

JUST Housing

Richmond's Affordable Housing Newsletter



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Faith Forum 2007

Faith Communities and Affordable Housing

Something new is happening in the streets of our towns and cities. For a growing number of Canadians being without a home has become a grim reality. Social experts and governments alike are struggling to understand the nature and scope of this unprecedented trend. You see the homeless shuffling behind a shopping cart that carries their possessions. You see them sleeping in a doorway, a park bench, or under a bridge. Some have called this a disaster of third world proportions. These are part of Canada's growing underclass---the Urban Refugees. (Urban Refugee 2006)

On February 27, the Richmond Poverty Response Committee hosted an evening for pastors and lay leaders to discuss the need for churches to engage in Richmond's housing ministry. It was held in the evening at Fraserview Mennonite Brethren Church on

Mellis Drive. About 45 people attended from a number of different Richmond Churches.

Lorne Epp, Executive Director of More Than a Roof Housing Society from the Mennonite Brethren Community, told us how his community had constructed about 400 low-income homes in BC, in partnership with BC Housing. He showed the excellent video

Urban Refugee, which is

now available free through their website More than a Roof or by e-mailing info@morethanaroom.org.

While watching More than a Roof, we saw Judy Graves, who has worked with the homeless for the past 15 years, helping the "living out". She said that her greatest concern was that we have

more people living outside than places available inside. Judy also stated that over the last ten years, BC has seen a decrease in the low-income housing that is being built as the church community has



not been able to partner with the Federal government. This has led to the churches helping with food and other band-aid solutions rather than with housing.

Hector Com spoke to the group as well. He who lives in Richmond's Dockside Village, a development that meets the needs of single parents, new immigrants, and people with disabilities. It was built by More than a Roof. Com told of his family's experience coming to Canada, inspiring many by what he said.

After listening to these two informative speakers we formed small groups to discuss questions about housing. Following this lively discussion there was a debriefing with a number of groups suggesting working together ecumenically. Since the time allotted that evening had run out the group did not have time to discuss what might be done together. A number of participants expressed an interest in discussing this further both at the meeting and on the questionnaire filled in that evening.

This group continues to meet on a regular basis; new members are welcome. If you are interested in participating, please leave voicemail for our Project Coordinator, Lynda Brummitt at 604-205-4700.

Deneanne Quamme

Mission Statement

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee is a coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects, and public education.

When will Richmond Stop Exporting its Homelessness Problems?

It is five years since the homelessness report was adopted by Richmond City Council. What has it achieved? In 2002 the City of Richmond with a grant from the federal government undertook a study of the needs for its most vulnerable citizens. The resulting report "It's My City Too!" provided a clear picture of Richmond's homelessness problem. Richmond provided so few services for people in crisis that homeless people are driven from the community. Our minimal shelters do not even provide access to all categories of people seeking shelter and even among target groups shelters turn away many people. There is a lack of affordable housing, a lack of services for families, immigrants and people with mental health issues.

The report proposed a strategy to tackle this problem. First it proposed a vision and seven guiding principles:

Vision: Richmond is an inclusive community that provides a wide range of services for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. The City takes a proactive role in developing affordable housing as a means to prevent homelessness. The City works with the business community, local faith organizations, community service organizations and the general public to find innovative methods of combating homelessness at the local level.

Guiding Principles

- *Responsibility: commitment to taking responsibility for Richmond's homelessness and those at risk of becoming homeless;*
- *Services: when Richmond residents become homeless necessary services will be available;*
- *Inclusiveness: this is an inclusive, caring community: We can do more;*
- *Housing: a commitment to addressing deficiencies in emergency housing;*
- *Housing: provide transition housing to fill the void between emergency shelter and permanent accommodations;*
- *Awareness: the community should be more aware about homelessness, find appropriate solutions and take preventative measures; and*
- *Partnerships: groups, including the business community, faith communities and local service providers, must work as partners.*

This was followed by a 12 step action plan:

Theme 1 – Upgrade and Increase Emergency Shelter Capacity

P1 - Richmond House Emergency Shelter

P2 - Nova House Transition Shelter

P3 - Family Emergency Accommodation

P4 - Youth Emergency Housing

Theme 2 – Create Supportive Housing for At Risk Groups

P5 - Second Stage Housing for Women and Children

P6 - Second Stage Housing for Single People

P7 - Supported Independent Living

Theme 3 – Increase Community Awareness

P8 - Community Awareness Strategy

Theme 4 – Increase Support to Local Services

P9 - Support Services Coordination

P10 - Financial Support for Local Services

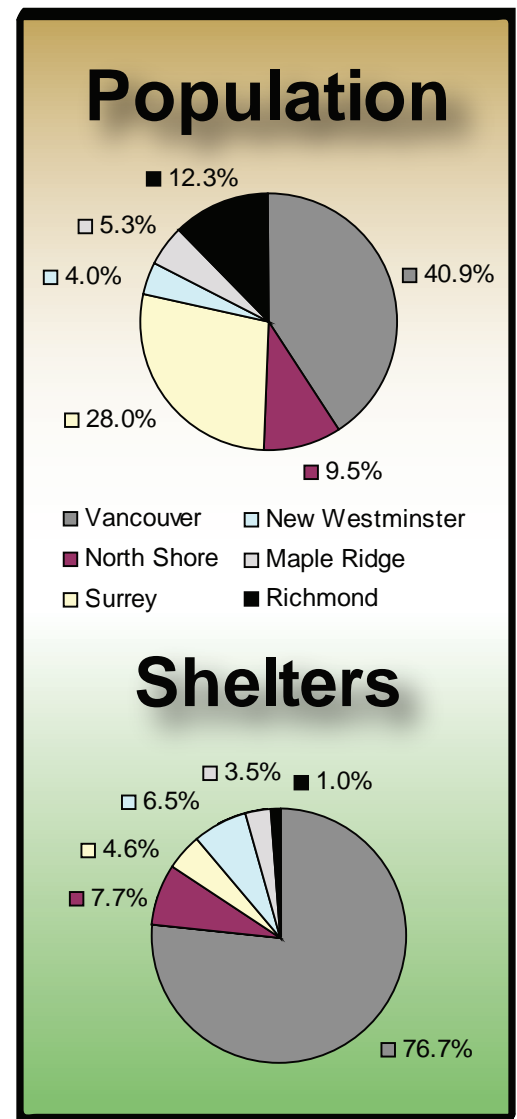
Theme 5 – Continue Leadership on Affordable Housing

P11 - Affordable Housing Strategy Review

P12 - Private Rental Housing

[from: "It's My City Too!" A study of the Housing Needs of Richmond's Most Vulnerable Citizens, CitySpaces Consulting Ltd., May 2002]

It is now five years later and Richmond is only taking preliminary steps to meet the goals of the report. While it is praiseworthy that the city has gotten behind the proposals for a Women's Shelter and Youth housing it is long overdue. Support has to continue until the projects are completed. There have been a number of projects recently that have begun with great fanfare but have never reached completion. In the meantime the problem has grown. Richmond prides itself on being a healthy community, but a healthy community provides support for all its citizens.



Provincial Politicians Have Been Getting Off Far Too Easy!

Under the constitution housing is a provincial responsibility. While we expect all levels of government to contribute to building affordable housing, the main responsibility must fall on the provincial government. And they have failed us.

Our local Richmond MLA's have provided little support for housing issues. During the ongoing struggle between tenants and landlord at Richmond Gardens Apartments they have been ineffective. They claimed to stand up for the tenants, but they provided little actual relief. Indeed support from MLA Olga Illich was an offer to help them find a new place and meager rent subsidies. MLA John Yap also was less than supportive. Questioned about the evictions he was quoted in the Richmond News "Could Amacon, as a corporate citizen, show more compassion? Sure, they could. But who am I to judge what is their right as business to conduct themselves?" He added the government's approach to housing is not to interfere with the market. Thankfully, while our MLA's didn't give the rights of the tenants a second thought, our court system did.



Richmond's affordable housing crisis needs a made in Richmond solution. Currently we are sending far too many of our community away to find shelter and housing. This is wrong in so many ways: It offloads the costs onto other communities; It pushes away Richmond residents at their time of need; It leaves many service and entry level jobs vacant or filled by commuters; Mostly though it is just the wrong way to handle housing people in need. To build a Richmond that is vibrant, healthy and safe, we need to build a community that takes care of issues like housing in Richmond. We need to keep people at risk of homelessness close to their support system of family and friends. Anyone working in Richmond should be able to live in Richmond. We need our provincial politicians to fight to make this happen.

Recently the BC Government has been spending millions of dollars buying single room occupancy buildings in downtown Vancouver. While this is an important and necessary step, it is not dealing with the problem at its source. We need to provide housing for people before they migrate to the Downtown Eastside. Once a person has left Richmond and moved downtown their problems will typically multiply.

Richmond's MLA's need to start fighting for Richmond based solutions to the housing crisis. We need the provincial government to understand our problems and we need the government to provide resources to Richmond

David Reay

For more information, or to be added to the Poverty Response Committee, Affordable Housing Task Force or Food Security Task Force mailing lists, please contact us:

Richmond Poverty Response Committee
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Have you ever met
**a person who
was homeless?**



For Dolores, support services, an adequate income and affordable housing made the difference between homelessness and a home.

Homelessness, together we can solve it.

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Greater Vancouver Regional
Steering Committee on
Homelessness

