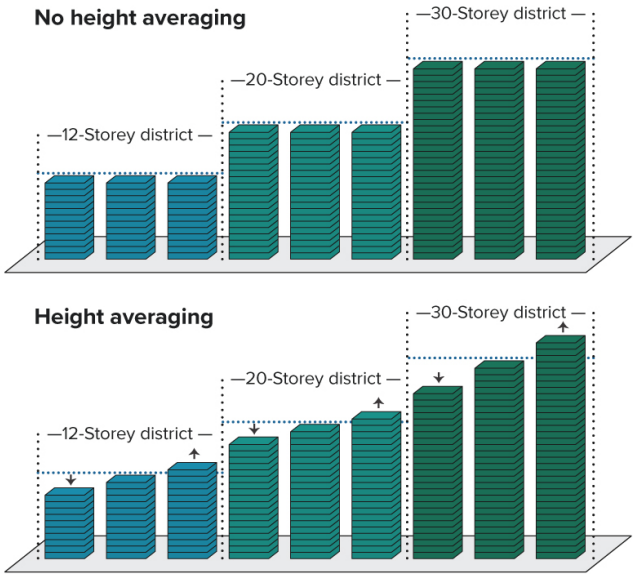


Complementing the new height-based zoning framework, the City's Form and Character DPA Guidelines provide direction on the design of new development, including building facades, landscaping, materials, and how buildings relate to surrounding streets and neighbourhoods. Together with the Zoning Bylaw, these guidelines help ensure new development contributes positively to Burnaby's urban environment and broader community planning goals.

Height averaging

The height-based framework supports variation in building height on larger development sites with multiple buildings through height averaging. This allows building heights to vary across a site while maintaining the overall height intent of the district.

For example, on a property with a height limit of 30 storeys, height averaging may allow one 25-storey, one 30-storey, and one 35-storey apartment building, provided the average height remains 30 storeys and the variation contributes positively to the character and urban design of the surrounding area.



For more information, visit Burnaby.ca/ZoningBylaw