

8

SOCIAL HOUSING WAITING LIST ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2007

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 3, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk distribute this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of the 2007 rent-geared-to-income waiting list activities and provides information about waiting list applicants.

3. BACKGROUND

The Region administers and maintains the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income 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 rent-geared-to-income 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 rent-geared-to-income housing to leave the abusive situation.

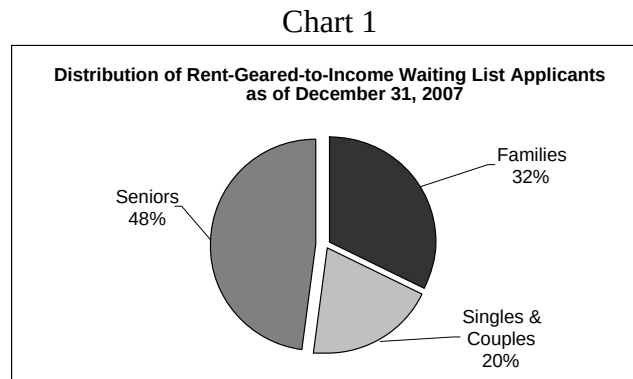
The six staff in the Housing Access Unit answer public and applicant enquiries, process applications, and update applicant files annually. In a typical month, staff answer approximately 1,000 telephone calls, meet with an average of 200 walk-in clients, process an average of 150 new applications, and update approximately 450 applicant files.

In 2007, the Housing Access Unit processed approximately 1800 new applications. At the same time about 1200 applications were cancelled, primarily because the applicants failed to respond to the annual information update request.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Almost half of the applicant households are seniors

There are approximately 5,600 households, representing approximately 11,000 people on the waiting list. The waiting list is subdivided into three general categories: seniors, families, and non-senior singles/couples (Chart 1). The distribution of applicants within these categories has remained relatively stable.

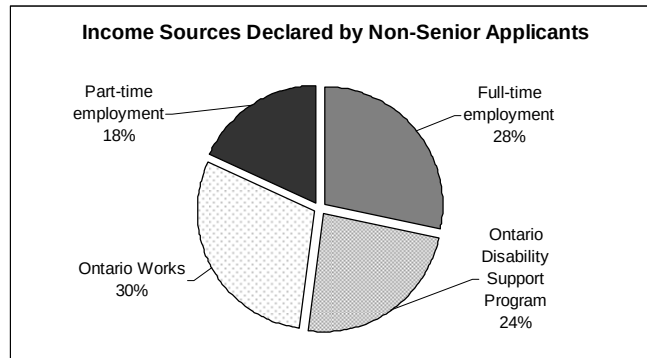


Almost 70% of all applicant households live on less than \$20,000 per year; many are working poor

Applicants are asked to declare their total household income and to identify their sources of income. Income is verified by the housing provider when the applicant has accepted a unit.

Almost 70% of all applicants declared incomes below \$20,000 per year. Only 4% have incomes greater than \$40,000. Many of the applicants are working poor. Although most senior applicants declare pension income, 17% report income from full or part-time employment. For non-senior applicants, 46% of the households on the waiting list have full or part-time employment income. Chart 2 illustrates the income sources for non-senior households.

Chart 2



Most applicants already live in York Region

Applicants who live anywhere in Canada may apply for rent-geared-to-income housing in York Region. Most (56%) of the applicants live in York Region. A further 36% (approximately 2,000 households) live in the City of Toronto, many in the areas just south of Steeles Avenue.

Toronto's Housing Access Centre reports that approximately 2,248 of the 50,000 active households on Toronto's waiting list are York Region residents requesting housing in Toronto.

In 2007, 87 applicants from the City of Toronto were housed in York Region's social housing portfolio and 87 applicants from York Region were housed in Toronto's portfolio.

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

Waiting times vary considerably depending on:

- Whether the applicant is eligible for dedicated seniors' buildings.
- The unit size required.
- 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.

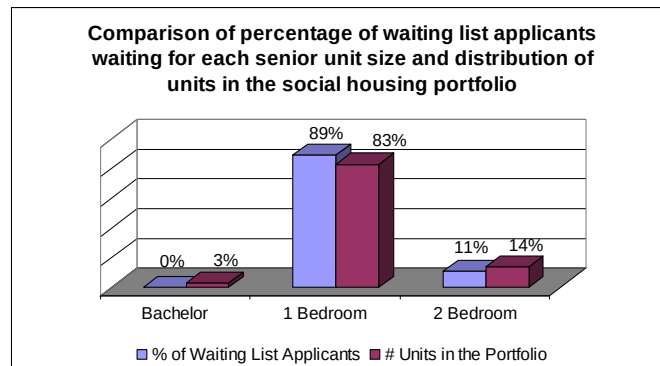
Most seniors can typically expect to wait approximately four to six years for housing in buildings reserved for seniors.

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

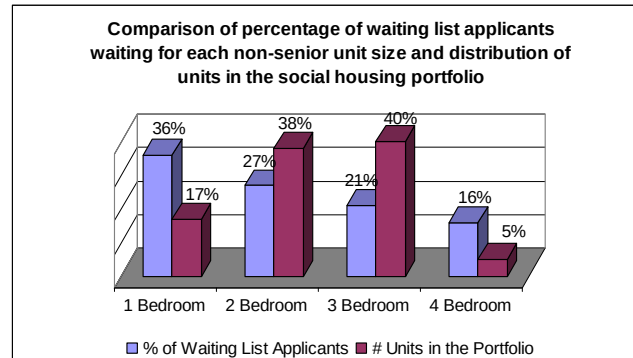


The picture is quite different for non-senior units. There is an acute need for one-bedroom non-senior units across the Region.

There are approximately 1,100 applicants waiting for one-bedroom non-senior 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 more, 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



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

Under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*, victims of domestic violence who need rent-geared-to-income 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.

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've chosen and whether or not they need one of the Region's limited one-bedroom units.

In 2007, there were 202 requests for Special Priority status approved, and 71 were denied. Of the 71 denied, 29 were subsequently approved through the review process, described later in this report.

In 2007, 423 applicant households moved into rent-geared-to-income housing in the Region

The number of rent-geared-to-income vacancies remains relatively stable from one year to the next. In 2007, 423 rent-geared-to-income vacancies were filled with applicants from the centralized waiting list. Of these, 176 were seniors and 247 were families and/or singles.

52% of all rent-geared-to-income 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 2007, 52% of all rent-geared-to-income 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 5% of all 2007 rent-geared-to-income vacancies were filled by Special Priority applicants.

4.1 APPLICANT REVIEW REQUESTS—2007 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 conducts 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 1 summarizes the 2007 reviews of the Housing Access Unit's decisions.

Table 1
Summary of 2007 Applicant Requests for Decision Reviews

Decision	Requests Received	Decision Upheld	New Decision Made
Not eligible to be on the waiting list	7	0	7
Not eligible for unit type/size requested	10	4	6
Refused an offer of housing	13	8	5
Not eligible for special priority ranking	56	27	29
Application cancelled for failing to respond to the annual update	204	13	191
Request to backdate application	12	11	1

Table 2 summarizes the typical reasons why new decisions are substituted for the original decisions in each category.

Table 2
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 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.
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.

4.2 WAITING LIST IMPROVEMENTS

In 2007, the Region undertook a number of initiatives to enhance services to housing providers and applicants:

- A volunteer group of housing providers were trained to use enhanced components of the web-based waiting list system as part of a pilot project. Additional providers will be included in this program in the future.
- The waiting list ranking system was changed from a multiple date system that reflected the integration of waiting lists maintained by individual housing providers before the centralized waiting list, to a single date system where the oldest application date is used for every building waiting list.

- 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 for training or service improvement.

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 challenges.

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 in Toronto and must commute in to work.

7. CONCLUSION

Affordable housing is a very valuable resource. Although the centralized waiting list has stabilized over the past few years at approximately 5,600 households, less than 10% are housed each year.

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 rent-geared-to-income vacancies.

Report No. 3 of the Community Services and Housing Committee
Regional Council Meeting of April 24, 2008

For more information on this report, please contact Sylvia Patterson, Director, Housing Services Branch at Ext. 2091.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.