

7 SOCIAL HOUSING WAITING LIST ACTIVITY REPORT

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 23, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information

2. PURPOSE

This report provides information summarizing rent-geared-to-income (RGI) waiting list activity as of year end 2006.

3. BACKGROUND

Under the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000* (SHRA), the Region is required to maintain a centralized waiting list system for RGI housing units. Applicants apply to the Region's Housing Access Unit and, if eligible, are added to the waiting lists of the social housing buildings of their choice, effective the date they applied. Each housing provider has electronic access to their subsidiary waiting list of applicants who have requested their building.

Housing providers are required to offer all RGI vacancies to the highest ranked applicants on their respective subsidiary waiting list. With the exception of the Special Priority category, all applicants are ranked based only on their application date. The Special Priority program is a provincially mandated program designed to assist applicants who have been abused by a member of their household and need RGI housing to leave the abusive situation. The SHRA requires that Special Priority applicants rank ahead of all other applicants.

3.1 Housing Access Unit

The Housing Access Unit (HAU) staff group is responsible for administering and maintaining the centralized waiting list. This includes determining eligibility for the waiting list, reviewing continued eligibility and determining eligibility for applicants applying for the Special Priority category.

Over the past few years, the Unit has streamlined its business processes and improved communication to applicants. The HAU has implemented a procedures manual which

includes template letters written in plain language. The application package and Special Priority forms are available for applicants to download from the Region's web-site. Also, a detailed inventory of modified units is available on the web-site so that people with disabilities can better match their needs to an appropriate unit.

On occasion, applicants may require translation or interpretations services. HAU staff can access these services, if necessary. Generally, though, the applicant arranges to have a family member or friend act as their interpreter.

Each Applicant Service Representative (ASR) works with a portfolio of approximately 1,700 applicants. The ASRs determine initial eligibility for the waiting list for new applicants. The Region requires households on the waiting list to update their information at least once every twelve months. Each month, approximately 500 annual update packages are mailed by each ASR. Applicants are required to inform the HAU of any changes in their situation, including contact information and household composition. Applicants are notified that if they do not respond to the information request, their application will be cancelled and they would need to reapply. Applicants can appeal to have their application reactivated through an internal review process. ASRs review the completed update forms to ensure that households continue to be eligible for the waiting list and update the database.

The ASRs provide program information to applicants so that they can make informed decisions regarding housing provider selections. They also provide additional resource information for applicants who may be on the verge of homelessness, and respond to walk-in inquiries.

3.1.1 Housing Access Unit Activity

In a typical month in 2003, the HAU responded to 1,700 telephone calls, issued 400 application packages, received 150 new applications, interviewed 25 Special Priority applicants, and maintained the RGI waiting list of approximately 5,100 households.

As of the end of 2006, the ASRs are averaging approximately 1,000 telephone calls per month. The decrease can be attributed to the streamlined process and more effective communication. The ASRs also respond to an average of 200 walk-ins per month. Although these numbers can fluctuate in any given month, these statistics have remained somewhat stable. A Senior ASR handles all applicant inquiries regarding the Special Priority program and provides information so that Special Priority applicants can make informed decisions regarding their housing provider selections.

The Department's Contact Centre is responsible for sending out HAU application packages to potential applicants. The Contact Centre sends out an average of 400 applications per month. The HAU processes an average of 150 new applications per month.

3.1.2 Electronic Software

In terms of the database used to manage the centralized waiting list, the Unit uses a web-based software program (YARDI). York Region is one of 28 Service Managers that have purchased the license to this product.

The system has been designed so that housing providers can have electronic access to their waiting lists. Initially, the HAU provided each housing provider with a paper copy of their subsidiary waiting list on a monthly basis. In 2004, the Region began to support electronic access so that housing providers could not only view their current waiting list, but view the details of the application, print a summary of the information and make electronic notes regarding the applicant. In the near future, it is anticipated that the level of housing provider access to the system will be increased. Analysis and testing for this feature is currently under development.

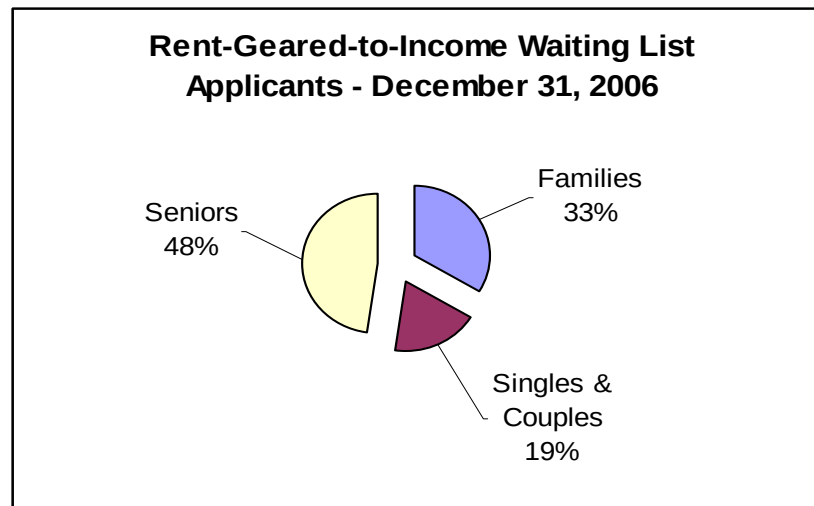
The system has been designed so that there is a waiting list for each social housing building. There are 41 non-profit and co-operative social housing buildings and Housing York Inc. (with 30 buildings under its administration). The system has been set up so that the HAU can run a waiting list for a particular unit size at any location. Housing providers, however, can only view the waiting list for their respective building.

The Housing Access Unit maintains a close relationship with the housing providers. On-going training/coaching sessions are held. As well, the Unit responds to technical issues providers may experience with the web-based software. Recently, the HAU has begun to host quarterly housing provider networking sessions to discuss issues providers may have relating to the waiting list.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

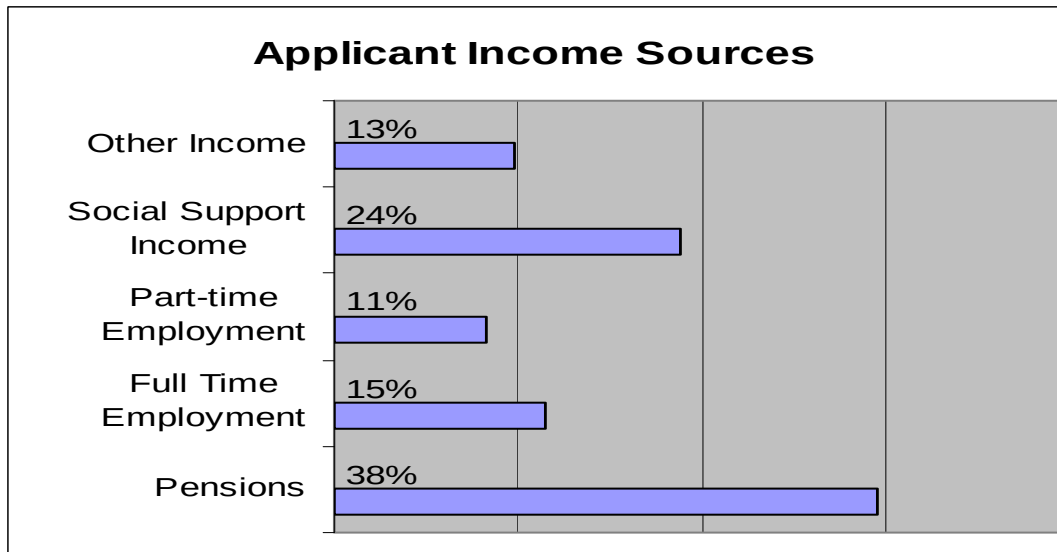
4.1 Demographic Analysis of Waiting List Applicants

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 within the categories has remained relatively stable. The RGI waiting list is comprised of approximately 5,300 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, 2006.



4.1.1 Applicant Income Sources

The following chart demonstrates the predominant sources of income applicants are receiving. The HAU does not verify income or asset information. Income information is self-declared by the applicant on the application and update forms. At the time of offer, the housing provider is responsible to thoroughly verify the applicant's income and asset documentation.



Other income includes sources such as employment insurance, self employment, support income, sponsorship income and short and long term Workers Safety Insurance Board benefits.

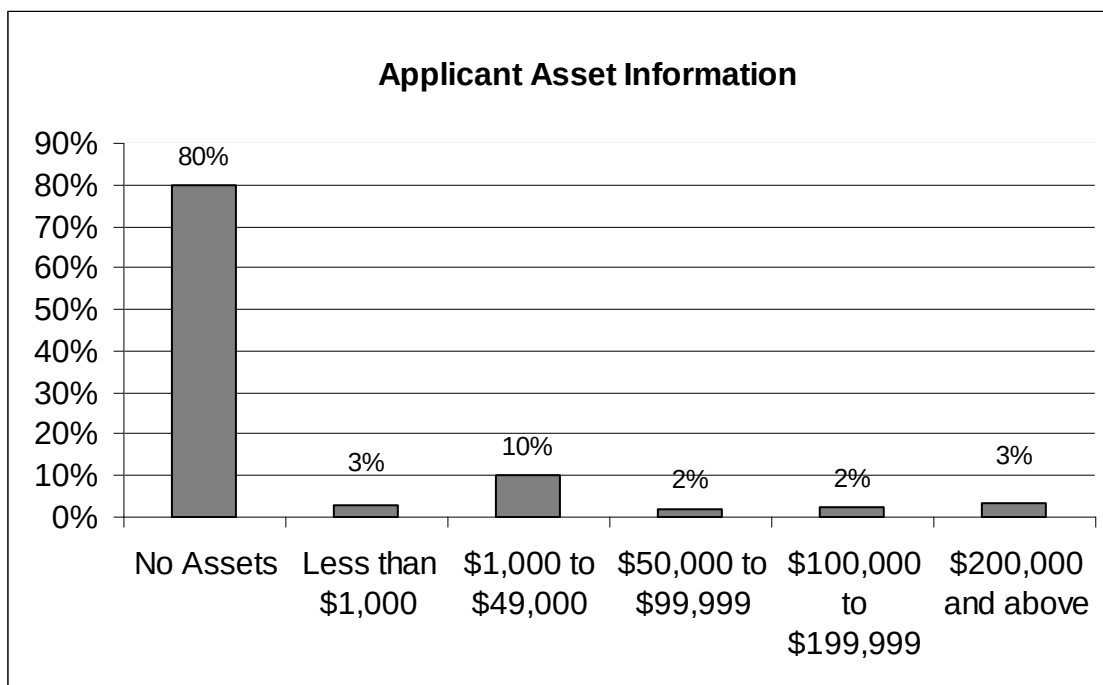
Social Support Income includes income from Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

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.

The percentages reflected by these income sources may suggest that the level of income is insufficient across the applicant population to afford market-housing rates.

4.1.2 Asset Information

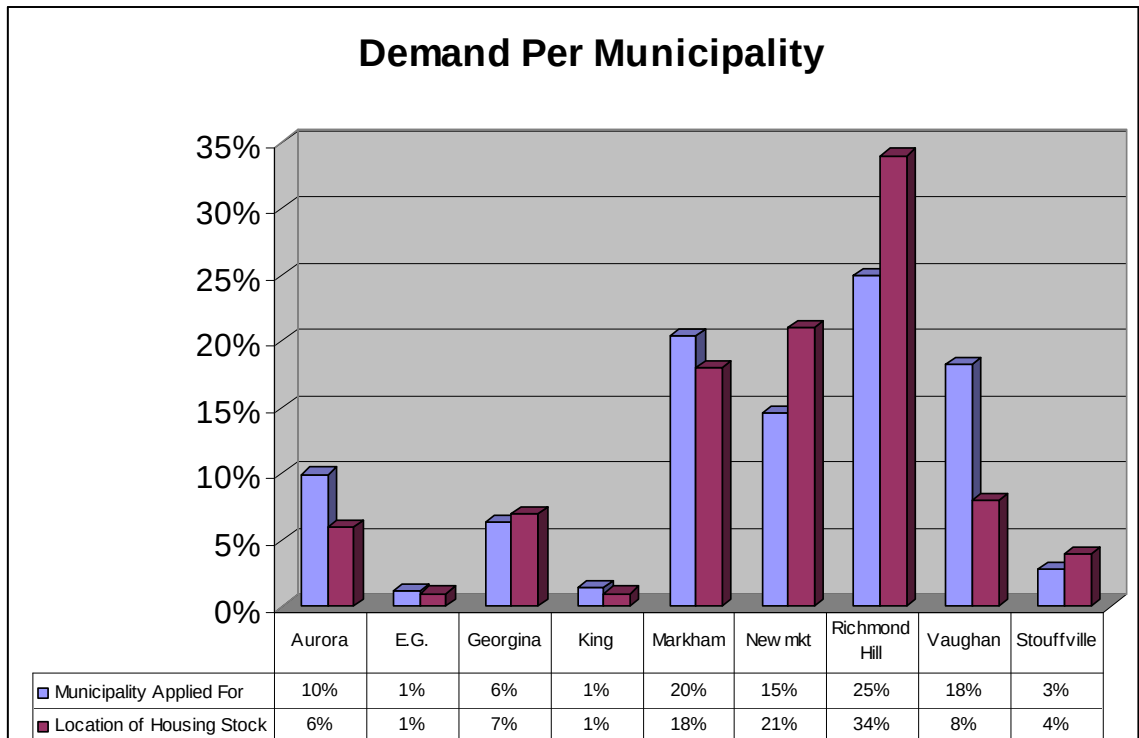
The following chart provides information with respect to assets applicants have declared.



Of the approximately 5,300 households on the waiting list, only 20% of the households have declared that they have assets. A small percentage of applicants may have assets at the time of application. This would typically reflect the case of seniors still residing in an owned home, or marital assets awaiting completion of a divorce proceeding.

4.1.3 Rent-Geared-to-Income Applicant Demand by Local Municipality

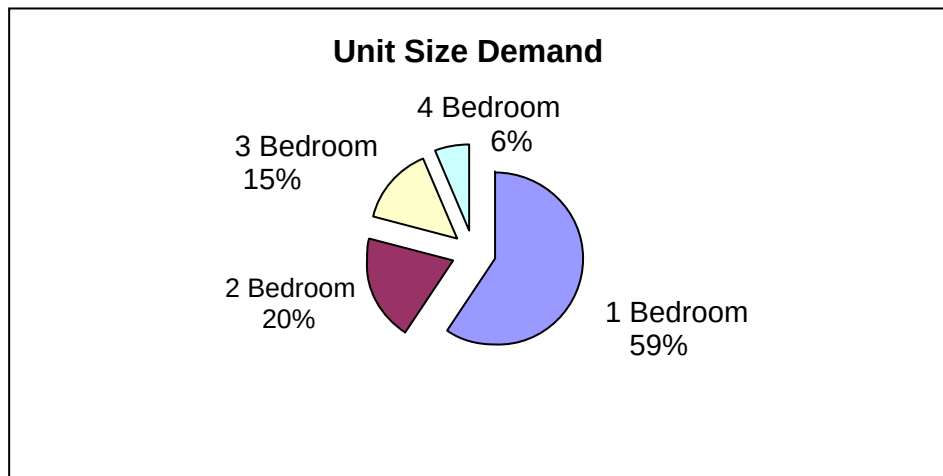
The following chart provides an overview of applicant activity by municipality for 2006.



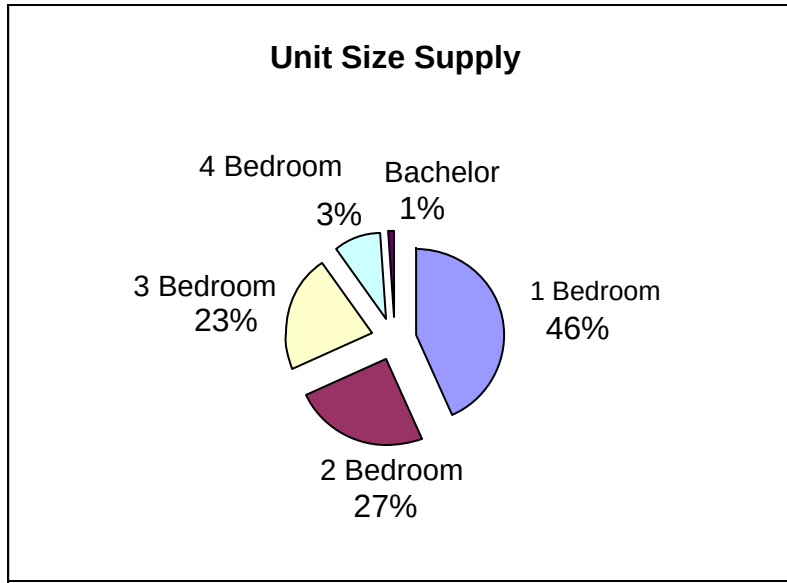
This chart also identifies the percentage of housing stock in each of the nine municipal areas. Richmond Hill continues to have the highest demand at 25%. This has been consistent for the last five years. It is important to note that demand often follows supply. Applicants apply for what exists and this will, therefore, not be a clear measure of demand locations.

4.1.4 Unit Size Demand and Unit Size Supply

This overview includes seniors, who would be eligible for one or two bedroom accommodation in seniors mandated buildings.

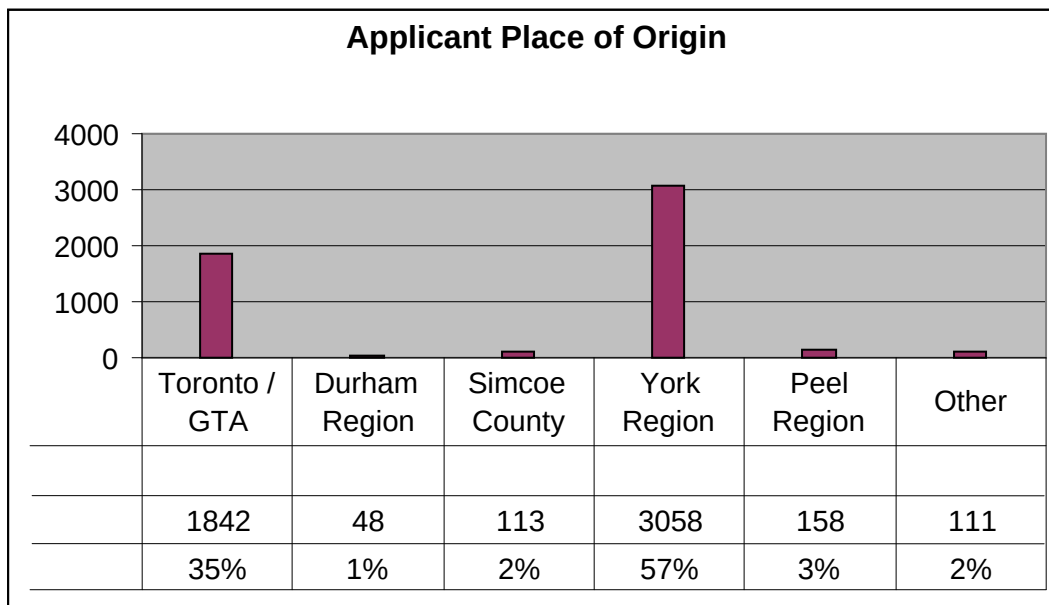


The overview of Unit Size Supply identifies the distribution of RGI units in York Region.



4.1.5 Current Location of Applicant

The SHRA 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 or have refugee status).



The vast majority of applicants live in either York Region or the City of Toronto; 57% of applicants live in York Region while another 35% reside in Toronto. Staff responsible for Toronto's centralized waiting list indicate that approximately 2,251 or 5% of the 49,000 active households on Toronto's waiting list are from York Region. In 2006, 19 applicants from the City of Toronto were housed in York Region's social housing portfolio and 109 applicants from York Region were housed in Toronto's portfolio.

Applications are received from many other areas, but their numbers are not significant enough to reflect in the chart so they have been combined as "other" (2%). The other category includes: Hamilton, Kitchener, Guelph, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary, Winnipeg, and other locations.

4.1.6 Special Priority Applicants

Applicants who have been abused by a member of the household and need RGI housing to leave the abusive situation may be approved for the Special Priority status. The SHRA requires that applicants who have been approved for Special Priority status rank ahead of all other applicants.

This category continues to have a significant impact administratively for the HAU, housing providers, and the waiting list in York Region. The Special Priority category is the only priority category that is legislated.

Table 1 provides an overview of the activity for Special Priority requests.

Table 1
Requests for Special Priority

Year	Number of Requests	Approved	Denied	Not Reviewed
2004	391	206	140	45
2005	400	139	125	136
2006	393	182	109	102

The "denied" category represents applicants who have been turned down for the Special Priority category. These applicants have the right to request an internal review of the decision. Requests that are not reviewed are ones where the applicant has provided incomplete documentation and a decision could not be made. Table 2 shows the number of requests and the outcome of the decision.

Table 2
Special Priority Internal Reviews

Year	Request for Internal Review	Overtured	Upheld
2004	71	15	56
2005	61	17	44
2006	46	12	34

In 2004, out of 71 requests, 15 decisions were overturned due to additional information provided by the applicant and 56 decisions were upheld. In 2005, 61 requests were made, 17 decisions were overturned and 44 decisions were upheld. In 2006, 46 requests were made, 12 were overturned and 34 were upheld.

4.1.7 Housed Data

The following table provides the number of applicants housed for the past three years and the breakdown between Special Priority applicants and applicants for the chronological waiting list.

Table 3
Housed Applicants

Applicants	2004	2005	2006
SPP Applicants	30% (16 senior)	22% (4 senior)	30% (14 senior)
Chronological Applicants	70%	78%	70%
Total Number Housed	458	423	453

In 2004, 9% of all RGI vacancies in seniors' buildings and 43% of all RGI vacancies in family and single buildings across the Region were filled by Special Priority applicants.

In 2005, 2% of all RGI vacancies in seniors' buildings and 37% of all RGI vacancies in family and single buildings were filled by Special Priority applicants.

In 2006, 3% of all RGI vacancies were filled by Special Priority applicants in seniors' buildings and 27% of all RGI vacancies in family and single buildings.

4.1.8 Estimated Rent-Geared-to-Income Applicant Waiting Times

Overall, waiting times vary considerably depending on the number of applicants in each housing category, the relative number of RGI units and the turnover. The waiting times for the southern municipalities of the Region are much longer as the demand is higher.

4.1.8.1 Estimated Rent-Geared-to-Income Waiting Times for Special Priority Applicants

Overall, the Special Priority applicants represent approximately 2% of the total waiting list. Special Priority applicants seeking housing in the Region's central or northern municipalities are typically offered housing in 3 to 6 months, whereas those requesting housing in the southern municipalities may wait 3 to 24 months. In fact, there are a few Special Priority applicants who have requested a specific building in the southern part of the Region who have been waiting longer than 36 months.

It is also important to note that 45% of the Special Priority applicants are waiting for one-bedroom non-senior units. Referring back to the Unit Size Supply chart, this unit type has the highest demand. Applicants waiting for housing for this unit type, even though they are Special Priority, could be waiting longer than 24 months.

4.1.8.2 Estimated Rent-Geared-to-Income Waiting Times for Chronological Applicants

Waiting times for chronological applicants depend upon the unit size required, building preference and area of the Region. Applicants seeking housing in the Region's central or northern municipalities are typically offered housing in 3 to 5 years. Those seeking housing in the Region's southern municipality can be offered housing in 5 to 9 years or longer. Some of our southern municipality housing providers still have chronological applicants on their waiting lists that applied to their building in 1995, 1996 and 1997.

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 and must commute in to work.

7. CONCLUSION

Affordable housing is a very valuable resource. The shortage of affordable housing 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.

For more information on this report contact Sylvia Patterson, Director, Housing Services Branch in the Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.