

Affordable Housing

Municipal councils can take a leadership role in supporting the provision of affordable housing in their communities.

Municipal councils can take steps to urge the federal and provincial governments to commit funding to safe, affordable housing.



Very little new affordable housing stock is being built in BC communities. Due to an erosion of existing market rental housing stock through conversion, demolition and redevelopment, as well as lagging incomes that have not kept pace with rising housing costs, many BC communities are facing a housing affordability crisis. Approximately 44% of renters and 23% of owners in BC are spending more than 30% of their income on shelter. The 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count reported 2,647 homeless people, an increase of close to 20% since 2005, and a jump of 131% since 2002. It is estimated that there are

over 10,000 homeless people in BC. A healthy community is one that is inclusive, with a range of housing types and prices, and a balance of living and working opportunities. Communities throughout BC are facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified employees, including professionals such as teachers, nurses, as well as emergency, fire rescue and policing staff, because of the lack of affordable housing. People with moderate incomes are feeling the affects of the increasing lack of affordable housing, living farther away from their place of work, impacting the environment, traffic volumes and their quality of life. Some communities are experiencing significant “graying”, with very few young families moving in and schools closing. In October 2006, the BC government introduced its provincial housing strategy, *Housing Matters BC*. In 2007, 225 new supportive housing units were completed through the program with promises of more

“ A healthy community is one that is inclusive, with a range of housing types and prices, and a balance of living and working opportunities. ”

than 4000 additional units over the following years. The province is expecting municipalities to contribute to building these units and has signed agreements with Vancouver, Surrey, Kelowna, and Victoria. Municipalities will contribute based on their own plans for how to go about addressing their unique situations. Differences in geographic regions, population diversity and density, and the type of industry and economic base available will change how each municipality approaches building affordable housing.

Some municipal councils have taken leadership roles in supporting the provision of affordable housing in their communities. They have provided land at below market rates to non-profit housing providers, negotiated with developers for affordable rental units during the rezoning process, established housing funds, and introduced regulations prohibiting rental conversion and controlling demolitions. They have also supported creative responses from the development industry, including laneway housing and shared equity ownership programs.

Other municipalities have done very little. The upcoming municipal elections are your opportunity to choose a council that will ensure that your community maintains or builds a diverse range of affordable housing stock. ■

What steps will you take to create an affordable housing plan for the community?

How will you improve supportive housing for people with addictions and mental health issues?

What will you do to ensure that the community is involved in the planning of affordable housing?

For More Information:

Metro Vancouver Housing Research
www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/housingdiversity/Pages/default.aspx

Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre
<http://www.tenants.bc.ca/>

www.sparc.bc.ca/resources-and-publications/category/45/affordable-housing-a-homelessness