

Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy

2012-2021

A home for
everyone



 CITY OF
VANCOUVER

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Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy

2012-2021

Prepared by Context Ltd. June 2011

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A man with short brown hair, wearing a blue denim jacket over a grey t-shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is using a key to unlock a white door. To his left is a wall with a textured, light-colored finish. In his left hand, he holds a blue plastic shopping bag and a brown paper shopping bag. The scene is set indoors, likely in a hallway or entryway, with a window and curtains visible in the background.

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1.0 Introduction

Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy

Vancouver is a growing and diverse city with significant housing challenges. Providing a range of housing options is critical to the social and economic health of the City. The Housing and Homelessness Strategy describes the City's overall direction for housing, including what we need and how we will achieve it over the next ten years. It identifies the different kinds of housing necessary to meet the needs of our citizens, as well as ways to improve and better preserve the housing we currently have.

The goals of the strategy are to end street homelessness and provide more affordable housing choices for all Vancouverites. This includes housing that is accessible, affordable and suitable for all income levels, seniors, families and residents challenged by disability. Modest market and rental housing is key to the economic development of the City.

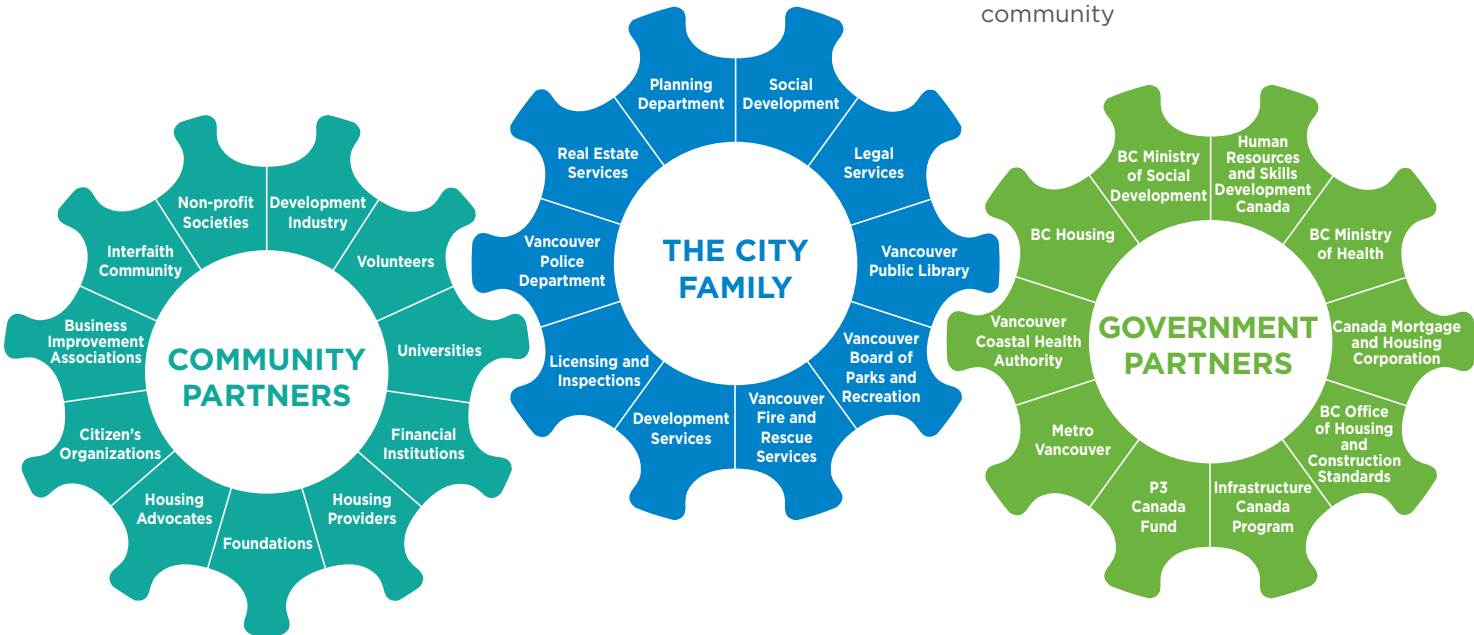
The strategic directions in this document address all points along the Housing Continuum. The Housing Continuum consists of the range of housing options available to households of all income levels, extending from emergency shelter and housing for the homeless through to affordable rental housing and homeownership. In the context of these challenges, the City is committed to policies and actions to improve housing affordability and diversity at all points along the continuum. The strategy will set priorities for capital projects, and direct housing programs, services and decisions.

The City of Vancouver's mission is to create a city of communities which cares about its people, its environment and the opportunities to live, work and prosper. Challenges with housing affordability and increasing homelessness pose significant barriers to achieving this mission.

Success depends on the support of all our partners

Success cannot be achieved alone. It requires:

- Commitment from all levels of government
- Support and cooperation of stakeholders and partners
- Widespread support from the community



2.0 Executive Summary

Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012-2021

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Mission

Create a city of communities which cares about its people, its environment and the opportunities to live, work and prosper

Goals

- End street homelessness by 2015
- Increase affordable housing choices for all Vancouverites



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Increase the supply of affordable housing

Priority Actions:

1. Optimize the City's use of land, capital grants, incentives, and other resources to lever and support housing partnerships
2. Refine and develop new zoning approaches, development tools and rental incentives
3. Pursue a new business model to enhance affordable housing delivery



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Encourage a housing mix across all neighbourhoods that enhances quality of life

Priority Actions:

1. Protect the existing rental stock by:
 - maintaining and exploring opportunities to improve the Rate of Change regulations and SRA Bylaw
 - providing incentives for upgrades
 - improving property and tenancy management practices
2. Target low barrier shelter, supportive housing and social housing:
 - in neighbourhoods with significant homeless populations and limited capacity, and;
 - to specific populations (e.g. youth, urban Aboriginal, mentally ill, women, etc.)
3. Use financial and regulatory tools to encourage a variety of housing types and tenures that meet the needs of diverse households



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

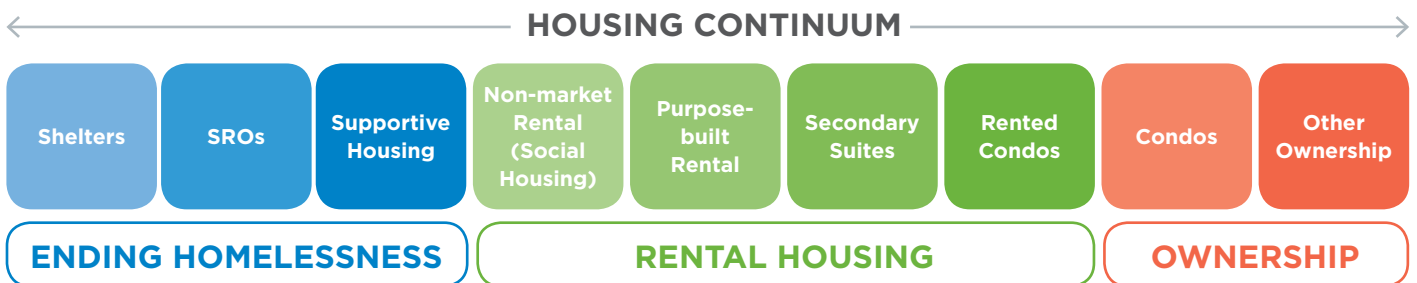
Provide strong leadership and support partners to enhance housing stability

Priority Actions:

1. Enhance support to renters
2. Strengthen the focus of the Urban Health Initiative on homelessness, with an emphasis on improving health, safety, food security, employment, and social supports
3. Demonstrate leadership in research and innovation to create improved housing options for our diverse population
4. Focus our efforts with partners on preventing and eliminating homelessness

3.0 The Challenge

The Housing Continuum consists of the range of housing options available to households of all income levels, extending from emergency shelter and housing for the homeless through to affordable rental housing and homeownership.



The City of Vancouver faces significant challenges at all points along the housing continuum.

In the context of these challenges, the City is committed to policies and actions to improve housing affordability and diversity at all points along the continuum.

3.1 Homelessness Challenges



- Although stabilized in the last 2 years, homelessness has increased nearly three-fold in the last 10 years.
- Inadequate SRO hotels form a key part of the lowest income housing stock, but rooms are being lost to conversions and rent increases.
- There are a significant number of supportive housing units in development, but this supply will not entirely address the need and will take several years to complete.
- Gaps in the health care and social safety systems contribute to the problem. The majority of homeless have mental health and addiction issues.

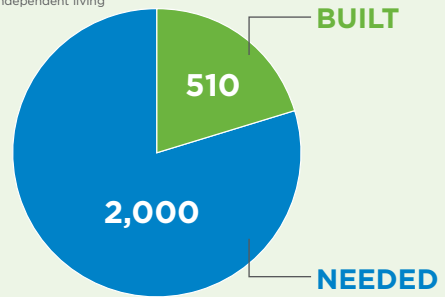


3.2 Rental Housing Challenges

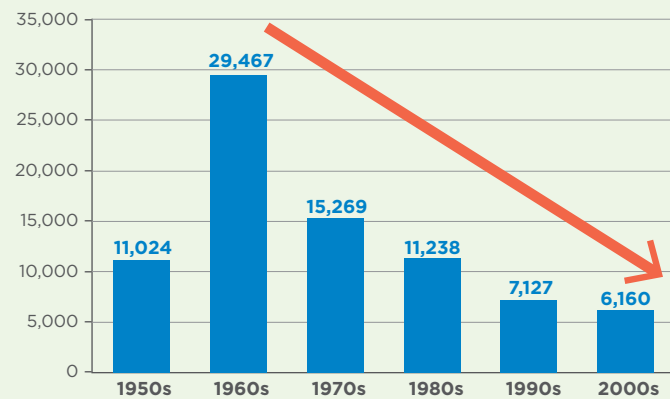


- New social housing supply has decreased in recent decades.
- There are very low vacancy rates in the market rental stock, with limited new supply in recent decades.
- Economic analysis of new purpose-built rental housing supply indicates that significant new supply by the private market is unlikely without incentives.
- Primary source of new supply is the secondary market, including secondary suites (which are usually affordable), and rented condominiums, which tend to have higher rents and have limited security of tenure.

Number of New-build Non-market Units* 2006 - 2010
* Independent living



Market-rental Apartment Completions by Decade (CMHC)

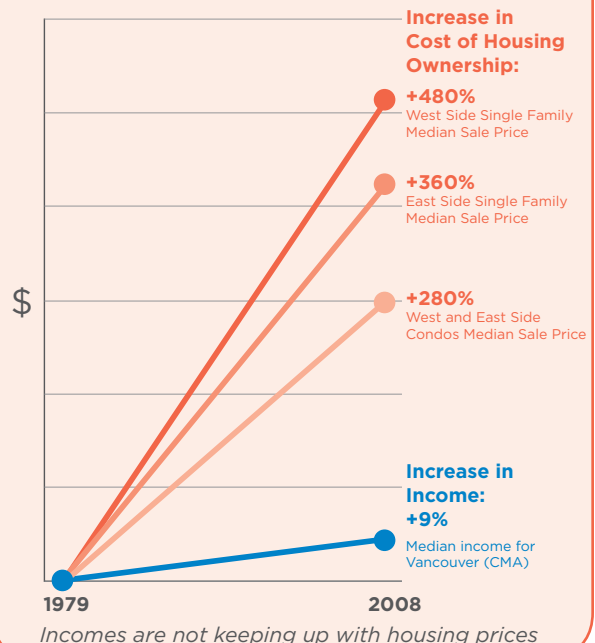


3.3 Home Ownership Challenges



- Vancouver has the highest house prices in Canada.
- The vast majority of renter households have incomes far below those required to purchase even a modest eastside condominium.
- The gap is widening — since the late 1970s, real household incomes increased by 9% while house prices increased by 280% for an eastside condo.

Affordable Home Ownership Challenges



4.0 Making Progress

4.1 What we have done (2009 - 2011)

The City has already made significant progress toward achieving its goals to address homelessness and affordability challenges.

In working to end homelessness by 2015, the City has:

- Increased shelter capacity during winter months through the Mayor's Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) and Winter Response low-barrier shelter initiative, and partnership with BC Housing and community partners. This has resulted in an 82% reduction in street homelessness since 2008.
- Funded the renovation of 200 units (Bosman Residence and Dunsmuir House) to provide capacity to reduce street homelessness and allow people to stabilize pending the completion of permanent supportive housing resources.
- Secured capital funding from the Province of BC for 1500 supportive housing units on 14 City-owned sites; four of these sites opened in the first half of 2011 with 390 units now occupied. The remaining units will be open by the end of 2013.
- Mobilized the community and established key partnerships with Vancouver Coastal Health, Business Improvement Associations, the Interfaith community and local churches to work on ending street homelessness and providing better support to the homeless.
- Launched the Urban Health Initiative in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health, focusing on a number of important initiatives targeting homelessness such as providing primary care in low-barrier shelters, addressing problem hoarding, Mental Health 101 training for frontline staff, and implementing food security initiatives.

To increase affordable housing choices for all Vancouverites, the City has:

- Developed the Short-Term Incentives for Rental (STIR) program which responds to the market rental shortage with incentives for the development of new market rental housing. Incentives include: waiving of development cost levies on rental units, reducing parking requirements, using discretion to determine unit size, increasing density and expediting permit processing. As of July 1, 2011, there are 1,100 rental units in the pipeline, of which 500 have been approved.
- Through new zoning policies, the City enabled the development of 750 new secondary suites and laneway housing units between 2009 and July 1, 2011. Single family housing with secondary suites is permitted in all residential areas in the city. To facilitate the creation of more secondary suites, zoning changes were approved to enable full-size basements and more livable basement suites in all single-family areas. As well, laneway housing was introduced in most single-family areas.
- Used a model similar to inclusionary zoning to support the Cambie Corridor Plan which requires 20% affordable market rental housing units on sites targeted for rental housing (creating the capacity of 2,900 rental units) or an increased allocation of affordable rental units on large and strategic sites.

Street homelessness has decreased 82% since 2008



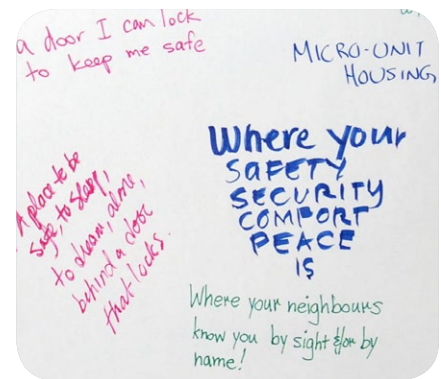
Official Groundbreaking at 215 West 2nd Avenue in Vancouver - June 27, 2011

4.2 What we learned from the public and our partners

The City has been making progress toward achieving our goals but success requires input, collaboration and partnership. To strengthen our strategy, in the spring of 2011 we conducted the **Talk Housing With Us Engagement Program**. The program provided an opportunity for housing stakeholders, experts and interested community members to present ideas, seek advice, and engage one another to find solutions to the challenges of housing affordability and homelessness.

What we heard and learned is captured below.

- Low-barrier shelters (such as the HEAT shelters) have been very effective at helping people come inside and as points of entry to the housing continuum. However, the uncertainty around opening and closure procedures for seasonal shelters each year creates challenges for everyone involved. More stability is needed in the Winter Response program.
- Location is extremely important to solutions to homelessness — people are more likely to come inside and be successful inside when shelter and supportive housing is provided in the neighbourhood they call home.
- Basic services can have a profound impact — nutritious food and primary health care encourage people to come inside, improve people's health and well-being and make low-barrier shelter and housing environments more manageable.
- The City's Rate of Change regulations (protection of rental stock) are effective at preventing loss of secure rental housing. However, the City needs to consider incentives to encourage repair and maintenance as the stock ages. Without Rate of Change regulations, 14,200 units of rental housing could be at risk by 2019.
- The Short-Term Incentives for Rental (STIR) program has been successful at encouraging purpose-built and market rental housing supply, but there is room for improvement. STIR projects are most successful when they fit with the neighbourhood context. STIR has enabled observations about which incentives, locations, and construction types are most successful. There is an interest in developing small projects, but these developers may require technical assistance in project development and development approvals.
- Minor changes to existing city policies and regulations can have significant impacts. (For example, zoning changes that encourage livable basements in single family houses have increased the supply of secondary suites).
- Broadening partnerships to include new sectors and organizations is a key to success.
- The City needs to pursue opportunities with new partners to increase the affordable housing supply with or without senior government funding.
- Renters face significant challenges finding and keeping affordable and adequate rental housing. Some renters are struggling to access the advice and support they need to understand and maintain their rights.
- Continued leadership from Mayor and Council is key to success.



Scrawl Wall at Housing Unconference Event: "What does home mean to you?"

Developing the Strategy

A wide range of citizens and key stakeholders participated in the development of this strategy. In the spring of 2011, over 400 people participated in the Talk Housing With Us engagement process, including a Stakeholder Workshop, Stakeholder Meetings, a Renters Roundtable, and an Unconference event.

In addition over 2,400 people visited the Talk Housing With Us Discussion Forums and 165 people discussed issues, posted questions, generated ideas and learned about housing and homelessness through fact sheets, links and videos.

5.0 Strategic Directions

To ensure the City and its partners sustain the progress we have made to achieve our goals, we have identified three strategic directions with corresponding priority actions:



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Increase the supply of affordable housing

Priority Actions:

1. Optimize the City's use of land, capital grants, incentives, and other resources to lever and support housing partnerships
2. Refine and develop new zoning approaches, development tools and rental incentives
3. Pursue a new business model to enhance affordable housing delivery



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Encourage a housing mix across all neighbourhoods that enhances quality of life

Priority Actions:

1. Protect the existing rental stock by:
 - maintaining and exploring opportunities to improve the Rate of Change regulations and SRA Bylaw
 - providing incentives for upgrades
 - improving property and tenancy management practices
2. Target low barrier shelter, supportive housing and social housing:
 - in neighbourhoods with significant homeless populations and limited capacity, and;
 - to specific populations (e.g. youth, urban Aboriginal, mentally ill, women, etc.)
3. Use financial and regulatory tools to encourage a variety of housing types and tenures that meet the needs of diverse households

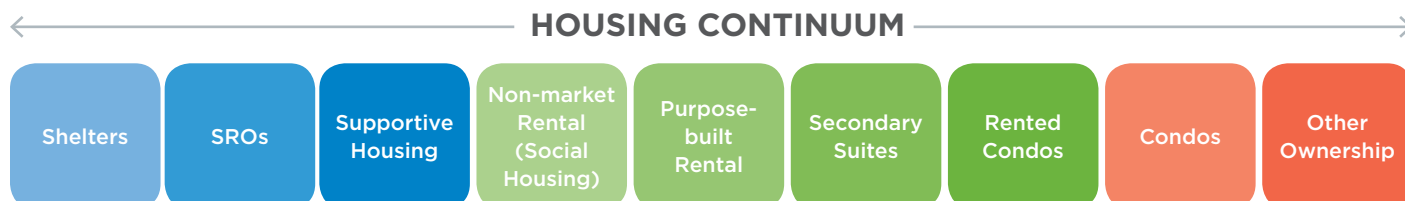


STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Provide strong leadership and support partners to enhance housing stability

Priority Actions:

1. Enhance support to renters
2. Strengthen the focus of the Urban Health Initiative on homelessness, with an emphasis on improving health, safety, food security, employment, and social supports
3. Demonstrate leadership in research and innovation to create improved housing options for our diverse population
4. Focus our efforts with partners on preventing and eliminating homelessness



The strategic directions address the entire housing continuum and are designed to meet the housing needs of all Vancouverites. An overview of what each strategic direction is designed to achieve, together with a picture of success and priority actions are described in the following sections.

5.1 Strategic Direction 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing

Increasing the supply of affordable housing will:

- Help reduce the significant number of homeless people on the street and in shelters
- Address the insufficient supply of rental housing, particularly that which is affordable to low and modest income households
- Help renters find housing. Incomes required for homeownership are out of reach for majority of renter households in Vancouver. The vast majority of renter households have incomes far below those required to purchase even a modest eastside condominium



The picture of success by 2021:

- Ensure shelter capacity to meet the needs of street homeless
- Enable 2,900 new supportive housing units
 - Phase 1: 1,700 units (funded and delivered 2011–2013)
 - Phase 2: 450 units (funded 2012–2014)
 - Phase 3: 750 units (funded 2015–2021)
- Enable 5,000 additional new social housing units (includes 1,000 units of SRO replacement with self-contained social housing)
- Enable 11,000 new market rental housing units
 - 5,000 purpose-built rental
 - 6,000 secondary market (e.g. suites, laneway housing)
- Enable 20,000 market ownership units



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1 PRIORITY ACTIONS:

1. Optimize the City's use of land, capital grants, incentives, and other resources to lever and support housing partnerships
2. Refine and develop new zoning approaches, development tools and rental incentives
3. Pursue a new business model to enhance delivery of affordable housing

5.2 Strategic Direction 2: Encourage a housing mix across all neighbourhoods that enhances quality of life

Encouraging a housing mix to enhance quality of life and choice in all neighbourhoods will:

- Increase the availability of well-maintained and suitable housing types and tenures for a diverse population (e.g. two, three and four bedroom units for families, supportive housing, accessible housing, seniors) across all neighbourhoods

The picture of success by 2021:

- high quality, well-maintained housing stock
- a complete mix of housing in each of the City's neighbourhoods



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2 PRIORITY ACTIONS

1. Protect the existing rental stock by:
 - maintaining and exploring opportunities to improve the Rate of Change regulations and SRA Bylaw
 - providing incentives for upgrades
 - improving property and tenancy management practices
2. Target low barrier shelter, supportive housing and social housing:
 - in neighbourhoods with significant homeless populations and limited capacity, and;
 - to specific populations (e.g. youth, urban Aboriginal, mentally ill, women etc.)
3. Use financial and regulatory tools to encourage a variety of housing types and tenures that meet the needs of diverse households

5.3 Strategic Direction 3: Provide strong leadership and support partners to enhance housing stability

Providing strong leadership and supporting partners to enhance housing stability will:

- Improve understanding of the importance of housing stability
- Help identify risks and overcome barriers to housing stability

The picture of success by 2021:

- Vancouver's citizens will have the support they need to access and maintain stable housing

Partnerships are essential in meeting our goals to end homelessness and to increase housing options for all Vancouverites



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3 PRIORITY ACTIONS

1. Enhance support to renters
2. Strengthen the focus of the Urban Health Initiative on homelessness, with an emphasis on improving health, safety, food security, employment, and social supports
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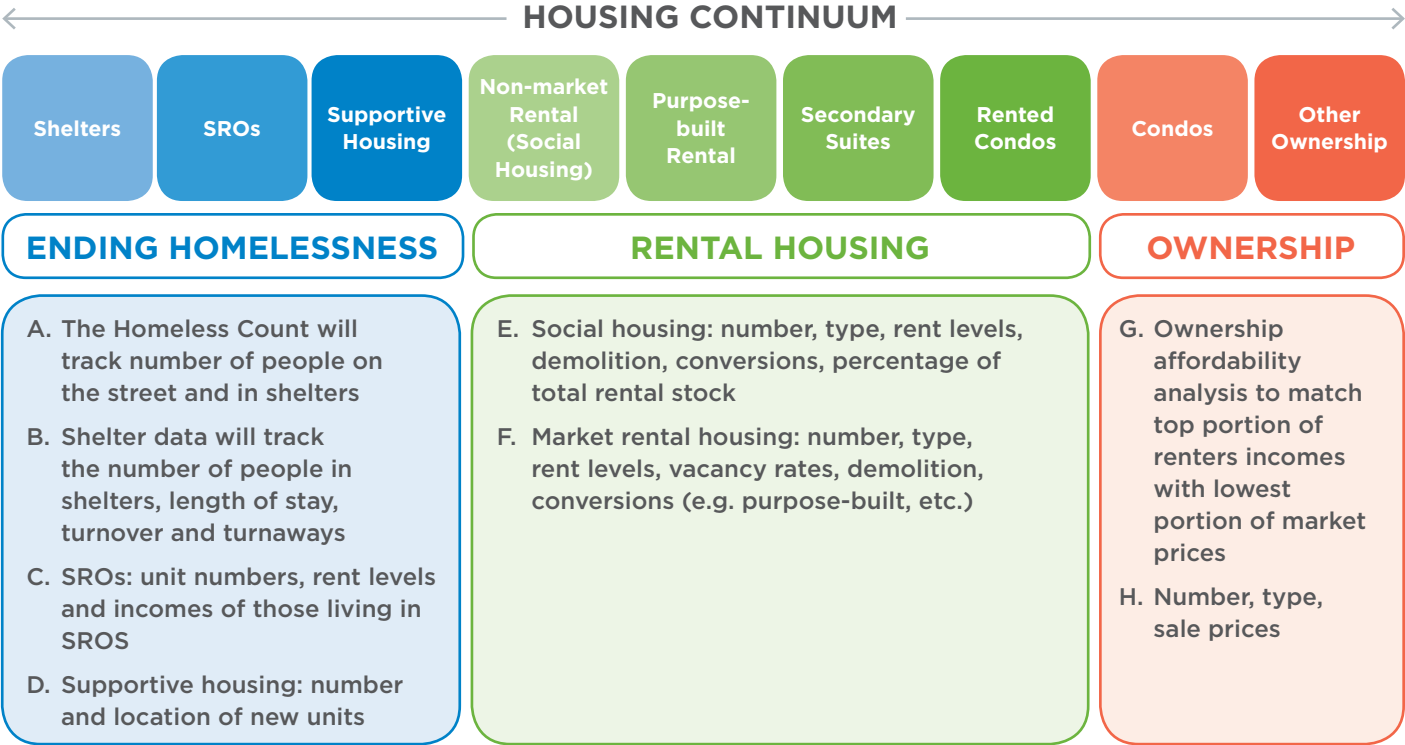
6.0 Implementation and Performance

Implementing the Strategy

The Strategy will be achieved through a series of Action Plans corresponding with the City’s capital plan cycle to aid with effective implementation.

Measuring Our Performance

A Housing and Homelessness Strategy report card will be presented annually to Council to track our progress towards achieving the strategy goals. Baseline indicators will be established to measure and evaluate our progress which will help fine tune priority actions or shift the focus as necessary.





Glossary



Affordable housing can be provided by the City, government, non-profit, community and for-profit partners and it can be found or developed along the whole housing continuum including SROs, market rental and affordable home ownership. The degree of housing affordability results from the relationship between the cost of housing and household income. It is not a static concept as housing costs and incomes change over time.

Emergency Shelters are temporary accommodation for the homeless; they prevent people from becoming street homeless.

Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Housing is the most affordable form of rental housing provided by the market. In Vancouver, the stock of SROs was built in the early 1900s to provide transitional housing largely for men working in the resource industries. A typical SRO unit is one room of about 10 x 10 feet with shared bathrooms and minimal or no cooking facilities. Over the last 20 years, a significant portion of SROs in the city have been bought and are operated by government or a non-profit partner.

Supportive Housing is non-market housing (see next definition) that, in addition to rental subsidy to make the housing affordable, also includes ongoing and targeted support services to residents who cannot live independently due to health problems and or other disability. This housing type can be provided in congregate settings or in scattered apartments. Typical support services include mental health and or other health supports, life skills training and meal preparation.

Social Housing/Non-Market Housing is housing for low and moderate income singles and families, usually subsidized through a variety of mechanisms, including senior government support. The current model in Vancouver is a self-contained unit, with private bathroom and kitchen, owned or operated by government or a non-profit. The rents vary to enable a mix of incomes and can range from the value of the shelter component of Income Assistance to 30% of tenant's income including market rents.

Secure Market Rental / Purpose Built Rental Housing are apartments and/or buildings that are built with the intent to be rented in the private market. Through regulation, they cannot be separated and sold as separate stratas.

Secondary Suites are typically additional units within the structure of a principal single family residence, and are often basement apartments or lock-off suites in townhouses / apartments.

Rented Condominiums are investor-owned condominium (strata) units rented on the private market.

Condominiums are buildings in which units of property are owned individually, while the common property is owned jointly by all of the owners.

Other Ownership refers primarily to single family dwellings and row house forms that are not owned as strata properties (i.e. condominiums).

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