



RICHMOND POVERTY REDUCTION COALITION

Housing Standing Committee

One Year Progress Report

August 2022

Prepared by
Deirdre Whalen
on behalf of the RPRC Housing Committee

INDEX

I. History and Work of the Housing Committee	page 3
II. R.E.N.T. Campaign	page 4
III. R.E.N.T. Roundtable	page 4 - 5
IV. Roundtable Findings	page 5 - 8
V. Summary and Conclusions	page 8 - 9

THANKS TO

Housing Committee Members: Alex Atkinson, Belinda Boyd, Karen Caley, Donna Colpitts, Theresa Head, Susan Johnsen, Joanne Long, Kathryn McCreary, Emma McGarry, Linda Rosas, and Jessica Smart-Abbey, De Whalen.

R.E.N.T. Roundtable Volunteers: Alex, Belinda, De, Donna, Irina, Jessica, Joanne, Sarah, Sandra, Theresa.

R.E.N.T. Roundtable Participants: Ann, Chandni, Dhalia, Flojo, George, Krista, Linda, Lucy, Merlita, Nooria, Scott, Tony, and Tristan.

I. History and Work of the Housing Committee

In August 2021, the Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition (RPRC) established a standing Housing Committee to investigate housing issues and challenges for Richmond residents living on low-incomes. Members of the RPRC were invited to join the committee, and in time other non-members joined to provide more insight into the challenges with Richmond's rental housing supply. The committee currently has 11 members.

Work in 2021 included studying the City of Richmond's Affordable Housing Strategy (AHS)¹ and the City's LEMR (Low End Market Rental) - their answer to affordable housing.

On two occasions, the committee invited City housing staff to answer questions that came up through our study (total number of units, number occupied, re-tenanting process, rent ranges) but were advised to go to the City's LEMR program policy,² and to the City's Affordable Housing Guide, which merely lists LEMR units.³

In early November 2021 the committee appeared before City Council regarding the LEMR program asking for the total number of units, a target number to achieve per year, and a transparent process so the City and the public know how LEMR's are used. They also noted the BC Housing waitlist was over 1,000 Richmond households and growing.

The City produced a 2021 Housing Needs Report in late November, a mandatory report to the provincial government from all municipal governments. The RPRC spoke to the report in December, saying it is comprehensive and confirms the observations and recommendations the RPRC has been telling city Council for years.

The report noted that, of over 49,000 units built in the past 30 years, only 6% have been purpose built rental. Added to that no non-market rental has been built in the last five years. The Committee's suspicions were correct and they agreed to use this document as a reference ongoing.⁴

In 2021 the RPRC also advocated to the City for the Richmond Caring Place II proposal (with rental housing), the Brighthouse United Church proposal (100% rental), the Bridgeport modular housing development (40 supportive studio units), and the Pathways Clubhouse development (supportive housing plus low-end rental).

¹ https://www.richmond.ca/shared/assets/City_of_Richmond_Affordable_Housing_Strategy54955.pdf

² <https://www.richmond.ca/shared/assets/info5159495.pdf>

³ https://www.richmond.ca/shared/assets/2021_guidelines_update56240.pdf

⁴ <https://www.richmond.ca/shared/assets/housingneeds59652.pdf>

II. R.E.N.T. Campaign (Richmond Electors Needing Tenancy)

2022 brought with it the Housing Committee's desire to engage in a campaign to fully engage people with real lived experience of rental challenges, and to educate the general public on the crucial need for non-market rental housing. The RPRC membership endorsed the R.E.N.T. campaign. The goal of the campaign is to urge Richmond City Council to make non-market rental housing their number one priority in the next term. Campaign phases to date have included:

- Naming the campaign R.E.N.T. (Richmond Electors Needing Tenancy)
- Writing letters to local papers
- Making presentations at City Council
- Meeting with city staff, councillors, developers, and housing advocates
- Researching best practices in other cities
- Inviting earned media from local news to report on our progress and actions
- Engaging Richmond residents in the first R.E.N.T. event in June 2022

The R.E.N.T. Campaign was launched with an RPRC presentation to City Council on July 11, 2022⁵ It will continue to the October 2022 municipal election, and beyond that the RPRC will keep a watch on Council's actions around non-market housing.

The RPRC presentation to Richmond City Council urged the City to undertake three initiatives:

- Actively pursue and secure federal, provincial, and any other accepted sources of funding to develop non-market housing and shelters using City-owned land,
- Order a full LEMR (Low End Market Rental) Review, and develop a LEMR Housing Registry and wait list for all LEMR units, AND
- Reduce the number of Richmond residents on the BC Housing wait list by 50% within five years (2027) by using rental tenure zoning and innovative partnerships to build sufficient housing for Richmond residents on the waitlist.

The R.E.N.T. campaign will continue through the summer and fall, with plans that include letter writing, meetings with municipal candidates, a rally, and a panel discussion with housing experts.

III. R.E.N.T. Roundtable

On June 29, 2022 the Housing Committee organized and hosted an event at the Richmond Food Bank and invited food bank clients to share their experiences, ideas, and actions.

After a nourishing dinner provided free of charge, the 13 participants broke into three tables to discuss questions posed with guided facilitation and notetaking. There were 10 volunteers assisting in this event.

⁵ <https://www.richmondprc.org/richmond-poverty-reduction-coalition-launches-rent-campaign/>

Initial discussion focused on their **experiences** in seeking affordable rental housing. Further discussion drilled down into their **ideas for change** and **collaborative actions** they would be willing to support and take part in. The group parted with good intentions of working together on the campaign. Many participants also signed up for various Actions in the campaign.

IV. Roundtable Findings

A. Experiences: The conversations around experiences confirmed many of the Housing Committee's findings, such as high cost of housing, discrimination, and landlords overstepping their rights. Other concerns surfaced, such as the appropriateness of housing, and health and safety concerns.

Notes collated from the three tables on Experiences are:

-> Landlord Rights, Responsibilities and Behaviour:

- When you begin to search for housing it initially seems as if there is a lot available but when you contact landlords, you just don't hear back
- No continuity in terms of what landlords ask prospective renters for
- The process of choosing a potential renter should be more equitable and transparent
- Insecure housing – landlord can evict for various reasons eg. relatives moving in, etc.
- Landlords asking for extreme things like screenshots of bank accounts
- Rents keep rising
- Giving “renoviction” notice

-> Housing Not Appropriate, Not Suitable, Not Safe

- Rent is \$800, home isn't habitable, there are rats, and no hot water but I can't find another place
- Gave up after prolonged search, am now living in a homeless shelter
- Renting a dump, but can't find another place that is habitable and affordable
- Those housing units they could afford were dirty and had vermin
- Renting an older affordable LEMR unit
- Living in development that is ageing and they might need to be rehoused
- Can't find housing, afraid of having to go to a shelter and feel “unsafe”
- Can't find housing that is safe, or leaving housing because of safety concerns
- Residence unsafe and needing repair

-> Equity issues

- People on assistance aren't given a fair shot
- Discrimination against those on social assistance (violation of human rights code)
- Discrimination/ Stigma – low income, income source, etc.
- Discrimination/ Bias based on race
- Not understanding that disability can be invisible (PWD recipient not “looking disabled”)
- Too many restrictions- no pets, no overnight visitors, no smoking, women only, students only, professionals only

-> Navigating the System

- Difficulty navigating the system to receive financial aid, disability assistance, or to physically visit potential housing sites
- Living in a shelter as a last resort
- Employed but due to illness and to ICBC issues was unable to work

B. Ideas for Change: The conversations around ideas for change also confirmed the stories the Housing Committee had heard over the last year, such as the need for more supports to navigate the system, a one-stop-shop, and housing options for people on very low-incomes. The group brought forward other ideas for change, such as a hotline to report abuses by landlords, limits on what landlords can ask for, and legislation on same.

It was interesting to note that education for landlords and tenants ranked high on their ideas for change. Many years ago, the RPRC ran a project called ‘*Richmond Rental Connect*’ for three years. That program is now administered by Chimo, although the education workshops for landlords and tenants on the Residential Tenancy Act has been discontinued.

The group had many ideas around the creation of more affordable housing, such as housing with rent geared to income (RGI), more co-operative housing options, a City Rent Bank, and the City creating its own Housing Corporation. These models are ‘best practices’ in other Metro cities. Other ideas included disincentives for developers to encourage them to build the right supply.

Notes collated from the three tables on Ideas for Change are:

-> Education

- Education for both landlords and tenants on the specifics of what is and is not allowed before, during, or after a tenancy
- Make BC “Rent It Right” and “I Rent It Right” programs mandatory **

-> Supports

- A community navigator that people can go to for help with all their housing needs
- One-stop-shop where they can receive help in every aspect of their search for, or issues with, housing in Richmond. **
- More help with crisis funds and more help finding housing
- More support/access for the “average” renter (not the addicted or disabled)
- More support from MCFD eg. one social worker to deal with while searching for housing
- Outreach worker to accompany/transport clients to prospective housing sites
- City rent bank or subsidy
- More community help to assist in locating housing
- For Richmond to keep the affordable housing listings up to date
- Health issues – unable to work full time or at all
- Expensive medication

**** Note:** People thought these were priority items

-> Hotline

- Place where people can report slum landlords or landlords doing questionable things so they can be held accountable
- Ensure properties are kept up to code
- Ensure that properties are being made available to the general public in a fair and equitable manner

-> Advocacy

- External advocacy for renters
- Better/more advocacy for renters
- Less of a power imbalance (landlords have the power)

-> Legislation

- Re: rental caps
- Legislation (like Ontario) that denies landlords the right to refuse pets
- Have specifics re: rules and regulations in terms of what landlords and renters can post online when seeking a tenant or seeking housing.
- Being out-bid when trying to rent (someone else offers more)

-> Possible Housing Solutions

- More LEMRs
- Open up/confiscate empty apartments for renters at affordable prices
- Impose a tax/ penalty on apartments left empty after a certain period of time
- More new buildings that have subsidized (30% of income) rent
- For the city of Richmond to have its own housing corporation
- Less “mega houses” being built, and the land being used instead for affordable housing
- Modular housing
- More subsidized housing for those unable to work
- More basic no-frills housing
- Local housing authority
- More cooperative housing based on shared needs or interests
- Recognition of developers who create affordable housing units

C. Collaborative Actions: The conversations around collaborative actions were free flowing and invited participants to voice their ideas on what they as a group could do. The Housing Committee had two actions they wanted participants to enlist in; a Tour of City Hall, and Tell your Story.

Every table said it was important to vote! Common actions included educating themselves and the general public, finding a municipal champion to take their concerns seriously, and having the courage to speak out and tell their stories.

Many people signed up for a City Hall Tour. Some told their stories and were interviewed by the Richmond News at the event. Participants also signed up for Other Actions, including Getting people on the Voters List, Working on a newsletter, and Leafleting for R.E.N.T.

Notes collated from the three tables on Collaborative Actions are:

-> Educate

- Reach out/ educate younger population on the affordable housing crisis and get them to vote
- More clarification and transparency re: landlord/ tenant rights
- Understanding disputes and Residential Tenancy Branch and how the final decision is made
- More workshops like this one
- Educate the general public on the affordable housing crisis and urge them to vote

-> Vote – period!

- If more people would vote for those in local government who will support and champion the cause of affordable housing

-> Find Elected Champions

- Need to find/ensure there are people in positions of power (local government, BC Housing, etc.) who are taking this issue seriously, especially in terms of how it affects people's mental health

-> Promote the Need/ Tell your Story

- Newsletters
- Write letters
- Attend rallies
- RENT promotions: t-shirts, bookmarks, leaflets
- Join organizations like RPRC
- Continue to find ways to collaborate and come together
- Attend City Council meetings and make your voice heard
- Try to be transparent and open about your own story/ journey but also with the media
- Share information with others

V. Summary and Conclusions

The RPRC Housing Committee has accomplished a lot in a short period of time. Members are committed to finding solutions to the affordable housing crisis in Richmond. They meet monthly and they regularly email each other about projects in Richmond and best practices in other Metro cities. They investigate housing models and contact non-profit housing providers in Metro Vancouver to help inform their research. They are focused on the Richmond housing scene and they advocate for improvements to City housing policies and for affordable, appropriate, and suitable housing options for all Richmond residents.

From its inception the Housing Committee knew they had to convince the general public the City could do better. They knew the best way to do this was to provide data but also give credence to stories of lived experience. The Housing Committee understands both aspects are needed in order to sway public opinion and in turn, show City Council they must make the changes necessary for Richmond residents to be housed safely and in dignity.

The work of the Housing Committee is to be commended. In a year, they have uncovered the City's less than stellar efforts in providing affordable housing. They have given Richmond residents with lived experience of housing horrors, a place to speak out and be validated. And they have initiated and are leading a housing campaign to bring to light how Richmond could be doing a better job of providing Housing for All.

The R.E.N.T. campaign will host a Panel Discussion for the general public in the fall, inviting housing experts to speak about best practices in their respective areas. The R.E.N.T. campaign will ask each Council candidate for a commitment to the RPRC's three recommendations. Then they will keep track of their voting records once a new Council is in place. Should the City Council not heed the RPRC recommendations, the Housing Committee will do their best to advocate to City Council on the continued need for housing for low-income Richmond residents. There is also discussion of a Housing Report Card that could be in the works for 2023.

The Housing Committee seeks the endorsement of the RPRC Board of Directors for this progress report.

Respectfully submitted by

Deirdre Whalen
President, RPRC