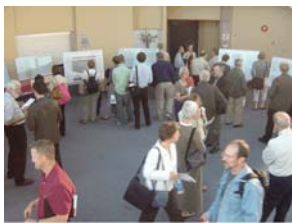


HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Overview

Housing affordability refers to housing that is adequate (not in need of major repair), suitable (enough bedrooms) and not consuming more than 30% of household income. In 2001, a quarter of HRM residents paid 30% or more of their income on housing and an additional 12% of residents paid more than 50%.¹ Housing prices in HRM have more than doubled over the last decade while incomes have increased at a much slower rate. In addition, shifts in demographics over the next few decades, including an increasing senior population, means a greater variety of housing options needs to be available.

The concept of increasing housing affordability includes a range of measures, from providing shelter for the homeless, to ensuring housing is affordable and available enough to attract new residents to the region. Increasing housing affordability also helps build a strong community and local economy.



Downtown Halifax Urban Design Plan

Throughout HRMbyDesign's public participation process, housing affordability has been

identified as a priority issue that requires an effective solution. The Downtown Plan sets a goal of increasing residential density in downtown Halifax with individuals and families at all ages and stages of their lives, and from across the demographic and economic spectrum. Policies proposed in the new Downtown Halifax

Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPS) address the following issues related to increasing housing affordability.

Housing type: The current downtown housing stock is dominated by studio and one-bedroom units



that are not suitable for all household types. To achieve the vibrant downtown envisioned by the Plan, the lack of downtown housing opportunities for households of two or more is addressed in the DHSMPS.

The provision of two and three bedroom units downtown will be provided through requirements established in the Land Use By-law that specify minimum ratios for a mix of desirable dwelling unit types. Furthermore, provisions are set out in the bonus zoning section of the Plan that encourage developers to incorporate amenities such as daycares and outdoor spaces that support larger households. Design considerations for housing are set out in the Design Manual, including requirements for landscaped open spaces for residential use in certain precincts in recognition of their residential character.

Housing Affordability: In addition to a greater variety of housing types, housing opportunities for residents with a variety of income levels encouraged through the bonus zoning provisions of the Plan.

The new Land Use By-law makes three important changes from existing policy that will improve housing affordability:

¹ Tomalty, R & Cantwell, R. Municipal Land Use Policy and Affordability - Halifax Regional Municipality. 2004.

- a. No minimum unit size.
- b. No maximum residential density per acre.
- c. No disincentive to larger units through extra landscaped open space requirements.

The design considerations for such housing are set out in the Design Manual. Beyond the regulatory provisions of the Land Use By-law, there is a significant opportunity for all levels of government to lead the way in providing housing affordability with the redevelopment of publicly-owned lands in downtown Halifax. Policies in the economic chapter of the DSHMPS encourage governments to negotiate an agreement to collaborate in the development of a full spectrum of housing affordability as part of the redevelopment of government-owned lands in downtown Halifax.

Minimum Parking Requirements: Currently there are no requirements to provide a minimum amount of parking for residential developments in downtown Halifax. As this is one measure that helps reduce the price of individual units, this regulation will be upheld in the proposed Downtown Halifax Land Use By-law.

Housing Affordability Functional Plan

The Regional Plan adopted by Council in 2006 called for the creation of a Housing Affordability Functional Plan to identify effective strategies to address this regional issue.

It recognized the need for a range of housing affordability and the roles of the market and different levels of government and the non-profit sector in this regard. While the vast



majority of housing in HRM will not require any municipal intervention (apart from a supportive regulatory framework and a fair and efficient development process), in some cases HRM may opt to develop incentive programs and partnership agreements to take advantage of, and to complement, federal and provincial housing programs.

The Housing Affordability Functional Plan will include:

- a. A definition of housing affordability for the purpose of regional and local priorities.
- b. A housing needs assessment and the development of neighbourhood change indicators.
- c. Implementation mechanisms to ensure a reasonable distribution of adequate, acceptable and affordable housing including financial and non-financial incentives.
- d. Creating and monitoring affordable housing targets.
- e. Funding opportunities and partnership possibilities for housing projects.
- f. Strategies that encourage innovative forms of housing.
- g. Identifying neighbourhoods requiring revitalization through community input and support.
- h. Identifying possible locations for affordable housing demonstration projects.
- i. Identifying possible incentives for non-profit and for-profit affordable housing developers such as bonus zoning.
- j. Investigating the potential of HRM real estate assets and business strategies (acquisition, leasing and sale) to support affordable housing retention and development.
- k. A public education and communication tool kit to address a range of housing issues.
- l. Accessible and adaptable housing design guidelines.

Regional and Community Planning staff will be working with stakeholders in the housing sector and consulting with the public over the next year to develop the Housing Affordability Functional Plan. It is anticipated that it will be completed in the 2009-10 fiscal year.

For more information:

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