

CITY OF BURNABY

COMMUNITY PLANNING & HOUSING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: CHANGES TO BC. HOUSING'S APPLICANT REFERRAL POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council advise the Acting General Manager of BC Housing of their concerns regarding the implementation of the applicant referral policy change, as outlined in this report.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to:

Mr. Peter Robinson, Acting General Manager
Michelle Neilly, Director, Client Services
BC Housing
1701 - 4330 Kingsway, Burnaby, B.C. V5H 4S9

REPORT

The Community Planning and Housing Committee, at its meeting held on 1999 May 18, reviewed changes to BC Housing's policy regarding referral of applicants to housing providers. The Committee advised that non-profit and co-operative housing groups who previously had 25% of their core need applicants referred from B.C. Housing's waiting lists will now have complete autonomy for selecting all their tenants.

The Committee encouraged actions that involve simplifying the application process through creation of a centralized registry of applicants and through improvement of the database of housing projects.

The Committee approved the abovenoted recommendations and submits this report to Council for endorsement.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor L.A. Rankin
Chairman

Councillor C. Redman
Member

Councillor J. Young
Member

: COPY - CITY MANAGER
- DIR. PLNG. & BLDG.

TO: CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS 1999 May 14
COMMUNITY PLANNING & HOUSING COMMITTEE

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING **OUR FILE: 12.000**

SUBJECT: CHANGES TO BC HOUSING'S APPLICANT REFERRAL POLICY

PURPOSE: To comment on proposed changes to BC Housing's policy regarding referral of applicants to housing providers.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** the Community Planning and Housing Committee recommend that Council advise the Acting General Manager of BC Housing of their concerns regarding the implementation of the applicant referral policy change, as outlined in this report.

2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to:

Mr. Peter Robinson, Acting General Manager
Michelle Neilly, Director, Client Services
BC Housing
1701-4330 Kingsway
Burnaby, BC V5H 4S9

REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND

Attached to this report is a letter from Mr. Peter Robinson, Acting General Manager of BC Housing. The letter provides an update on the consultation process dealing with a change of policy whereby non-profit and co-operative housing groups who had previously had 25% of their core need applicants referred from BC Housing's waiting lists will now have complete autonomy for selecting all of their tenants.

The purpose of this report is to provide a description of the change in policy, the results of the consultation process and the impact of the change in policy on the City.

2.0 CHANGE IN WAITING LIST POLICY

Prior to November 1998, all non-profit housing providers had one-quarter of their core-need applicants for housing referred from BC Housing's waiting list. This ensured that those seeking housing through BC Housing's wait lists had easy access to a wider choice of housing projects. This policy also provided assurance to BC Housing that those most in need of the housing were accessing it. From the perspective of the housing providers, however, there was a feeling that the Operating Agreement that governs the operation of the society should provide assurance that the housing was being provided to appropriate people. The policy change eliminated an area contention between BC Housing and housing providers and reinforced the government's support for reduced bureaucratic intrusion in the day-to-day management of non-profit providers.

In eliminating the referral policy, BC Housing's Board of Commissioners instructed their staff to work with housing providers to develop mutually acceptable processes that support the following principles:

- there should be a fair and consistent approach with each applicant being given the same opportunity to access housing;
- opportunities to access housing should be maximized while still promoting the availability of housing to a full range of households;
- recognition should be given to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the communities being served.
- victims of domestic violence should continue to be given priority;
- the system should be predictable and easy for applicants to understand and should reduce steps which applicants are required to take in order to locate affordable housing;
- applicants should be made aware of their range of housing options and the steps which are required to access this housing;
- the system which is developed should be cost effective and build on the existing infrastructure and partnership arrangements; and
- development of the plan should be based on regional considerations and take into account local issues.

3.0 RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

As a result of the change in policy and consultations, most (2/3) of non-profit housing providers chose Option 1, (as outlined in letter from BC Housing *attached*) that is the transferal to the housing providers of the names of those applicants on the BC Housing wait list who had indicated an interest in living in their respective housing developments. The housing provider will manage their own applicant lists and take complete responsibility for selecting tenants in accordance with the criteria established in the Operating Agreement with BC Housing.

In the Lower Mainland, housing providers and advocates have a shared concern regarding the difficulty of potential residents accessing housing if people must contact each housing provider individually. Because of this, a central registry project is being piloted with the co-operation of three major housing providers. The three organizations are creating wait lists using the same software, so that the three lists can be integrated and act as a registry. If the pilots are successful, this model could be expanded to other housing providers.

In addition, BC Housing is intending to create a more complete data base of housing projects throughout the province that will provide detailed information about resident requirements, pet policies, waiting list status and unit types that will help potential residents to focus on applying to those developments that are most suitable for them. This information will be made available through the Internet on BC Housing's web site and will include direct links to housing providers web sites and their online application forms. The updated data base information will also be made available through BC Housing offices.

4.0 IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Currently, those people who request information from Burnaby staff about affordable housing are given a list of developments with contact phone numbers and are also referred to BC Housing. This practise will not change since BC Housing does maintain its own waiting list for the projects that they directly manage.

Planning staff are aware of the effort required by people who are looking for affordable housing. Each housing provider must be contacted separately and the potential resident must follow each providers unique application process. Before the change in policy, applicants had access to a wider range of housing options through submitting an application to BC Housing. While it is desirable that non-profit and co-op groups should have more autonomy in their selection of tenants, this must be balanced with the need to treat applicants fairly and equitably so that there is equal access to affordable housing. Planning staff believe that to be effective, the change in policy must be implemented in accordance with the principles prescribed by the Board of Commissioners outlined previously in this report. The development of a centralized registry would be an important contribution to supporting those principles.

BC Housing has requested that Planning staff review the detailed data base to ensure that the information for developments located in Burnaby is accurate. Staff will be able to make this information available to those that request it. Also, as the online application process is developed, staff will make this information known and will refer those that do not have access to the Internet to the Burnaby Public Library where public Internet access is available.

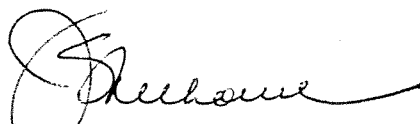
5.0 CONCLUSION

This report provides an update of the consultation process regarding changes to the way that waiting lists will be handled, as described in the letter from BC Housing attached to this report. Further, staff from BC Housing has informed City staff that most operators have decided to maintain their own wait lists for housing, and that there will be a pilot project involving three of the larger housing providers where the formation of a central registry will be explored.

As well, the access to information about current housing projects will be enhanced through an improved data base on BC Housing's website where an electronic application will be found. It is recommended that the Community Planning and Housing Committee recommend that Council forward this report to the Acting General Manager

At the local government level, staff is often contacted for information about accessing affordable housing. Frequently, affordable housing seekers state their frustration with an application process that involves contacting each society separately and following each one's unique process. It is important that the policy change be managed effectively and that applicants continue to have fair and equitable access to affordable housing. From this perspective, staff would strongly encourage any actions that involve simplifying the application process through the creation of a centralized registry and the improvement of the database of housing projects. To aid in this effort, City staff will review the database information for BC Housing to ensure that it is complete, and provide a link to the BC Housing website from Burnaby's Internet home page.

It is recommended that a copy of this report be forwarded to the Acting Manager, BC Housing Management Commission.


D.G. Stenson, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

BG/ma

cc: City Manager



BC Housing

March 22, 1999

File: 84120-01-RGF

Dear Housing Proponent:

In November 1998 Minister Mike Farnworth announced that BC Housing's Applicant Referral Policy would be eliminated on April 1, 1999. As a result of this change in policy, non-profit and co-operative housing providers who previously had 25 percent of their core need applicants referred from BC Housing's waiting list, will now have complete autonomy for selecting all of their tenants. This letter provides an update on the consultation process and the ongoing communication with housing providers and applicants.

Since the announcement in November, staff from BC Housing have held consultations with housing providers from across the Province including; representatives from the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), the Co-op Housing Federation of BC (CHF-BC), the Public Housing Advisory Council (PHAC) and key advocacy agencies which work with individuals in search of affordable housing.

Meetings were held in Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Kamloops, Nanaimo, and Prince George to ensure regional issues are considered throughout the elimination process and to identify the steps necessary to ensure a successful implementation by April 1, 1999.

Based on the consultation process, three options were developed and presented to all housing providers for consideration:

- Option 1: BC Housing will transfer to the housing providers the names of those applicants on our wait list who have indicated an interest in living in their respective housing development(s). The housing provider will manage their own applicant list(s) and take complete responsibility for selecting tenants.
- Option 2: BC Housing could provide an interim database service for housing providers in the lower mainland until such time as a *Central Registry* is established. Lower mainland housing providers have been working hard at developing a registry system so that applicants need only contact one agency to access multiple housing choices. When the *Central Registry* is operational it will manage the applicant list(s) and the housing provider will have full responsibility for selecting tenants.
- Option 3: BC Housing provides a database service for housing providers where applicant information is transferred to housing providers on a monthly basis or when units become available. Housing providers continue to have complete autonomy for selecting tenants.

Based on the option chosen by the housing provider(s), applicants will be informed about the status of their file.

During this period of change, BC Housing is looking at ways of providing improved information and resources to assist housing providers, such as; a **new** generic application for accommodation form, a **new** non-profit housing residential tenancy agreement and an improved housing list that includes all housing developments in the province.

We are open to any suggestions you may have regarding the process or administration of the policy change. Please call Michelle Neilly, Director, Client Services at (604)439-4721.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Robinson
Acting General Manager

