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Fast Lane for Affordable Housing Approvals

VICTORIA, BC — Victoria Council has unanimously passed new legislation to accelerate construction of new affordable housing in the City, following a public hearing this evening.

Projects by non-profit, government or co-op housing organizations will no longer require rezonings or public hearings when they are consistent with the City's Official Community Plan and related design guidelines.

"The change we made tonight will get more affordable homes built more quickly for families, workers and people who need it the most," said Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps. "Council is taking a bold step to remove the uncertainty around affordable housing decisions and cut red tape. It's the first of hopefully many tectonic shifts in how Victoria is improving the housing development process."

Victoria is the first municipality in B.C. to approve a city-wide accelerated process for qualifying affordable housing projects. Developments that meet all the necessary criteria will be permitted to build up to the maximum density in the City's Official Community Plan. It's the first of several major policy moves identified in the City's Housing Strategy to close the supply gap and make homes more affordable, more accessible and more attainable for people living in the city.

"Cities taking steps to speed up approvals for new public and affordable housing makes it easier, cheaper and faster for the province and the federal government to respond to the housing crisis by building the homes that are desperately needed," said David Eby, Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing. "Because of the scope of our housing investments, having a partner at the municipal level who facilitates quick approvals helps get doors open sooner for people living in the streets and parks, and also for people who simply need a more affordable place closer to work. A special thank you and recognition are due to Victoria's Mayor and City Council for taking this important and meaningful step to accelerate approvals of affordable housing."

All City approvals will now be delegated to staff, including development permits and variances. This change is expected to cut about nine months off current timelines for a typical project, and even more for others.

With residential construction cost inflation running at more than one per cent a month, according to Statistics Canada's building price index, that shaves an estimated \$2 million off a typical affordable housing project – a significant saving that can be used to build more housing and provide deeper affordability.

“There are three key factors that put affordable housing projects at risk once they enter the municipal approvals process: time, cost and uncertainty of approval,” said Jill Atkey CEO, BC Non-Profit Housing Association. “Victoria City Council removed all three of those barriers and now shines as an example to other municipalities serious about affordable housing in their communities.”

Non-profit housing providers will have more certainty to secure senior government funding that allow homes to be delivered with deeper levels of affordability, without the risk of a project being turned down at a public hearing. This positions the City of Victoria as a strong partner with the federal and provincial governments in the delivery of affordable housing.

Nearly half of Victoria’s 27,000 renter households are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. Recent reports from BC Housing indicate a waitlist of more than 1,100 individuals and families in Victoria in need of affordable housing.

Projects led by non-market affordable housing providers and government partners, such as BC Housing and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, would qualify for the accelerated process. Co-op housing projects could also qualify under the new changes.

Affordable housing projects would have the affordability of rental units secured through a legal agreement with the City.

Since 2018 the City of Victoria has approved more than 900 affordable rental units. The City’s Housing Strategy has a goal to build 2,100 affordable rental homes by 2025.

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