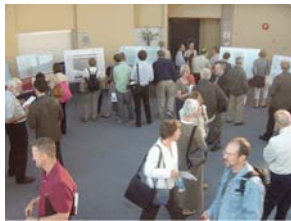


AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVES

Overview

Affordable housing is recognized as 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 affordable housing includes a range of measures, from providing shelter for the homeless, to ensuring affordable housing is available to attract new residents to the region. Affordable housing also helps build a strong community and local economy.



Downtown Halifax Urban Design Plan

Throughout HRMbyDesign's public participation process, affordable

housing 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. This includes providing housing opportunities for singles, couples, young families, and mature families - all with a mix of income levels. Policies proposed in the new

Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPS) address the following issues related to the creation of more affordable housing.



Housing type: To achieve the vibrant downtown envisioned

by the Plan, the lack of downtown housing opportunities for households of two or more must be addressed. The current downtown housing stock is dominated by studio and one-bedroom units that are not suitable for all household types.

Downtown housing must therefore be expanded to include more two and three bedroom units 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 must be accommodated. Therefore, affordable housing will be encouraged through the bonus zoning provisions of the Plan. Affordable housing as it relates to this Plan is defined in the Land Use By-law.

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

Three important changes from existing policy made in the new Land Use By-law that will improve affordability are:

- 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 municipal, provincial and federal departments and agencies to lead the way in providing affordable housing with the redevelopment of publicly-owned lands in downtown Halifax. Policies in the economic chapter of the DHSMPs encourage governments to formalize a commitment to support the development of a full spectrum of affordable housing as part of the redevelopment of government-owned lands in downtown Halifax, through a memorandum of understanding agreement.

Minimum Parking Requirements: Current legislation requires developers to provide a minimum amount of parking at any multi-unit apartment or condo building in downtown Halifax. The new Land Use By-law removes that requirement, which should help to reduce the price of individual units.

Affordable Housing Functional Plan

The Regional Plan adopted by Council in 2006 called for the creation of an Affordable Housing Functional Plan to identify effective



strategies to address this regional issue. It recognized the need for a range of affordable housing 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 Functional Plan will include:

- a. A definition of affordable housing 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 Functional Plan. It is anticipated that it will be completed by 2009.

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