The regional economy depends upon a diverse and affordable housing supply to meet the needs of its residents. Much has been accomplished since Metro Vancouver’s Regional Affordable Housing Strategy (RAHS) was adopted in 2007, but much remains to be done. To reflect current conditions and identify new directions going forward, Metro Vancouver staff is working with member municipalities via the Regional Planning Advisory Committee Housing Subcommittee to update the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

**PRIORITIES FOR THIS UPDATE:**

1. Expand the purpose-built rental housing supply.
2. Increase affordable housing located close to Translink’s Frequent Transit Network.
3. Expand the role of non-profit and co-operative housing providers, including Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation (MVHC), to increase the supply of mixed income housing.

This handout summarizes a March 2014 discussion paper intended to facilitate dialogue with both internal and external stakeholders about directions this update strategy should take.

**WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

Most of the actions recommended in the RAHS 2007 have been implemented or are in progress. Key points to note are:

- The number of new dwelling units has kept up with demand in terms of quantity, but prices have continued to escalate, reducing affordability.
- Some progress has been made in addressing homelessness, thanks to the Regional Homeless Strategy, the Provincial Homelessness Initiative, provincial/municipal Memorandums of Understanding, the Homeless Partnering Strategy, and the efforts of non-profits, community agencies, and municipalities.
- Rental housing construction is increasing due to market factors and municipal policies, such as secondary suite legalization and purpose-built rental incentives.
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

■ The number of affordable rental units for low income households has not kept pace, as these require government subsidies, but rent supplement programs have helped.

■ We now have a better understanding of the purpose-built rental housing supply, and are developing tools to retain and renew this important stock.

■ Significant capacity and equity is available within the non-profit and cooperative housing sectors, and the Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation (MVHC) is a valuable resource for the region.

CURRENT & PRESSING CHALLENGES

Despite concerted action and progress, housing affordability and diversity remain challenges, and new issues have gained prominence since 2007. These challenges can serve as the focus for strategic action going forward:

■ Broad contextual factors, such as population growth and community resistance to increased density in established neighbourhoods.

■ Inadequate security of the rental housing supply.

■ Lack of rental housing that is affordable to low and moderate income households.

■ Little affordable ground-oriented housing suitable for families.

■ Lack of suitable multi-unit living options.

■ Lack of support or services for seniors aging in place or in their communities.

■ Gaps in the seniors housing continuum.

■ High combined housing and transportation costs.

■ Inadequate or incomplete housing market information needed to make informed policy decisions.

OPPORTUNITIES

These are some opportunities on which we can build a renewed Regional Affordable Housing Strategy:

■ Heighten awareness of the importance of housing affordability and diversity.

■ Expand use of municipal and regional tools to facilitate new affordable housing, e.g. waiving fees or other financial incentives.

■ Transit-oriented locations enhance affordability by reducing households’ transportation costs.

■ Utilize existing resources and capacity, such as provincial rent supplement programs; non-profit equity and expertise; and innovative public, private and non-profit partnerships.
PROPOSED GOALS

The following broad goals are proposed for the 2014 RAHS update. They have been developed in collaboration with staff from Metro Vancouver’s member municipalities and build upon the directions in the 2007 Strategy.

1. Maximize housing diversity and affordability to meet a range of needs.
2. Align housing initiatives with Metro 2040: Shaping Our Future, with a particular focus on rental and affordable housing near the Frequent Transit Network.
3. Expand the rental housing supply, including mixed income housing for low and moderate income households.
4. Sustain, where possible, the existing purpose-built rental housing stock.
5. Meet the needs of low and moderate income renters, including through redevelopment.
7. Increase the supply, diversity, and affordability of housing through federal and provincial government measures.
8. Understand the drivers of high housing costs and affordability challenges in Metro Vancouver.

PROPOSED DIRECTIONS

The following directions are proposed for discussion. Specific actions and recommendations will be developed at the next stage of updating the Strategy.

1. Diversify the supply of housing to meet a range of needs.
2. Capitalize on transit-oriented locations for rental and affordable housing locations before escalating land values eliminate affordability as an option.
3. Support the non-profit sector to continue to operate and develop mixed income rental housing.
4. MVHC to work with municipalities to redevelop existing sites to expand the supply of mixed income rental housing.
5. Investigate measures to preserve or sustain the existing purpose-built rental housing stock to extend its useful life while avoiding measures that lead to tenants losing their homes because of renovation activities.
6. Support the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness in its efforts to end homelessness through implementation of the Regional Homelessness Plan.
7. Advocate for provincial and federal housing policies and resources to achieve regional goals.
8. Develop new data sources and measures to improve housing policy and planning decisions.
THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

While the market ultimately drives housing supply and price, each level of government, as well as, the private sector and the non-profit and cooperative housing sector has a role to play in working towards improved housing diversity and affordability.

Local governments:
- develop plans and policies to support improved housing affordability and diversity;
- use the tools provided by provincial legislation to lever the development of affordable or rental housing;
- use their own assets directly for housing purposes;
- undertake housing policy research; and
- advocate to senior levels of government to provide needed housing resources.

Metro Vancouver, a member organization with 22 local governments:
- supports municipalities in their roles by providing information, research and advocacy;
- convenes municipal staff and politicians on housing matters; and
- provides a policy framework through Metro 2040: Shaping Our Future, the regional growth strategy and the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

Provincial and federal governments:
- provide subsidies and programs for low-income households and individuals who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Before beginning to draft the updated Strategy, we are consulting with stakeholders to get their feedback on the proposed goals and directions. We will be checking in again with these stakeholders once the draft Strategy is complete.