

Written and Oral Submission to City of Richmond Public Hearing November 15, 2021

My name is Deirdre Whalen, and I am a long-time resident of Richmond. I have been asked by the Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition (RPRC) to speak on item # 2: 0260 (Low End Market Rental Housing Program).

RPRC members include individual Richmond residents as well as several local non-profit organizations representing hundreds of low-income clients and/or members. We are committed to reducing poverty levels in Richmond starting with adequate and affordable housing.

The Coalition does not have an opinion on whether 10% or 15% is the proper percentage for city centre LEMR units. It is a start but it does not get at the nub of the issue, which we believe is to provide truly affordable housing in Richmond based on documented need.

And here are our reasons why. Recently the RPRC established a Housing Committee. We are examining many issues, including reviewing City of Richmond documents such as the Affordable Housing Strategy where 'Low End Market Rentals' or LEMR units are defined.

Firstly, we discovered that the 2007 Affordable Housing Strategy stated '*affordable subsidized rental housing*' as its No. 1 priority and it had a target of 73 affordable subsidized rental housing units per year. Now LEMR has become the Strategy's first priority.

Secondly, we looked for a target number of LEMR units so we could understand exactly how many LEMR units have been provided since the establishment of the Affordable Housing Strategy in 2007.

The numbers we found troubled us, as we read the following documents:

- The Affordable Housing Strategy (2017-2027) states that 429 LEMR units are secured,
- The City's 2019 Market Rental Policy states there are 798 LEMR units (257 have occupancy), and
- The City's 2021 Affordable Housing Guide references 383 LEMR units.

These numbers represent the number of LEMR units provided in a 14 year period - not a lot, no matter which number is correct.

We also noted that anyone looking for a LEMR unit were advised to contact each property manager directly. These contacts include developers, housing societies, and even someone called 'Eric.'

The Coalition sees two issues with the foregoing:

1. If the City doesn't know how many LEMR units have been created, how can they know when their target has been achieved. Is there a target number?

2. This ‘hands-off’ approach is not transparent and opens the LEMR tenancy process to abuse. There is no oversight and as the City directive states, *‘the City of Richmond does not keep a waiting list for LEMR units.’* Perhaps they should.

The Housing Committee also found that there are **838 on the BC Housing waiting list** looking for subsidized housing in Richmond. The Coalition agrees this number is more realistic of the real need out there.

We hear lived experience stories every day from the people we serve – people who live in the market-driven rental supply. For example the Food Bank states that 52% of their clients are in market rentals. Only 5% are in subsidized housing.

Thirdly, we note that even when LEMR units are let, they are rented out at 10% below market (2017 rates). Seeing that in Richmond market rents are ridiculous, this ‘affordable’ housing is really only affordable for a select few.

Finally, we note that LEMR units can be moved offsite through a ‘special circumstance,’ so there is no guarantee these LEMR units will actually be built in city centre.

In conclusion, the RPRC encourages City Council to revisit the whole LEMR process and the Affordable Housing Strategy to ensure the ratio of market to non-market subsidized supply is what Richmond actually needs.

Thank You,

Deirdre Whalen

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