

## Co-op Leasehold Discussions: What CHF BC Heard from Members

In January and February 2019, CHF BC held meetings for co-ops with City of Vancouver leases. Dozens of co-ops are affected by leasehold challenges; multiple meetings allowed more people to participate. The co-ops which had shorter-term original leases met first; the longer-term lease co-ops met soon after. Turnout was good for both groups, and despite somewhat different time horizons, members were in agreement. Almost everything we heard from members at one meeting was echoed in the other.

CHF BC began the meetings by providing an overview of the history of the challenges surrounding extending leases or agreeing to new arrangements. Members then spoke of their concerns and made some suggestions on next steps.

What follows are point-form notes of what we heard:

### **General Concerns about Process and Progress**

- Disappointment in the lack of progress over so many years was a recurring theme.
- Concerns about the democratic process (as the last Council had unanimously passed the framework, but City staff were unable or unwilling to come to agreements that would have allowed existing communities to remain intact)
- Concern about a loss of trust in the City as a partner
- Some regard the City's behavior as 'landlord' as almost accepting of renovations (because the impact of not coming to agreements, or coming to unfair agreements, will be that members of co-op communities will be forced to move for financial reasons)
- Concerns about the appropriateness of arbitrary increases to the co-op cost model (MIRHPP vs more traditional break-even housing charges)
- Brought up issues of the need to refinance beyond paying for lease extensions: buildings need reinvestment (and some co-ops can't wait because they need renewed leases now to look after their buildings properly)
- Unreasonableness of having existing non-profits that offer affordable housing erode that affordability to provide money for new non-market housing that won't be able to deliver the same level of affordability.

### **Other Comments/Questions**

- Should there be a City department that's specifically directed at co-ops?
- Co-ops are willing to look to improve their environmental performance
- Speakers are firm on the importance or retaining (at the co-op level) decision-making in member selection even if some joint screening were an option
- In certain cases, redevelopment might be appropriate, but maximizing density over other concerns would be inappropriate. The expiry of a lease shouldn't be an automatic signal to redevelop.

- Some expressed a willingness to look at downsizing to address any over-housing, especially in collaboration with other co-ops so that members' security of tenure was protected
- No significant disagreement with providing City with relevant information and audits
- Co-ops should not move forward with deals outside a transparent, documented process

### **Areas for Further Discussion**

- New member application processes
- Options on to deal with over-housing – perhaps more shared co-op lists
- How best to put forward our messaging
- Clarification on the optimal lease term

### **Hopes for Next Steps**

- Early re-engagement with the City
- Discussions with new Council are critical and should happen at the earliest opportunity; division within Council shouldn't be an impediment to progress
- Want to impress on City Council the importance of co-ops in the housing landscape and the urgent need to resolve lease uncertainty
- Do not want City Staff to control progress
- Maintaining affordability is a key outcome: want to maintain support for low-income households *and* maintain mixed-income communities without displacement
- Need clarification on the setting of housing charges (that won't force members out)
- New leases should be long-term leases

Again, CHF BC appreciates all the members who took time to come out to the meetings and looks forward to re-engaging with the City in support of the members' goals of protecting and expanding co-op housing within Vancouver. Securing new leases is a key element.