
Present:

Councillor Kooner, Chair
Councillor Stutt, Vice-Chair
J. Cuenca
J. Gosal
C. Izsak
M. Mubanda

Regrets:

N. Atwal
M. Rooney

Staff Present:

T. Waterhouse, General Manager, Community Services
A. Murphy, Acting Manager, Housing and Social Development
C. Brown, Housing Planner, Housing & Social Development
S. Lee, Administrative Assistant

Guests:

E. Armitage, Lead Organizer, BC ACORN
L. MacFarlane, Co-Chair, Newton ACORN
A. Sadowska, North Surrey ACORN Member

A. ADOPTIONS**1. Adoption of the Agenda**

It was Moved by J. Gosal
Seconded by Councillor Stutt
That the agenda of the Livability and Social
Equity Committee meeting of April 19, 2023, be adopted.
Carried

2. Adoption of the Minutes – March 15, 2023

It was Moved by J. Gosal
Seconded by Councillor Stutt
That the minutes of the Livability and Social
Equity Committee meeting held on March 15, 2023, be adopted.
Carried

B. DELEGATIONS**1. Emily Armitage, Lead Organizer, BC ACORN, Leslie MacFarlane, Co-Chair, Newton ACORN, and Adriana Sadowska, North Surrey ACORN Member**

The delegation provided a presentation regarding the City's Standards of Maintenance Bylaw and highlighted the following information:

- Through tenant complaint surveys focusing on current maintenance issues in Surrey's purpose-built rentals, ACORN has received over 310 responses from 54 apartment buildings across Surrey since last year. According to preliminary results, more than 98% of respondents had at least one ongoing maintenance issue, 50% of tenants had an ongoing pest infestation, and many tenants reported having to wait months or years for basic repairs and resorted to doing repairs or paying for pest control treatments themselves after their maintenance requests were ignored. Building-wide issues, such as overall lack of cleaning in common areas or ventilation problems, were common throughout many larger apartment buildings in North Surrey.

- Most rental buildings in Surrey were built in the 1960s to 1970s and many have fallen into disrepair. Based on a case study of one building, it was found that lack of funds is not often an issue for the landlords since the rental building was owned by one of BC's largest developers. The tenants in this building have complained about issues such as leaks and mold and appliances that do not work, but were offered only temporary solutions, such as replacing a broken appliance with another old appliance with potentially the same issue. The long-term tenants perceived the lack of repairs as targeted since they do not bring as much rental income as a new tenant would. Moving was also not an option as rent prices have increased drastically throughout the region. As a result, the tenants suffer from physical and mental health issues.
- To prevent degradation and maintain the current housing stock, a simple and cost-effective recommendation would be to review and strengthen the current Standards of Maintenance Bylaw in Surrey by including the most reported maintenance problems such as pest infestations, broken appliances, and plumbing problems. This in turn would protect tenants from unhealthy and unacceptable conditions. In addition, since the current Standards of Maintenance Bylaw is not well understood by tenants, many issues are not reported to the City and landlords are not incentivized to do routine maintenance and repairs. The City was therefore recommended to consider:
 1. Broadening the scope of the Standards of Maintenance Bylaw; and
 2. Implementing landlord licensing which would create an enforcement system for the Standards of Maintenance bylaw and provide the City with more regulatory tools to do proactive inspections of buildings before issuing or renewing licenses.

J. Cuenca joined the meeting at 6:17 p.m.

In response to questions from the Committee, the delegation provided the following information:

- Tenants often refrain from going to Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) because they are afraid that the landlord will fabricate another reason to evict them. If they go to the RTB, it will likely be months or years before their situation could be resolved due to backlogs and the system being overloaded. In addition, enforcing the rulings from RTB is an issue as the landlord may choose not to follow the orders in which case the tenant has to go to small claims court.
- It was recommended that landlords be required to follow the same increased standards to maintain a landlord license as restaurants are required to maintain restaurant licensing. For example, the City of Toronto has RentSafeTO program where the registration and renewal fee is charged per residential unit from landlords. If the landlords decide to indirectly pass down the cost of licensing fees and related expenses to the tenants, it will be a nominal amount for the tenant as opposed to the benefits they receive, such as not suffering from chronic issues like mental health problems or respiratory illness due to issues such as mold. They are already paying increased rent even without the maintenance.

- When it comes to housing, the City does not have much jurisdiction. The Standards of Maintenance Bylaw is a way where the City can make a big impact on the quality of life for the tenants in Surrey by providing an avenue where the residents can contact the City when their landlords are not doing repairs.

It was

Moved by Councillor Stutt

Seconded by J. Gosal

That staff provide a report to the Committee for consideration on the current Standards of Maintenance Bylaw with statistics on complaints and enforcement, and to provide options to strengthen the current bylaw without negatively impacting the tenants.

Carried

2. **Aileen Murphy, Acting Manager, and Christa Brown, Housing Planner, Housing and Social Development, Community Services**

Staff provided a presentation on housing needs and strategies, existing and in-development non-market housing stock, and current initiatives. The following information was highlighted:

- The Housing and Social Development Division focuses on non-market housing that is primarily operated by non-profit or government agencies, and includes emergency shelters, transitional and supportive housing, other types of supportive rental housing, and non-market rental housing. The division also works with the Planning Department on policies and regulations relating to affordable housing or vulnerable renters.
- The Surrey Housing Needs Report, adopted by Council in March 2022, compiles data from the 2016 census and other data sources, along with results from community consultations, on current and anticipated housing needs in Surrey. The city has an immediate need for 17,900 affordable rental housing units and over the next ten years, the city will need 18,600 new homeownership units and 22,600 new rental units, with 13,700 non-market rental units, 4,000 near-market rental units, and 4,800 market rental units. The report overall shows that Surrey does a good job at the creating new supply of diverse housing stock, with over 3000 to 4000 new units per year in recent years. The most pressing housing needs are for rental housing and especially affordable rentals for low and moderate income households.
- The Surrey Affordable Housing Strategy has a focus on rental housing. The four key strategies are preventing the loss of purpose-built rental housing, strengthening protection for tenants, encouraging the development of new purpose-built rental housing, and increasing the supply of housing affordable to renter households with low to moderate incomes. When this strategy was adopted in 2018, the City adopted a new policy that sets out the requirements for redevelopment of purpose-built rental housing and provision of assistance to tenants when redevelopment occurs. In addition, the Affordable Housing Contribution of \$1000 per residential unit was introduced to support the development of additional non-market housing.

- Surrey is currently developing a Homelessness Prevention and Response Plan to replace the Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey which was adopted by Council in 2013. This plan will focus on looking city-wide at homelessness including the needs in each of the six communities in Surrey, and the diversity of the homeless population, and will identify solutions including looking at the needs in terms of new housing stock or supportive housing units and looking at more coordinated responses with various government agencies and non-profit partners. A key part will be the City developing partnership with federal and provincial government agencies. This plan is currently underway with the background research and the development of an engagement strategy. The engagement is anticipated to happen between May to July this year, and part of the plan is to engage the Committee. Staff will also bring the results of the most recent point-in-time Metro Vancouver Homeless Count conducted in March 2023 to the Committee when the results are available in the fall of this year.
- Surrey has seven supportive housing developments that have opened since 2021 and they represent 326 supportive housing apartment units and 86 shelter beds. Three developments were developed as modular construction technology which speeds up the delivery of these types of projects. The City is expecting an additional 90 supportive housing units in 2023, with 30 units for youth in the Pacific Community Resource Society (PCRS) housing project and 60 units for people at risk of homelessness in Safe Sleep. In terms of affordable housing, Surrey opened Legion Veteran's Village in 2023 with 91 apartment units which prioritizes rentals for veterans and first responders. They also lease space to organizations that provide services to veterans. Surrey has a few projects underway that represent another 624 non-market affordable housing units across six developments. This includes two projects with 279 apartment units for Indigenous individuals and families.
- The Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) is a federal initiative administered by Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) and is intended for the rapid construction of new permanent affordable housing. The third round of CMHC RHI funding was announced in November 2022, and the City has been allocated \$11.4 million to provide 23 units of permanent supportive housing in Surrey for individuals experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Staff are waiting for project approval which is anticipated by May 15, 2023. If approved, the project would be constructed rapidly and anticipated to be occupied by November 15, 2024.
- The CMHC Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) will provide \$4 billion in funding to Canadian municipalities across the country and the goal of the program is to provide more than 100,000 housing units. The purpose is to incentivize local governments to accelerate the rate of growth of housing supply. To be eligible for the funding, municipalities must develop an action plan to achieve a committed housing supply growth target. There are additional incentives for building certain types of housing such as multiple unit housing, missing middle housing, and affordable housing units. Staff are currently preparing the application which will be submitted in June 2023.

In response to questions from the Committee, staff provided the following information:

- The City's requirement for new residential housing units to contribute \$1,000 per unit to the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund came into effect in April 2018. The fund currently has a low dollar value because all projects that were in-stream at that time were not impacted with this change, and new project applications that were submitted afterwards have taken a while before they are fully approved and the fees are collected. The fund will increase based on the number of units that are developed in Surrey. Market and non-market rental housing are excluded from having to pay these fees. This fund will be applied to support the development of new non-market housing. However, the City needs more money in the fund to be able to go to Council to identify the specific criteria for its use. It was also acknowledged that \$1000 per unit seemed too low, especially due to inflation since 2018.
- Based on the discussions with CMHC staff on the Housing Accelerator Fund, staff have guidelines on what the action plans need to include to qualify on funding. Staff will submit their action plan first to Council for approval and then to CMHC for review. The City has a general idea of how much funding they will qualify for, but it is not something they could make public or be specific on until they have prepared the action plans to match those criteria and get them approved. Staff will report back to the Committee once more information is available.
- New buildings with affordable units are generally under six storeys because wood frame construction is more affordable than concrete. Anything over six storey needs to be concrete buildings which increases the cost exponentially. Mixed-income housing projects are a common approach in new non-market housing projects as units with higher rents can off-set the more subsidized units, and the mixed rental levels within a building can create a diverse and healthy community.
- According to the last Homeless Count in March 2020, 644 individuals were homeless in Surrey. This result was most likely an undercount because it is challenging to find people, they may not want to participate in the count, and the hidden homeless (such as youth, women, or women with children) may not be captured. Taking into account the hidden homeless, Surrey's homeless population in 2020 was estimated to be 2,254 individuals.
- One of the reasons why there were relatively fewer purpose-built affordable housing units in the past few decades is that the Federal government withdrew from funding new social housing in the early 1990s. However, that has started to change with housing affordability being a priority for both the Federal and Provincial Governments, and this is the time for Surrey to catch up on building more affordable units. The Homelessness Prevention and Response Plan will quantify the number of units needed to make homelessness rare, brief, and possibly extinct.

- An interesting and consistent result in the Homeless Count reports has been that the majority of homeless individuals in Surrey are from Surrey. They are generally Surrey residents. In addition, it was also found in the 135A Street project (homeless encampment) led by the City of Surrey with BC Housing in 2018 that most homeless individuals who were present on 135A Street had been in Surrey for years. They would occasionally cycle in and out of homelessness because they did not have the stability and the services that are required to allow them to maintain their housing.

C. OUTSTANDING BUSINESS

1. Annual Workplan Draft

It was

Moved by J. Gosal

Seconded by Councillor Stutt

That the Livability and Social Equity Committee

support the Annual Workplan as presented.

Carried

D. NEW BUSINESS

This section had no items to consider.

E. CORRESPONDENCE

This section had no items to consider.

F. INFORMATION ITEMS

This section had no items to consider.

G. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Committee Member Updates

No updates were provided.

H. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Livability and Social Equity Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, May 17, 2023.

I. ADJOURNMENT

It was

Moved by J. Gosal

Seconded by Councillor Stutt

That the Livability and Social Equity Committee

meeting be adjourned.

Carried

The Livability and Social Equity Committee adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Jennifer Ficocelli, City Clerk

Councillor Kooner, Chairperson