

Staff Report

Origin

At the City Council meeting on February 14, 2022, Council adopted the following resolution:

That the City of Richmond send a resolution to the LMLGA (Lower Mainland Local Government Association) requesting that UBCM request the Provincial Government and BC Housing for an increase to the maximum rent ceiling and monthly payment amounts provided by the BC Housing Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program.

This report responds to the above resolution and recommends City Council endorsement of the proposed resolution in support of an increase to maximum rent ceilings and monthly payment amounts through BC Housing's SAFER program (Attachment 1).

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018–2022 Strategy #6 Strategic and Well-Planned Growth:

6.5 Ensure diverse housing options are available and accessible across the housing continuum.

This report is also consistent with the Richmond Affordable Housing Strategy 2017–2027:

Strategic Direction 5: Increase Advocacy, Awareness and Education Roles

Analysis

The City is committed to playing a leadership role to increase housing choices for all Richmond residents, including seniors. The Richmond Affordable Housing Strategy (2017–2027) identifies seniors as a key priority group for the City's affordable housing programs and initiatives. The City of Richmond's Housing Needs Report released in 2021 further supports the ongoing prioritization of housing support for seniors, which were the fastest growing age group in Richmond from 2006 to 2016. As of September 2021, 48% of households on the BC Housing waitlist were seniors 55 years and over, a proportion that has stayed consistent since 2017.

BC Housing's SAFER Program

BC Housing's SAFER program provides rent supplements to low-income seniors in market rental housing in order to support housing affordability for seniors in need. As of September 2021, 1,057 Richmond seniors (over 60 years) were receiving rent subsidies through the SAFER program. In 2018, BC Housing reported that the average monthly payment provided by SAFER across the province was \$265 per month.

Two significant eligibility criteria for the program include its maximum allowable household income and maximum rents paid by the applicant. The program's maximum annual household income limits for Richmond residents are currently \$33,000 per couple or \$30,600 per sole-individual household. Rent ceilings, or maximum allowable rent paid by applicants in Richmond are currently set at \$866 per couple or \$803 per sole-individual household.

While the SAFER program provides much needed rent subsidies for seniors, the program's current rent ceilings and monthly payments do not reflect increasing housing costs for seniors renting in Richmond. For example, in October 2021, the average market rent for a studio apartment in Richmond was \$1,170 and the average market rent for a one-bedroom apartment was \$1,318 per month.

BC Housing's SAFER program is an important support within the housing continuum for many seniors in Richmond. In order to reflect the region's rising rental costs since 2018, SAFER's maximum rent ceilings and monthly payment amounts require a significant increase to be appropriate within Richmond's housing market.

Proposed UBCM Resolution

The proposed resolution requesting the UBCM advocacy to the provincial government to increase the maximum rent ceilings and monthly payment amounts to low-income seniors through BC Housing's SAFER program will focus needed attention on the growing gap between the rental amounts permitted under the program and the cost of rental housing in Richmond. Following Council's endorsement, the resolution will be forwarded to UBCM for consideration during its 2022 Convention.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Supporting a UBCM resolution for increasing the maximum rent ceilings and monthly payment amounts provided under BC Housing's SAFER program will help to close the gap for low-income seniors receiving rental assistance and the cost of rental housing. With the combined efforts of all levels of government, low-income seniors can receive the assistance they require to achieve housing stability.



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KS:ks

Att. 1: Proposed City Council Resolution Supporting an Increase to the Maximum Rent Ceilings and Monthly Payment Amounts through BC Housing's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) Program

Proposed City Council Resolution Supporting an Increase to the Maximum Rent Ceilings and Monthly Payment Amounts through BC Housing's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) Program

AN INCREASE TO MAXIMUM RENT CEILINGS AND MONTHLY PAYMENTS FOR BC HOUSING'S SAFER PROGRAM

City of Richmond

WHEREAS BC Housing's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program is an important support within the housing continuum for many seniors, and where provincial funding for the program has remained stagnant since 2018;

AND WHEREAS BC Housing's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program provides much needed rental subsidies for low-income seniors, yet the program's current rent ceilings and monthly payments do not reflect increasing housing costs for renters in many communities;

AND WHEREAS municipalities are committed to increasing housing choices for all residents and low-income seniors are a key demographic, increasingly in need of affordable housing and other forms of financial assistance;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Richmond urge the Government of British Columbia to provide an increase to the maximum rent ceilings and monthly payment amounts through BC Housing's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Province ensure that BC Housing's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program will receive regular increases to its maximum rent ceilings and monthly payments in subsequent years.