

Schedule 2 to the Minutes of the  
Planning Committee meeting of  
Richmond City Council held on  
Tuesday, February 2, 2015.

TO: MAYOR & EACH  
COUNCILLOR  
FROM: CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

Speaker: James Caspersen

Organization: Richmond Drop in Centre

*To Feb 2, 2016 Planning  
Item # 1.*

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Through a year and a half with the Richmond Drop in Centre, I have encountered dozens of individuals seeking housing in the Richmond private rental market. For a typical individual on Income Assistance of \$610 a month, \$375 of which is intended for rent, this greatly limits the number and types of units available. No clients in my experience have been able to secure a place on their own, which most report preferring. Instead, they have to live with roommates. This inherently denies them of the freedom of choice in where and how to live, and makes further treatment of any underlying physical or mental health issues difficult.

There are limited subsidies available through Vancouver Coastal Health via the Mental Health Team, the Homeless Prevention Program, through higher income assistance programs, such as the Persons with Disabilities benefit, and through BC housing, such as SAFER. However, the eligibility criteria, limited time of the subsidies, and low availability of some subsidies keep them out of reach of most clients, and are further limited by programs like SAFER excluding those who collect income assistance. For those who are fortunate enough to receive a VCH or Homeless Prevention Program subsidy, the time is usually limited to 6 months to a year, which is not enough time to make significant changes to help these clients not need the subsidy in the future, and can put them at risk of becoming homeless again.

There are also unluckier clients, such as a middle aged female who does not present with mental health challenges severe enough to warrant a VCH subsidy, and does not fall into the HPP criteria of fleeing violence, being a youth transitioning from foster care, being discharged from an institution, or aboriginal. Her age and physical health also mean she cannot collect SAFER or Persons with Disabilities benefits. She is currently homeless, and any housing searches she attempts are a constant decision making process about which of the things she wants in a home she is willing to live without, which does not provide a supportive environment for making any other changes in her life. As of last week, we count 53 clients in this situation of not meeting criteria.

I am hoping the planning committee will be encouraged to explore options for subsidies to be made available for Richmond residents in this situation. There is good evidence that supports the use of subsidies for individuals like this, if they are made available broadly and have a longer time period of up to three years. The evidence also shows that these are a cost effective option when compared to the cost of an individual experiencing chronic homelessness on the health, justice, and social services systems. This is also a key recommendation made by Dena Kae Beno through the report titled "Examining Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Options" presented to this committee in May of last year, which identifies the potential development of a Cooperation Agreement for a pilot project as a way to make these subsidies available to vulnerable Richmond residents for up to 3 years.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

