

DATE OF MEETING September 22, 2021

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SUBJECT FAMILY-FRIENDLY HOUSING POLICY

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

To inform the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness of Staff's intent to begin work on a Family-Friendly Housing Policy.

BACKGROUND

Nanaimo's primary rental vacancy rate of 1% (October 2020) is well below the 3-5% threshold indicator of a healthy rental housing market. The 2020 vacancy rate for two bedroom apartments is even lower at 0.8% and 0% for three or more bedroom units.

The City's Affordable Housing Strategy, and recent rental housing survey, recognizes that the increasing housing costs and lack of rental spaces has made finding housing challenging for all types of families requiring multiple bedrooms. The City of Nanaimo's Official Community Plan (2008) and Affordable Housing Strategy (2018) include an objective to "Diversify Housing Form in All Neighbourhoods" in order to "create attainable homeownership options and alleviate pressure on the existing rental housing stock". Developing a policy on Family-Friendly Housing (objective 3.2) is identified as a short-term priority (1 to 2 years) within the Affordable Housing Strategy.

The Affordable Housing Strategy recommends the following actions as part of developing a policy on Family-Friendly Housing:

- Complete market research analysis to understand the cost implications of requiring an increased proportion of two and three bedroom units in new multi-unit residential developments, including both rental and ownership housing.
- Consult with the development community and non-profit housing sector regarding the proposed incentive program.
- Develop a specific policy on family-friendly housing to encourage new multi-unit developments to provide a minimum percentage of two and three bedroom units.
- Provide incentives for developments that provide a greater proportion of units that are two and three bedrooms. For example, where a project included 20% of units as two and three bedrooms, then the additional incentive would apply.
- Ensure the parking requirements for family-friendly housing reflect access to frequent transit service and that there be access to local amenities such as parks, playgrounds, and schools.
- Provide guidelines or suggestions to developers in terms of family-friendly design, space programming, and availability of amenities.

DISCUSSION

Staff have begun work on creating a family-friendly housing policy for the City of Nanaimo. The goal of the project is to encourage the construction of two, three and three plus bedroom units appropriate for larger and/or extended families, including families with children, within new multi-unit residential developments. The project will seek to better understand the following:

1. The supply and demand for two, three and three plus bedroom multi-family housing (rental and ownership) in Nanaimo.
2. The cost implications of requiring an increased proportion of two and three bedroom units in new multi-unit residential developments.
3. How to encourage amenities and housing types best suited to support families with children.
4. What amendments, if any, should be made to City bylaws and other documents to encourage more family friendly multi-family housing. This includes informing the development of REIMAGINE Nanaimo strategy documents (integrated and updated City Plan that includes the OCP with other documents like the Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan) as well as other documents or bylaws such as the Off-Street Parking Bylaw, Zoning Bylaw and/or design guidelines.

The project will include:

- a review of best practices from other municipalities;
- an inventory of two, three and three plus rental and condominium units in Nanaimo;
- an economic impact study of housing policies that require a set percentage of accessible and/or adaptable units; and
- stakeholder engagement.

There will be engagement opportunities for identified stakeholders including: developers, real estate professionals, renters with children, non-profit housing providers, family advocacy groups, neighbourhood associations and School District 68. The project is expected to conclude with a final report to Council in Spring 2022. Prior to bringing a report with recommendations to Council, Staff will present the report to the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness for endorsement.

NEXT STEPS

Staff anticipate presenting a draft adaptable and accessible housing policy to the Committee early this winter for feedback. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- Staff have begun work on creating a family-friendly housing policy for the City of Nanaimo.
- Introducing a family-friendly housing policy was identified as a short-term priority of the Affordable Housing Strategy
- The goal of the policy project is to encourage the construction of two, three and three plus bedroom units appropriate for larger and/or extended families, including families with children, within new multi-unit residential developments.

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