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REPORT TO HOSPITALS AND HOUSING COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 03, 2021

SUBJECT Tenant Advisory Committee 2020 Year End Reporting

ISSUE

To provide the Capital Regional District's (CRD) Hospitals and Housing Committee (HHC) an overview of 2020 activities of the Tenant Advisory Committee (TAC) in accordance with the TAC Terms of Reference (ToR).

BACKGROUND

At the April 11, 2018 CRD Board meeting, the TAC was established through the HHC. The recommended membership of the TAC includes the Chair or delegate of the HHC and up to eight tenant representatives in good standing. Tenants in good standing are individuals who have been tenants with the Capital Region Housing Corporation (CRHC) for 12 consecutive months, have paid their rent on time and in full for the previous six months, have maintained their unit in good condition with no damage in excess of normal wear and tear, and have ensured that their standard of conduct has not resulted in a warning letter from CRHC.

The purpose of the TAC, through the HHC, is to promote effective communication, engagement and collaboration between the CRHC and its tenants, and provide information, feedback and advice regarding tenant-related policies and programs to support healthier and more livable communities. Further details of the TAC can be found in the ToR, attached as Appendix A. An overview of 2020 TAC activities is attached as Appendix B – Tenant Advisory Committee 2020 Annual Plan.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1:

That the Tenant Advisory Committee 2020 Year End Report be received for information.

Alternative 2:

That the Tenant Advisory Committee 2020 Year End Report be referred back to staff for further review based on Hospitals and Housing Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Service Delivery Implications

Due to COVID-19, the TAC was not able to meet as frequently as was intended in 2020. Of the five meetings originally scheduled, the TAC only met a total of three times, with the April 2020 and June 2020 meetings being cancelled. The cancelled meetings have had an impact and ability of the TAC to undertake all activities included in the 2020 Annual Plan. In some instances, the activities are underway, but are behind schedule and in others the 2020 activities are under consideration to be included in the 2021 TAC Annual Plan still under development.

The TAC provided important feedback that CRHC staff could improve communication in a number of areas including unit upgrades, online presence and the Tenant Handbook. With input from the TAC, staff were able to better tailor the materials about Tenant Component Replacement Requests to highlight this initiative to modernize occupied units to interested tenants. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, all occupied unit work has been on hold but is expected to continue when safe to do so. Another important area relating to communication included enhancing the representation of the TAC and its members. Updates were made to highlight this committee and its membership on the CRD website. The Tenant Handbook was another item of focus as the TAC was presented with various iterations of the handbook from previous years and provided general support to the direction staff were taking with updates to the document. This work included developing an online version.

Improvements in customer services was also a focus of the TAC in 2020 and was rooted in the results from the 2018 CRHC tenant survey. Staff presented the operational commitment to response times based on urgency and other general improvements to customer service. The TAC reviewed these standards and affirmed their implementation.

Online banking has been identified as a key priority for many tenants and staff have been working to advance this effort. It is expected that tenants will be able to pay for some of their expenses online in 2021, though there is still a process underway as the financial institutions will need to authorize final implementation of this tool for tenants. The TAC continues to be kept up to date on the progress of this initiative.

The two final items the TAC contributed to in 2020 include Pride of Place and potential updates to CRHC's pet policy. Related to Pride of Place, the TAC discussed various tenant behaviours and the compounding impacts of the ongoing pandemic as it relates to mental wellness and some of the operational implications this can have for various buildings. Staff look to work with tenants exhibiting behaviours that can impact their neighbours in a one on one and as needed basis, but continue to appreciate the input from tenants on how these challenges can impact the enjoyment of CRHC properties. Related to the Pet Policy, CRHC shared activities already underway with regard to the process around various updates, including a survey of staff, working group, and literature review. Staff sought advice from TAC members on suggestions to address the two major issues with allowing dogs: feces and safety. Two TAC members submitted suggestions/policy ideas.

Financial Implications

Due to the inability to undertake certain planned activities in 2020, the total budget allocated to tenant engagement was underspent. Approximately \$6,000 was spent on programming and \$3,200 spent on printed communication of a budgeted \$20,000 across all properties. For 2021, the budget remains at \$20,000 and staff are working to plan activities and expenditures that are possible should the COVID-19 pandemic continue through 2021.

Social Implications

Tenant Engagement (TE) as a related function of the TAC was greatly reduced by COVID-19 regulations, particularly in CRHC's apartments for seniors and people with disabilities, many of whom are being very cautious with regard to contacts. TE still managed to support a number of activities and events with staff distributing seedlings from the City of Victoria to a number of complexes. CRHC added soil, planters and tools as well to promote small-scale gardening activities. TE activities were limited to and focussed on those that were intended to support safe, socially distanced community building.

Larger-scale events were not able to take place as anticipated, but staff actively supported food distribution alongside community partners, supporting vulnerable lone tenants to access services to befriend and support, and working to manage many of the tensions that surface in times of isolation and stress. The proposed in-person tenant orientation sessions were put on hold during the state of emergency but is being planned to take place in 2021 with four videos for new tenants under development. These videos are expected to support new tenants to understand the CRHC and its role as landlord as well as to support a more comfortable settling in to their new homes and how to better ensure a long-term and successful tenancy.

In an effort to support the continued engagement of tenants through the TAC and the continuity of work currently underway, staff have executed a process to support staggered TAC terms going forward. At the end of 2020, the TAC had six members whose terms were scheduled to end and two vacancies. Staff engaged the existing six members to identify four willing to accept a one-year reappointment. Two existing members and the two new members have been appointed for a two-year term thereby creating a process where membership on the committee is staggered to encourage continued capacity building and continuity on projects and initiatives.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The CRD's 2019-2022 Board Priority of Community Wellbeing includes housing as a key component. Specifically, that the CRD will advocate, collaborate and form partnerships to address affordable housing needs of a growing and diverse population. The TAC represents residents across a range of CRHC properties and helps to inform service planning, trend identification, tenant engagement and policies that contribute to enhanced community wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Though the TAC was not able to connect as frequently as planned, work continues to be underway and will be carried into 2021. Renewed and staggered appointments have been made and the TAC continues to be a vital connection to residents of CRHC properties to provide information, feedback and advice on tenant-related policies and programs with the aim of supporting healthier and more livable communities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Tenant Advisory Committee 2020 Year End Report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Don Elliott, MUP, Senior Manager, Regional Housing & CRHC
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P.Eng., MBA, General Manager, Planning & Protective Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A – Tenant Advisory Committee Terms of Reference
Appendix B – Tenant Advisory Committee 2020 Annual Plan