

**MINUTES OF THE
RENTERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 15, 2020**

YUKA KUROKAWA CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 5:07 P.M.

Committee Members Present: Alieda Blandford, Vanessa Hammond, Amy White,
Yuka Kurokawa (Chair)

Apologies: Leslie Robinson

Councillors: Jeremy Loveday

Guest Speakers: Chelsea Fiorentino – Research Coordinator,
Community Social Planning Council
Margaret Forbes – Senior Researcher, Community
Social Planning Council

Staff Present: Lindsay Milburn – Senior Planner, Housing Policy
Ryan Shotton – Citizen Engagement Coordinator
Ayla Conklin – Secretary
Katie Lauriston – Administrative Assistant

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Amy White, that the September 15, 2020 Agenda be approved as presented.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

2. ADOPTION OF THE MEETING MINUTES

August 12, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Alieda Blandford, that the August 12, 2020 Meeting Minutes be adopted as presented.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Staff provided the Committee with the following updates:

- Council approved the updates to the *Tenant Assistance Policy* (TAP), including the provision for moving cost compensation to be reviewed at regular intervals. Tenants may request a different moving cost rather than what is presented by the landlord.
- The *Rental Property Standards Maintenance Bylaw* (RPSOM) was approved by Council.

- Additional provisions added to the bylaw resulting from the Committee's recommendations and to match other municipalities. Once the bylaw receives first and second readings, there will be a public comment period where tenants and landlords can provide feedback on the bylaw.
- Staff have recommended that the Tenant Ambassador oversees the work of this bylaw.
- There are no enforcement provisions within the bylaw, as enforcement will be undertaken by the province.
- This bylaw is on track to come into effect in January 2021.
- The Engagement department will provide online tools and assist with clear communication regarding this bylaw.
- The Tenant Ambassador position is scheduled for recruitment in January 2021.
- Lindsay Milburn is moving on from the City of Victoria for new endeavors. Hollie McKeil will continue as the liaison.

4. COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL PRESENTATION

Chelsea Fiorentino and Margaret Forbes of the Community Social Planning Council presented a new report, *Under Pressure: The rental housing experience of seniors living in James Bay, Victoria*.

- Chelsea described the project and their organization:
 - Research partnership for service and program delivery to promote health and well-being. Partnered with James Bay New Horizons and local seniors.
 - 31 question survey provided to seniors in James Bay. Survey represents concerns regarding rental market and allows them to share their experience.
- Margaret discussed the main conclusions of their project:
 - Low to moderate-income seniors are facing a significant crisis of affordability, security of tenure, and rent stability. Based on neighbourhood projections for growth due to aging and in migration this crisis will only increase.
 - James Bay has many features that are desirable to seniors on fixed incomes.
 - There needs to be a larger focus on seniors housing in the community and across Victoria.
- Chelsea provided recommendations:
 - Development of more affordable rental housing in James Bay geared towards seniors.
 - James Bay seniors' rental housing navigator program which could provide advocacy, information, and assistance.
 - James Bay food security program (sustained following the pandemic).

The Committee and Community Social Planning Council Researchers discussed:

- Could the work of the recommended Seniors Rental Housing Navigator be fulfilled by the City's Tenant Ambassador position?

- The Tenant Ambassador position will likely not have capacity. The Navigator would link seniors to services, deal with renovation and provide legal support.
- Would a volunteer position be viable to fulfill this role?
 - An application for funding has been filed for the Rental Housing Navigator position through New Horizons. This community centre was initially mandated for recreation and leisure and has taken on advocacy due to the high need.
- Is there opportunity for a posted volunteer position to support this role? Funding is often a barrier for this type of position.
 - Rental Housing Navigator position would be a full-time paid position. There is a challenge for seniors navigating through different services. Navigator would be one liaison for all services relating to seniors.
 - Volunteers would be helpful to expand the program.
- How does the James Bay Land Use Committee feel about developments and density? Is this an area for advocacy? Does the Community Association have The Good Food Box program?
 - This report will be used as a tool for advocacy.
 - There have been some social housing projects that have requested variances from the *Official Community Plan (OCP)* which were voted down. James Bay is scheduled to have local updates to the OCP. The Land Use Committee did not previously have the kind of hard data that this report provides.
 - The Community Social Planning Council is holding a webinar on Oct 7, 2020 to discuss opportunities after their findings and how to achieve their goals.
- There is opportunity to incorporate the new James Bay library with social service delivery. They provide many social services and rely on City funding to run community programs.
- When social determinants of health are considered, after clean air, clean water and nutritious food come safe housing and social connections. Seniors need community more than resources. To maximize the use of scarce land resource, it is worth exploring co-housing, which is not something that is currently available on a rental basis in Victoria and James Bay. Is there any thought given to this?
 - The Community Social Planning Council is hoping to reach out to communities who have explored seniors co-housing to better understand the process.
- Councillor Loveday, City's appointee on the Library Board, advised he supports making connections through the James Bay Library and will support the RAC on this if required.

5. MEMBER REPLACEMENT

Renters' Advisory Committee (RAC) to consider a recommendation to Council consideration regarding whether to replace Committee member vacancies.

Staff advised that RAC has received resignations from Riga Godron and Ashley McKay. Does RAC want to fill those vacancies? Some considerations:

- quorum requirements
- Committee term ends January 31, 2021.

The Committee discussed:

- Not replacing members after the many events regarding membership that have occurred this term.
- Increased input would be beneficial, however there are advantages to having a smaller, more efficient group.
- What is the timeline for recruitment? When would the posting go up and someone join the Committee?
 - Uncertain of a specific timeline. Council would have to indicate the replacement of members, post the positions and recruit. If the decision is to replace, staff can provide RAC with a timeline.
- Committee signaled a timeline for replacement is not required.
- Councillor Loveday to bring the RAC membership motion as an update to Council.

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Vanessa Hammond, that Renters' Advisory Committee recommend that Council does not replace members that have left the Committee in the interest of efficiency for the few meetings that are remaining.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

6. RENTER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

The Committee reviewed the Renter Engagement Toolkit in response to the current COVID-19 context. The Committee considered how current approaches can be adapted to online formats and continue to be effective in reaching renters.

The Committee discussed:

- Is it possible for staff to use strategies that are not described in the toolkit?
 - Yes, toolkit is a guideline and open to flexibility.
- Are there any virtual platforms that are designed for town hall type meetings?
 - The City is launching the new Online Engagement Portal in the coming days. This is a much broader toolkit for engagement than the current portal.
- Opportunity for active renter advocacy online. Suggestion for the City to join established renter advocacy groups on social media (Facebook/Reddit) and create posts there.
- There are barriers associated with online-only engagement. Many demographics may not have access to internet/computer. Are there ways to increase accessibility?
 - The public library provides internet access and free training. There is a lot of work being done regarding tutorials and videos on how to use the new Online Engagement Tool. Socially-distanced tutorials could also be explored.
- Social media is an effective way to reach many people. However, there is a large segment of people who are not on social media. Advertisements on the radio or in newspapers would reach those not captured with online engagement.

- Suggestion for a socially distanced and virtually streamed event at the Cook Street Activity Centre.
 - Staff noted that the toolkit would be updated to include the Committee's recommendations.

7. RENTAL PROPERTY LICENSING BYLAW - EARLY CONSULTATION

Staff will inform RAC of the scope of the bylaw and are seeking RAC's early feedback on the project objectives and engagement approach.

- How can this bylaw assist in preventing renovictions in rental apartments? Strategies include regulating through business licensing and adding provisions from the *Tenant Assistance Policy* (TAP).

The Committee discussed:

- Through the *Rental Property Licensing Bylaw* can the City ensure the TAP is followed for developments other than rezoning? For example, house conversions?
 - Yes.

Discussion questions:

Staff asked: Are there any other conditions that a landlord would need to comply with to operate a rental business?

- What type of bylaws do they need to adhere to currently?
 - For a landlord to obtain a building permit there is a requirement that the landlord adheres to all related bylaws.
- Scope isn't wide enough to include *BC Building Code*? Or is it inherent that they meet building bylaws?
 - Applicants would have to adhere to *BC Building Code* before the permit is completed.
- How are already existing properties affected?
 - Rental businesses must have a license for commercial units. A landlord with a basement suite does not need a license. Enforcement would be incorporated, and it would apply to existing buildings.
- Yuka Kurokawa expressed interest in joining a subcommittee for this topic.

Staff asked: What are the impacts (direct or indirect) of eviction that this policy should address? The number one direct impact is loss of their home. Indirect impacts such as risk of homelessness, financial burden, disrupted social network, stress and health concerns.

What are the impacts of eviction and development on tenants?

- There is an implication that there is a financial problem with the tenant. Even though eviction is not regarding tenant's ability to pay rent.
 - This bylaw would address renovictions only. Staff clarified that a renoviction is used as a strategy for landlords to remove their current tenant to acquire a higher income tenant after the renovation.
- There is a social implication attached to evictions. When tenants search for new housing, future landlords may perceive that a tenant who has been evicted, for any reason, was not paying their rent.
- There is a large social disruption because renters will be forced to leave the city. Members noted personal experience having to leave their neighbourhood when

their rental was demolished. There is major displacement, and the *Tenant Assistance Policy* (TAP) only provides supports within Victoria.

- Staff made distinction between demoviction and renovation. TAP would relate more to demovictions when the building is proposed to be redeveloped through a rezoning application process.
- Other municipalities have a requirement for the landlord to provide financial support to tenants during the renovation. This amount can exceed the initial rent amount. Also, financial support for the right for first refusal for the tenant to return to the unit. Landlords have issue with this. The bylaw is a way to indirectly discourage upgrade, while some buildings do need an upgrade.
- There are adjacent policies to help mitigate displacement. This policy may not be able to address all issues surrounding housing.
- Which rentals are considered businesses?
 - No license is required if the landlord is living in a home with a rental suite. A license is required for apartment buildings and landlords renting out an entire house.

Staff asked: How should the City reach tenants to engage?

- A problem with handouts to renters is the amount of “no junk mail” labelled on mailboxes. It could be an expensive and missed opportunity.
- Opportunity with YAM and other local free magazines.

Staff asked: How can the City best communicate this technical bylaw in a way that is easy to understand for the public?

- General best practices such as visual information, pyramid effect, clear concise language, big bold print.
- Inclusion of populations where English is not their first language. Is it possible for translation?
- Communication from the City includes jargon, acronyms and words that are not easily understood.
- Request that policy/bylaw communications are distributed where there are intersected demographics to confirm if the language is accessible and clear to those who may not have background knowledge on the subject.

Staff asked: How can the City best communicate this policy to landlords and developers to encourage compliance?

- It will be a challenge to communicate that a loss of money for their business is necessary to support renters.
- Members described their personal challenges to humanize the experience to developers.
- There is already a lack of compliance with illegal suites. Finding a way to motivate landlords to comply is a challenge.
 - Staff noted that the bylaw would not apply to secondary suites, which may help to prevent illegal suites.

Staff asked: How could the Tenant Ambassador position support this bylaw? With only one staff member, they will not be managing a case load of tenants/clients. They will be advising on policy and some personal guidance on these issues.

- The Tenant Ambassador could be an information officer with a dedicated phoneline. One day per week to answer calls.

Staff asked: Are there any additional comments?

- Connecting with organizations to target renters of wide demographics. Targeting senior renters.
- How does the City think large business landlords will react to this bylaw? Is there fear surrounding this?
 - Landlords are mounting the appeal against New Westminster in a legal case. The main concern from landlords is that these are punitive measures from municipalities, and that municipalities are overstepping their jurisdiction by duplicating provincial legislation. Another concern is that each municipality will create unique expectations for landlords, above and beyond the RTA. However, municipalities often step in where there are gaps, in order to protect tenants. There may be low support among landlords generally, however many landlords also want to do the right thing and do comply with existing RTA legislation.
- Reaction may differ if the landlord is a company or person. Motivations may be different from a person than a company.
 - Even across property management companies there are different corporate values which will have different responses.
- Legally the obligation for a corporation is to maximize profit for their shareholders. The City should consider advising landlords that by complying with this bylaw it will make it easier for them to achieve their financial goals.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

It was moved by Yuka Kurokawa, seconded by Amy White that the Renters' Advisory Committee meeting of September 15, 2020 be adjourned at 7:00pm.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY