

**MINUTES OF THE
RENTERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 21, 2021**

ALIEDA BLANDFORD CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 6:45 P.M.

Committee Members: Alieda Blandford (Acting-Chair), Vanessa Hammond, Leslie Robinson

Councillors Present: Councillor Sarah Potts

Staff Present: Chloe Tunis – Tenant Assistance Planner
Ayla Conklin – Planning Secretary
Margot Thomaidis – Planning Assistant
Andrew Cusack – Senior Housing Planner

Guest Speakers: Diana Gibson – Executive Director of the Community Social Planning Council

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The committee discussed:

- Request to amend the agenda to include a discussion on engagement and co-housing before the final item.

Motion:

It was moved by Alieda Blandford and seconded by Leslie Robinson that the September 21, 2021 Agenda be approved as amended.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

2. ADOPTION OF THE MEETING MINUTES

June 15, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Motion:

It was moved by Alieda Blandford, seconded by Leslie Robinson that the June 15, 2021 Meeting Minutes be adopted as presented.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. UPDATE ON NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER RECRUITMENT

Recruitment of eight new members who will attend the October meeting to discuss an updated work plan and meeting schedule for 2022. Chloe Tunis, Tenant Assistance Planner, will be on parental leave November 2021 forward and a replacement is being recruited.

The committee discussed:

- Suggestion to send the RAC recruitment advertisement to the Credit Unions for their Social Action Committees.

4. RENT BANK DISCUSSION CONTINUED

Follow up from the June 15, 2021 RAC meeting to discuss the potential for a motion to support the Rent Bank with their financial request to Council.

46% of applicants are from the City of Victoria. This service is for emergency situations and takes a case-management approach. CRD Reaching Home funds were projected to supply multi-year funding. This funding can only be secured until March 2022. Provincial Rent Bank multi-year funding will be available. This requires an increased match each year from municipalities. Provincial funding is geared towards loans, so CSPC is looking for municipalities to provide supplementary funding for grants. The CSPC received a \$30,000 grant from the City of Victoria this year and will be looking to request additional funding as part of 2022 budget process. They are also requesting funding from Colwood. Municipality supplementary funding for loans and grants would be earmarked towards residents in these municipalities.

The committee discussed:

- Can you advise of the City of Victoria budget discussion timeline?
 - Councillor Potts: Pre-liminary discussions begin in October 2021. Decisions are made in February 2022. April 2022 is the absolute deadline. Sooner is best to bring something forward.
- Hesitation toward Rent Banks because they are a temporary solution for a much larger systematic issue. What is the City doing to reduce rents and support tenants? Disappointment with the lack of engagement targeting tenants, including promotion of the *Rental Property Standards of Maintenance Bylaw*. RAC has discussed a request to financially support Tenant Associations. This has not come to fruition. Rent Bank support would funnel taxpayer money to landlords rather than addressing the core issue. Request for RAC to review further before drafting a motion to support this topic.
- Option for RAC to discuss their top priority funding requests in the October 2021 meeting with new members.
 - Staff will be bringing an initial request, likely in late October 2021, exact date not known. This would be in line with beginning of the larger City budget 2022 process. A RAC motion of support for Rent Bank funding can come after late October and still come forward to Council in time for this budgeting process. The support from RAC can also come afterwards.
- Supporting the Rent Bank doesn't prevent RAC from bringing forward other funding priorities. Without interim support, people will still be losing their housing.
- What is the different between RAC supporting now or later?
 - It would be beneficial, but not required, for Council to have the support from RAC for October 2021 when they first discuss the topic.
 - Councillor Potts: Support to bring this motion forward for whichever date is preferred.

Motion:

It was moved by Alieda Blandford and seconded by Vanessa Hammond that although there is a wide range of actions that could address the root causes of the housing affordability crisis, in order to provide short-term emergency assistance to help prevent homelessness in the region, we recommend that the initiative be supported. RAC recommends to Council, through the Council Liaison, that the City of Victoria budget for stable funding for the Community Social Planning Council Rent Bank in Fiscal 2022/2023.

CARRIED (2/1)

5. RENTER RELATED BYLAW UPDATES

Andrew Cusack, Senior Housing Planner, provided an update on the *Rental Business Licencing Bylaw* (RBLB) project – Staff went to Committee of the Whole on September 2, 2021 with a report that recommended pausing developments of a RBLB bylaw for a period of two years in order to monitor how a potential municipal bylaw would interact and best fit with the recent changes to the *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA) that came into effect on July 1st of this year. Council passed a motion for staff to continue going forward with drafting the bylaw, using the existing work already undertaken, but considering how it may best fill the gaps of the Provincial regulation. Projection for Fall/Winter 2021 is to engage with RAC as well as other municipalities on the bylaw.

The committee discussed:

- The *Rental Business Licencing Bylaw* was conceptualized to prevent illegal renovations. Another benefit of the bylaw was to increase the applicability of the *Tenant Assistance Policy* (TAP). Currently, the TAP is only required as part of a rezoning application. A New Westminster bylaw includes a clause that tenants have the right of first refusal at the same or lower rates.
- Request for a presentation on this bylaw, a document showing an overview and an interactive discussion on the *Rental Business Licencing Bylaw* and *Rental Property Standards of Maintenance Bylaw*.
 - Staff can bring these bylaws back in the form of a presentation after the new members have joined in November 2021.
- Request for original bylaw proposal to be provided and for a subcommittee meeting about the bylaw before the official discussion in November 2021.
- RAC wasn't aware that staff recommended to Council that the *Rental Business Licencing Bylaw* not go forward.
 - Staff were not recommending cancelling the bylaw, more so that the amendments to the RTA had to be reviewed against the *Rental Business Licencing Bylaw* before moving forward.
- A gap within the RTA amendments is accommodation assistance during a renovation. According to RTB policy guidance, if the proposed renovation work requires that a tenant be displaced for less than 45 days the RTB will probably not approve an eviction; if the renovation will take longer than 45 days the tenant is more likely to be evicted. Currently, there is no assistance during displacement, this would be addressed in the *Rental Business Licencing Bylaw*. The right of first refusal is included in the RTA but the new rental rate is at the discretion of the landlord (most likely market-rate) and not offered at the previous rent.
- General request for materials and minutes provided as soon as they are available.
 - Staff will provide the draft bylaws and the Council report as a package prior to the next meeting.
 - It's a challenge to provide minutes and especially materials earlier than what is currently our departmental standard (3 weeks or with the next meeting package).

Rental Property Standards of Maintenance Bylaw (RPSOM) – City hasn't conducted a full engagement on this bylaw but has been sent to stakeholders. A federal organization named "The Shift Initiative" may provide support for both bylaws in the future.

The committee discussed:

- What is the email list of subscribers that it was sent to?
 - Staff have been in touch with some stakeholders but are pulling contacts from various other lists to provide a more widespread, generalized update, and to have a more 'go-to' list for general housing updates such as RPSOM and the RBLB
- This bylaw is intended to have a review after 18 months. Suggestion to connect with people who have already reached out inquiring about the bylaw. RAC has already provided several engagement strategies that were not acted on. Request to promote RPSOM bylaw to tenants linked to the lack of heating in apartments.
 - The timing didn't align for that promotion last year and hope to promote it this season. Outreach through Facebook ads and the City of Victoria newsletter were supported through the budget.
- Suggestion for bus shelter ads. Many tenants take public transit. Suggestion to advise landlords that heat is going to be required as part of the RPSOM bylaw.
- Suggestion to promote the bylaw through removing mold from units.
 - Staff will be meeting the Engagement team this month to discuss.

6. CO-HOUSING (ADDED AGENDA ITEM)

The committee discussed:

- There are seniors that are interested in co-housing. There were attempts in the past by the City to set up co-housing and it failed. Request for RAC to review this to accommodate seniors and increase social connections.
 - Co-housing, co-op and land trusts are an action on the Housing Strategy for 2019-2022. Staff are working on picking up this project in the work plan for 2022.
- Suggestion to review other countries that have implemented this housing strategy.
 - Councillor Potts: Discussions at Council included the limitations around the City doing the work of matching people to co-housing situations. Support was shown for the City to support an outside organization to take that on.
 - Andrew Cusack: This may have been put on hold due to funding, zoning and the Missing Middle Project. There is a very successful co-housing association that is looking for projects in Victoria. Ross Soward has been involved with this organization to discuss how the City can provide support.
 - Suggestion for that organization to make a presentation to RAC and RAC could put forward support.
 - Request that the co-housing be rental based rather than ownership.

7. CITY OF VICTORIA ENGAGEMENT (ADDED AGENDA ITEM)

The committee discussed:

- Member has been receiving correspondence from the City that is not tenant focused. Member has been writing to engagement requesting to target tenants. The Missing Middle Project received a lot of engagement but is not a tenant-focused project. The engagement department is excluding tenants in their communications. The needs

- are far greater for tenants and those experiencing homelessness compared to those that can afford to purchase homes (Missing Middle Project). The RPSOM bylaw hasn't received any publicity compared to the Missing Middle Project.
- More tenant-focused communication is needed. The Missing Middle Project is in their engagement stage and that's why there are many updates relating to this project.
 - There are many pressing issues with housing, and it seems that there is a lack of promotion on these matters.
 - The City 'Building Blocks' talking series was an initiative to that came out of the Housing Strategy. Feedback on engagement has been noted.
 - Is it possible that the City didn't want to be overwhelmed by the engagement of the RPSOM before the Social Planner began their position?
 - While there has been an adjustment period with staffing shuffles and onboarding with new positions, the housing team is currently fully staffed and can get the engagement work moving on the RPSOM.

8. ITEMS FOR FOLLOW UP – OPEN DISCUSSION (DEFERRED DUE TO TIME)

9. ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

It was moved by Alieda Blandford, seconded by Leslie Robinson that the Renters' Advisory Committee meeting of September 21, 2021 be adjourned at 8:42 P.M.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY