

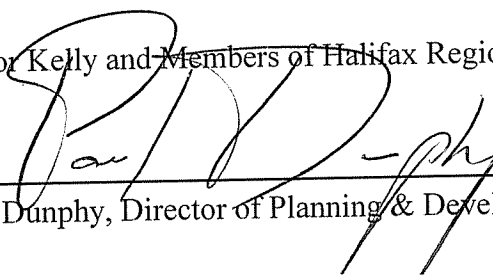


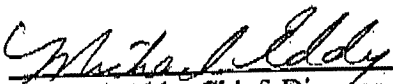
PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Halifax Regional Council
November 16, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:


Paul Dunphy, Director of Planning & Development Services


Michael Eddy, Chief Director, Fire & Emergency Services

DATE: November 8, 2004

SUBJECT: Presentation - Halifax Coalition Against Poverty

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

- October 26, 2004 Regional Council presentation from the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP)
- Additional detail and specific requests were provided in an E-mail to Councillor Uteck from Mr. Cole Weber on behalf of HCAP.

DISCUSSION

The Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP) requested that HRM:

- Amend the Residential Occupancy Standards By-Law (M-100) to guarantee adequate shelter to tenants effected by the enforcement of the by-law;
- Halt the enforcement of Residential Occupancy Standards By-law (M-100) until such an amendment has been made; and,
- Identify current and planned activities to support the development of a "shelter of last resort" and implementation of the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Program.

Enforcement

Staff share HCAP's concerns over the lack of affordable and appropriate housing that would allow residents of substandard rooming houses to access suitable housing, and in that vein, it is also important to consider additional factors:

1. When HRM is notified of a complaint and verifies the existence of significant life safety issues, it is **legally obliged** to address the violations. To ignore the violations or allow the building to be temporarily occupied while alternative accommodations are sought allows the tenants to remain at risk and amounts to negligence on the part of HRM.
2. The recent orders to vacate rooming houses were issued by the Provincial Fire Marshall's under the authority of the Nova Scotia *Fire Safety Act*, not the Municipal Government Act and the Residential Occupancy Standards By-law (M-100).
3. In the rare case that a building is vacated, Fire Services follows a protocol and notifies the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services and other appropriate agencies in an attempt to provide alternative accommodations for affected tenants. Fire Services is open to suggestions on how to improve this protocol. A meeting to discuss this issue is being organized with municipal and provincial officials and community stakeholders.
4. Staff is also aware of the lack of appropriate accommodation for some tenants, particularly those affected by addictions and mental illness issues, but HRM is not responsible for the provision of social housing. The challenge and responsibility of finding appropriate emergency shelter for those people affected rests with the Government of Nova Scotia. This challenge does not relieve the Municipality of its responsibility to respond to life safety issues in a timely manner.
5. To date The Residential Occupancy Standards By-law (M-100) instrument has not been used nor would be likely used to close a building because the vast majority of infractions under M-100 do not comprise immediate risk to the life safety of residents and can be remedied while tenants remain in the building. Fire Services has responded to over 1,000 complaints since passage of the by-law and these recent closures indicate the very low odds for closure and the extreme conditions that would trigger an order to vacate.
6. All of the complaints received to date have been from tenants who are living in properties that they feel are substandard. The Fire Safety Act and the Residential Occupancy Standards By-law (M-100) are the only way for tenants to raise long standing and unaddressed housing safety issues.
7. There is no initiative to identify rooming houses that do not comply with The Fire Safety Act or the Residential Occupancy Standards By-law (M-100), nor is there a list of building identified for closure. Staff communicated this to members of HCAP on several occasions. Where there are no immediate life safety issues, property owners are allowed 30 days to provide a plan of action on how the infractions will be remedied and staff is committed to assisting property owners in this process. The majority of properties can and have been

remedied in this manner. Buildings have only been closed in cases of exceptional life safety risk to the tenants.

Shelter of Last Resort

A shelter of last resort is an alternative shelter service that provides emergency shelter for those individuals currently not served by the shelter system by virtue of their behaviours and special needs as a result mental illness, addiction and other related problems. They are not normally accommodated in shelters due to the disruption and risks they pose to others.

1. HRM has increased awareness about the need for a shelter of last resort through the release of the *Homelessness in HRM- Portrait of Streets and Shelters* report and a separate *Harm Reduction Needs Assessment* report. The findings were widely distributed to local stakeholders and decision makers and a number of presentations were made with regard to the gap in existing services.
2. Staff supported efforts of the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association to develop a detailed program and design proposal for a 25-Unit Crisis-Transitional Housing facility for people disabled by mental illness and co-occurring substance use. Specifically:
3. Staff provided relevant research and policy information to the consultant hired by Metro Non-Profit Housing Association (NPHA) and reviewed draft copies of the proposal.
4. Staff made an effort to locate HRM land for the project and organized a meeting with the proponents and area Councillor. Given the short time line a suitable piece of land has not been located prior to the proponent's funding application deadline, but HRM indicated that they would continue to work on this file if requested to do so.
5. Director of HRM Planning and Development Services signed a letter of support for the project.
6. Staff also informed the MNPCHA it can apply and be considered for HRM cash grants, property tax concessions with respect to permit fees, and deed transfer tax (1% of the sale price) in accordance with HRM policies. This could potentially contribute substantial savings and may be used by the proponent as leverage once a suitable site is located. Staff is also willing to work with other groups interested in pursuing this important priority.

Canada- Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Program

The Municipality is encouraging implementation of the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Program through the following:

1. Director of Planning and Development sent a letter to the NS Senior Director of Income Assistance Employment Services and Housing (April 2004) indicating HRM's willingness to provide support to ensure a successful implementation of the program in HRM.

2. Several meetings took place between HRM and provincial staff on general program priorities as well as specific project proposals. HRM emphasized the need to address housing needs of low-income single individuals and residents of rooming houses. Staff was invited to participate in reviewing proposals submitted in response to the May 2004 call for proposals.
3. Mayor Peter Kelly sent letters to Minister of Community Services David Morse and Prime Minister Paul Martin (July 2004) on the need to move swiftly on the implementation of the Affordable Housing Program and the need to organize a meeting of the federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers to discuss implementation of the Affordable Housing Program.
4. Staff made a presentation to the Atlantic Mayors' Congress on October 29th, 2004 on housing and homelessness issues in Atlantic Canada. The mayors passed resolutions related to lobbying federal and provincial ministers to increase the shelter component income assistance rates; introduce a new rent supplement for low-income working renters; strengthen the existing Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives (SCPI) Program, modify the Affordable Housing Program to facilitate its implementation; and the needs of low income households for deeper unit subsidies. (See Appendix 2: Resolutions)
5. Staff contributed to research and advocacy at the national level through membership on the FCM's National Housing Policy Options Team (NHPOT) which recently revised the FCM Recommendations for a National Affordable Housing Strategy in its *Moving Forward*. report. Staff has also been involved with the FCM Quality of Life Reporting System which recently published the Quality of Life In Canadian Communities Highlights Report 2004; and the theme report *Incomes, Shelter and Necessities*
6. Staff will continue to work with provincial and federal officials, the Community Action on Homelessness Steering Committee and other community stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing program. Recently Council approved the sale of land to Assisted Living Enterprises, Dartmouth Non-Profit Society and Harbour City Homes for \$1.00.
7. Staff is working on developing an *Affordable and Diverse Housing Policy and Strategy* as part of the Regional Planning process.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

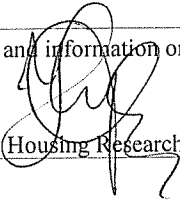
None

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1: HCAP E-mail

Appendix 2: Atlantic Mayors' Congress Resolutions

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by:  Kasia Tota, Housing Research Coordinator (902)490-4023

>>> <cole_webber@riseup.net> 25/10/2004 4:04:40 pm >>>

Dear Councillor,

This letter is being written on behalf of all the members and supporters, from all HRM districts, of the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP). It has recently been brought to our attention that numerous rooming houses throughout the HRM will be forced to shut down due to infractions of by-law M-100 and fire safety codes. While HCAP does not condone rooming houses that are unfit to live in, we recognize that often times these accomodations are a safer alternative to the street, or otherwise.

We recognize the responsibility that the city has to maintain building codes and standards, however, we do not believe that HRM council and staff should have the ability to force low or no-income tenants onto the street. Often the population living in rooming houses are those considered 'hardest to house' meaning that because of their drug/alcohol addiction or mental illness they are not able to find alternative housing and are not permitted in shelters. This draws attention to the need for a harm reduction facility in Halifax. HCAP recognizes that the construction and funding of such a facility is the responsibility of the province and the federal government, however, we also are aware of HRM's resolution passed unanimously on February 10th to:

"Encourage the Provincial and Federal government to support the development of a shelter of "last resort" for individuals currently not served by the shelter system by virtue of their mental illness, addiction and related problems"

and

"Encourage and support the Provincial government in its implementation of the Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Program and direct staff to explore appropriate partnership"

Based on this committment by HRM the members of HCAP would like to know what action has been taken around these two resolutions and what future plans are being made by HRM to continue putting pressure on the Provincial government for this type of support.

HCAP would also like you to consider and bring forward in the next council meeting our requests:

1. Make an amendment to By-Law M-100 that guarentees adequate shelter to tenants effected by the enforcement of the by-law.
2. Halt the enforcement of by-law M-100 until such an amendment has been made.
3. Put pressure on the Provice to make good by the Federal/Provincial Bilateral Housing Agreement and BUILD HOUSING NOW!

We look forward to your response.

Appendix 2

Atlantic Mayors' Congress Resolutions

October 30, 2004

Resolution #1 – Income Assistance Rates and Shelter Allowance for Working Poor Renters

Whereas the social assistance rates in Atlantic Provinces are some of the lowest in Canada and well below Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off Rates;

Whereas the lack of affordable housing units contributes to rising levels of homelessness;

Whereas renter households represent the majority of households in core housing need in Canada and in the Atlantic Provinces;

Be it resolved that the Atlantic Mayor's Congress write to all of the Atlantic Premiers and appropriate Ministers requesting that they in partnership with the Government of Canada directly address affordability problems in their provinces by addressing deficiencies in the shelter components of provincial income assistance programs and by creating a new shelter allowance program for working poor renters.

Resolution #2 – Sustainability of Homelessness Prevention Programs

Whereas the Supporting Communities Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) of the Government of Canada initiated in 1999 and extended in 2003 has filled an important gap in providing capital funding for emergency and transitional housing for homeless individuals and made a positive contribution in creating collaborative community responses to local issues;

Whereas the implementation of the second phase of the SCPI program has been slow because many non-profit community organizations that strive to respond to pressing community needs cannot demonstrate that their programs are sustainable without core operating financial support;

Be it resolved that the Atlantic Mayor's Congress write to Prime Minister Paul Martin and to The Honourable Joseph Frank Fontana Minister of Labour and Housing

requesting that the Supporting Communities Partnerships Initiative be established as a permanent program that includes long term operating program and social development funding in addition to capital funding.

Resolution #3 – Federal-Provincial-Territorial Affordable Housing Program

Whereas the Government of Canada has committed \$1 Billion between 2001 and 2007 to increase the supply of affordable housing as part of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Affordable Housing Program (FPT) but the program has been slow to get off the ground and few units have been announced to date;

Whereas the structure of the FPT program requires Provincial Governments to Cost Share 50% in the program and this share may be prohibitive for the full, timely and equitable participation of the Atlantic Provinces in this national initiative;

Whereas the maximum per unit subsidy has been set at \$50,000 per unit and the target of average market rent far exceeds the level of affordability either for working poor or income assisted households;

Whereas there is a lack of flexibility in how the funds can be used and the timelines are prohibitively short;

Whereas the lack of investment in rehabilitating existing social housing in the Atlantic Provinces means that existing social housing units are being lost;

Whereas investment in social housing creates positive return on investment for both the federal and provincial levels of government;

Be it resolved that the Atlantic Mayor's Congress write to Prime Minister Paul Martin and The Honourable Joseph Frank Fontana Minister of Labour and Housing requesting that the Federal – Provincial-Territorial Affordable Housing Program be modified to extend the program beyond its 5 year anniversary sunset date, reduce provincial cost sharing requirement from 50% to 25%, allow 100% of federal funding per unit up front with the understanding (by formal agreement) that the provinces will put in its share subsequently, allow greater flexibility in how the money can be spent and increase the maximum level of subsidy per unit to achieve affordability equivalent to 30% shelter to