

Affordable & Social Housing

Moved by: Right to Housing Coalition

This is a renewed resolution from 2019 with significant updates.

Whereas: The average vacancy rate in Manitoba has risen and in Winnipeg, at 5%, it is at a rate not seen since 1997.¹ Despite a high vacancy rate, many Manitobans are unable to find a suitable and adequate home they can afford in the private market. Far too many households spend 50% or more of their income on rent, putting them at significant risk of losing their housing, their health and their spirit.

Whereas: Federal tax structures and the lack of a national housing strategy (until recently) have, over the past 40 years, slowed the creation of social and affordable rental housing. Our existing stock is eroding through aging, demolition, asset sales, expiring federal operating agreements and conversion to condominium, and is not being adequately replaced. These factors have escalated rents to make them unaffordable to a growing number of people, especially the most vulnerable (those on a fixed income, persons with disabilities, persons living with mental health challenges or mental illness, newcomers, women, trans people, Two Spirit people, gender non-conforming people, and Indigenous people). The Province of Manitoba has increased rents for people living in social housing from 25% of the household's income to 30%.

Whereas: New housing construction is needed to accommodate the distinct needs of specific demographics. Women experiencing domestic violence or sexualized violence and exploitation require housing that is designed to optimize their safety, and that is accompanied by trauma-informed supports. Persons with disabilities require housing built to high standards of accessibility. People experiencing homelessness require access to housing with tenancy supports. Youth aging out of the child welfare system require transitional housing with supports that enable them to move into permanent affordable housing. Many large low-income families, including Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee families who live with extended family and friends, require housing with three or more bedrooms. Indigenous Peoples, immigrant, and refugee families also require housing that is appropriate to cultural needs. All of these housing types are in short supply.

Whereas: Social and affordable housing is a key piece of neighbourhood renewal and a necessary foundation for neighbourhood and family stabilization. As housing costs increase, people are forced to spend food money on rent, making personal debt and food banks sad

¹ CMHC rental market survey report, February 2022, p.52

necessities for survival. When housing needs are met, children do not need to move from school to school, parents have reduced stress and the means to provide the necessities for their families (food, winter clothing, transport, school supplies, etc.).

Whereas: All three levels of government have to play a role in affordable and social housing. The Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg can be proactive in working with the federal government as it implements and funds its national housing strategy.

Whereas: The Province of Manitoba can add to the supply of social and affordable housing through new builds and new subsidies, however, it has no current commitment to increase supply. Rent Assist continues to be available to support low-income Manitobans in private rental housing although cuts since 2016 have eroded the program, making fewer people eligible and reducing benefit amounts for some existing program participants. The Province can also help build the capacity of community organizations to take advantage of funding opportunities to create new social housing. Ongoing investments in addressing expiring federal operating agreements as well as in capital repairs and maintenance in public housing units are needed to preserve the existing stock. However, the Province of Manitoba has reduced annual expenditures from a high of \$120M in 2015/16 to \$67.341 in 2021/22. Public housing tenants require access to resources and opportunities (e.g. mental health services, literacy training, job training, education and childcare) that enable them to maintain their tenancy, meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life.

Whereas: The City of Winnipeg passed the Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2021, which affirms the central importance of housing in addressing poverty. In 2022, the City passed the Affordable Housing Now program, which supports the development of new affordable rental housing with support from the Federal government. Neither of the two policy initiatives set out commitments to a specific number of new units of social or affordable housing.

Whereas: The City of Winnipeg is committed to supporting neighbourhood renewal and the creation of affordable housing through the Housing Rehabilitation Investment Reserve (HRIR), however, the HRIR budget allocation is not sufficient to address the current rental housing shortage. The HRIR provides funding for housing development and renewal to the five Housing Improvement Zones, but the revitalization funds do not adequately address the livability and disrepair of rental units, nor is there a requirement for property owners not to raise rents when improvements are funded. Significant increases to the HRIR allocation and changes to the revitalization programs are required to ensure the City has sufficient capacity to support neighbourhood renewal and affordable housing development and renewal.

Whereas: The City of Winnipeg has commissioned and accepted the Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment, which outlines the housing needs of Winnipeg residents and sets modest targets for new social and affordable housing units to reduce housing need by 50% in ten

years, including 75 units of transitional housing, 300 units of rent-geared-to-income housing, 300 affordable units for seniors, 100-150 units of assisted housing for seniors and support to address the affordability needs of another 1,731 households per year.

Whereas: The City has senior staff and City Council representation on the board of the autonomous Winnipeg Housing and Rehabilitation Corporation (WHRC), which develops, renovates, owns, and manages affordable housing primarily in Winnipeg's inner city.

Whereas: The City of Brandon passed an Affordable Housing First policy for surplus land disposal. A significant constraint for the development of additional affordable housing is the availability of reasonably priced residential land. Brandon's policy can help ensure that full priority is given to mobilizing potential partners for the creation of affordable housing on surplus land before the property is disposed of through traditional market means.

Whereas: Providing housing is cost effective compared to the costs associated with homelessness. It costs on average \$48,000 a year to leave someone on the street versus \$28,000 a year to house them. Long-term social housing is one of the most cost-efficient ways to house someone. Furthermore, housing can be used to create employment and training opportunities for people commonly shut out of the workforce, including social housing tenants. This helps generate new tax revenues and keeps money circulating in the local economy.

Whereas: This resolution fits within the Ending Poverty theme, particularly as it relates to addressing homelessness and core housing need.

Be It Resolved That the City of Winnipeg:

- A. Supports Provincial and National affordable housing initiatives by using the planning, regulatory and financial tools and powers at its disposal to support affordable rental housing and social housing.
- B. Continues to fund the Housing Rehabilitation and Investment Reserve or subsequent relevant budget reserve and develop a regular and transparent process for reviewing and adjusting its size to ensure it adequately meets housing needs in Winnipeg and targeting a minimum of 150 units per year.
- C. Municipal governments in Manitoba prevent the loss of rental housing by regulating the conversion, demolition, and redevelopment of rental housing stock, mandating a unit-for-unit replacement or payment-in-lieu (where replacement is not possible) to be dedicated to housing programs.
- D. The City should dedicate full-time staff (at a rate consistent with the average in similar sized cities across Canada, approximately one FTE to every 100,000 residents) to ensure the full and best use of municipal tools to develop new social and affordable

rental housing and prevent the loss of existing rental housing affordable to people living on low incomes.

Be It Resolved That the Province of Manitoba:

- A. Establish a policy for all surplus land disposals that ensures non-profit, Indigenous, and cooperative housing providers are prioritized for receiving surplus land for the purpose of creating social housing.
- B. Invests in 300 net new social and affordable units built by the public, non-profit, Indigenous and co-op sectors annually, including transitional and permanent supportive housing. New units should be built in a variety of neighbourhoods to offer choice, near essential services, and should meet or exceed standards of energy efficiency where possible and should be accessible in the broadest possible sense.
- C. Reinststitute the Tax Increment Financing Program and Rental Construction Tax Credit to support community housing development that meets the affordability, sustainability, and accessibility criteria of National Housing Strategy funding programs.
- D. Continues to make Rent Assist available to low-income Manitobans on and off of EIA at an equal rate, regardless of age or ability status, and provide it at a rate of 80% of Median Market Rent and 25% of the recipient's income going towards rent
- E. Ensure there is no net loss of social housing as a result of asset sales, expiring federal or provincial operating agreements, and deferred capital repairs. Investments of at least \$130M are needed to meet the estimated need for capital repairs and maintenance in public housing units annually.
- F. Ensure that all social housing tenants have access to housing support workers or tenant-driven resource centres that offer comprehensive supports either on site or nearby.
- G. Develops a Capacity Program/Fund that non-profit housing organizations can easily access to help increase their capacity to develop new housing and increase their portfolios as community needs arise in order to ensure that communities in most need of housing have improved access to housing funding.
- H. Examine ways to discourage properties being left vacant. This might include using tools such as a speculation and vacancy tax on buildings that are left vacant for more than one year.
- I. Implement and fund an integrated design process that involves a variety of stakeholders when constructing new and renovating existing social housing to ensure (or move towards at the greatest extent possible) universal design accessibility for all Manitobans. Stakeholders should be consulted at various stages of the design and construction process to build it right the first time, saving on materials and dollars in the future.
- J. Ensure all new housing be high performance buildings, which may require exceeding current energy efficiency code standards, and that energy efficiency measures are

implemented during significant renovations. This will help save residents and building managers money on their energy bills and help to meet provincial GHG targets.

How the Resolution will be Advanced: Right to Housing coalition is a leader in advancing this policy resolution alongside the coalition's many member organizations and individuals. CCEDNet Manitoba supports the coalition through the staff time of Lindsey McBain who chairs the Steering Committee. CCEDNet members are encouraged to connect with and support Right to Housing's advocacy campaigns on these issues. Sustainable Building Manitoba, with support from its network, will provide additional capacity and expertise to the energy efficiency side aspect of affordable housing.