

Market Rental Revitalization Study

Tenant Focus Group Session

February 7, 2018, 5:30-8:00pm

Victoria City Hall, Songhees Nation Meeting Room

11 participants attended the session

Agenda overview:

1. Overview of MaRRS project
 - Questions and discussion about MaRRS project
2. Explanation of Standards of Maintenance (SOM) Bylaw
 - Questions and discussion about SOM Bylaw
3. Explanation of Tenant Protection Policy
 - Questions and discussion about Tenant Protection Policy

General questions and comments from participants

- Questions regarding baseline data for the survey: will the rental housing inventory be available to the public?
- Renters make up the majority (60%) of City of Victoria's population
- What defines "aging" rental stock? Which aspects of the building are most important?
- Concerns about "renovictions", in addition to redevelopment, as a large contributor to tenant instability and displacement
- Concerns about the detrimental impact renovations (if tenants remain in place) may have on tenant (and worker) health

Standards of Maintenance Bylaw – Comments from Participants

- Questions around what types of buildings this applies to (are there exclusions?)
 - Concerns that SOM Bylaw could lead to housing loss of currently illegal secondary suites, leading to tenant displacement
- Concerns that SOM Bylaw could actually trigger "renoviction" by providing justification for landlords to undertake more intensive renovation work, which may lead to displacement
- Concerns that SOM Bylaw could lead to rental rate increases
- Enforcement as a concern – even if it is on a complaints basis and for bad actors, how will the City be able to ensure compliance
- Concept of a "license of occupancy" brought up as a potential tool to ensure compliance (but would require proactive enforcement)
- SOM Bylaw could be useful for tenants as they file complaints with the Residential Tenancy Board – can use to demonstrate that their housing situation is falling short of standards
- Tenant health a concern – is there no government authority to protect the health of tenants?

- Importance of finding balance between simple, straightforward regulations that are easy to enforce and comprehensively covering aspects that relate to tenant health and safety
- Additional items suggested by participants for consideration:
 - Accessibility standards
 - Specification about preventing heavy metal contamination in water due to pipe problems
 - Impacts of plumbing leaks, like rotting drywall, wet insulation, re-hydrated rat feces
 - Mould and mildew
 - Ventilation in bathrooms
 - Elevators in working order (accessibility concern)
 - Garbage systems up to date
 - Building envelope
 - Pest control – should require particular types of treatments (e.g. heat treatment in the case of bed bugs)
 - Safety issues:
 - Stairwell and handrails
 - Lighting – outdoor lighting

Tenant Protection Policy – Comments from Participants

- Concerns about the limitations to City of Victoria's jurisdictional authority
 - Is there an opportunity to change the Community Charter so that Victoria can have the types of jurisdictional powers that the City of Vancouver has?
 - Concerns that the TPP is voluntary vs mandatory
- Questions about if/how tenants would be protected in cases of:
 - Renovations that aren't related to the MaRRS project
 - Renovation or redevelopment that doesn't require rezoning
- Supply of affordable housing is the most important issue
 - Even with tenant relocation coordinator, if there is no comparable affordable housing and a low vacancy rate, then it is a problem
- Order of importance of TPP aspects, based on questionnaire rank averages (not necessarily representative of broader trends or even trends within the group):
 1. Moving Assistance
 2. Right of First Refusal – with comparable/discounted rent level requirements
 3. Increased compensation
 4. Moving costs
 5. Increased notice
- Comments on particular aspects of Tenant Protection Policy:
 - Right of First Refusal
 - Must be at current level of rent, or at least significantly below market
 - Compensation

- 1-3 months' rent compensation does not compare to the cost of displacement for the tenant, nor does it compare to the profit that can be made by the landlord in renovation or redevelopment
- Notice of ending tenancy
 - "Notice doesn't matter that much when there's nowhere to go"

Action items for MaRRS Project Team

- Explore jurisdictional responsibility for Standards of Maintenance categories (i.e. Health, Fire etc.) and provide clarification for those that are covered by other regulations (e.g., building code)
- Further explore Municipal Authority to require tenant protections for Building and Development permits.
- Consider planning a second Tenant Focus Group session to focus further on the Tenant Protection Policy.

Market Rental Revitalization Study
Tenant Focus Group Session
March 28, 2018, 5:30-8:00pm
Victoria City Hall, Songhees Nation Meeting Room

8 participants attended the session

Agenda of session:

- Explanation of Tenant Protection Policy
 - Questions and discussion about the elements of the Tenant Protection Policy
 - Notice
 - Compensation
 - Moving assistance
 - Right of first refusal

General Questions and Comments

- Concern that the policy will create a two tiered system, where people that live in a building that undergoes a rezoning will receive additional compensation and notice while tenants evicted due to renovations will not.
- Concern that being asked to provide input into policies that were already well developed and based on those already implemented in other BC Municipalities was confining and didn't allow for innovative approaches to protecting tenants.
- Concern that visible minorities or persons with lived experience of housing insecurity were not well represented in the focus group.
- Concern that the Tenant Protection Policy is a dislocation policy and a comment that: "We need security of tenure, and looking at upgrades, but money doesn't replace housing. And neither does notice. I'm offended it's called a Tenant Protection Policy. It's not to protect, it's for after tenants weren't given proper protection"
- Concern that developers will pick and choose the parts of the tenant relocation plan that are most convenient to them and use the plan as a bartering tool to secure rezoning's.
- Communication:
 - Suggestion that Tenants and community associations be made aware of tenant relocation plans at an early stage before they become final as it will encourage accountability.
 - Suggestion that the city should be more proactive in informing tenants of their rights. Comment that it seems it is up to individuals to pursue what their options are and not all tenants have the time or the expertise to do so.
- Comment that the policy should be designed to be more stringent during times that the vacancy rate falls below 1%

Notice

- Comment that three months is the perfect amount of notice for tenants. The extra month (beyond the 2 months stipulated in the RTA) would give tenants extra time to dispute the notice.
- Suggestion that notice period be linked to the average amount of time it takes to secure rental housing in the City. 3 months of notice may not be sufficient in the current rental market.

Compensation

- Comment that 3 months of rent is “awesome” but concern that it will be difficult to compel developers to meet this requirement.
- Suggestions that more compensation and notice should be offered to families as it will be more difficult for them to find alternate multi-bedroom housing.
- Comment that basing compensation on the length of tenancy, excludes young renters. These renters have shorter tenancies but it takes them the same amount of time to find alternate accommodation.

Moving Assistance

Relocation Coordinator

- Concern that about a recourse if the tenant isn’t happy with the relocation coordinator’s work.
- Suggestion that an independent body be appointed to determine whether or not relocation coordinators have filled their role.
- Concern that a relocation coordinator won’t be able to find alternate housing that doesn’t exist. Comment that the tenant relocation policy should be focused on increased compensation.
- Concern that owners/landlords would print off kijiji ads, shoving them under people’s doors, and walking away rather than being more engaged.
- Suggestion that relocation coordinators be required to provide tenants with contact details for tenant advocacy groups such as TAPS.
- Concern that relocation coordinator, if hired by the developers, won’t be in it to help tenants.

Moving Expenses

- Suggestion that moving expenses amount be determined by getting in touch with local moving companies for quotes.

Right of first refusal

- Comment that if a tenant is asked to move and given three months’ notice that it would likely be a permanent move. Questions about why tenants would consider to move back to the building?
- Comment that Right of First refusal could reduce some of the incentive for owners to profit off of a big development as it would limit their potential future revenue.
- It’s important to offer. It makes no effect if you don’t want it, but it would be sad if you took it away and those that want it can’t have it.
- Suggestion that right of first refusal be paired with options in place for short term housing so that the tenants can move back.
- Suggestion that right of first refusal be at the same rent the tenant was paying previously. Comment that right of first refusal would be taken up by a many tenants.