

To Linda McPhail

May 4th, 2015

Planning Committee

Please find attached some information regarding work that the City of Vancouver is doing to collect information about vacant houses in Vancouver.

The data base would help the City of Vancouver understand the impact of vacant houses and track the affect that they have on neighbourhoods.

Given that the affordability of housing in Richmond has become problematic for buyers and the negative effect ghost houses have had on existing neighbourhoods I would like to refer this information to staff for comment.

Thanks very much

Carol Day

Empty home on your street? City of Vancouver may soon have a website for that

BY JOANNE LEE-YOUNG, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 27, 2015

A home that sits empty on Commercial Drive, according to beautifulemptyhomes.tumblr.com

Photograph by: beautifulemptyhomes.tumblr.com , .

VANCOUVER -- The City of Vancouver plans to develop a new website in a bid to tackle the growing issue of vacant homes.

It will be a digital service where the public can report vacant homes "in a coherent fashion," according to a memo from the city's chief housing officer, Mukhtar Latif, which was made public Sunday.

Addresses of empty residences will be matched up with BC Hydro data, the memo adds.

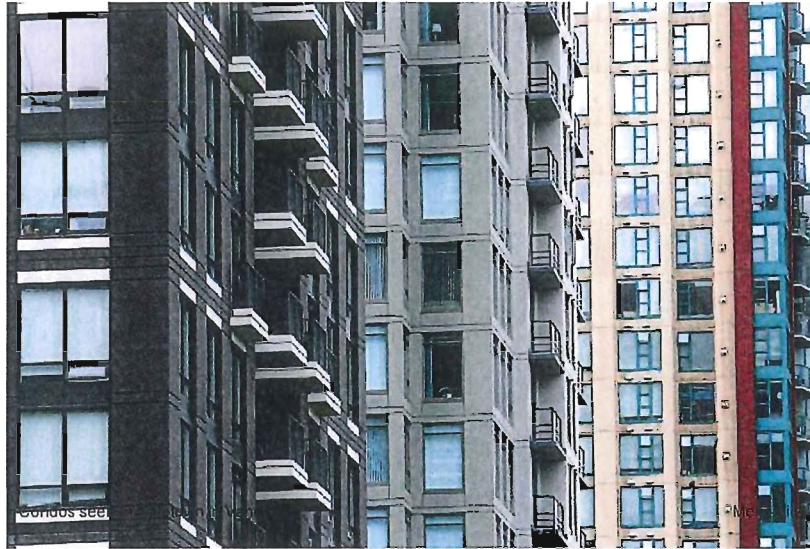
"There is significant public interest in the issue of homes being left vacant given affordability challenges across the housing continuum and very low rental vacancy rates together with the impact on vibrancy of neighbourhoods," wrote Latif.

Latif has identified reasons why homes are being left vacant in a list that shows how difficult it is to get a handle on this hot topic.

City website will let residents report vacant homes in Vancouver



(<http://metronews.ca/author/mkleitka/>) By Matt Kleitka (<http://metronews.ca/author/mkleitka/>)
Metro



The City of Vancouver wants to develop a website that would allow residents to report vacant homes.

The news comes from an April 20 memo sent to mayor and council from the city's chief housing officer, Mukhtar Latif, who was asked to look into the issue of vacant homes during the city's housing crisis.

Latif outlined the lack of data and limited research available, and writes a website that allows the public to report vacant homes – which would then be paired with BC Hydro data to confirm homes are indeed vacant – would be helpful.

"We've all heard people asking why Vancouver is so expensive and telling us to look at all these empty houses. It's a persistent question, so let's get to the bottom of it and find out," Coun. Kerry Jang said on Sunday.

Jang said he often receives feedback from frustrated residents blaming vacant homes and prospective foreign owners on Vancouver's high housing prices, but the city is unsure whether those claims are justified and to what extent.

Jang said he personally is unsure whether those claims are true or not.
"That's what we're trying to find out," he said.

Latif's memo cites two studies that try to get a handle on the issue.

Using 2011 census data, the Urban Futures Institute reported 6.7 per cent of the city's apartment dwellings are unoccupied (it's seven per cent across all Canadian metro areas).

Bing Thom Architects' Andy Yan studied 2009 hydro data and surmised five to eight per cent of downtown condos are "dark".

Neither study looks at vacant detached homes.

The city says it has had difficulty identifying data sources that can provide exact numbers, though it is working with Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to try to understand the issue.

The Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency has also issued a request for proposals from consultants to help investigate vacant housing.

If the data shows vacant homes are contributing to rising housing costs and low rental supply, Jang said the city would look for solutions with provincial and federal partners.

Other jurisdictions, including Australia and the United Kingdom, have experimented with restrictions and additional levies on foreign ownership of real estate.

According to CMHC's 2014 market rental report, the city's rental vacancy rate is just 0.5 per cent.

The average cost of a detached home in Vancouver is now more than \$1.9 million, according to a recent Vancity report.