

Municipal Report Card on Housing and Homelessness

This report card was prepared by the Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre (TRAC). We receive feedback from tenants and community advocates on a daily basis allowing us to monitor the difficulties faced by tenants in different municipalities around the province. We have an on-going dialogue with housing groups and governments regarding the problems facing tenants and possible solutions for safe, affordable rental housing. This report card is a result of our observations. In the face of a worsening problem of affordable housing availability and homelessness, none of the GVRD municipalities have been given an A.

The Need for a Local Government Role

Starting in 1992, the provincial government introduced changes to the then Municipal Act, giving local governments a variety of tools designed to increase their powers to support the creation of affordable housing in their communities or to preserve the existing rental stock. However, local government uptake of these tools has been mixed and, as we stated in our 2002 report card, many are still unwilling to participate because they saw it as downloading of responsibility from senior levels of government, or they did not recognize the growing housing problem in their community. Some of the tools only work with partnerships from senior levels of government, but some, such as secondary suite by-laws and Standards of Maintenance by-laws, are solely a municipal responsibility.

There has been no uptake on Standards of Maintenance By-laws by most of the GVRD municipalities since our 2002 report card. Municipalities should and could prevent blighting or purposeful deterioration of some of their existing rental stock by establishing requirements for maintenance standards in rental buildings.

There are many things that municipalities can do without help from senior levels of government. We have looked at local governments in the GVRD over the past few years and given each municipality a grade based on our perception of how they are approaching the worsening problem of affordable housing and homelessness. None got an A and one failed.

How do we get all GVRD municipalities to recognize they are equally responsible for ensuring affordable housing? How do we get them to realize the value of their existing rental stock and to prevent its sometimes purposeful deterioration? How do we get all municipalities to value the secondary housing market, such as secondary suites and

different types of infill housing? Can this only be done by some form of mandated regional standards? Or should the provincial government pass more prescriptive legislation to direct planning, housing and land use issues for the entire province? The current system isn't working.

While we recognize that municipalities are discouraged by the diminishing senior government role in providing adequate funding, significantly more housing must be constructed in the region to meet the ever-growing demand, and it

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—Premier Gordon Campbell

should be recognized that the GVRD requires coordinated planning. It is estimated that there will be another 400,000 people in the GVRD by the year 2021. The biggest challenges that local governments face are NIMBYism, unrealistic Official Community Plans (OCP's), and the length of approval times for developments. Many are locked into a system of planning and approval that is forty years out of date.

As Premier Campbell recently stated, "we simply can no longer afford not to make better use of our local land base, not to shrink processing times, not to reduce the burden of fees and not to build smaller units."

Without equitable development, diversity and density standards throughout the entire region, the economy will be hurt. Businesses will suffer if employees cannot afford to live here. We need substantially more housing—not just non-profit but also affordable rental units and entry-level affordable market housing—to meet the demand.

There has been some significant movement recently by some municipalities, most notably Richmond and Surrey. There is an increased awareness that municipalities do have an important role to play.



Grading

We graded 16 municipalities in the Greater Vancouver Regional District based on the following criteria: permitting and/or legalization of secondary suites; how they attempt to preserve their existing rental stock through a Standards of Maintenance by-law; the steps they take to provide affordable housing; and how they tackle homelessness. As in our last report card, consideration was given to the fact that not all municipalities have the same resources or the same opportunities for involvement in social housing. In this report card, we have included the number of applications on the BC Housing waitlists for the respective municipalities. The number of applications reflect the serious shortage of affordable housing available in both the private and non-profit rental markets. The average rent and vacancy rates are taken from tables 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 of the CMHC *Rental Market Report* for 2006. The numbers of tenant households, tenants paying more than 30% of their income on rent, and the percentage of tenants at risk of homelessness is based on the 2001 Census as calculated in *Affordable Housing Supply Analysis Municipal Consultation Results* which was prepared for the GVRD Policy and Planning Department by McClanaghan and Associates in 2005.

Burnaby

C-

Average rent \$940 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$915 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.8% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 1.0% in 2005

31,720 tenant households making up 43% of the population

29% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent

12% of tenants at risk of homelessness.

1,448 applicants on BC Housing waitlist (950 families, 248 seniors, 250 special needs)

Burnaby does not permit secondary suites. They cite liability concerns even though immediate neighbors (Vancouver, New Westminster and Coquitlam) have legalized suites. There are no Standards of Maintenance by-laws to help preserve existing housing stock although they say they are considering one, and recently received a 450-signature petition from their citizens to adopt one. Many problems with slumlords in the Edmonds area. Burnaby could be more proactive here and in other areas - by going after the causes instead of the effects.

Burnaby has secured a few units of Special Needs Housing through density bonusing provisions for community amenities, an approach they say they are expanding. Good. They take a strange position on homelessness. Still no shelter and one New Westminster Councilor accused Burnaby of pushing the homeless to those municipalities with shelters. However, the municipality recently agreed to partner up with several housing organizations to find suitable sites for transitional and supportive housing and possibly even a shelter – as long as the provincial government pays for it. A shelter and transitional housing are long overdue! The city is looking at the site of the former Women's Correctional Centre for affordable housing.

Coquitlam

C+

Average rent \$850 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$816 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.7% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 3.4% in 2005

11,710 tenant households making up 30% of the population

29% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent

12% of tenants at risk of homelessness

546 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (374 families, 93 seniors, 79 special needs)

Secondary suites are permitted in Coquitlam, with stringent criteria – which they are thinking of softening. Still no Standards of Maintenance by-law to help preserve existing stock. They recently produced an excellent report/strategy for affordable housing that should be required reading for all municipalities in B.C. (Available on the city website.) The report suggests the city use its land holdings to help meet affordable housing needs; minimize regulatory barriers for residential developers; increase awareness of Coquitlam’s housing needs and keep affordable housing on the city’s policy agenda. Acceptance of this document stalled at City council. But at least it is out there and will serve them well in the future. They have endorsed the regional homelessness plan, but they have no shelter or transition house yet. We hope they work closely with the other two Tri-City municipalities on homelessness and other social issues that affect them.

Delta

F

Average rent \$914 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$854 in 2005
1.4% vacancy rate (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 8.3% in 2005
6745 tenant households making up 21% of the population.
26% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent.
10% of tenants at risk of homelessness.
176 applications on BC Housing waitlist (105 families, 32 seniors, 39 special needs)

Delta has not legalized secondary suites but they charge extra utility fees for them anyway. So much for a basic step in the Livable Region Plan. (Nine years ago the Supreme Court of BC ruled Delta’s policy on secondary suites for family members only was discriminatory.) There are no Standards of Maintenance by-laws to protect their existing stock. While they have endorsed the regional strategy to combat homelessness, they have taken little action. There is tremendous NIMBY pressure in the south of the municipality. It will take real leadership to get extra density, creative projects and more development and infill in some areas.

Delta’s new OCP is a bit light, to say the least, on affordable housing. The section on Housing and Neighborhoods contains encouraging words and phrases, such as, “encourage a range of housing types...” and “consider incentives, such as a bonus density, to encourage the provision of seniors’, rental or special needs housing.” Monitoring, encouraging, identifying and considering housing and housing types is great. Let’s see where it goes.

Langley City

C-

Average rent \$839 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$815 in 2005 (City and Township)
Vacancy rate 1.5% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 1.1% in 2005 (City and Township)
4,225 tenant households making up 42% of population
35% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent
15% of tenants at risk of homelessness
220 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (141 families, 38 seniors, 41 special needs) (City and Township)

Langley City finally authorized secondary suites. What took so long? A City poll in 2004 showed 81% supported suites. (Residents showed little concern about legalizing suites—only four people showed up at the public meeting.) There are no Standards of Maintenance by-laws to protect existing stock, despite having a large percentage of renters. A lot of their rental stock is aging and will be under re-development pressures. Langley could be more proactive here because redevelopment pressures on older rental stock will come. They endorsed the regional homelessness plan and there has been talk of developing a homeless shelter in conjunction with the Township of Langley. And they will now see some money and perhaps a shelter from the new provincial Housing Matters strategy. The strategy was released by Housing Minister Coleman who is from the area.

Langley Township

C-

Average rent \$839 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$815 in 2005 (City and Township)

Vacancy rate 1.5% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 1.1% in 2005 (City and Township)

4620 tenant households making up 16% of population

27% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent

11% of tenants at risk of homelessness

220 applications on the BC Housing waitlist: (See Langley City)

Langley authorized secondary suites recently. The enabling by-law allows homeowners to put in a second set of cooking and laundry facilities. Suites can now be legally built and registered with the Township. No Standards of Maintenance by-laws to protect existing rental housing stock. No new non-market housing has been built in Langley in some time. Major development going in around Fort Langley: single family homes, row houses and condos. No mention of any affordable housing. Could they have got a few affordable units through density bonusing? Much the same as the City of Langley on efforts to deal with homelessness. We hope they take advantage of provincial money to deal with homelessness.

Maple Ridge

C+

Average rent \$772 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$768 in 2005

Vacancy rate 2.4% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 5.6% in 2005

5,025 tenants household making up 22% of the housing stock

35% of tenants who pay more than one third of their income for rent

14% of tenants at risk of homelessness: 14%

242 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (160 families, 48 seniors, 34 special needs)

Secondary suites are permitted in Maple Ridge. They do not have a Standards of Maintenance by-law to help preserve existing stock. The District has been supportive of the non-market housing built there in recent years although there is a need for more to be built. Maple Ridge has endorsed the regional homelessness plan and has a transition house and emergency shelter. The current mayor has made it a priority to take care of the indigenous homeless. Good. Finally, hats off to the residents of the Silver Valley area of Maple Ridge. They actually lobbied and won council approval for higher density housing in that area so that they could have a village centre and more shopping in the area. The mayor suggested doubling the density by adding legal suites to single family homes, now that's good—and Smart Growth.

New Westminster

B-

Average rent \$862 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$820 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.6% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 1.5% in 2005

13,515 tenant households making up 52% of the population

31% of tenants paying more than 30% of their income for rent

13% percentage of tenants at risk of homelessness

564 applications on the BC Housing wait list (288 families, 120 seniors, 156 special needs)

New Westminister allows secondary suites. They have a standards of maintenance by-law. They negotiated an affordable housing project through density bonusing in the Upper Town, and Council showed some practicality and leadership in resisting NIMBY pressures against the project. They have endorsed the regional homelessness plan and seem to be actively trying to deal with homelessness. They have several shelters.

North Vancouver City

C+

Average rent \$1,010 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$976 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.6% (2 bedroom) in 2006, unchanged from 2005

10,720 tenant households making up 52% of the population

25% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent

11% of tenants at risk of homelessness

*503 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (262 families, 121 seniors, 120 special needs)

*(North Vancouver City and District)

North Vancouver City permits secondary suites. They have a Standards of Maintenance by-law to protect existing housing stock. They get bonus marks for trying to take an inventory of their existing rental stock as they realize that much of it is 'old growth' and is not being renewed. As the city is nearly 'built out', there will be conversion pressures on some of their older stock. Much redevelopment on the waterfront, but not for affordable housing as they claim the sites are too small—a little more effort here is required.

North Vancouver City is part of the North Shore Homelessness Task Force and played an active role in opening a shelter. The City is aware of present and future housing problems. The City has shown some leadership in dealing with strong NIMBY pressures. They negotiated an affordable housing project on the old Lions Gate Hospital lands. They recently sponsored an affordable housing conference and most councilors appear to be proactive. The current council also floated the great idea of allowing secondary suites in duplexes.

North Vancouver District

C

Average rent \$1,078 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$1,052 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.7% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 0.0% in 2005

6,090 tenant households making up 21% of the population

23% of tenants paying more than one third of their income for rent

11% of tenants at risk of homelessness

503 applications on the BC Housing waitlist. (See above City of North Vancouver)

Secondary suites are legal in all single-family neighborhoods and the municipality has wisely resisted some minority pressures to change their suite policy to make it less inclusive. They have a Standards of Maintenance by-law. No initiatives in new non-market housing for some time. A lot of their rental stock is vulnerable, especially in the Lynn Valley area where land costs are high. While not unanimous, Council recently approved the conversion of a 46-unit rental building for redevelopment to a 135-unit condo project and 32 new rental units. Some councilors expressed concern that many of the 46 families who lived there will not be able to afford the new rentals. Will more conversions of this type come? The District is an active player in the North Shore Homelessness initiative and contributed to the homeless shelter.

Port Coquitlam

C+

Average rent \$850 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$816 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.7% (2 bedroom) 2006, vs. 3.4% in 2005

4,505 tenant households making up 25% of the population

34% of renters paying more than one third of their income for rent

13% of renters at risk of homelessness

184 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (123 families, 28 seniors, 33 special needs)

Secondary suites are legal. There are no Standards of Maintenance by-laws to help protect existing stock. They seem to take social issues a little more seriously than the other two Tri-city members—their recently-released Port Coquitlam Social Housing and Services Strategy states they “score higher than their neighbors in providing affordable and seniors’ housing, special needs and other non-market homes and recovery beds” and that “they should work with Coquitlam and Port Moody to offer a transition home of shelter for Tri-City homeless.” However, we wish they hadn’t made it difficult for the Salvation Army to put in some extra recovery beds to make a proposed rehab project viable. Politicians were concerned about perceived neighborhood opposition.

Port Moody

C+

Average rent \$850 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$816 in 2005

Vacancy rate 0.7% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 3.4% in 2005

2,000 tenant households making up 23.5% of the population

23% of renters paying more than one third their income on rent

7% of renters at risk of homelessness

68 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (41 families, 13 seniors, 14 special needs)

Port Moody allows secondary suites. There are no Standards of Maintenance by-laws to help preserve existing housing stock. They endorsed the regional homelessness strategy. A few years ago, they contributed \$750,000 in land to the Inlet Centre, a well-designed affordable housing project that combines seniors’ housing, a hospice, family housing and housing for mature women. We hope they will work closely in the future with the other two Tri-city members on homelessness and other social issues.

Richmond

C+

Average rent \$1,069 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$943 in 2005

Vacancy rate 3.7% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 3.1% in 2005

16,315 tenant households making up 29% of the population

26% of renters paying more than one third of their income for rent

12% of renters at risk of homelessness

692 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (417 families, 185 seniors, 90 special needs)

Much concern about the recent displacement of almost 200 tenants due to a form of gentrification of rental housing, where the owner evicted for renovations to get higher market rents. Council struck an affordable housing task force that made some interesting recommendations which seem to have the support of council. Their interim report slaps a moratorium on the demolition or conversion of all rental housing. Also, the city has developed some solid definitions of affordability, as well as targets. The strategy allows for flex or convertible housing (a form of legal suites). The strategy encourages developers to provide affordable housing in their developments or pay in lieu. A permanent plan is expected in a few months.

Richmond is seriously considering adopting a Standards of Maintenance by-law in response to a landlord who turned off the heat on his tenants, many of whom were disputing a well-publicized eviction for renovations. If passed, a single by-law infraction could result in a fine of up to \$10,000 for each day the by-law is violated. Landlords could also face up to six months in prison. Richmond has one shelter. They are embarking on an affordable housing strategy for seniors.

Surrey

C-

Average rent \$815 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$778 in 2005

Vacancy rate 2.8% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 4.9% in 2005

32,745 tenant households making up 30% of population

32% of tenants who pay more than one third of their income for rent

12% of tenants at risk of homelessness

1,425 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (984 families, 195 seniors, 246 special needs)

The new mayor and council have had to face a lot of housing realities that were not dealt with by the previous councils. The announcement that they plan to take a more active role in procuring affordable housing for low-income residents is good news. Surrey will now set up a homelessness fund that will be overseen by an existing foundation. More than eight million dollars in the municipal affordable housing fund will be transferred to the City of Surrey Homelessness Fund. This fund will be used to provide seed money for non-market housing proposals for low-income residents, those requiring supportive housing and special needs housing. Surprisingly, long-term councilor, Marvin Hunt, recently announced that the City will consider legalizing secondary suites. Surrey should also adopt a Standards of Maintenance by-law as this is the next logical step to preserve the existing stock from disinvestment.

Vancouver

B-

Average rent \$1,243 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$1,194 in 2005

*Vacancy rate 0.4% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 1.0% in 2005

*(The vacancy rate is actually 0.0% for the West End and Kitsilano)

131,420 tenant households making up 57% of the population

28% of renters paying more than one third their income for rent

12% of tenants at risk of homelessness

4,056 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (1,826 families, 1,022 seniors, 1,208 special needs)

Secondary suites were recognized in 2003 following public consultation. Over two days of public hearings, only 13 speakers signed up, all of them in favour of legalized suites. (Vancouver also gets higher marks for its Standards of Maintenance by-laws to help protect existing housing, although maybe it should be strengthened as disinvestment in existing rental properties is becoming widespread as land values increase.) The City was an active player in the creation of new non-market housing under the old Homes BC, and has been involved with the limited federal/provincial programs of recent years. The City contributed money and land and used other tools such as density bonusing and amenity contributions for the creation of non-market housing. The City passed a conversion and demolition by-law to help save the vulnerable SRO stock. There is now a demolition fee if SRO rooms are demolished or converted and redevelopment applications must go to Council for approval. However, this alone may not be enough to protect the remaining SRO stock. The city claims that it has 19 sites set aside for non-market housing.

Vancouver has endorsed the regional homelessness strategy, and has shelters and transition houses. We'd give them a higher grade if it weren't for their decision on Southeast False Creek. Much of the nearly decade-long public planning process that endorsed a one-third, one-third, one-third mix of housing was diluted to 80% market and 20% core need. It may be a good move by Mayor Sullivan to propose a ballot initiative in the next election for an affordable housing levy and encouraging other municipalities to do so. (Much like the one in Seattle.) Vancouver realizes that some other municipalities are not doing their share about affordable housing. The Capital Regional District has a housing levy, but less than half of its municipalities bought in. Without some provincial 'big stick' approach, this will be the case in the GVRD.

West Vancouver

C

Average rent \$1,590 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$1,548 in 2005
Vacancy rate 0.0% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 0.1% in 2005
3,835 tenant households making up 23% of the population
23% of renters paying more than one third their income for rent
13% of renters at risk of homelessness
81 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (36 families, 29 seniors, 16 special needs)

West Vancouver has not legalized secondary suites. They do not have Standards of Maintenance by-laws to help protect existing housing stock. While this type of by-law may not be as needed in West Vancouver, they may need a conversion by-law as redevelopment pressures on some of their low-density rental stock will surely come. West Vancouver participated in the North Shore Homelessness Task Force. The city kicked in for a recently opened 72-unit assisted living project. NIMBYISM a very powerful factor in this affluent municipality.

White Rock

C+

Average rent \$909 (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. \$892 in 2005
Vacancy rate 0.0% (2 bedroom) in 2006, vs. 0.5% in 2005
3,240 tenant households making up 36% of the population
34% of renters paying more than one third of their income for rent
17% of renters at risk of homelessness.
66 applications on the BC Housing waitlist (24 families, 21 seniors, 21 special needs).

White Rock legalized secondary suites a few years ago with little opposition. They do not have a Standards of Maintenance by-law, and in fact they turned one down a few years back citing lack of resources. There has been no non-market housing built in some time and they did not get around to endorsing the regional plan to fight homelessness. They have struck a Housing Diversity Task Force and have some councilors who are able to look ahead and see the need for this. There are intense NIMBY pressures in the community which could be overcome with better leadership.



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