

Response to Richmond Affordable Housing Strategy

The Richmond Affordable Housing Strategy is an important step forward. It is a step that has been requested by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee and the Affordable Housing Task force for a number of years. Lack of affordable housing is a major factor in people being overwhelmed by poverty and access to affordable housing is the major factor in getting people out of poverty. It has been clear that Richmond residents are demanding that all levels of government take steps to deal with this issue.

This report has been delayed many times and is now 5 months past its original deadline. During this time families have left Richmond because there is no affordable housing for them; people have been sent to shelters in other communities because of the extreme lack of shelter beds in Richmond; mental health clients have been located in other communities where supported housing exists. Connections to families and support groups were strained and broken. The delay has caused real harm.

That Richmond is ready for action is clear. In February the Poverty Response Committee organized a Faith Forum specifically on affordable housing and the role of the faith community. Our Faith Forum Task Force has since held a follow-up meeting and has identified a number of concrete steps to be taken. They and other groups have identified affordable housing as a major problem that needs to be addressed now.

Regarding the staff recommendations (Attachment #1) we do have a few comments:

Recommendation #1: "That the City hire a temporary full time employee, to work in the Real Estate Services Division of the City's Business & Financial Services Department, to assist in the implementation of the *Richmond Affordable Housing Strategy*, with funding for this position to come initially from the enterprise fund and permanently from the Affordable Housing Operating Reserve Fund."

It is our belief that this position is essential. Within the current climate of limited and complex funding arrangements the ability to coordinate our limited resources is paramount. At the Faith Forum group discussions bureaucratic red tape was identified as one of the key stumbling blocks and we see this position as being able to help resolve this issue. We are concerned however that the salary will come out of the Affordable Housing Operating Reserve Fund and would prefer Council to find another method of paying the salary.

Recommendation # 2: "That a proposal call be issued by the City for non-profit housing providers and property management companies to manage the affordable low end market rental housing units that will be built by the development community and transferred to the City as a condition of rezoning approval."

While we fully support this recommendation, we do encourage Richmond to use this as an opportunity to build local resources in this area.

Recommendation # 3: Density Bonusing Approach

The density bonus levels have been an area of concern, particularly among developers. Any value that accrues due to zoning changes is first and foremost a community value and must be looked upon in this manner. At a time of skyrocketing land valuations, there is no need to provide this extra compensation to the land owners and or developers.

Recommendation #4: “That the City’s current moratorium on the demolition or conversion of the existing multi-family rental stock, except in cases where there is a 1:1 replacement, adopted by City Council on July 24, 2006 as part of the Interim Affordable Housing Strategy, be rescinded.

The staff recommendation appears to be significantly different than the report recommendations that ask for a replacement policy. Even this policy is unacceptable as its wording (“encouraging”, “in appropriate circumstances”) is too weak to be enforceable.

Recommendation #5: “That not for profit rental housing, including supportive living housing, be exempted from paying City Development Cost Charges (DCCs) on a case by case basis by Council on a trial period (eg. 3 years).

For non-profit organizations considering an affordable housing project Development Cost Charges will often dissuade people from proceeding past the initial exploratory steps. It is therefore welcome that these charges will be waived where possible. Again it is preferable that the vague wording “case by case basis” be reworded to provide some mechanism to the decision making process.

Recommendation #6: “That a letter be sent to the GVRD asking them to survey all the GVRD municipalities asking if they would support a request to the Province to amend the *Local Government Act* to include affordable housing as a Development Cost Charge item under Section 933(2) and subject cost charge waiver under Section 933(12).

It is our understanding that this already exists for the City of Vancouver due to its special legislative relationship with BC Government. It is important that the province extends this right to surrounding communities.

Recommendation #7: “That the GVRD be requested to waive Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District (GVS&DD) regional DCCs on affordable subsidized rental housing and to reduce GVS&DD regional DCCs on affordable low end market rental housing in Richmond.

This is an obvious extension of Recommendation #5. It should be made clear that references to rental housing includes co-op housing as it is not strictly rental housing.

Unfortunately missing from the staff recommendation was any reference to targets. Without goals to measure our success any plan is doomed to failure. SPC (statistical

process control) is a necessary step in any process re-engineering such as this. We need to identify the key metrics and staff needs to report on a regular basis on how Richmond is performing. For example the new *Homelessness Partnering Strategy* provides \$269.6M over two years to help prevent and reduce homelessness. Richmond should identify what portion of this fund that it can realistically pursue and then track our success in being able to achieve our goal. In the past we have simply left too much money on the table that with effort could have been used in our community. We no longer have the luxury of letting that happen any more.

Finally, the ability to implement change is related directly to the commitment to it by leaders of the organization. For any affordable housing strategy to work, senior staff and Council members are going to have to provide leadership.

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Richmond Affordable Housing Task Force (Richmond Poverty Response Committee)
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