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SOCIAL HOUSING WAITING LIST ACTIVITY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2008

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated April 2, 2009, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of the 2008 rent-geared-to-income (RGI) waiting list activity and information about waiting list applicants.

3. BACKGROUND

The Region administers and maintains the waiting list for RGI housing units in York Region through its Housing Access Unit. The Unit receives housing applications for social housing across the Region and, if eligible, adds these applicants to the waiting lists of the social housing buildings of their choice.

Housing providers offer their RGI vacancies to the highest ranked applicants on their waiting list based on the application date. Exceptions are made for applicants in the Special Priority Program who rank ahead of all other applicants.

The Special Priority Program is a provincially mandated program that assists applicants who have been abused by a member of their household and need RGI housing to leave the abusive situation.

The six staff in the Housing Access Unit continue to answer public and applicant enquiries, process applications, and update applicant files annually. In a typical month, staff answer approximately 1,000 telephone calls, meet with an average of 200 walk-in clients, process an average of 160 new applications and update approximately 450 applicant files.

In 2008, the Housing Access Unit processed approximately 1,900 new applications (an increase of approximately 1% from 2007). At the same time, 1,260 applications were

cancelled, primarily because the applicants failed to respond to the annual information update request.

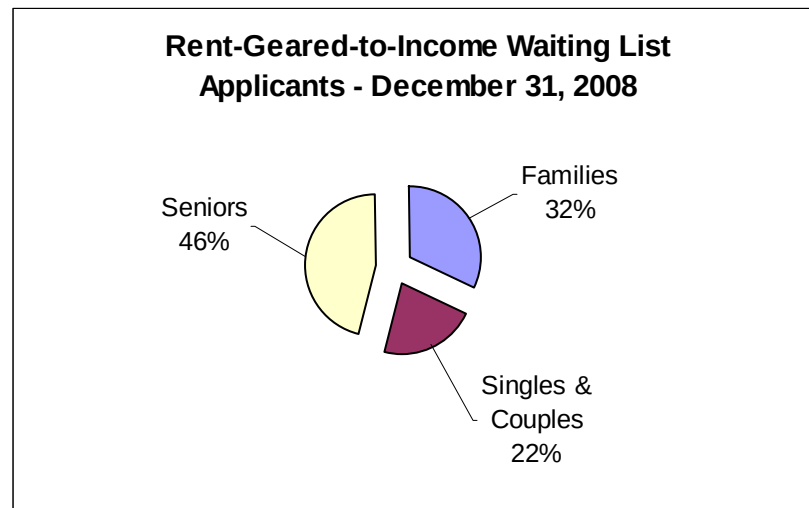
Overall activity for 2008 has remained consistent with what has been reported in previous years. The Contact Centre continues to send out an average of 350 to 400 applications per month to potential applicants.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Almost half of the applicant households are seniors

The waiting list is subdivided into three general categories: families (with dependent children), singles/couples, and seniors. Although the number of applicants on the waiting list changes from month to month, the distribution of applicants with the categories has remained relatively stable. The RGI waiting list is comprised of approximately 5,833 applicant households. These households represent approximately 11,000 people. The following chart provides information on the proportion of applicants by category as of December 31, 2008.

Chart 1



65% of all applicant households live on less than \$20,000 per year

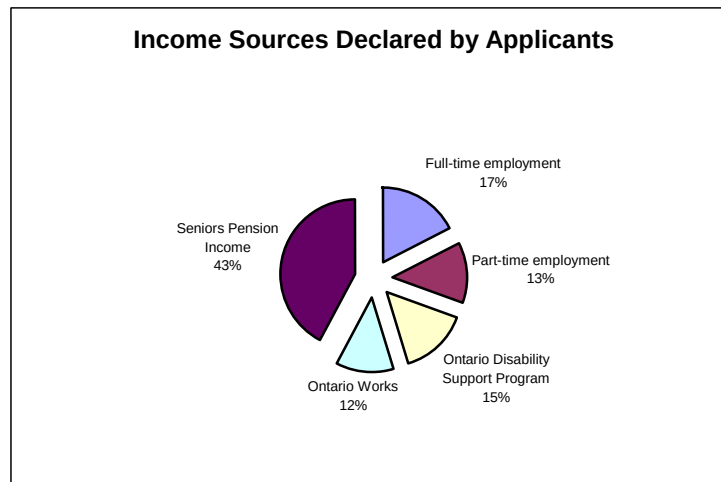
Income information is self-declared by the applicant on the application and update forms. The Housing Access Unit does not verify any income or asset information. At the time of offer, the housing provider is responsible to verify the applicant's income and assets.

Approximately 65% of all applicants declared incomes below \$20,000 per year. Only 5% have incomes greater than \$40,000. Thirty-nine percent of the households on the waiting

list report income from full or part-time employment. Many of the applicants are working poor.

Chart 2 illustrates the income sources for seniors and non-senior households.

Chart 2



With respect to seniors' pension income, the system captures many sources of pension income. For the purposes of this report Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan, company pensions and annuities have been combined.

Most applicants already live in York Region

The *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* allows applicants to live anywhere in Canada and apply for RGI housing in York Region. However, applicants must have legal status in Canada (e.g. Canadian citizen, landed immigrant, refugee status, etc.). Applications are received from many other areas in Ontario as well as other provinces, such as British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Fifty-eight percent of the applicants on the waiting list live in York Region. A further 35% (approximately 2,000 households) live in the City of Toronto, many in areas just south of Steeles Avenue.

Toronto's Housing Access Centre reports that approximately 2,593 of the 50,000 active households on Toronto's waiting list are York Region residents requesting housing in Toronto. In 2008, 87 applicants from the City of Toronto were housed in York Region's social housing portfolio and 107 applicants from York Region were housed in Toronto's portfolio.

Waiting times vary from 3 years to over 10 years depending on circumstances

Waiting times vary considerably depending on:

- Whether the applicant is eligible for dedicated seniors' buildings.
- The unit size requested.
- The area of the Region the applicant wants to live in.
- The number of buildings the applicant selects.

Waiting lists for housing in the Region's central or northern municipalities are typically much shorter, with many applicants offered housing in three to five years.

The waiting time for those seeking housing in the Region's southern municipalities is much longer where some waiting lists still include a number of applicants who have been waiting for more than ten years.

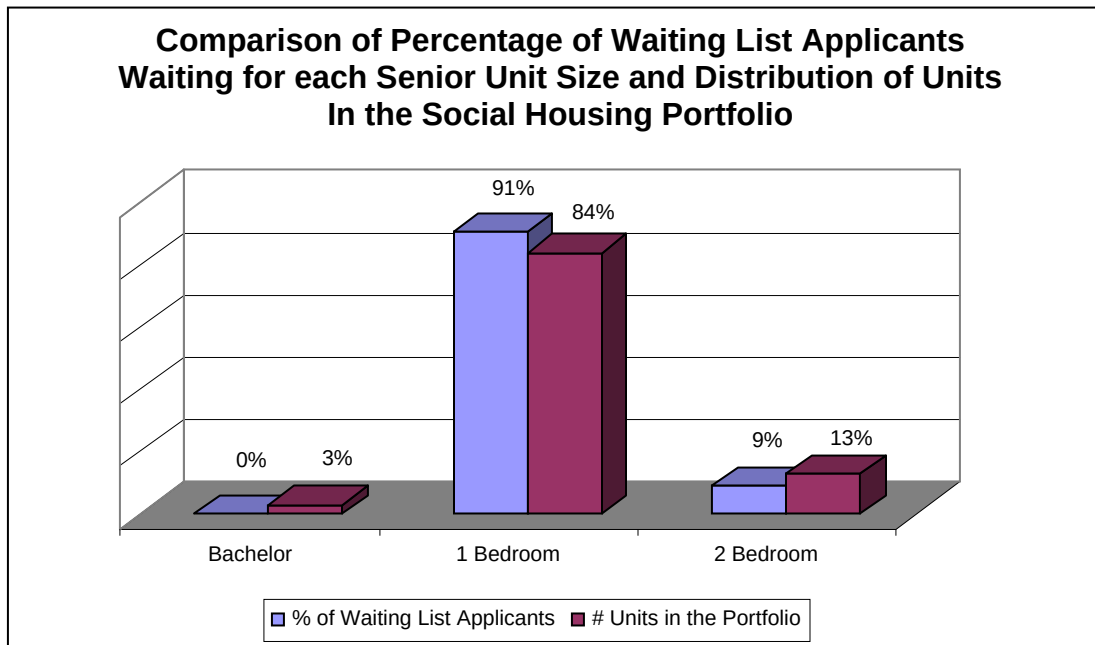
Most seniors can typically expect to wait approximately four to six years for housing in buildings reserved for seniors.

The wait time is greatest for one-bedroom and four-bedroom units

The most frequent question asked about the waiting list is "How long will I have to wait for housing?" Although there are a number of factors that affect the answer to the question, one of the main drivers is the relationship between the number of applicants who need a particular bedroom size and the number of units in the Region with that number of bedrooms.

For seniors' housing, the distribution of units corresponds fairly well with the percentage of senior applicants on the waiting lists for each unit type, as illustrated in Chart 3. As a result, there isn't a significant difference in the waiting times for bachelor, one or two bedroom units.

Chart 3

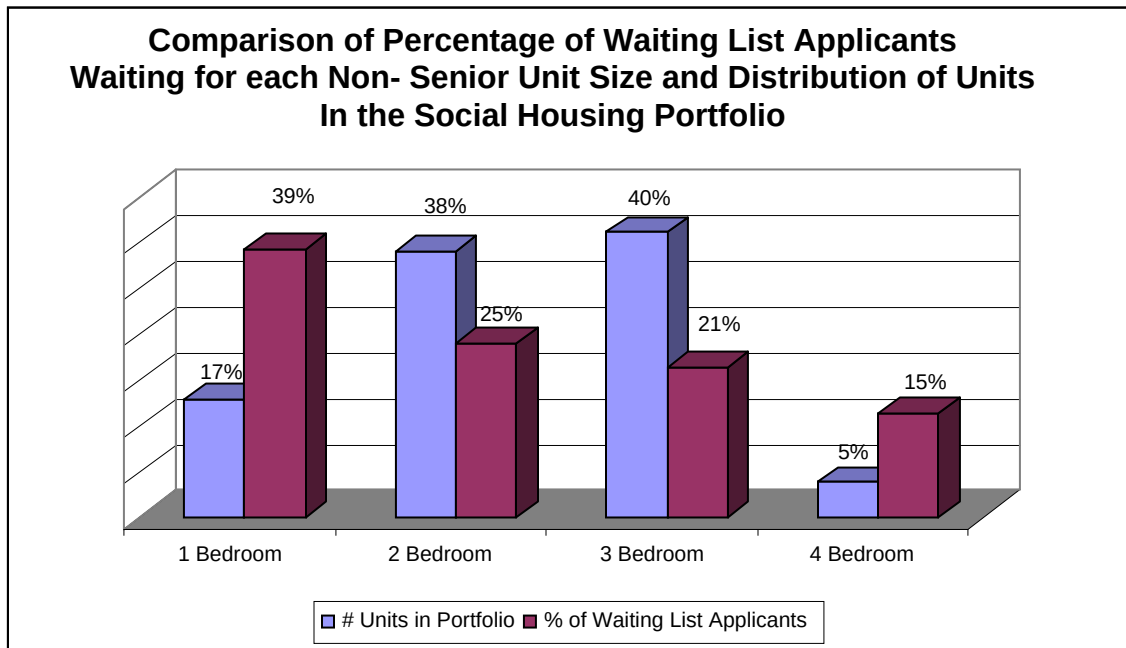


This is not the same for non-senior units. There is an acute need for one-bedroom non-senior units across the Region.

There are approximately 1,200 applicants waiting for non-senior one-bedroom units, including many households receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. However, there are only about 500 non-senior one-bedroom units in the Region. While most seniors can reasonably expect an offer of housing within four to six years, there are non-senior one-bedroom applicants who have been waiting for housing since the early 1990's.

Similarly, there are very few four-bedroom units in the Region. As larger families migrate to the Region, the pressure on the four-bedroom waiting lists continue to grow. Chart 4 depicts the relationship between supply and demand for non-senior units.

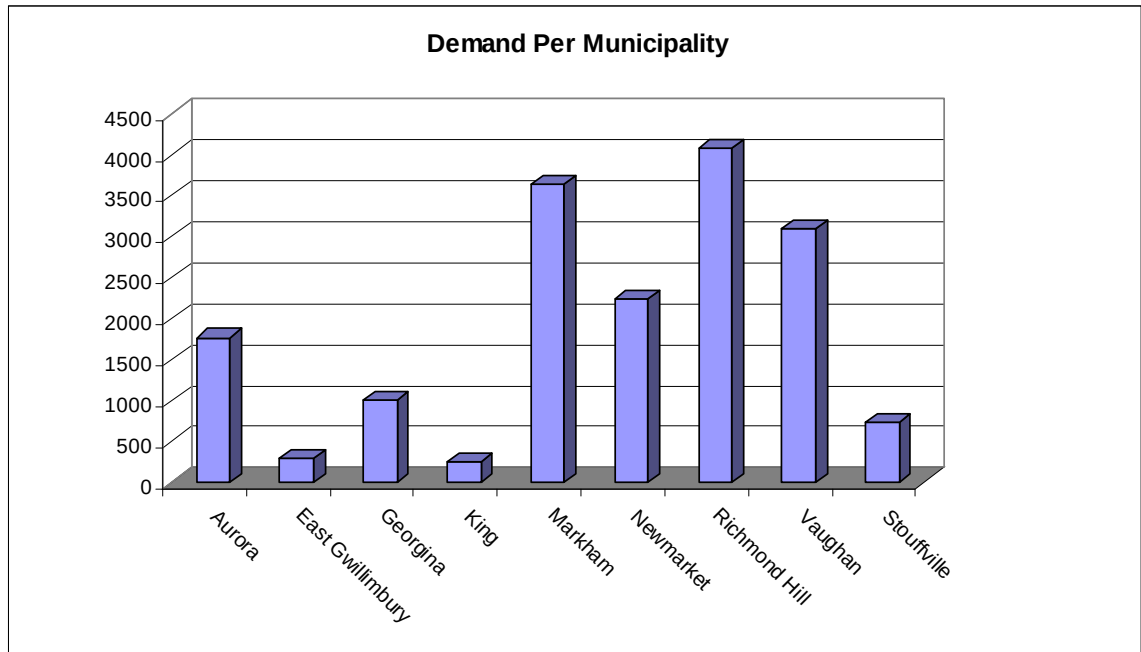
Chart 4



Areas of Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan are most requested areas

The previous charts have provided an overview of the percentage of applicants on the waiting list for a particular size of unit compared with the distribution of units in the social housing portfolio. Chart 5 demonstrates the demand per municipality and Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan, by far, are the most popular areas selected. As indicated earlier in the report, applicants are able to choose as many social housing buildings as they wish to live in. Therefore, applicants can apply to many municipalities.

Chart 5



Applicants with Special Priority status are housed quickly, usually within months

Under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* victims of domestic violence who require RGI housing to enable them to leave an abusive relationship may be eligible for Special Priority ranking on the waiting list.

Applicants who have been approved for Special Priority status are placed on the waiting list ahead of all chronological applicants and are offered housing within months rather than the years all other applicants typically wait. As the supply of housing is so limited and the waiting periods are so long, people who do not meet the provincial eligibility criteria sometimes request Special Priority status in an attempt to obtain subsidized housing in a shorter period of time.

This category continues to have a significant impact administratively for the Housing Access Unit, housing providers and the waiting list in York Region. Over the past five years, the number of requests for Special Priority status has increased by approximately 10%.

Special Priority applicants seeking housing in the Region's central or northern municipalities are typically offered housing in three to six months, whereas those requesting housing in the southern municipalities may wait three to twenty-four months, depending on the number of buildings they have chosen and whether or not they need one of the Region's limited one-bedroom units.

In 2008, there were 163 requests for Special Priority approved, and 76 were denied. Of the 76 denied, 53 requested an internal review of the decision made. Through the review process, 28 were subsequently approved, described later in this report.

In 2008, 355 applicant households moved into RGI housing in the Region

In 2008, 355 RGI vacancies were filled with applicants from the centralized waiting list. Of these, 159 were seniors and 196 were families and/or singles. This number is significantly lower than in previous years as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of Housed Applicants

Year	Family/Single	Senior	Total
2008	196	159	355
2007	247	176	423
2006	260	193	453
2005	240	183	423

42% of all RGI family vacancies were filled by Special Priority applicants

At any given time, Special Priority applicants account for approximately 2% of the total waiting list. However, in 2008, 42% of all RGI vacancies in family and single buildings were filled by Special Priority households.

As a result, chronological applicants are waiting much longer for housing, particularly in the south end of the Region where some housing providers have filled the majority of their vacancies with Special Priority applicants for a number of years. The impact is lower in seniors' buildings where only 8% of all 2008 RGI vacancies were filled by Special Priority applicants.

APPLICANT REVIEW REQUEST – 2008 ACTIVITY

Applicants may appeal eligibility and placement decisions

The *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* entitles applicants to ask the Region to review any decision made with respect to their eligibility or placement on the waiting list. The review must be conducted by persons who did not participate in the original decision. Senior regional housing programs staff conduct all reviews of decisions made by the Housing Access Unit.

As part of the review, applicants have an opportunity to provide additional information that may not have been considered when the original decision was made. The Region has

the authority to substitute a new decision as a result of the review. Table 2 summarizes the 2008 reviews of the Housing Access Unit's decisions.

Table 2
Summary of 2008 Applicant Requests for Decision Reviews

Decision	Requests Received	Decision Upheld	New Decision Made
Not eligible to be on the waiting list	4	2	2
Not eligible for unit type/size requested	14	5	9
Refused an offer of housing	29	14	15
Not eligible for special priority ranking	55	27	28
Application cancelled for failure to respond to the annual update	202	11	191
Request to backdate application	10	9	1

Table 3 summarizes the typical reasons why new decisions are substituted for the original decisions in each category.

Table 3
Summary of Reasons Why Decisions Are Made

Original Decision	Typical Reasons for Implementing a New Decision
Not eligible to be on the waiting list	• Applicant provides documents verifying that all members of the household are legally entitled to be in Canada. • Applicant pays arrears or enters into an arrears repayment agreement with a former social housing provider and provides a copy of the agreement.
Not eligible for unit type/size requested	• Applicant provides medical documentation verifying the need for additional bedrooms or an accessible unit.
Refused an offer of housing	• The Region confirms administrative error or that there may have been a miscommunication between the applicant and the housing provider.
Not eligible for Special Priority ranking	• Applicant provides verifying documentation from a qualified professional confirming that the applicant meets the Special Priority eligibility criteria. • Removal of Special Priority status when applicant accepts RGI unit in another municipality.
Application cancelled for failing to respond to the annual update	• Applicant submits a completed annual update form within one year of the date the application was cancelled.

Request to backdate application	• The Region confirms administrative error or the applicant submits medical documentation confirming they were unable to keep their former application up to date.
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WAITING LIST IMPROVEMENTS

In 2008, the Region undertook a number of initiatives to enhance services to housing providers and applicants:

- A second volunteer group of nine housing providers were trained to use enhanced components of the web-based waiting list system as part of a pilot project. It is the intention to roll out these enhanced components to all housing providers in the near future.
- The Region has been working with Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch staff to develop and conduct a survey of all applicants currently on the waiting list to determine how they are coping while waiting for RGI assistance and their level of awareness and use of community services in the Region.
- Regional staff provide on-going training and one-on-one coaching sessions for housing providers as well as technical support for those who need assistance with the web-based waiting list system.
- Regional staff regularly consult with housing providers to identify further areas of training or service improvement.
- Several presentations were made to various community agency organizations promoting the role and responsibility of the Housing Access Unit, along with information regarding the eligibility for the waiting list, special priority program, housing stock and estimated waiting times.

It is anticipated that the Housing Access Unit will experience an increase in the volume of applications, client inquiries and walk-in traffic as a result of the economic situation in the country.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The continued demand for subsidized housing creates organizational pressure to invest in new housing initiatives. Continued efforts to attract funding from senior levels of government will be important in order to minimize the demand on regional expenditures.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The lack of sufficient affordable housing in York Region is a serious concern. There are increasing pressures on municipalities due to a growing population, high rents, long waiting lists, and waiting times for social housing. Adult children and senior parents of local residents may be unable to get housing in their communities, close to their support systems. The municipalities in the southern part of the Region are particularly impacted by these complex changes.

The lack of affordable housing, and more specifically the lack of rental housing, may affect the continued economic prosperity of municipalities in the Region. Many of those working in low to moderate paying occupations live in multi-residential units and must commute in to work.

7. CONCLUSION

Affordable housing is a very valuable resource. Over the past few years approximately 10% of applicants were housed into RGI units. The percentage for 2008, however, was much lower as only 6% were housed. This decline may already be an indication of the uncertainty with the economy and the fact that people are not moving. The shortage of affordable housing also means that many people are living in overcrowded conditions and other unsafe environments, having to commute long distances to work, and paying rents that they cannot afford. This places many households in a precarious financial position sometimes resulting in economic eviction and destabilization of the family.

The Region continues to monitor and evaluate the waiting list process and seeks out opportunities to provide better customer service for the applicants who require social housing and the housing providers who use the Region's waiting list to fill their RGI vacancies.

For more information on this report, please contact Sylvia Patterson, General Manager, Housing and Long Term Care at Ext. 2091.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.