

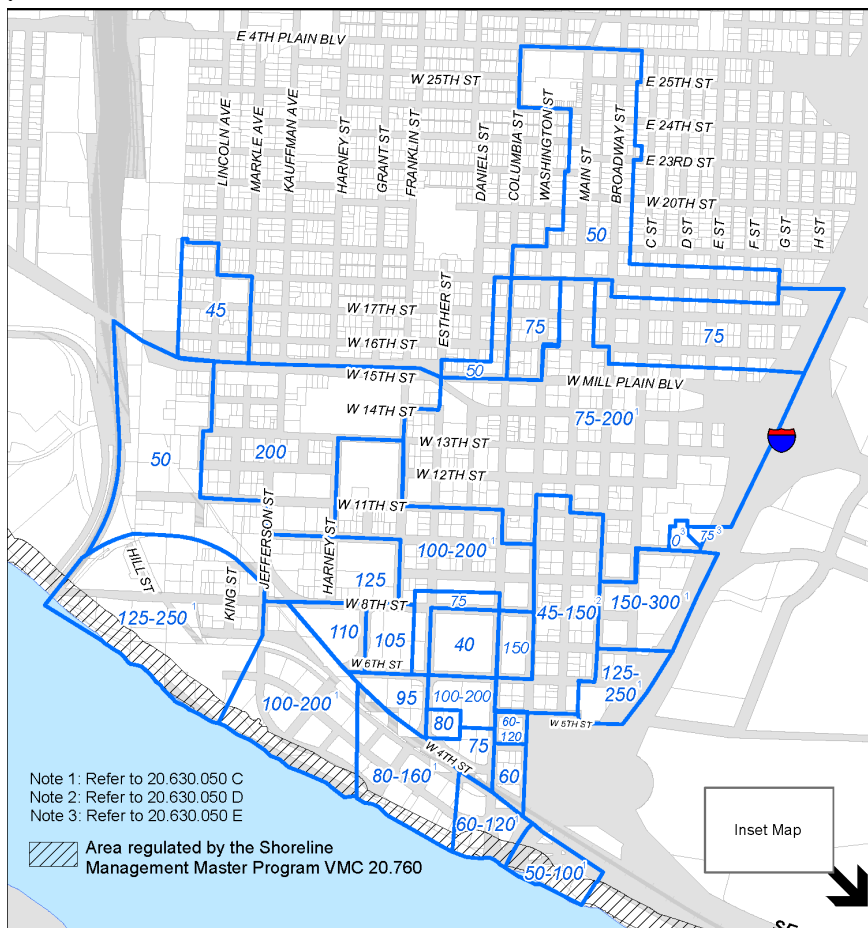
DATE: April 4, 2023

TO: Chair Ledell and Planning Commission members

FROM: Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner, Community and Economic Development Department

RE: April 11 workshop review of proposed zoning code text change to eliminate downtown building footprint limitations. Public hearing scheduled for May 9.

VMC 20.630, Downtown District, contains various standards for the function and appearance of downtown buildings. [VMC 20.630.050](#) regulates maximum building heights, with specific maximums indicated in Figure 20.630-4, excerpted below.



For those portions of downtown where height limits are expressed in a range, the lower number may be achieved outright, whereas the high number is only allowed conditionally.

There are also limitations on the size of building footprints. VMC 20.630.050.C.2.c requires footprints of any building floors that are located more than 50% above the lower end of the height range to be limited to 12,000 square feet or less. In the area denoted by footnote 2 in the map, which can generally be described as the blocks on both sides of lower Main Street between 5th and 12th Avenues, all floors of any buildings taller than 100 feet must also be limited to footprints of 12,000 square feet or less, with a stated goal of ensuring sufficient light at street level.

12,000 square feet is slightly more than a quarter of the site of most downtown blocks. The newly constructed building at Block 10, for example, appears to have an upper floor footprint of approximately 37,000 square feet. With increased development interest in downtown in recent years, developers have raised concerns that the footprint limitations restrict building options that cannot be easily corrected in the future. Once a building is constructed that limits its otherwise intended height or uses small footprints on its upper floors, this lost development capacity will not be realistically added to in the future unless the building is torn down. Of particular concern to staff are the limits these regulations effectively impose on upper floor housing construction, which could serve to activate downtown and support more commercial activities, as well as provide additional housing options, in an area well served by infrastructure and services.

While the goal of ensuring adequate street level light is reasonable, it's not clear that the footprint limitations are necessary to achieve it, given that downtown streets are not particularly narrow, and allowed building heights in much of downtown are relatively limited. There is no indication that other concerns drove the creation of downtown building footprint limitations when they were created in the 2004 to 2009 period.

Pending discussion at the April 11 Planning Commission workshop, staff anticipates proposing elimination of the VMC 20.630.050.C.2.c and 20.630.050.D.2 downtown building footprint limitations at the May 9 Commission public hearing. No changes to maximum building heights or other provisions of VMC 20.630 are envisioned. Staff has solicited comment from the Vancouver Downtown Association but have not yet received feedback.