

Christine Havelka

From: webforms@victoria.ca
Sent: Tuesday, January 12, 2016 3:18 PM
To: Council Secretary
Subject: Thank you for your submission - City of Victoria - Address Council Form

Name: Victoria Adams **Date:** January 12, 2016

Address: 200 Dallas Road, Victoria, BC V8V 1A4

I wish to appear at the following Council meeting: January 14, 2016

I represent: Self

Topic: ADVOCACY FOR AFFORDABILITY & SECURITY OF RENTAL HOUSING

Action you wish Council to take:

I wish to recommend that Council consider amending the Motion concerning: "Advocacy for Affordability & Security of Rental Housing."

CONTACT INFO:

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January 12, 2016

Mayor and Council, City of Victoria, Victoria, BC

**SUBJECT: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, SECURITY OF RENTAL TENURE,
AND PRESERVATION OF RENTAL HOUSING STOCK**

Background:

As a James Bay renter for the past 17 years, I am following up on the Tenancy Act meeting organized by TAPS on January 6, 2016 at James Bay New Horizons. As a former tenant in Charter House (435 Michigan Street), one of six multi-family rental properties recently acquired by Starlight Investments, I can speak to many of the tenant concerns such as: eviction notices to renovate units; health and safety of tenants during renovations; and exorbitant rent increases of refurbished suites beyond the 2.5 per cent provincial rental guidelines.

In early December 2015, Starlight Investments Ltd., a \$4.5 billion private equity real estate investment corporation, acquired the largest privately owned multi-family residential rental properties in the Lower Mainland (Lougheed Village in Burnaby and other units in Vancouver). In Victoria, it acquired the largest privately owned multi-family residential rental property complex (four Quadra Pacific apartment blocks) in James Bay. In addition, Starlight Investments and its management company, Larlyn Property Management Ltd., made two smaller multi-family residential property acquisitions and undertook renovations in Seaview Towers at 450 Douglas and a low-rise apartment block at 660 Niagara.

In this high-density housing neighborhood of more than 11,000 residents, we are seeing an unprecedented demolition of older wood-frame apartment buildings, government offices, and small bungalows. We are also seeing the rapid growth of high-priced condominiums, and now significant renovations are being undertaken by a new corporate owner to upgrade more than 500 multi-storey rental housing units into *"condo lifestyle" residences*.

James Bay has a high proportion of renters, many of whom are seniors on fixed incomes, younger retirees who have sold their homes to live in maintenance free and affordable rental accommodations, and middle income working individuals and millennials who prefer to rent rather than save for a downpayment on a home or risk taking on a long-term mortgage in a volatile employment environment.

Recommendations:

THAT Mayor and Council take **immediate measures to protect the rights of tenants and protect the existing rental housing stock which supplies shelter to 59 per cent of Victoria households**. (Source: Housing Affordability Task Force Recommendations, p. 3).

Housing is a right for everyone, and rental tenure should be recognized as a legitimate choice for residents whether they are modest or middle-income individuals.

While refurbishing is encouraged in order to retain multi-family rental units, aesthetic modifications—laminated floors, installation of steel appliances, and bathroom fixture upgrades—do not justify doubling rents, and displacing long-term tenants who cannot afford the new premium rents and must often compete with short-term vacation renters and affluent non home-owners seeking suitable accommodation in a low-vacancy rental market (under .6%).

I urge the Mayor and Council to:

1. **(a) Write to and meet with the residential building owner, Starlight Investments, and Larlyn Property Management to request clarification as to the nature of their renovation and refurbishment plans and a timeline for completion so that any structural changes and additional development on their properties will minimize tenant displacement and ensure affordable rents for tenants after the residential unit upgrades are finished.**
- (b) Revise the City's Permits & Inspection Policy (Letters of Assurance for Tenant Improvement Work) to expand beyond shopping mall projects and include large-scale renovations of multi-family residential rental units (like the Starlight Investment properties).**

As a past tenant in Charter House, I experienced major problems with elevators, boilers, and consistently low water pressure in the upper floor apartments as well as internal water damage (particularly in the south-facing units). I have also learned that as a result of the recent earthquake, at least one unit sustained a broken window. Previous water damage to the hardwood floor in one unit is now exacerbated by additional water damage from a recent storm, suggesting that mold may now pose a potential health hazard for some tenants.

I am also aware that the previous building owner arranged for a consulting engineer to assess potential vapor barrier issues and replacement of windows in the building. The project did not proceed possibly due to the prohibitive expense involved in resolving the problem.

It is likely that asbestos insulation was used in the walls of this building erected in the 1960s. There may also be some health and safety matters necessitating an investigation by WorkSafe BC or the Vancouver Island Health Authority.

- (c) Amend the City's Housing Affordability Strategy to broaden its focus and mandate to provide "housing for all".** *Housing affordability is not exclusively a social-housing matter designed to alleviate 'homelessness' by providing more seasonal shelters, renovating subsidized hotel units or building tiny-homes on wheels. Housing affordability includes providing appropriate and affordable rental accommodation for middle-income tenants who represent the majority of households who choose to rent rather than own a single family dwelling, condo, townhouse etc.*

City residents who pay taxes and make a significant contribution to the economic sustainability of a community through rent, utility payments, groceries, and other purchases have a right to an affordable roof over their heads like everyone else. They should not be ignored or penalized because they choose not to own a home. If it is acceptable for 80 per cent of Europeans to rent their accommodation, and more than 4/5 of Montrealers to rent their homes, apartments or condos, why can't we recognize the value and rights of tenants in our capital city?

In particular, The Housing Affordability Strategy should include action steps to preserve the City's existing rental housing stock (to ensure affordable rents), to preserve rental tenure as a housing option, and to increase the rental housing stock to accommodate the diverse income levels of more than 3,000 newcomers annually who expect to live and/or work in the Greater Victoria area.

- (d) Develop a Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy and Guidelines** (similar to one adopted by the City of Vancouver on Dec. 10, 2015) designed to increase protection for renters impacted by redevelopment or renovation activities as part of the City's commitment to preserving the existing rental stock in Victoria.
 - (e) Establish a Renters' Advisory Committee** to assess the current housing needs and concerns of tenants with regard to the gentrification of neighborhoods, preservation of appropriate and affordable rental stock, and other relevant issues that may arise.
 - (f) Consider rezoning certain areas to Comprehensive Development zoning, and/or revise Development Permit areas to address multiple-family residential use, so as to monitor and evaluate both new construction and redevelopment of existing residential units in order to retain an appropriate balance of homeownership and rental tenure options.**
 - (g) Assess the potential negative impact of unoccupied owner residential units which reduce the number of actual housing units (both condo and apartments) available in the rental pool. Often long-term local renters are overlooked in favor of high value vacation or short-term stay visitors. Many new condo units and several recently upgraded rental units in Seaview Towers (owned by Starlight Investments) are now listed on premium vacation rental websites as well as owner.direct.com.**
- 2. Write a letter to the Premier of B.C. the Minister of Housing, and Director of the Residential Tenancy Branch to take certain measures to address the rental housing and tenancy issue:**
- i. amend the Residential Tenancy Act to provide increased protection for tenants facing eviction from their suites during renovations, and excessive rent increases following upgrades;

- ii. amend the BC Building Code to strengthen the building permit process and planning requirements related to upgrading and renovating multi-family residential properties;
 - iii. amend zoning regulations to include “rental tenure” as a viable housing option.
- 3. Write to the Prime Minister of Canada, the Minister Responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to express the need for a national affordable housing strategy as well as to request changes to the Federal tax system and other fiscal mechanisms to support the refurbishment and retention of affordable rental housing.**

Your consideration of these recommendations will be a positive step towards addressing the issues and concerns not only of James Bay tenants but everyone who wants to turn the right to housing for all into a reality.

Sincerely,

Victoria Adams
200 Dallas Road, Victoria, BC V8V 1A4