EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Affordable Housing Strategy

Affordable housing is becoming an increasingly significant issue in the City of Barrie. Affordable housing has been identified by City Council as a strategic corporate priority for 2014. On Council’s direction, staff have prepared this draft Affordable Housing Strategy.

Background

The Strong Communities Through Affordable Housing Act, 2011 (formerly Bill 140) identifies affordable housing as a matter of Provincial Interest. Although the County of Simcoe is the service provider for this region and has prepared a Housing and Homelessness Plan, local municipalities must play a role as well including initiatives such as amending their planning instruments to enlarge permissions for second suites and other forms of affordable housing in accordance with Provincial legislation and policy.

In accordance with Council direction, the City has prepared this Affordable Housing Strategy to address the issue of housing and homelessness within the City. The strategy examines the current (2013) housing situation in Barrie and recommends a series of action items ranging from amendments to the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-law to enacting a demolition control by-law for rental housing.

What is Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing is defined by the Provincial Policy Statement as well as the City’s Official Plan as:

In the case of home ownership, the least expensive of:

- housing for which the purchase price results in annual accommodation costs which do not exceed 30% of gross income for low to moderate income households; or
- housing for which the purchase price is at least 10% below the average purchase price of a resale unit in the regional market area.

In the case of rental housing, the least expensive of:

- a unit for which the rent does not exceed 30% of gross annual income for low to moderate income households; or
- a unit for which rent is at or below the average market rent of a unit within the regional market area.

Policy Framework and Community Context

The study reviews the existing legislative and policy framework associated with the provision of affordable housing including:

- The Planning Act;
- The Strong Communities through Affordable Housing Act;
- The Provincial Policy Statement;
- The County of Simcoe’s Housing and Homelessness Plan; and
- The City of Barrie Official Plan and Zoning By-law.

The City of Barrie population is projected to grow from its 2013 population of 143,000 to approximately 210,000 by 2031, increasing the demand for affordable housing proportionately.
Under the Provincial Policy Statement and Official Plan definitions of affordability, a dwelling unit priced at $280,000 can be considered affordable for the 60th percentile of average incomes. In 2013, there were only 10% of new dwellings and 22% of current resale listings that would be defined as affordable.

The average household income required to purchase an “affordable” home based on the above criteria would be $82,600.

The rental vacancy rate in Barrie has fluctuated between 2.5% and 1.7% over the past four years. A vacancy rate of 5% is considered a “healthy” rental market.

The average monthly rent for a 2 bedroom apartment in Barrie in 2013 was $1,037 which is the 6th highest average monthly rent in Canadian metropolitan areas.

The supply of rental housing in Barrie is also significantly impacted by the demand for housing created by almost 2,700 Georgian College students that cannot be accommodated in dedicated student housing. This number is only expected to increase as the College continues to grow and expand.

**Social Housing**

Social Housing is defined as subsidized or rent-geared-to-income housing provided by not for profit housing providers. The County of Simcoe is the service provider within the region, however the City also controls its own social housing provider, the Barrie Municipal Non-Profit Housing Corporation.

Of the 1,732 social housing units owned or funded by the County of Simcoe in Barrie, 953 are administered by the Barrie Municipal Non-Profit Housing Corporation. The remainder of the units are administered by other not-for-profit providers such as Collier Street Senior, St. Mary’s, Coral, and Gateway Co-op.

The County’s most recent (2012) statistics shows a significant increase in the demand for social housing in Barrie with approximately 1500 households on the Waitlist. The average wait time for social housing in the County is 2.3 – 4.2 years.

**Affordable Housing Strategy**

The Affordable Housing Strategy recommends a variety of action items including short, mid and long term items.

The Strategy recommends revisions to the Official Plan including:

- amending the existing Second Suites policies to increase permissions for this housing form;
- the addition of new policies regarding applications for condominium conversions;
- the addition of new policies regarding the purchase and sale of City lands for affordable housing;
- the addition of new policies including affordable housing in Community Improvement Plans; and
- the addition of new policies permitting the temporary use of garden suites for 20 years.

**Second Suites**

The Strategy recognizes second suites as an option to increase supply of affordable rental housing.

Under the current provisions of the City’s Official Plan and Zoning By-law, second suites in free standing detached dwellings are specifically permitted in the Multiple Family RM1-SS zone, only in plans of subdivision registered after January 1, 2004. Two unit dwellings are permitted in all other multiple family zones.
The Strategy recommends broadening the zones permitted for second suites to be permitted in free standing detached dwellings (including accessory structures to these dwellings) into the R1, R2, R3 & R4 zones.

In order to mitigate the potential impact of this recommendation, the Strategy proposes specific development standards in association with the revised permissions as follows:

- Each dwelling containing a second suite would be required to provide a minimum of 1 parking space per unit.
- Only one second suite would be permitted per detached dwelling.
- Second suites would be restricted to a minimum of 35m$^2$ and a maximum of 50m$^2$ in either the main or accessory building.

These standards are intended to mitigate the potential impact of second suites by ensuring that adequate off street parking is provided, that multiple units are not provided in a single detached dwelling and that the units would ideally accommodate only one or two tenants.

**Other Strategic Initiatives**

The Strategy also recommends other strategic initiatives intended to preserve rental housing stock and facilitate the development of new affordable housing. These initiatives include:

- Demolition and Conversion By-laws to assist in the retention of existing rental housing.
- A requirement for the provision of lots and blocks to assist in the development of affordable housing in new subdivision developments.
- The development of a tracking system to ensure the Official Plan’s 10% targets for affordable housing is met.
- Assessment of opportunities for financial incentives for not-for-profit providers.
- Inclusion of social housing in the update of the Development Charges By-law in order to allow a portion of Development Charges to fund new capital social housing projects.
- Provision of land by City for the development of affordable housing by not-for-profit housing providers.
- Request the Federal Government to extend funding for the investment in affordable housing to be extended for year 2015 and beyond or introduce new programs with additional funding.