



RENTERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MINUTES

July 15, 2020

A special meeting of the Renters Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, July 15, 2020, at 5:39 pm, by electronic means, for the purpose of discussing four motions.

PRESENT: Jacint Simon, Co-Chair
Taylor Fleming, Co-Chair
Matt Damaro
Megan Morrow
Melissa Penner
Anne Vavrik

ABSENT: Emily Bailey
Louise Chivers (Leave of Absence)
Catherine Li

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Jean Swanson, Council Liaison

CITY CLERK'S OFFICE: Irina Dragnea, Meeting Coordinator

WELCOME

The Meeting Coordinator acknowledged we are on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and we thank them for having cared for this land and look forward to working with them in partnership as we continue to build this great city together.

Leave of Absence Requests

MOVED by Matt Damaro
SECONDED by Melissa Penner

THAT the Renters Advisory Committee approve leave of absence for Louise Chivers, for this meeting.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Approval of Minutes – January 29, 2020

MOVED by Matt Damarico
SECONDED by Melissa Penner

THAT the Renters Advisory Committee approve the Minutes from the meeting of January 29, 2020, as circulated.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

1. Update on Committee Members

The Meeting Coordinator provided an update on the Committee members that have resigned.

2. Sharing is Caring

The Committee members shared, via roundtable discussion, something positive that has happened in the last week.

3. Liaison Updates

Councillor Swanson discussed the following items:

- The Park Board approved by-law that allows overnight homeless camping in city parks;
- Potential Tenant Protection Plan future update; and
- Vacancy control in the Single Room Occupancy (SROs) and asking the Province for support.

4. Chair Update and Election of New Co-Chair

Jacint Simon, Co-Chair, reviewed the responsibilities required for the role of Co-Chair of the committee and encouraged other members to apply to become a Co-Chair in 2020.

The Committee agreed to further discuss this item under New Business.

5. Motion to Support Hogan's Alley Society

Jacint Simon, Co-Chair, introduced the above-noted motion.

MOVED by Matt Damarico
SECONDED by Megan Morrow

WHEREAS

1. The Hogan's Alley Society has the following petition:

<https://www.hogansalleysociety.org/stand-with-vancouvers-black-community-now/>

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, subject to consultation with the Hogan's Alley Society (HAS), the Renters Advisory Committee supports the HAS in their efforts and call on the City of Vancouver to "take immediate action to Redress the Displacement of the Black Community in the area known as Hogan's Alley by making a commitment to our Proposal for a Non-profit Community Land Trust on the Hogan's Alley Block (Bound by Gore, Main, Union, and Prior Streets)."

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

6. New Business

(a) COVID-19 Response for Low Income Housing

MOVED by Matt Damarico

SECONDED by Taylor Fleming

WHEREAS

1. As members of the City of Vancouver's Renters Advisory Committee, we have been watching City and Provincial support for renters closely during the COVID-19 State of Emergency in BC;
2. Housing is a human right, and this has been acknowledged by Canada's National Housing Strategy, as well as the United Nations;
3. Housing is widely accepted as a key determinant of health, and experiences of homelessness, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, put individuals at profound risk of various health-related harms and render them unable to safely and privately social distance;
4. There are many unhoused individuals currently staying outside or camping within city-limits (e.g., Strathcona Park encampment) who are unable to secure tenancies due to unaffordability, unavailability, and prejudice;
5. Social assistance rates in BC (\$760 a month for a single person on welfare and \$1,183 for a person on disability) have remained virtually stagnant for years, and continue to be far below the poverty line;
6. The Provincial government has authorized a \$300 top-up for people on social assistance for the months of April, May, and June, in recognition of the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic is violently exacerbating health and social inequities experienced by people living in poverty;
7. The Provincial government has announced (to date) that they will continue to ban evictions for non-payment of rent until August 31st, although no direction on how renters will be impacted after this date has been provided; and

8. When the ban on evictions ends, many low-income residents are at risk of eviction due to either no longer being able to pay rent after losing the \$300, or being unable to repay any owed rent accrued during the eviction ban.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Renters Advisory Committee calls on the City to use its powers to **immediately house all homeless individuals**, including those experiencing street-based homelessness, camping within city-limits, and who are precariously housed, in currently-empty hotel rooms or other suitable housing that **meets their needs** (e.g., accessibility, drug use);

FURTHER THAT the Renters Advisory Committee calls on the City to make building welfare-rate and low-income housing a key priority within the coming recalibration of the Housing Vancouver Strategy, and for the City to commit to aggressively meeting targets for this type of housing in ways it has not previously;

AND FURTHER THAT the Renters Advisory Committee requests that Council work with City staff in order to **publicly** advocate for its most marginalized residents at a provincial level by demanding the Province permanently adopt the \$300 increase in monthly social assistance payments, and that the ban on evictions continues for a period after the State of Emergency ends for people living in low-income housing, such as single room occupancy hotels.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(b) Rent Forgiveness Program

MOVED by Melissa Penner
SECONDED by Megan Morrow

WHEREAS

1. As members of the City of Vancouver's Renters Advisory Committee, we have been watching City and Provincial support for renters closely during the COVID-19 State of Emergency in BC;
2. Many renters have lost income during this time, and as a result have struggled to pay their rent, and that this is particularly true in Vancouver, where according to the 2016 census 35% of renter households spend 30-99% of their income on housing;
3. The Committee is thankful that the BC government has announced (to date) that they will continue to ban evictions for non-payment of rent until August 31st, however, despite both provincial and federal financial assistance programs, there are many renters in Vancouver who are struggling to pay for housing (while also paying for other necessities);
4. Rents have not been forgiven, only delayed, even for those hardest hit by the pandemic;

5. Due to unemployment, among other factors, many renters will not be able to pay the accrued rent amount once the eviction ban is lifted, even with a provincial payment plan in place; and
6. Loans from a “rent bank” to cover arrears, which must be paid back, can also put many renters at risk of ruinous rent debt through no fault of their own.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Renters Advisory Committee urges Council to advocate for a rent forgiveness program to the Government of British Columbia for those who cannot pay their full rent due to financial impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic;

FURTHER THAT accrual of further debt through “rent banks” are acknowledged as an unacceptable solution to missed rent payments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(c) Prohibition of “No Pets” Clauses in Rental Contracts

MOVED by Matt Damarico
SECONDED by Taylor Fleming

WHEREAS

1. Under the guidelines set forth by Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry, British Columbians have been strongly encouraged to practice physical distancing with all but one’s own household. Social distancing is particularly difficult for seniors, underhoused individuals, and those who live alone. It has become clear that pets can help ease this isolation;
2. COVID-19 has exacerbated an already existing problem: the current legislation discriminates against renters that have pets and are trying to find affordable housing in BC. The BC SPCA reports that “no pets” policies are the leading cause for surrender and abandonment of pets; and
3. Ontario prohibited “no pets” policies in rental units, and this law has brought benefit to renters and pets for decades in Ontario. As the two provinces face similar pressures in rental housing, this model could be studied and applied within BC.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Renters Advisory Committee request that Council advocate for the prohibition of “no pets” clauses in rental contracts, and to look into what mechanisms the City can use to curb landlords’ right to refuse rental on the basis of pet ownership.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(d) Election of New Co-Chair

MOVED by Megan Morrow
SECONDED by Matt Damario

THAT the Renters Advisory Committee appoint Taylor Fleming to serve as Co-Chair until December 31, 2020.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Taylor Fleming
SECONDED by Anne Vavrik

THAT this special meeting be adjourned.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Next Meeting:

DATE: September 23, 2020
TIME: 5:30 pm
PLACE: WebEx (electronic)

The Committee adjourned at 7:17 pm.

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