

north shore news

Subsidies halted for housing co-ops

Maria Spitale-Leisk / North Shore News

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Fiona Jackson, of the Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C., speaks at a November meeting on the Mount Seymour Park Housing Complex. Photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

Many low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities living in North Vancouver housing co-ops face an uncertain future.

Federal rent subsidies for 150 North Vancouver households (and other low-income co-op members across the province) will end as early as 2021, according to the Co-operative Housing Federation of British Columbia.

The federation has launched its You Hold the Key campaign ahead of the expiration of federal funding, asking its members to lobby the provincial government for a rent-geared-to-income program for low-income co-op households.

"We are saying in our campaign that housing is a provincial responsibility," said federation spokeswoman Fiona Jackson.

The federation estimates it would cost the province approximately \$20 million to fund a co-op rent supplement program by 2020, a figure the association said "pales in comparison to the social and financial costs of homelessness."

In November, members from North Vancouver's nine housing co-ops, comprising some 465 households, met at the Mount Seymour Park Co-op to learn more about the imminent changes to the rent subsidy program.

Each housing co-op has its own 35-year federal operating agreement, which started the year it was built.

Six of the North Van co-ops will see those low-income subsidies expire in 2021.

Under the current program, rent supplement covers the difference between 30 per cent of a co-op member's income and the full rent charged to other members.

"Our philosophy is that someone shouldn't be paying more than 30 per cent of their income to put a roof over their head," said Jackson. Monthly rent at the Mount Seymour Park Co-op is approximately \$750 for a one-bedroom unit, and up to \$1,178 for four bedrooms. Co-op members also pay a one-time "share purchase" or membership fee, which ranges from \$1,500 to \$3,000, depending on the size of the unit.

In April, City of North Vancouver council unanimously supported the federation's low-income housing subsidy proposal to the province, passing a resolution that was in turn endorsed by the Metro Vancouver board. More information on the You Hold the Key campaign is available on the federation's website at chf.bc.ca.