

December 8, 2015 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**. 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.”

In reading the Affordable Housing Strategy and the Staff Report it was a walk down memory lane. For those who may not know, Richmond PRC has seen affordable housing as one of our key aims since our inception in the year 2000. One of the first advocacy actions of the Richmond PRC was to urge City Council to develop a **Standards of Maintenance** bylaw for Richmond rental properties. *excellent*

Then in 2008-2009, the PRC developed and monitored the **Homes For All - Study Circles** project with the Richmond Civic Engagement Network and the City of Richmond.

In 2009 the Richmond PRC started the **Richmond Homeless Connect** event with their Faith Housing Group task force. It is now organized and carried out by the Richmond Homelessness Coalition and we had our 7th successful event in October 2015.

In 2010 we organized the “**Building Hope**” **Housing Forum**, inviting 15 housing specialists from Metro and beyond to speak about their challenges and successes and new ideas for housing. Actions arising from the Forum included the creation of a **Drop In Centre** and the **Richmond Homelessness Coalition – Homes For All**. As founding members of both of these initiatives, the Richmond PRC remains active at these planning tables.

In viewing the stakeholder groups in the AHS update staff report I note that the Richmond PRC is not specifically mentioned. But in understanding our commitment to affordable housing, I hope you will include us!

Although the AHS has met many milestones, it is now evident that it needs an update. The Richmond PRC would recommend the Housing Action Plan consider the following:

1. Join BC municipalities in urging the provincial government to increase rent supplements for low-income individuals and families as well as increase the income ceilings for these supplements.

The current affordability gap is getting bigger and people have to use money earmarked for food, transportation, childcare and utilities to fill that gap every month.

2. Work with developers to prioritize the building of purpose-built affordable rental properties that will stay rentals in perpetuity.

The current 5% AH units in new developments is not keeping up with the need for affordable rental units. In addition, demolition of older, but perfectly sound single family homes housing two families is creating a dearth of affordable options for low-income families. Finally, encouraging the building of secondary suites does not necessarily translate into rented-out affordable housing units. The Richmond PRC's Rental Connect project found only 70 landlords out of the thousands of secondary suites that were willing to rent at below market.

3. Investigate the feasibility of establishing a local Housing Authority or similar entity.

The purpose of authority would include coordinating activities such as: ease of administering affordable rental units in new developments; providing a snapshot of vacant rentals with private providers (eg. Caprent); creating a one-stop shop for renters seeking accommodation; establishing uniformity in eligibility criteria for renters.