Using the Build Homes Not Barriers Letter Generator

Acknowledgement

- The BHNB letter generator was built on a template by Abundant Housing Vancouver http://www.abundanthousingvancouver.com/. You can find more information about it here: https://www.reillywood.com/blog/housing-projects/.
- Its letter generator was inspired by activists working to protect Vancouver's Chinatown (Details here: http://savechinatownheritage.org/105-keefer-development-open-house/)

Purpose of the Letter Generator

- The use of the letter generator is free to organizations advocating for or developing new affordable housing in BC. Contact us and let us know about your idea or issue.
- It is primarily intended to be used during rezoning/public hearing processes, but the tool can also be used during other engagement or decision-making processes that align with this goal, such as (examples only):
  - submissions to Government on specific policy issues related to housing demand or supply (i.e. Provincial budget submissions), bylaws affecting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness (i.e. panhandling or RV bylaws)
  - submissions to community-based organizations holding land that could be used for affordable housing (i.e. school boards, churches, etc)
  - etc

How it works (for organizations seeking support)

To use the tool we require some lead time (ideally up to two months prior to the decision) and information on the project. The information requested includes:

- **Name:** Title of your project (Max 60 characters)
- **Community and Neighbourhood:** Municipality and neighbourhood name
- **Project description:** Describe your project in a few paragraphs (300-400 words ideally), incl. links to any official project websites, Q&As and supporting documentation. The description should be succinct and outline why this project is important, who will benefit from it, how many units are proposed at which rent levels and any special circumstances important to know for your supporters.
- **Picture**: Incl one high-resolution image reflecting the proposed design

How it works (behind the scenes)

The letter generator will be made active as long as letters of support are accepted by the municipality/council/board.

The structure of the letters is pre-defined. It includes the following sections:
- introduction
- letter author's relationship to the project/neighbourhood/community
- list of the reasons why the author supports the project
- list of suggestions for improvement
- closing paragraph

Once the letter is generated, however, the user is given the opportunity to customize the letter and no longer has to conform to that structure.

Setting up a letter generator (technical details)

The letter generator administrator sets up the specific options and wording for each of the sections mentioned above that will go into the letter.

For example, here's the one used by Abundant Housing Vancouver – and how it works:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1kIkLMFe6VG8Fgpy0bLgLdelFzXppda0yl4jdKo9WICM
- The first sheet (**Projects**) is the list of projects we are supporting. This includes the name of the project, list of recipients that the letters are sent to (e.g. Mayor + Council, planner, etc), a description that shows up on the project page and an optional list of tags (more below).
- The second sheet (**Options**) lists the different options that should show up in each section. If a tag is set for an option, then it will only be shown for projects that have a matching tag.
- The third sheet (**Text Bank**) provides a variety of ways that each of the options can be worded. The actual generated text will be randomly chosen from the text bank. For example, when a user picks "I work nearby" as their relationship to the project, the generated letter might say "I work in the neighbourhood" or "The project is close to work for me", etc.
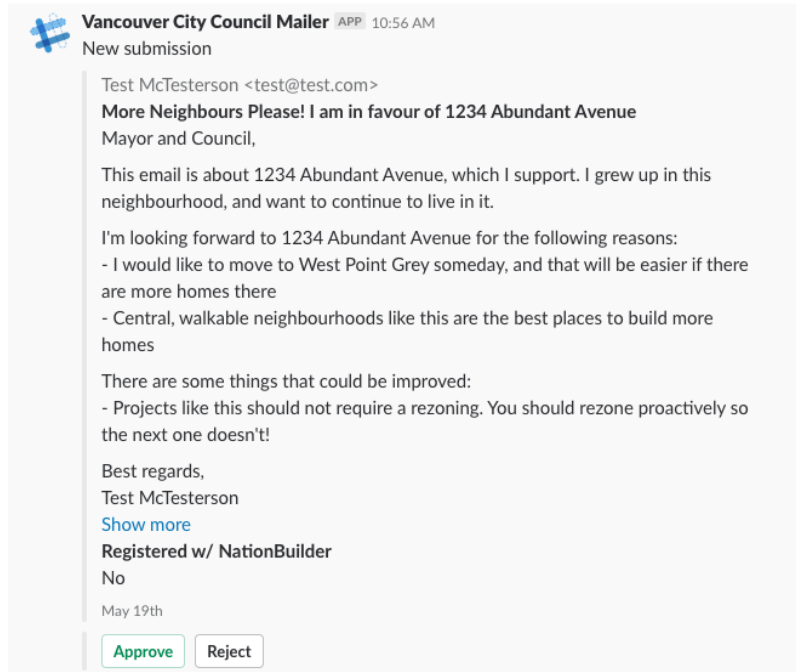
Individual sections can be modified based on specific requests (i.e. a specific reason for support can be included).

Approving/rejecting letters

When a user generates a letter and clicks "Send", the letter generator publishes the letter (along with the author's name / email / etc) to a channel in our Slack for approval. We can then choose to approve or reject the message. We do this to prevent abuse.

Once the message is approved, the email is sent on to the designated recipients. It will be shown as coming from the author, not from Build Homes Not Barriers.

Vancouver City Council Mailer APP 10:56 AM
New submission

Test McTesterson <test@test.com>
More Neighbours Please! I am in favour of 1234 Abundant Avenue
Mayor and Council,

This email is about 1234 Abundant Avenue, which I support. I grew up in this neighbourhood, and want to continue to live in it.

I'm looking forward to 1234 Abundant Avenue for the following reasons:
- I would like to move to West Point Grey someday, and that will be easier if there are more homes there
- Central, walkable neighbourhoods like this are the best places to build more homes

There are some things that could be improved:
- Projects like this should not require a rezoning. You should rezone proactively so the next one doesn't!

Best regards,
Test McTesterson
Show more
Registered w/ NationBuilder
No

May 19th

Approve   Reject

www.buildhomesnotbarriers.ca