

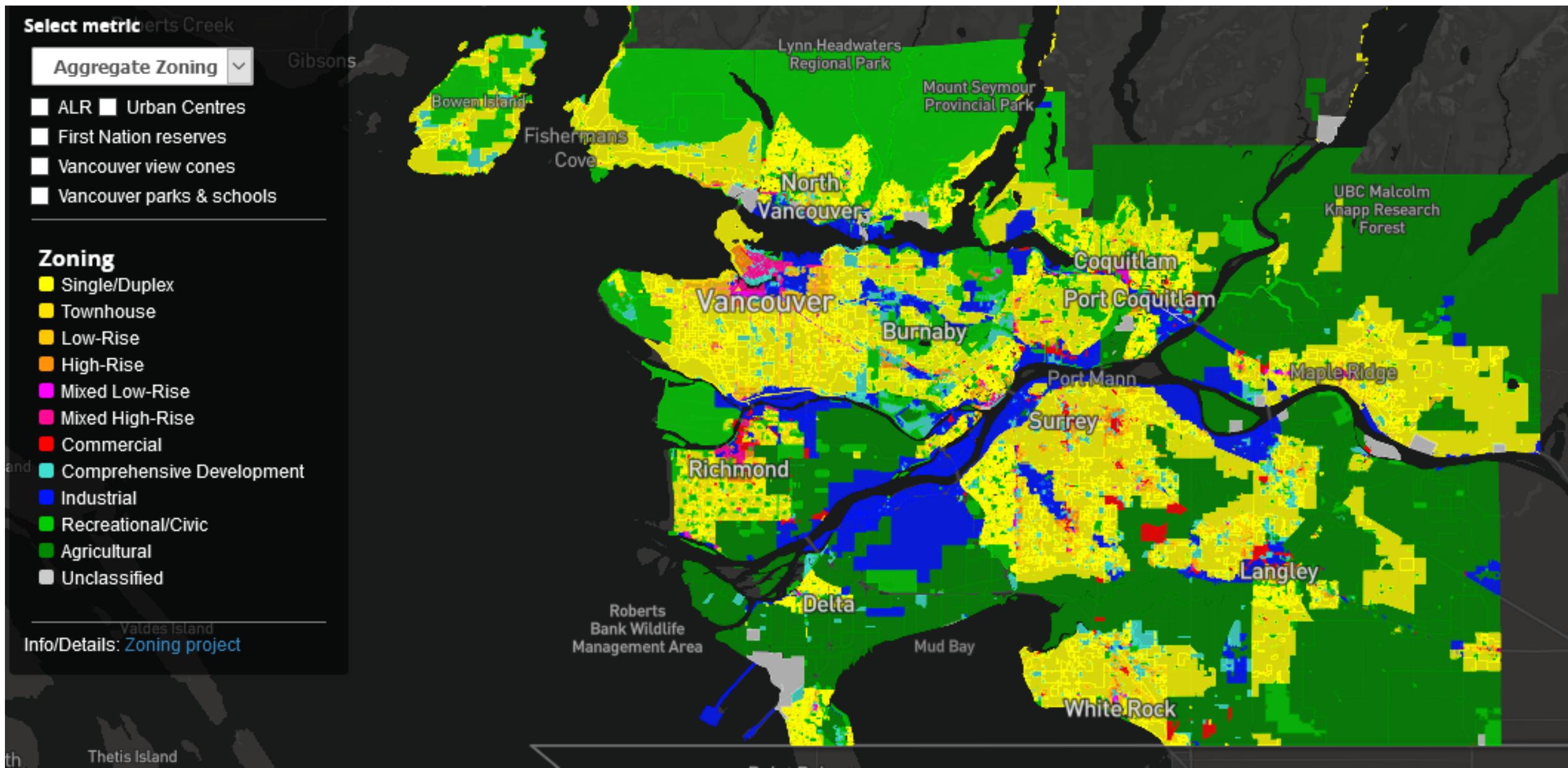
Zoning Regimes and the Development of Multi-Family Housing in Vancouver

Nathanael Lauster, UBC

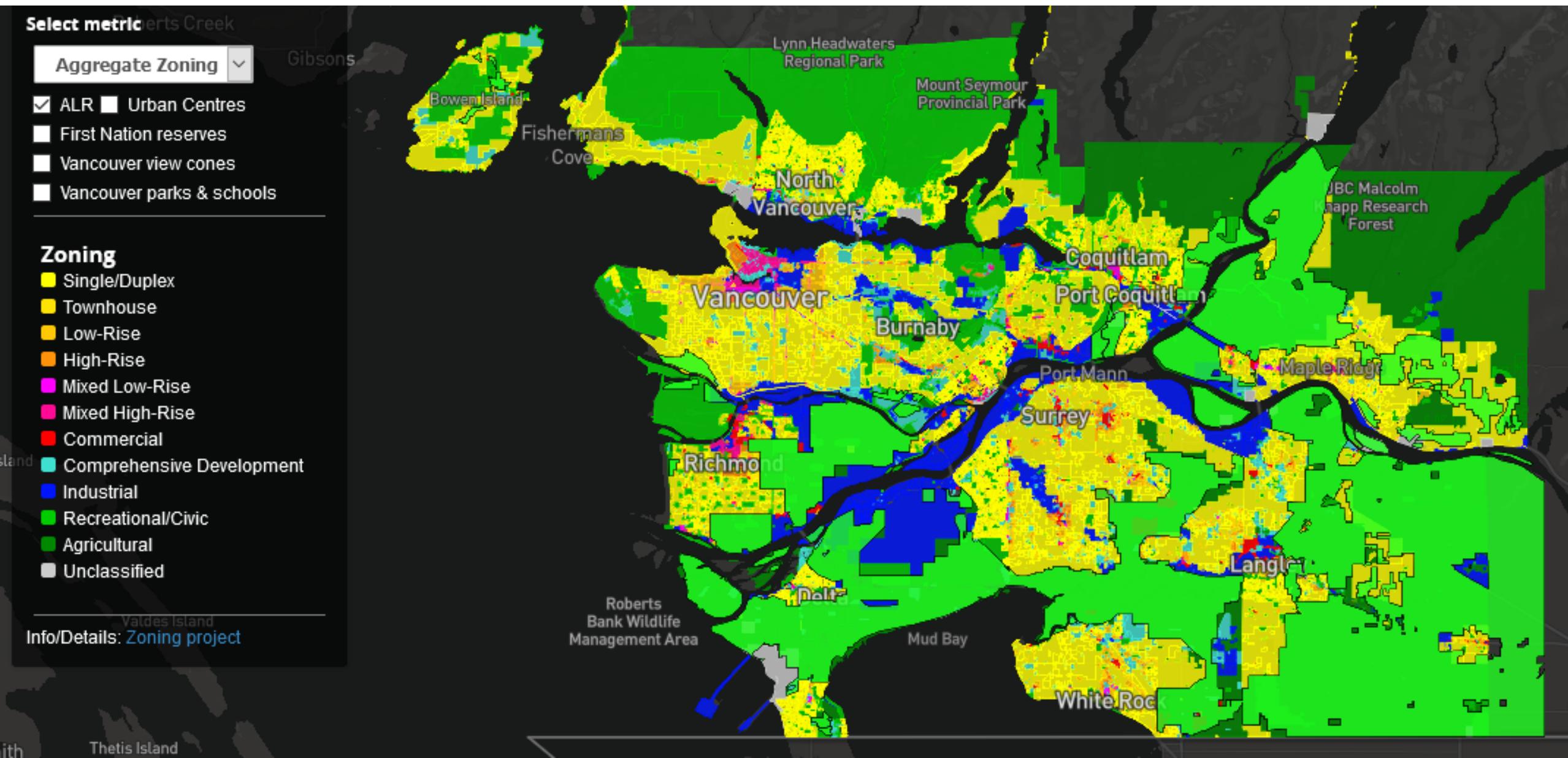
Jens von Bergmann, MountainMath

Metro Vancouver Zoning Project <https://zoning.sociology.ubc.ca/>

Metro Vancouver Zoning Project (documenting & mapping zoning history & codes of 21+ municipal authorities)

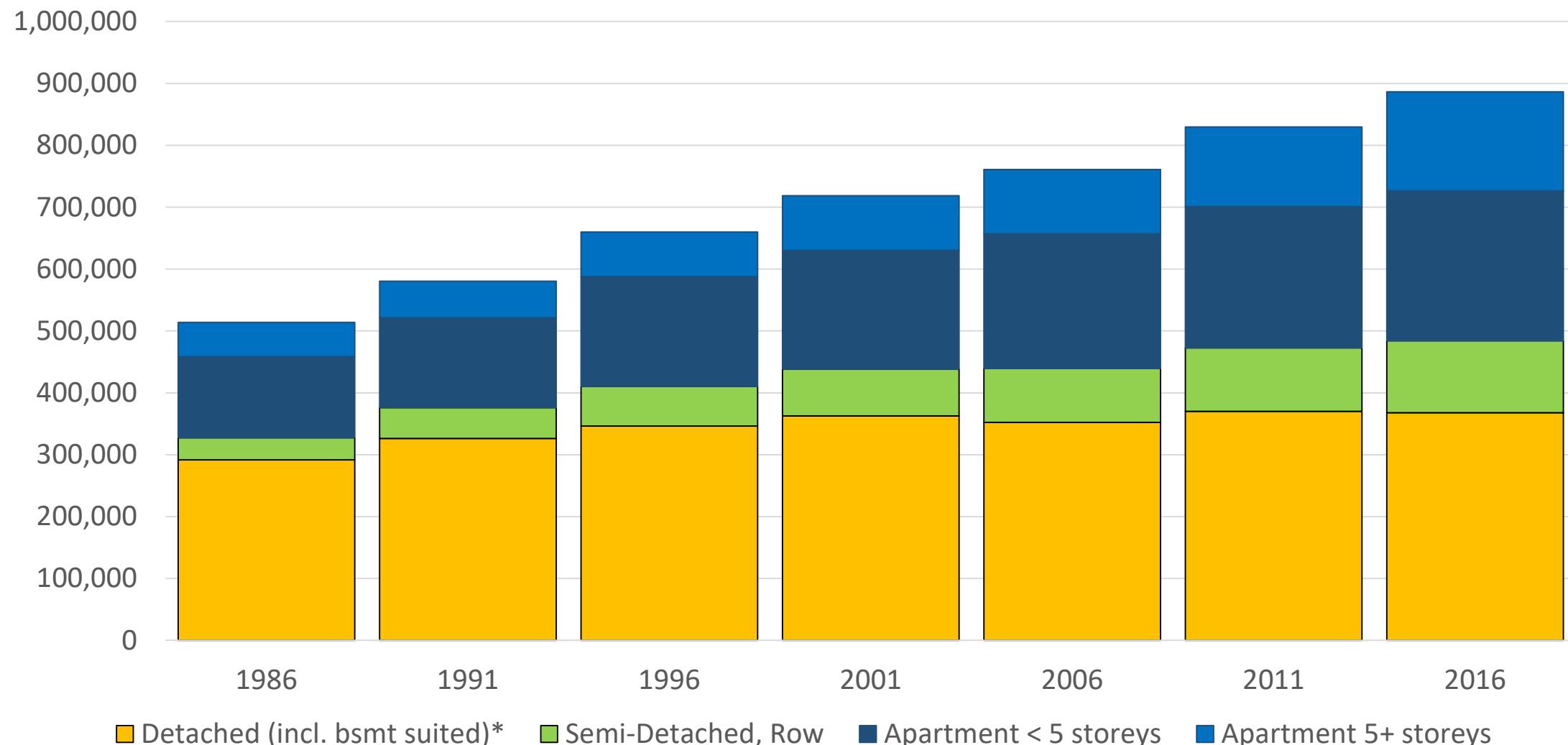


Mostly Built Out! Agricultural Land Reserve, etc., constrain more detached house construction



Net New Housing mostly from Apartments, Detached House Stock Now Mostly Flat

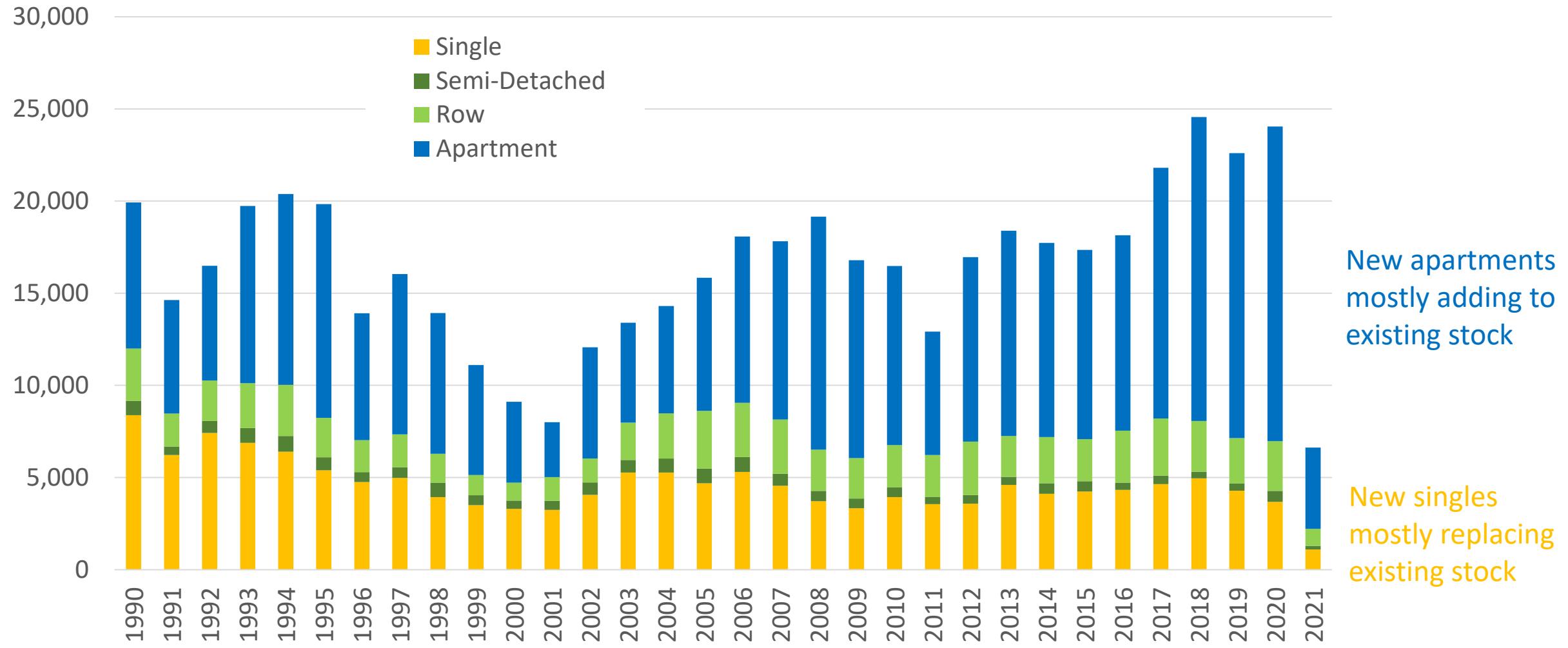
Vancouver (CMA), Est. Occupied Housing Stock by Census



* Though suites add significant rental stock, they are difficult to track and often recombined. Here “apartment in duplex” are grouped back in and adjusted to reflect detached properties

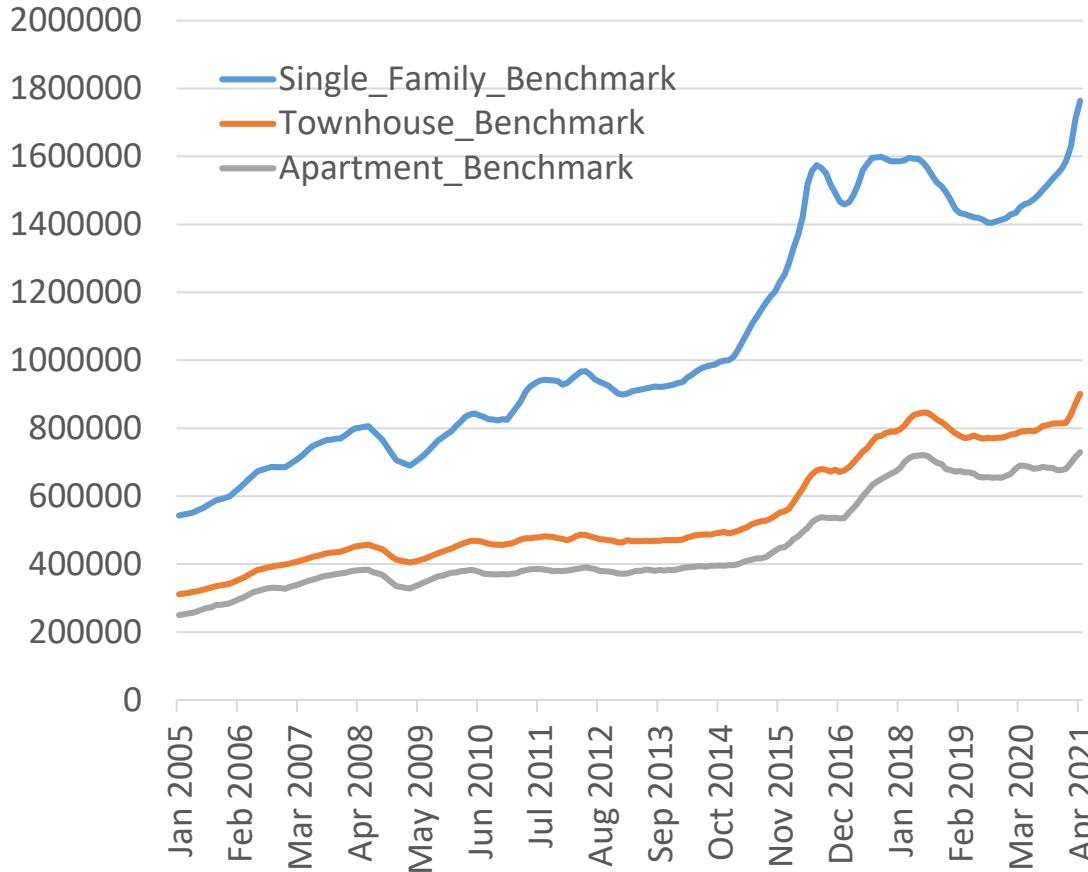
Increasing Role of Apartments also seen in New Dwelling Completions

New Completions by Type, Vancouver (CMA) 1990-2021
CMHC Housing Market Information Portal

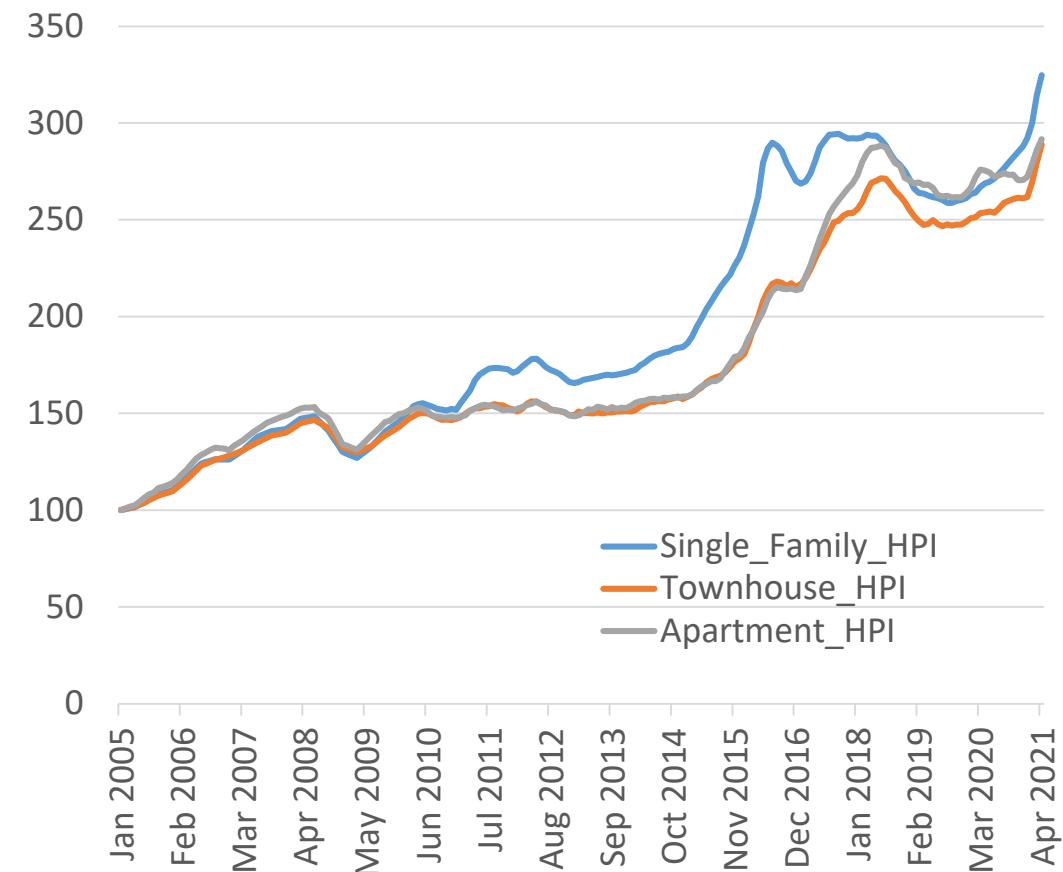


Given constraints, increasing Inelasticity (transition to Luxury Market) expected for Single Family Detached Houses, but surely we've got room to build even more Apartments?

MLS Benchmark Price – Greater Vancouver

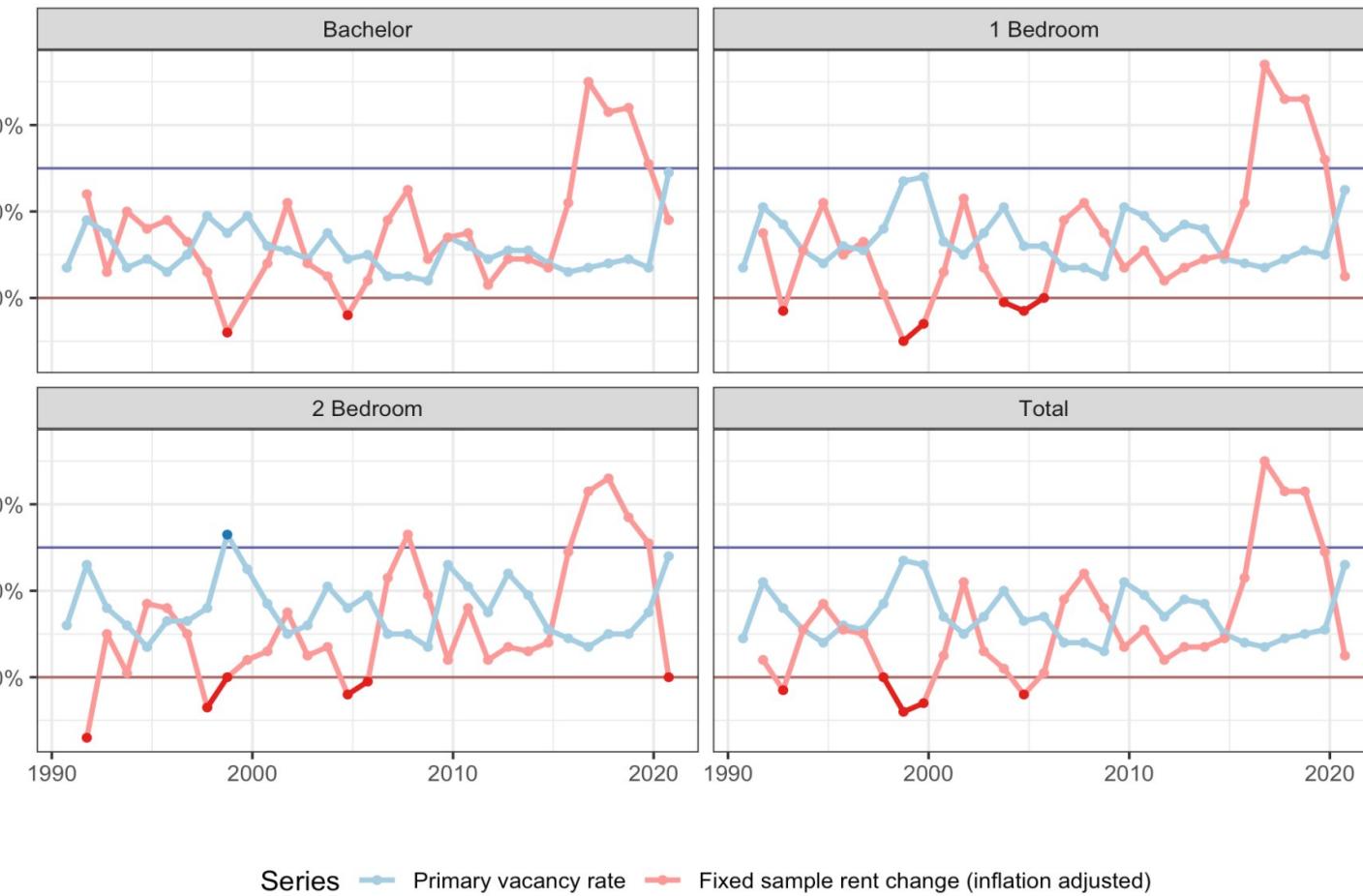


MLS HPI (Price Increase) – Greater Vancouver



Having lots of Apartments is even more important for boosting rental vacancy rates into stable ranges (3%+) to keep down rents, so surely there's room to build more Apartments?

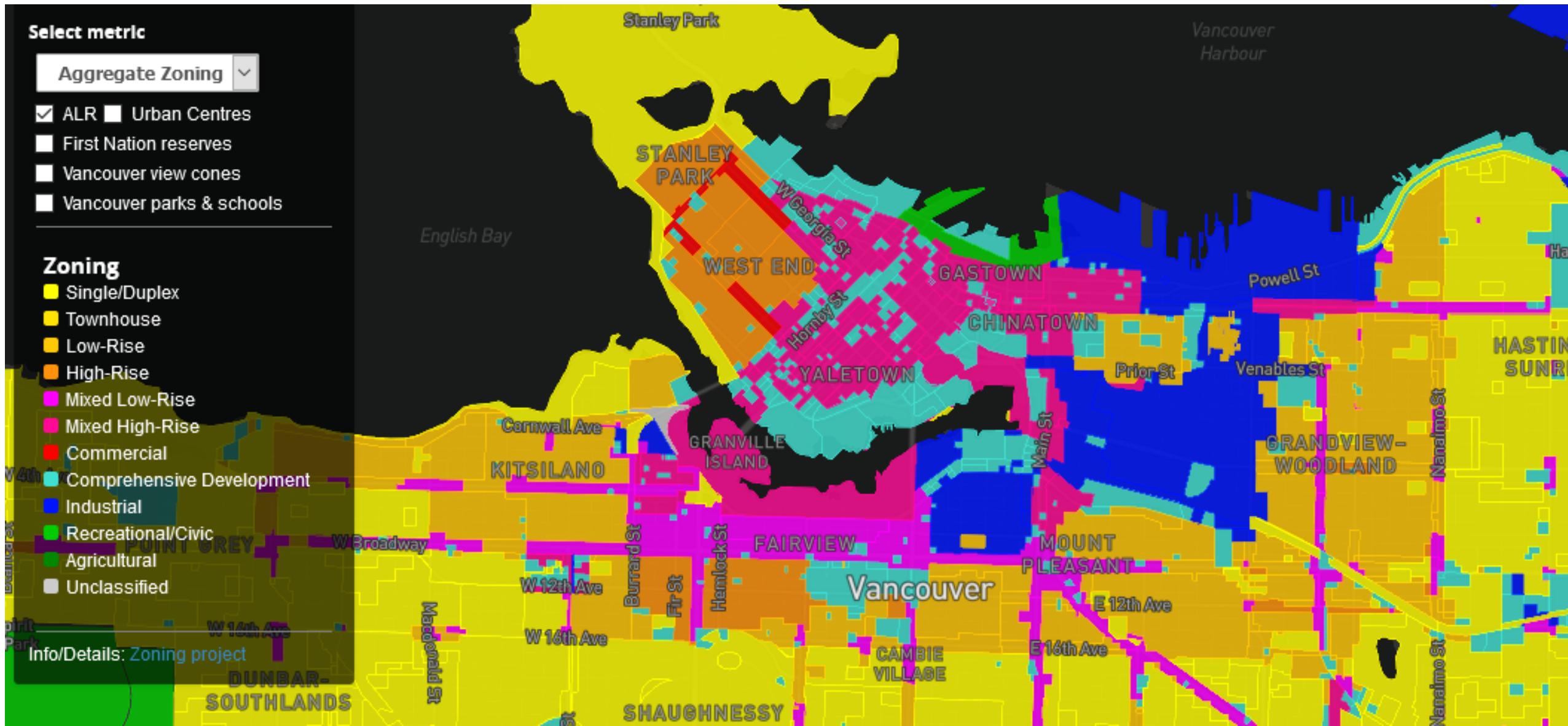
Metro Vancouver vacancy rate and rent change



Other benefits of more apartments include more non-profit & public housing, less sprawl, enabling more transit, and reducing Greenhouse Gas production

So surely we've got room for more apartments?

But New Apartment Buildings ALSO constrained, especially by Zoning.
e.g. only generally allowed in Vancouver in RM, C, CD, and even there tightly controlled



Zoning Codes have **lots** of ways to restrict development, especially of apartments

RM-4 and RM-4N Districts Schedule

1 Intent

The intent of this Schedule is to permit medium density residential development, including a variety of multiple dwelling types, to encourage the retention of existing buildings and good design, and to achieve a number of community and social objectives through permitted increases in floor area. Additionally, this Schedule is intended to encourage development of six storey social housing apartment buildings. The RM-4N District differs from the RM-4 District in that it requires evidence of noise mitigation for residential development.

2 Outright Approval Uses

- One-Family Dwelling.
- Rooming House.
- Two-Family Dwelling.

3 Conditional Approval Uses

(iii) multiple dwelling or seniors supportive or assisted housing, provided that:

- a. all required parking spaces shall be provided underground or within the outermost walls of a building (but in no case with the floor of the parking area above the highest point of the finished grade around the building), except in the case of lots of 560 m² or less;
- b. useable on-site open space shall be provided;
- c. a minimum of 20 percent of total units within any building shall contain 2 or more bedrooms, except in the case of buildings designed specifically for use as senior citizens' housing or other similar use;
- d. in no case shall the site coverage exceed 65 percent; and
- e. the maximum floor space ratio shall be 1.45.

4.3 Height

4.3.1 The maximum height of a building shall be 10.7 m, but no portion of the building shall extend

Outright Use

incl. No. Dwelling limits

Conditional Use

befriend/impress a planner!

Floor Space Ratio (FSR)

Height

Frontage

Lot Coverage

Setbacks (Front, Side, Back yards)

Horizontal angle of daylight

Acoustic mitigation

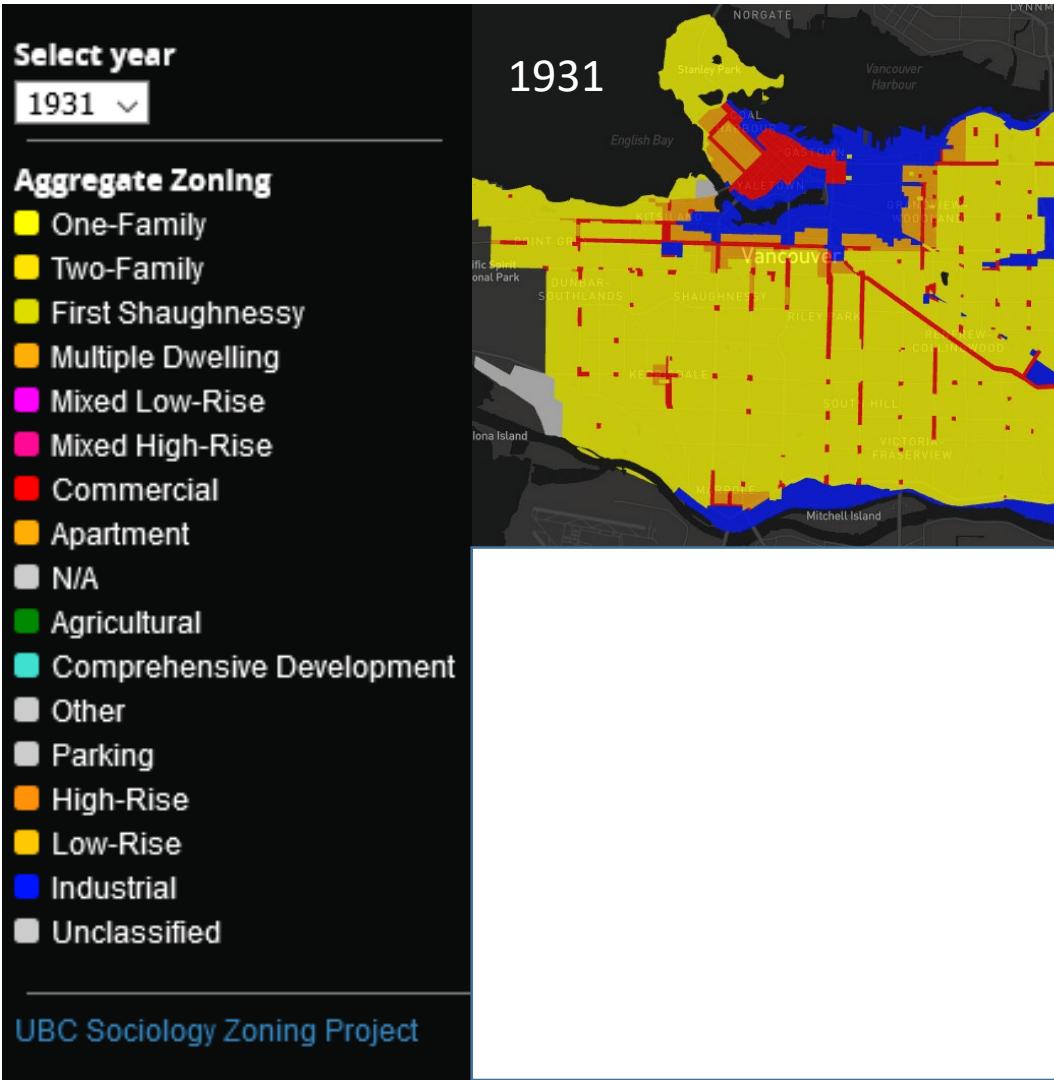
Max dwelling per hectare

Subdivision rules

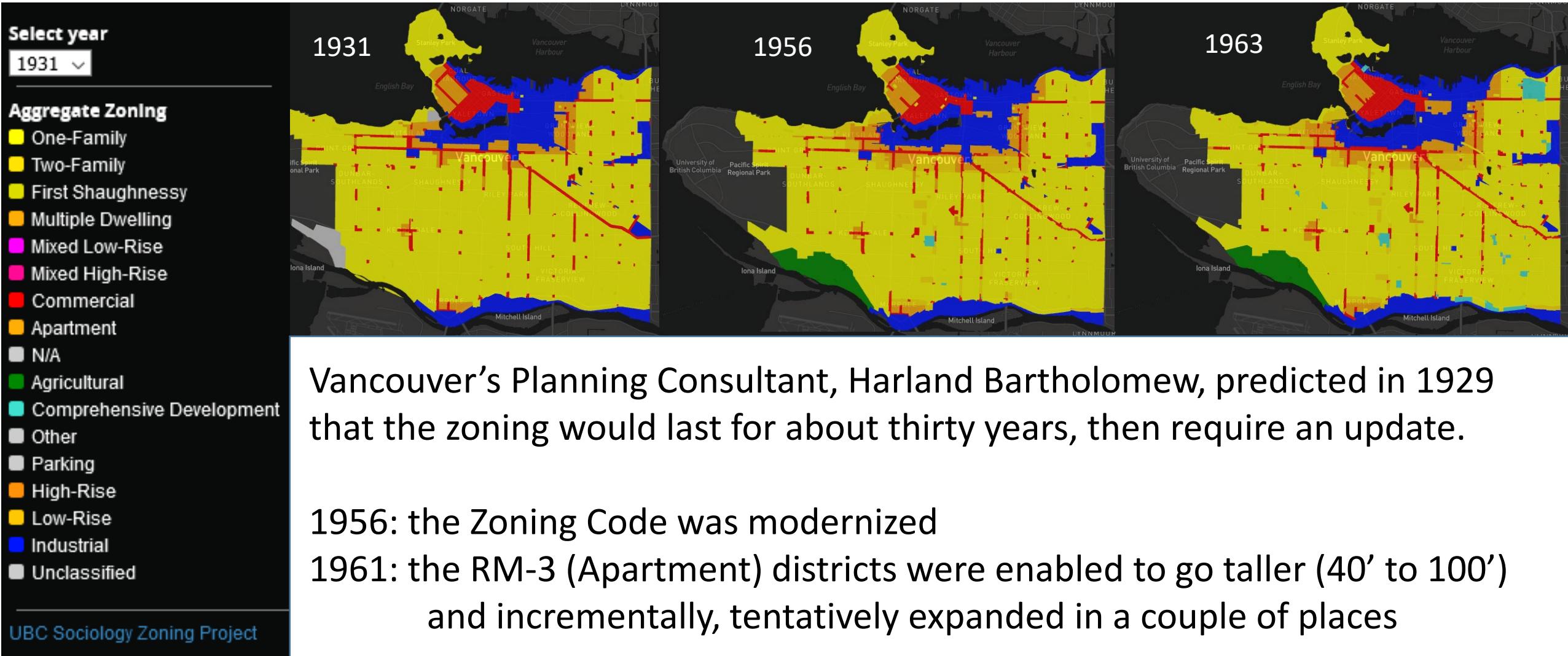
Tenant relocation policies

Minimum % by bedroom

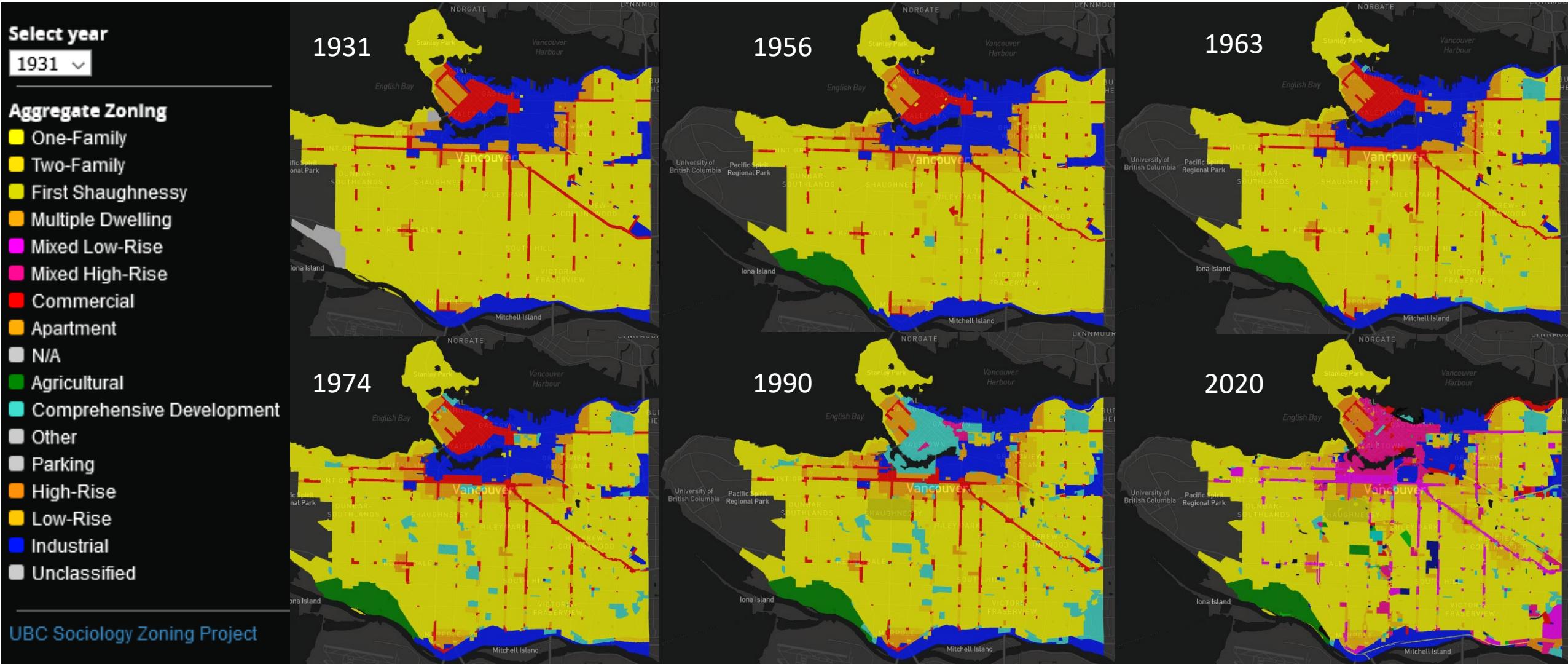
Looking back historically, has zoning for apartments at least been enabled to expand?
When, where, how?



Zoning arrives in City of Vancouver through the 1920s, as elsewhere, primarily to protect single-family dwellings from intrusion of apartment buildings... (e.g. Lauster, 2016)



But then Apartment Districts (RM) were downzoned again following the rise of neighbourhood activism and reform politics (TEAM), extending from 1970s-present, very little expansion since. The “Great House Reserve” remains in place.

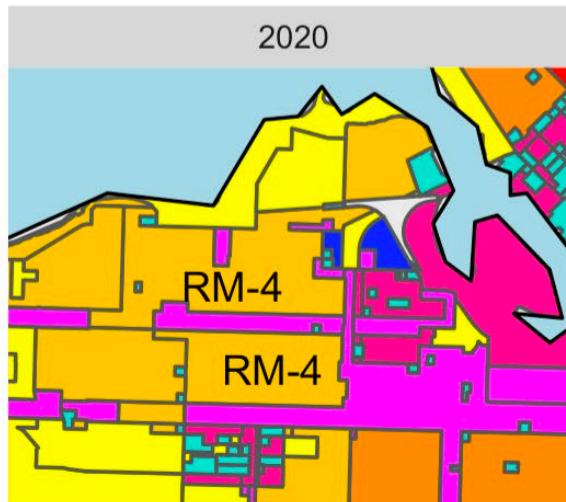
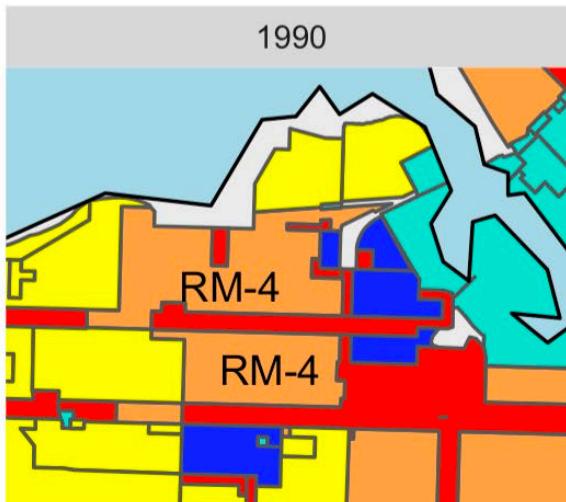
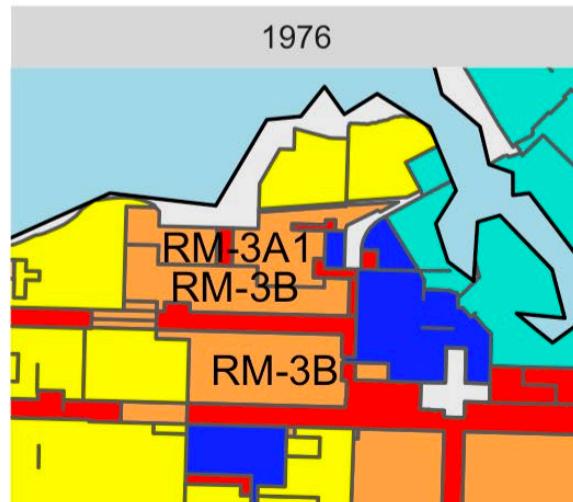
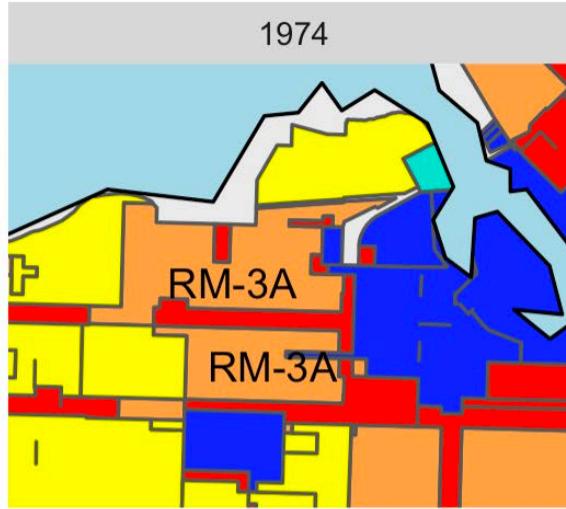
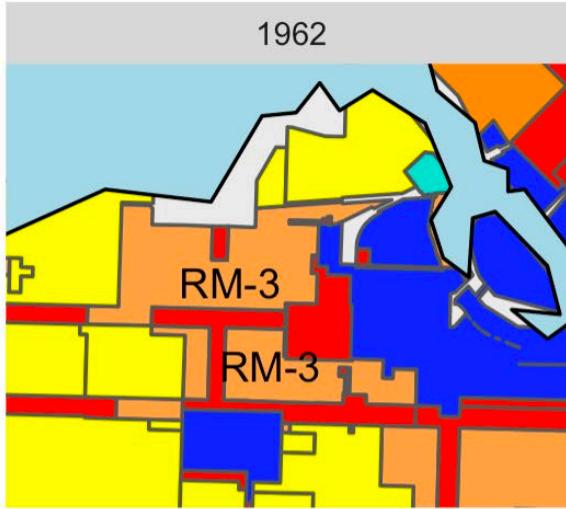
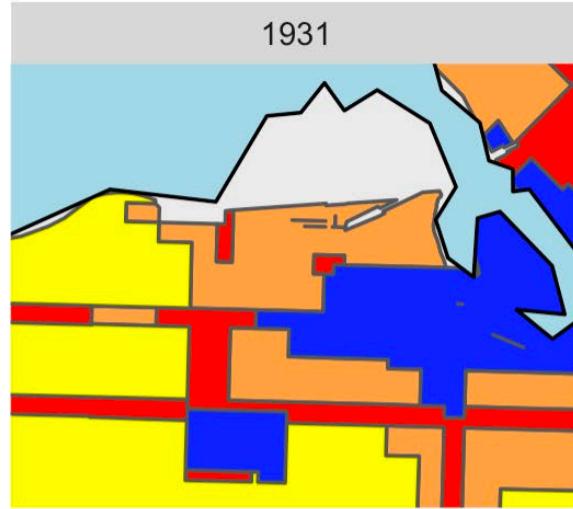


Apartment Districts (RM) upzoning and downzoning occur within RM code, sometimes by creating new schedules (e.g. RM-3A), sometimes by changing text, sometimes by rezoning

RM-3 & RM-4 Zoning Districts									
	1956	1963	1974	1976	1990-Present	Trajectory			
East Kitsilano (45 ft)	RM-3 (40 ft)	RM-3 (100 ft)	RM-3A (35 ft)	RM-3B, RM-3A1, RM-6	RM-4 (35 ft)	Up - Down (1974)			
South Granville	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3, RM-3A, expand (over RT-2)	RM-3	RM-3	Up - Stable			
Fairview	RM-3	M-1, C-2, RM-3	CRM-3	CRM-2	FM-1	Use Change, Use Change, Use Change			
Mount Pleasant	RM-3	M-1, RM-3	RM-3	RM-3, RM-3A	RM-4, RM-4N	Up & Use Change - Stable - Down (1990)			
Strathcona	RM-3	RM-3, expand (over M1, M2)	RT-2	RT-3	RT-3	Up - Way Down (1974)			
Commercial Drive	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3	RM-4, RM-4N	Up - Stable - Down (1990)			
Hastings-Sunrise	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3A	RM-3A	Up - Down (1976)			
Kerrisdale	RM-3	RM-3, expand (over RS-1)	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3	Up - Stable			
Marpole	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3A	RM-3A	Up - Stable - Down (1976)			
Mini-Arterials (e.g. Alma, 10th, Broadway, 4th)	RM-3	RM-3	RM-3, RM-3A	RM-3, RM-3A	RM-3, RM-3A, RM-4	10th Up-Stable, & down (1974)			
West End (80 ft)	RM-4	RM-4	RM-4A	WED	RM-5, RM-5A, RM-5B	Up - Stable - Down (1974)			

A peek at apartment district history (orange) in the Kitsilano neighbourhood
(where activists are currently protesting proposed social housing viewed as out of character)

Zoning changes in Kitsilano



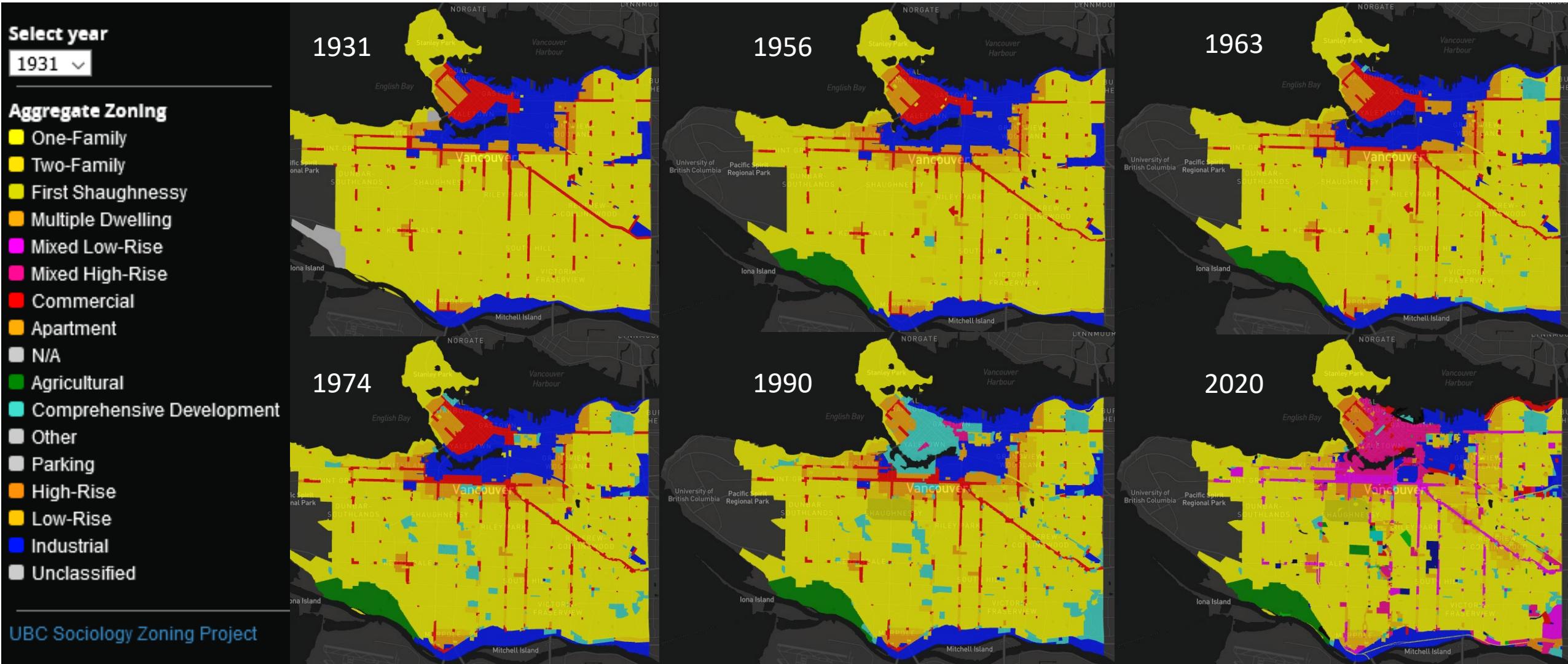
UBC Sociology Zoning Project

A handful of towers get built between 1961 & 1970s downzonings, when RM capped at 35 ft



A social housing overlay up to six floors for non-profit housing **just added** in 2021

Industrial Districts (blue) rezoned to support residential apartment uses 1970s-present
Commercial Districts (red), including Downtown & arterials, enabled to support increasing apartment uses, often through “spot” **Comprehensive Development (CD)** (light blue & pink)



To Re-Cap

Agricultural Land Reserve & related factors limit more detached house development.
Zoning (Great House Reserve) limits multi-unit apartment development.

Apartments have grown via filling out higher density residential districts, rezoning of former Industrial districts, and redeveloping of Commercial districts & Arterials into Mixed Use, often via “spot-zoning” Comprehensive Development.

But apartment districts (RM) have also been downzoned, and we’re running out of redevelopable Industrial & Commercial districts (with negative consequences). Plus rezonings add time, cost, and uncertainty to the process of developing more apartments.

Are there solutions?

Potential Solutions

1. Municipal Democracy

Polls generally show broad support for reform, but municipal politics often poorly representative (low & selective voting & participation) ;

Fundamental problems: local membership with non-local effects ; limited powers to reform

Some successes: Vancouver's RS duplex & laneway, RM social housing overlay

2. Prov. Target Setting

Maintain Local Planning

But Connect Needs Reports to Official Community Plans to Pre-emptive Zoning to Fast Permitting

Funding (e.g. transit) for success (carrots)

Bypass rules for failures (sticks)

3. "The New Zealand"

Limit municipal exclusionary powers

e.g. Single-family, max height, parking requirements

Buildings within a walkable range from city centres, metropolitan centres and existing or planned rapid transit stops may now be six storeys, or higher.



Zoning Regimes and the Development of Multi-Family Housing in Vancouver

Research increasingly suggests the strong role of zoning as a constraint upon urban development in North America. In particular, zoning restricts parcels available for multi-unit housing by design. As an obscure and largely municipal policy, the content and direct effects of zoning often escape careful research attention. Recently we obtained CMHC support for a project documenting and codifying municipal zoning across the 21 municipalities of Metro Vancouver (<https://zoning.sociology.ubc.ca/>). In addition, the project explores historical change in zoning within the City of Vancouver. In this paper we directly explore and systematize changes in the City of Vancouver's zoning regimes as they bear upon the development of multi-unit housing. We then connect changes in zoning regime to changes in urban development patterns from the initiation of zoning (across the 1920s) to the present day, highlighting the changing processes by which regimes have enabled new multi-unit housing. Overall the evidence suggests a strong and determinative role for zoning regimes in limiting multi-unit housing, opening up our discussion of several suggestions for policy reforms.

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Metro Vancouver Zoning Project
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