



RENTERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

November 23, 2016

A meeting of the Renters Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, November 23, 2016, at 6:00 pm, in Committee Room 1, Third Floor, Vancouver City Hall.

PRESENT: Alvin Singh, Chair
Karen Ameyaw
Peter Harvie
Meseret Taye
Daniel Oleksiuk
Joshua Prowse
Noah Quastel

ABSENT: Miran Aziz
Jessie Fletcher (Leave of Absence)
Nicola Hill, Vice-Chair (Leave of Absence)
David Isaac
Mira Oreck (Leave of Absence)
Karen Sawatzky (Leave of Absence)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Andrea Reimer (Council Liaison)
Celine Mauboules, Senior Planner, Housing Policy and Projects (Staff Liaison)
Graham Anderson, Housing Policy and Projects

CITY CLERK'S OFFICE: Lori Isfeld, Meeting Coordinator

Leave of Absence Requests

MOVED by Joshua Prowse
SECONDED by Karen Ameyaw

THAT the Renters Advisory Committee approve leaves of absence for Jessie Fletcher, Nicola Hill, Mira Oreck, and Karen Sawatzky, for this meeting.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Approval of Minutes

MOVED by Joshua Prowse
SECONDED by Meseret Taye

THAT the minutes of the Renters Advisory Committee meeting held October 12, 2016, be approved, with a correction to Item 3 regarding Hackathon - Report Back, to indicate there were two proposals presented at the event.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Approval of 2017 Regular Meeting Schedule

MOVED by Joshua Prowse
SECONDED by Karen Ameyaw

THAT the Renters Advisory Committee approve the following schedule of Regular Meeting dates for 2017:

Wednesday, January 18, 2017 - 5:30 - 7:30 pm
Wednesday, March 1, 2017 - 5:30 - 7:30 pm
Wednesday, May 24, 2017 - 5:30 - 7:30 pm
Wednesday, July 19, 2017 - 5:30 - 7:30 pm
Wednesday, September 13, 2017 - 5:30 - 7:30 pm
Wednesday, November 8, 2017 - 5:30 - 7:30 pm

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

1. Regulating Short-Term Rentals in Vancouver

Follow-up to the report dated September 28, 2016, entitled “Regulating Short Term Rentals in Vancouver”, that was dealt with by Council at the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on October 5, 2016.

Following discussion and questions to the Staff and Council Liaisons, it was,

MOVED by Daniel Oleksiuk
SECONDED by Karen Ameyaw

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver (the “City”) has a crisis-level shortage of rental housing, as evidenced by a chronically low city-wide vacancy rate that was at only 0.6 percent in late 2015;
2. The City has implemented changes to its zoning rules to allow for the legalization of secondary suites and laneway houses in what were previously single-family zones, in part to meet residents’ need for more rental housing, as well as more diverse types of rental housing;
3. The City includes the numbers of new secondary suites and laneway houses it has enabled when it reports on its progress toward achieving its housing goals, including in its annual housing report cards;
4. Renting a dwelling unit for less than one month (30 days) currently contravenes sections of the City’s zoning and development bylaw, including section 10.21.6;

5. In the Administrative Report dated September 28, 2016, entitled “Regulating Short-Term Rentals in Vancouver”, staff proposed a new approach to regulating the rental of dwellings for less than 30 days, also known as short-term rentals, that would limit eligibility for short-term rental business licences to those applying to rent their principal residence;
6. One of the goals of their proposed new regulatory approach is to create short-term rental rules that are easy to understand, administer and enforce;
7. At the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities on October 5, 2016, and subsequently in the media, a representative of the Airbnb corporation stated that the corporation would like the City to allow property owners to rent secondary suites and laneway houses, that are not their own principal residence, on a short-term basis, on the grounds that this flexibility is needed to meet the needs of families as they change in size or composition;
8. Under both the current zoning rules and staff’s proposed new approach, property owners who wish to earn income from secondary suites and laneway houses that are not their primary residence have the option of renting those units for periods as short as 30 days;
9. In the Administrative Report dated September 28, 2016, entitled “Regulating Short-Term Rentals in Vancouver”, staff recommend against attempting to impose an annual cap on nights rented on a short-term basis because, based on extensive research of best practices, such caps have proven to be unenforceable, as well as an inefficient use of enforcement resources; and
10. Without such caps, there seems to be no straight forward way of allowing the flexibility that Airbnb requested without opening the door to allowing secondary suites and laneway houses that are not someone’s principal residences, to be used as short-term rentals on a full-time basis;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT the Renters Advisory Committee strongly supports the recommendations that restrict eligibility for short-term rental business licences to those applying to rent out their primary residence, which means that renting a secondary suite or laneway house that is not someone’s principal residence would not be allowed.

- B. THAT the Renters Advisory Committee supports the general approach to regulating short-term rentals as described in the Administrative Report dated September 28, 2016, entitled “Regulating Short-Term Rentals in Vancouver”.

CARRIED

(Noah Quastel abstained from the vote)

(Note: Section 145.1 of the Vancouver Charter states "Where a member present at a meeting abstains from voting, they are deemed to have voted in the affirmative.)

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At 6:15 pm, the Committee agreed to vary the order of the agenda to deal with the New Business items next.

The minutes are recorded in numerical order for ease of reference.

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4. State of Renters Report Project - Workplan

The Chair distributed a workplan document for the State of Renters Report Project. Discussion ensued and names were assigned to various tasks. The Chair advised he will update the workplan document and that the next step will be to insert timelines and dates.

5. Liaison Updates

Councillor Reimer reminded members about the upcoming Awards of Excellence event, and requested that names of any potential nominees be provided by November 25, 2016.

6. Member Updates

Due to time constraints, no updates were provided.

7. New Business

(a) Housing Reset Process - Feedback

Following discussion on proposed feedback on the Housing Reset Process that had been prepared and circulated to the committee by Karen Sawatsky, it was,

MOVED by Daniel Oleksiuk

SECONDED by Karen Ameyaw

THAT the following feedback on the Housing Reset Process be submitted to Council and Housing Policy staff:

As members of the Renters Advisory Committee, we request City staff and Council to include or at least consider the following ideas and questions as part of the current housing reset process.

1. Allow small purpose-built rental apartments on non-arterial streets in residential areas.

Why:

- Under current zoning, the vast majority of residential land in the city is zoned for single-family residential dwellings. While this zoning does allow for new rental housing to be built in the form of secondary suites, laneway houses and any whole houses that are rented, this type of rental housing does not represent long-term supply. It is not covered by the City's rate of change regulations and any rental units can easily be taken out of the rental stock when tenants move out, or when owners decide they want to leave the units vacant instead, or allow family members to move in instead. We believe it would be far easier to add the amount of reliable long-term rental stock that renters need if new purpose-built rental housing was allowed in areas of the city where zoning currently prohibits it.
- While we understand the economic and planning reasons for restricting new purpose-built rental buildings to arterial and adjacent streets, we object to this in principle because we believe new purpose-built rental housing belongs in all residential parts of the city and that it can be built in ways that are suitable to all parts of residential neighbourhoods. Also, while living on arterial roads has some benefits, it also has several significant drawbacks, including the likelihood that residents will have to tolerate higher levels of noise and air pollution than those who live on residential streets. Restricting new purpose-built rental housing to arterial streets means renters will be disproportionately forced to tolerate those drawbacks and we don't think City policy should implicitly endorse that.
- Small apartment buildings (such as those of six to 10 units) can provide housing options far more affordable than single family homes and are comparable in size to many large single-family houses, including older character houses. As such, we reject the idea that small apartment buildings don't and can't fit on residential streets in existing single-family neighbourhoods. We know that there are many forward-thinking and talented architects, designers and builders who are creating these types of buildings, both locally and further afield. We urge the City to make use of those resources and expertise.

2. In general, move in the direction of diversifying the housing supply in all parts of the city, but with a focus on the areas where current single-family zoning limits that.

3. **Specifically address the question of where and in what type of housing the minimum-wage and low-waged workers who work in the city are envisioned to live according to the new housing and homelessness strategy.**

Why:

- At the current minimum wage of \$10.85 per hour, someone who works full-time (40 hours x 40) grosses \$1,736 per month, or about \$23,000 per year. Using the CMHC's 30%-of-gross-income affordability criteria and formula (which while flawed, is standard) that person can afford about \$520 for their monthly housing costs. Obviously, people earning that wage cannot afford to rent a studio or one bedroom apartment themselves. In fact, it takes an hourly wage (at 40-hour weeks) of about \$19 (about \$40,000 per year) to be able to afford \$912 for monthly shelter costs using that formula. According to the 2011 NHS, there were about 112,000 people (aged 15 and over, 2010 income) living in Vancouver who made between \$20,000 and \$40,000. We know that minimum and low-waged workers are not just young people earning extra money while they live at home. People with jobs or who are capable of working are generally not considered a priority for social housing, if they're eligible for the waiting lists at all. These people do work that is essential to the functioning of the City of Vancouver's economy, yet they can't afford housing within the city boundaries. In saying that the new housing strategy needs to address where the city's minimum and low-waged workers are expected to live, we do not mean that we believe it is the City's sole responsibility to address this problem. We certainly recognize that the senior levels of government are responsible and have far more resources - but the City's new housing strategy should still explicitly address this group of people.

One way to address the housing needs of people with low incomes is to acknowledge the need for shared housing options. This means acknowledging and addressing the fact that families with children are not the only demographic group that need larger-sized units (of two or more bedrooms). Sharing housing is the only way many people, including many working people, can afford to live in Vancouver.

If shared housing is an important part of our affordable housing supply, then there may be a need now or in the future to revisit the currently proposed approach to regulating short-term rentals. The current approach does not restrict the use of private rooms (bedrooms) for short-term rental purposes. This means there's nothing preventing a person who owns or rents a two-bedroom condominium from renting out the second bedroom to a tourist on a part-time or full-time basis instead of having a roommate. Similarly, there is nothing preventing someone who owns or rents a multi-bedroom house from doing so, as long as the person uses that dwelling as her or his principal residence.

4. **Acknowledge the fact that the proportion of renting households in the city has declined from a high of 59% in 1991 to its current 51.4% and make it a goal of the strategy to keep an approximately equal balance of renting and home owning households in the city.**

Why:

- It is important to acknowledge the context and reality of tenant displacement from the city.
- Given what we know from the census and other sources about the household wealth of tenants and the rate of housing price increases, it is highly unlikely that the decrease in the percentage of tenant households over this time period, and especially more recently, is due to most of those tenants becoming homeowners in the City of Vancouver.
- Given the disconnect between local incomes and the costs to purchase housing, an increase in the percentage of home owning households will be a product of the displacement of lower income people from the city - and these circumstances are likely to be in effect for the remaining period this housing strategy applies to. Striving to keep an approximately equal balance of tenant and owning households is therefore in line with the City's other goals related to decreasing inequality, such as are articulated in the City's Healthy City Strategy.

5. **Taking #4 into account, prioritize purpose-built rental housing by setting higher goals for the number of units the city enables.**

Why:

- The existing unit goals were not only met but exceeded, which indicates there is room to be more aggressive about targets.
- This would be a concrete and specific way of prioritizing the creation of more rental housing, as opposed to condominiums.
- Purpose-built rental housing should be prioritized, because it is a more secure form of long-term housing than is provided by secondary units, such as suites and rented condominiums.

6. **Use the vacancy rate as one of the indicators of the strategy's success.**

Why:

- While the current housing and homelessness strategy refers to the rental vacancy rate, it does not use it as an indicator of the success of the strategy, even though the low rental vacancy rate is clearly a problem that needs solving and that motivates the strategy. It would be better to make increasing the vacancy rate an explicit goal of the strategy. This can be done while acknowledging that there are many

factors outside the City's control (the housing policies of other municipalities being just one example) that affect the vacancy rate.

7. **Acknowledge the diversity of renters and the people who are struggling to afford their housing - this includes people of all ages and household types.**

Why:

- Since the last housing strategy, much-needed attention has been paid to the issues of homelessness and also the lack of housing affordability for millennials, including young families and those who are well-educated yet still can't afford to buy a house in the city. While these issues need continued attention and problem-solving, the discussion needs to broaden to acknowledge the realities of affordability stresses experienced by other groups, including people of all ages, those who do not have the benefit of post-secondary education, and single-person households who must pay their housing costs on one income - in some cases due to the lack of shared housing options.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(b) Pets

Joshua Prowse distributed a draft motion with recommendations regarding pets and renting in Vancouver. Following discussion it was,

MOVED by Joshua Prowse
SECONDED by Peter Harvie

WHEREAS

1. While 57% of Canadian households own a pet, and more than half of Vancouver households rent, renters in Vancouver have special difficulty finding accommodation that allows pets;
2. Pets are a significant source of companionship for many people and play an important role in maintaining health, wellness, and quality of life, especially for seniors and people with disabilities;
3. Due to a low vacancy rate and high demand for affordable housing, many private landlords in Vancouver refuse to accept tenants with pets;
4. There is no reason in principle why the nature of a person's housing tenure should determine whether they can have pets, yet renters disproportionately have difficulty finding accommodation that allows pets;
5. The Renters Advisory Committee notes popular petitions in BC calling for the provincial Residential Tenancy Act to be changed to support tenants with pets;
6. Upwards of 20% of pet surrenders to the BC SPCA (about 1,500 pets per year) are related to housing challenges;

7. The City of Vancouver allows pets in all directly managed City-owned non-market housing. However, many housing units that the City of Vancouver funds, but does not directly manage, include blanket prohibitions on tenants having pets;
8. Some other jurisdictions have adopted special rules concerning pets. Ontario prohibits evicting tenants who have pets unless the pets are causing problems. In Nunavut, landlords providing public housing may not refuse to rent a unit to a tenant who has a pet;
9. Similarly, as part of the *Housing and Urban-Rural Recovery Act of 1983*, the United States Congress passed a rule titled Pet Ownership in Assisted Rental Housing for the Elderly or Handicapped, which provides that owners and managers of federally-assisted rental housing for the elderly or handicapped cannot prohibit or prevent a tenant from owning common household pets; and
10. An approach that allows pets in publicly-funded housing may still allow the housing provider to place restrictions on the size, kind, or number of pets that a tenant may have, or allow for the removal of pets that constitute a nuisance;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Renters Advisory Committee recommends:

- A. THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to investigate and report back on the extent to which City-funded housing prohibits pets outright and how the City could, when such agreements come up for renewal or renegotiation, incorporate terms in funding agreements with housing providers specifying that tenants be allowed to keep pets.
- B. THAT Vancouver City Council write to BC Housing advocating for pets to be allowed in Vancouver-area housing they manage or fund.
- C. THAT Vancouver City Council write to the provincial Minister Responsible for Housing requesting that the province study ways that the provincial Residential Tenancy Act could better support renters with pets.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(c) Empty Homes Tax

Following discussion regarding a draft motion put forward by Karen Ameyaw, it was,

MOVED by Karen Ameyaw

SECONDED by Noah Quastel

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver is experiencing an unprecedented housing crisis that requires the intervention, coordination and involvement of all levels of government to implement a myriad of measures to address the crisis;

2. On June 29th 2016, Vancouver City Council (“Council”) took under consideration the potential of empty homes as a source of rental housing supply and directed Vancouver City staff (“City Staff”) to report back on a City-administered program to levy a tax on empty homes;
3. In an Administrative report dated September 13, 2016, entitled “Encouraging Homes for Renters: Emerging Approach on empty Homes”, City staff proposed an approach to levy a tax on empty homes in order to encourage owners to occupy or rent out their unit with the net funds to be used for affordable housing initiatives;
4. At the Regular Council meeting on September 20, 2016, Council approved in principle an approach for taxing empty homes and directed City staff to undertake public consultations and report back with a recommended policy;
5. On October 12, 2016, City staff attended the Renters’ Advisory Committee meeting for consultation on the proposed empty home tax;
6. In an Administrative Report dated November 6, 2016, entitled “Encouraging Homes for Renters: Recommended Approach for Taxing Empty Homes”, City staff outlined the proposed approach for the empty home tax. The proposed empty home tax would be administered through a by-law that applied to a residential property that was neither the principal residence of the owner or their permitted occupier, nor occupied by a tenant or subtenant, for more than six months of the past calendar year, unless an exemption in the by-law applied. City staff recommended that the tax be levied at a rate of 1%; and
7. At the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services meeting on November 16, 2016, Council approved the above-noted report and the Vacancy Tax By-law;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

- A. The Renters Advisory Committee strongly supports the recommendations in the Administrative Report dated November 6, 2016, entitled “Encouraging Homes for Renters: Recommended Approach for Taxing Empty Homes”, that outlined that the empty home tax be levied at 1% and administered through a by-law that applied to a residential property that was neither the principal residence of the owner or their permitted occupier, nor occupied by a tenant or subtenant, for more than six months of the past calendar year, unless an exemption in the by-law applied.
- B. THAT the Renters Advisory Committee strongly supports Council’s approval of the Vacancy Tax By-law, which was approved at the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services meeting on November 16, 2016.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Next Meeting:

DATE: Wednesday, January 18, 2017
TIME: 5:30 pm
PLACE: Committee Room 1, Third Floor, City Hall

The Committee adjourned at 7:38 pm.

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