

Housing is City Business

Business needs affordable housing. An adequate supply and array of housing options benefits a city and its people with social inclusion, safety, healthy communities and healthy citizens, all of which attract businesses and workers.

Cities across Canada have made housing their business.

Many cities across Canada have recognized the benefits of affordable housing and have committed to action. **Calgary is committed to supporting the development of 8,500 affordable housing units by 2018 via programs, partnerships and policies. Saskatoon has targeted the development 5,000 affordable units over 10 years. In comparison, The City of Winnipeg's newly adopted Housing Policy and Implementation Plan commits to developing only 75 units of affordable rental housing over 5 years.**

In a city nearing 700,000 people with a vacancy rate of less than 2% this is inadequate. In 2011, nearly 13,080 Winnipeg households were paying 50% or more of their income on rent and therefore at a high risk of losing their housing. Given this need, it would be more appropriate for The City of Winnipeg to set targets aligned with the Provincial Government, utilizing City resources to facilitate, partner and leverage. Consequently, **we propose that The City of Winnipeg support at least 350 new units of affordable rental housing, and 350 new units of social housing over three years.**

Winnipeg has the resources to support affordable housing.

Diane MacKay, of the Conference Board of Canada: *"the housing crisis that has been unfolding for years has all kinds of impacts, including on the ability to draw workers."*

Here are a few ways that don't require changes to the budget:

1. **Land donations** – Land is a limited resource, which should be used wisely and in the best interests of The City. Many cities have and Winnipeg could prioritize city-owned land for affordable housing first.
2. **Tax increment financing** – Grants equal to municipal taxes to developers have increased downtown development. TIF grants will be effective if prioritized for affordable housing development.
3. **Cost offset grants** – Waivers of development fees and other charges cost the city very little and help the economic viability of projects.
4. **Moratorium on Condo Conversions** – The City has the authority to preserve its existing rental housing stock when vacancy rates are low.

Mayor Nenshi: *"Well quite bluntly, everyone in the city should have a safe and a decent place to live. And the problem we have right now is that the supply of rental housing and entry-level housing has not kept pace with the demand."*

The Right to Housing Coalition is a Winnipeg-based group of individuals and organizations working together to promote affordable and social housing by advocating for housing policy solutions to three levels of government that would result in decent housing for all. For more information go to: <http://righttohousing.ca/> or contact city@righttohousing.ca

5. **Planning and land use** – Identifying and pre-zoning land for affordable housing initiatives speeds up the development process. City planning and zoning should respond to affordable housing needs.
6. **Inclusionary zoning** –The City can require developers to build, or pay for, a portion of affordable housing whenever they build any housing. The City should assure affordable housing exists in all Winnipeg neighbourhoods.

Increasing affordable housing needs government. Budgets indicate a city’s commitments, and Winnipeg’s housing budget has remained stagnant for years. Most of the City’s Housing Rehabilitation Investment Reserve (\$1m/year) goes to neighbourhood revitalization initiatives. This funding is successfully improving housing in inner city neighbourhoods, but it’s not building new affordable housing at the scale required. An affordable housing development corporation, or a much larger Housing Department, with the mandate and resources to develop affordable housing, is needed. The City of Winnipeg’s investment in downtown development through CentreVenture Development Corporation has shown this approach to be very effective.

The City of Winnipeg should show government support, coordination and resources for affordable housing development through an agency dedicated to increasing affordable housing throughout the city.

Affordable housing is city business. Affordable housing provides the foundation for commercial and community development. Affordable housing is required for seniors to age in their neighbourhoods, for young families to grow their roots, for workers and students to come to Winnipeg, stay in Winnipeg, and succeed. **Effectively providing a range of housing options for all residents needs leadership that only the City can provide – in planning, zoning, land allocations, funding and collaborations with developers and social organizations.** Cities that have made any significant progress in increasing affordable housing options have Mayors and City Councillors who understand that affordable housing is city business.

Mayor Robertson: *“The City needs to be a leader in creating the affordable housing our residents deserve, especially when there is such a shortage of affordable homes in Vancouver.”*

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