

DATE OF MEETING FEBRUARY 11, 2019

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SUBJECT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with information on the current context and City initiatives related to housing affordability and homelessness in Nanaimo.

Recommendation

That the “Housing and Homelessness” report dated 2019-FEB-11 be received for information.

DISCUSSION

Housing and homelessness are major concerns for Nanaimo’s growing population. According to a recent release from BC Statistics, Nanaimo’s population increased by 1.6% in 2018, to an estimated 97,618 residents. This marks the third consecutive year that Nanaimo’s population growth has outpaced that of Victoria. As the pressure increases on Nanaimo’s housing market, the effects can be seen in both a rise in the price of housing and the growth of Nanaimo’s homeless population.

Between December 2017 and December 2018, the benchmark price of a single-family dwelling in Nanaimo increased seven percent to \$538,300, and the average sale price rose from \$518,452 to \$556,820. The impact of the housing crunch can also be seen in the rental market, where the vacancy rate remains below 3% (2.4% as of October 2018) and average rents continue to rise. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) reports the average cost of a two-bedroom apartment increased nearly 10% between October 2017 and October 2018, from \$984 to \$1,084, far outpacing the average BC wage increase of 2.4% in 2018.

In terms of the numbers of absolute homelessness, the April 2018 Point-in-Time (PiT) homelessness count documented 335 homeless individuals in Nanaimo (see Attachment A). This marked a near doubling from the last PiT count in February 2016 of 174 individuals. It is estimated that there are an additional 150-200 homeless individuals who were not captured by the 2018 PiT count, for a total homeless population of approximately 500 people.

In light of these realities, the City has taken concrete steps towards improving housing affordability and availability. On 2018-SEP-17, Council approved the Affordable Housing Strategy (the “Strategy”, see Attachment B), the City’s first comprehensive study of affordability across the housing continuum, which includes social, non-market and market housing. The Strategy establishes the City’s role and priorities with regard to promoting affordable, appropriate, and accessible housing in Nanaimo over the next ten years (2018-2028).

At the same meeting, Council endorsed the Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness (the "Action Plan"), a process that was led by the Nanaimo Coalition on Homelessness (the "Coalition"). The Action Plan is a five-year plan to help Nanaimo end homelessness, or where homelessness persists to diminish the harms it produces, by guiding and organizing homelessness services. The Action Plan is included in this report as Attachment C.

Affordable Housing Strategy - Update

The Strategy describes affordable housing as "*Housing that includes a variety of housing types, sizes, tenures and prices and housing that supports a mix of incomes, ages and abilities. It includes housing across the entire housing continuum from temporary shelter to social or supportive housing, market rental and homeownership.*" Nanaimo's Strategy targets both low- and moderate-income households, as well as renters and owners, but unlike the Action Plan does not seek to address the complex social and health challenges faced by many homeless individuals.

The primary focus of the Strategy is housing needs and affordability. Different levels of affordability apply to different types of households and, as such, the Strategy includes definitions for non-market housing, affordable market rental, and affordable home ownership that were created specifically based on Nanaimo's context and goals. The Strategy outlines five broad policy objectives, each with a number of policies and actions that will help achieve the stated goal. The five objectives are:

1. Increase the supply of rental housing stock
2. Support infill and intensification in existing neighbourhoods
3. Diversify housing form in all neighbourhoods
4. Continue to support income and special needs housing
5. Strengthen partnerships and connections

In total, the Strategy includes 23 policies and over 100 actions. Since the Strategy's adoption in September 2018, City Staff have been working on implementing some of the most immediate action items, including the regulation of short-term rentals, introducing a minimum required number of adaptable units in new multi-family developments, creating an inventory of existing rental stock, developing a secured market rental policy, and establishing criteria for the acquisition of land for the purpose of developing affordable housing. Staff will be bringing forward reports to Council on each action item to provide background information and progress updates.

Action Plan to End Homelessness - Update

The Action Plan lays out ten strategies for addressing the issues and challenges faced by Nanaimo's homeless population and service providers. Since the Plan's adoption, the City and its Coalition partners have been involved with a number of initiatives that align with the strategies of the Action Plan:

Strategy One: Better engagement with people on the perimeter of the shelter system

- Two of the Coalition member agencies (Nanaimo Women's Centre and Nanaimo Citizens Advocacy) have partnered with BC Housing and St. Peter's Catholic Church to

open 35 additional cold weather shelter beds in December 2018 until 2019-MAR-31 to deal with increased homelessness following the closure of the tent city at 1 Port Drive.

- BC Housing has provided funding for additional outreach workers from Canadian Mental Health Association to serve the non-housed population.

Strategy Two: Create a Day-Space/Drop-In Facility

- Staff have been working with our partners at the Coalition and a non-profit organization based in Victoria to identify funding, operating, and location options for a daytime drop-in centre.

Strategy Four: Managing Market Pressures and Income Security

- BC Housing partnered in the Fall of 2018 with member agencies of the Coalition (Canadian Mental Health Association and John Howard Society) to provide 50 additional rent supplements to people at risk of homelessness. However, the tight housing market has meant that finding units to apply the rent supplements to is an ongoing challenge.

Strategy Five: Supportive Housing

- Two member agencies of the Coalition (Island Crisis Care Society and Pacifica Housing) have partnered with BC Housing to operate 170 additional temporary supportive housing units. These units became available in December 2018 to occupants of the tent city at 1 Port Drive who were without shelter.
- City Staff continue to work with BC Housing to identify potential sites that may be suitable for the development of permanent supportive housing.

Strategy Eight: Increased Sector Capacity

- The United Way received a \$36,000 Social Planning Grant from the City of Nanaimo for the purpose of hiring a part-time coordinator of homeless services on behalf the Coalition and its member agencies. This position will enhance the ability of the Coalition to communicate what the issues are regarding homelessness in Nanaimo and what is being done by the Coalition and our partners to address these challenges.

Strategy Ten: Prevention through Agency Coordination

- The Coalition has initiated discussions on how to better coordinate access to homeless services and housing. Over the coming months, the Coalition will be working with our Provincial and Federal partners to identify best practices from other communities with the goal of creating a coordinated access model that works for our local context.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Affordable Housing Strategy is a municipal plan that establishes the City's role and priorities with regard to promoting affordable, appropriate, and accessible housing in Nanaimo over the next ten years.
- The Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness is a five-year plan by the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition to help end homelessness in our community, or where homelessness persists to diminish the harms it produces.
- Staff are now working to implement the recommendations of the Strategy and the Action Plan to improve access to housing across the continuum.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: 2018 Point-in-Time Homelessness Count

ATTACHMENT B: Nanaimo Affordable Housing Strategy (2018-2028)

ATTACHMENT C: Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness (2018-2023)

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