

November 8, 2016 Planning Committee, City of Richmond

My name is Deirdre Whalen and my address is 13631 Blundell Road Richmond.

I am here to speak on behalf of the **Richmond Poverty Response Committee (PRC)**. The Richmond PRC is *“a coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects and public education.”*

We commend city staff on their well-researched and informative reports regarding the Metro Vancouver Regional Housing Action Plan and the update on the Richmond Affordable Housing Strategy. Many of our concerns around affordable housing for low-income individuals and families were heard and appear in both reports.

It is evident that the gap between rent and income is becoming wider. And while people on extremely low incomes may qualify for government rent supplements, these supplements can only be applied to market rental accommodation, not subsidized housing. But if they can actually find a unit, the supplement still doesn't cover the gap. Add to this that over 600 Richmond families sit on the waitlist for subsidized housing for years (eg. BC Housing), and it should be clear that Richmond has an immediate need for affordable rental accommodation.

In Richmond the average household income is about \$60,000/year so “affordable” means rent should be no more than 30% of gross income. But finding housing for \$1500/month is almost impossible. And with the very low vacancy rate, the task of finding any rental housing in Richmond is almost insurmountable.

Richmond is overdue for the building of affordable purpose-built rental housing. The report says 22.4% of our residents are low-income and our population is over 200,000 (this is about 45,000 people). The report also tells us there are only 3,477 units of purpose-built rental housing. In addition, much of the rental housing we depend on was built 30 years ago and many owners are contemplating demolition. Yes we do have some newer purpose-built rentals (eg. Riverport Flats and Imperial Landing) but I don't think anyone can say they are “affordable.”

The Richmond PRC agrees with the report in noting the City's Social Development Strategy states the need for workforce housing. The report says 70% of Richmond residents own their own homes. We have become a lopsided city and more rental options should be provided if Richmond is to be a complete community that includes all income levels and all demographics.

Concerning the percentage of affordable units secured under the Affordable Housing Strategy, we understand the City of Vancouver has a target of 20% affordable units per development. Providing only 5% affordable units will never meet the immediate need for housing let alone Richmond's housing needs into the future.

Lastly, the Richmond PRC is heartened to see the City acting on a recommendation we made concerning the coordination of housing services. Our hope for a long-term solution would include a housing authority to administer a variety of rental accommodation services.

The Richmond PRC would recommend the City consider the following actions:

1. Find a way to cover the rent gap for low-income individuals and families;
2. Protect the current stock of purpose-built affordable rental units;
3. Build more purpose-built affordable rental properties that will stay rentals in perpetuity;
4. Increase the percentage of affordable housing units in the Affordable Housing Strategy; and
5. Establish a local Housing Authority or similar entity.