

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.	04-99-0001/05-99-0004
Your File/V/Réf.	03-07-99-0127
DATE	14 October 1999
TO/DEST.	Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee
FROM/EXP.	Special Advisor on Social Housing
SUBJECT/OBJET	VACANCIES IN SENIORS' HOUSING UNITS RESPONSE TO CS INQUIRY NO. 23(99)

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee receive this report for information

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to respond to the following Inquiry raised by Councillors M. McGoldrick-Larsen and D. Holmes at the Community Services Committee meeting of 8 Jul 99.

Would staff report back on the number of vacancies in seniors' housing units, whether these are all subsidized units; what was the situation in the past; how long is it taking for these units to be filled. In addition, would staff report back on why the units are empty, how many evictions have there been because of policy changes, the number of illegal activities that go on in these buildings (drug abuse, prostitution, etc.) and the availability of support services to residents.

Social Housing for Seniors in Ottawa-Carleton

As shown in Table 1, there are currently 4325 units of social housing targeted to seniors in Ottawa-Carleton. Nearly 4100 of these are located in 36 seniors-only projects. Sixteen of these projects are administered by Ottawa-Carleton Housing (OCH); twenty more are managed by sixteen different municipal and private non-profit and co-operative housing providers. The remaining 230 units dedicated to seniors are found in thirteen projects also administered by municipal and private non-profit and co-operative housing groups and serving a mix of household types. The majority of the seniors-only projects are currently administered by the Province and funded by the Region.

In addition to these units targeted specifically to seniors, there are a number of seniors living in age-integrated projects managed by OCH and City Living. OCH has 2089 units in 11 age-integrated buildings, while City Living has 646 units in 6 buildings.

Just over 3600 (84 percent) of the units targeted to seniors are rented on a rent-geared-to-income (RGI) basis. All OCH units are RGI; the proportion of RGI in other projects varies depending on the program under which the housing was developed. All age-integrated units provide rents geared to income.

Table 1: Age-Integrated and Seniors Social Housing in Ottawa-Carleton, 1999

<i>Provider</i>	<i>Number of Projects</i>	<i>Number of Units</i>	<i>Number of RGI Units*</i>
<i>Seniors-Only Projects:</i>			
• Ottawa-Carleton Housing	16	2987	2987
• Municipal Non-Profit Housing	10	400	261
• Private Non-Profit Housing	5	348	135
• Co-operatives	5	358	78
<i>Total - Seniors Only</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>4093</i>	<i>3461</i>
<i>Dedicated Seniors Units in Mixed Use Municipal & Private Non-Profits & Co-operatives</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>232</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>Age-Integrated Projects (available to senior & non-senior households):</i>			
• Ottawa-Carleton Housing	11	2089	2089
• City Living	6	646	646
<i>Total - Age Integrated Projects</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>2735</i>	<i>2735</i>

* Includes 760 units funded under Rent Supplement Programs.

Conversions of Seniors-Only to Age-Integrated Projects

Historically, the largest providers of seniors' social housing in the Region have been OCH and City Living, the City of Ottawa's Non-Profit Housing Corporation. Until the 1990s, OCH managed 27 projects and City Living, 9 projects, for seniors.

Prior to 1988, eligibility for social housing was restricted, with few exceptions, to family and senior households. However in February of that year, the provincial Ministry of Housing extended eligibility to all permanent legal residents of Canada. With this extension, single persons and other households without children became eligible for assistance, thereby increasing the demand for small unit accommodation. Small units were located primarily in seniors projects. At the same time, demand by senior citizens was dropping, the result of a decrease in numbers (a smaller age cohort due to lower birth rates during the Depression), an improved economic situation (in part due to the introduction of government pensions) and the relative attractiveness of private market units.

Both OCH and City Living opened a number of their seniors' projects to non-senior singles and couples in order to accommodate this changing demand and to address the problem of vacancies in their portfolios. Although seniors continue to live in these age-integrated projects, units are not targeted exclusively to them.

City Living embarked on a multi-phase process to convert its seniors projects in the fall of 1989. As shown in Table 2, three projects have been retained for seniors. Of the remaining six, some have been opened to all households and some targeted to households aged 50 and over as well as resident 'empty nesters'. At the outset of the process, approximately 25 percent of tenants in the seniors portfolio were under the age of 60. This has now risen to 50 percent.

OCH has converted eleven projects to age-integrated status, six in 1992 and another five in 1996. With approximately 12 percent turnover per year, early OCH conversions now house up to 80 percent non-senior households.

Table 2: OCH and City Living Seniors Housing, Pre-Conversion & Current

<i>Provider/ Target Households</i>	<i>Pre-Conversion</i>		<i>Current Status</i>	
	<i>Number of Projects</i>	<i>Number of Units</i>	<i>Number of Projects</i>	<i>Number of Units</i>
<i>Ottawa-Carleton Housing:</i>				
• Seniors Only	27	5076	16	2987
• Age Integrated	-	-	11	2089
<i>City Living</i>				
• Seniors Only	9	820	3	174
• Age-Integrated	-	-	6	646

Vacancies in Seniors Housing Stock

Vacancies in many seniors-only projects are rare. According to Social Housing Registry statistics, vacancies in projects operated by small providers and those located in outlying areas where there are fewer rental options occur at a rate of one every year or two. However, as noted above, concern over vacancy levels in the seniors projects led two of the larger providers (OCH and City Living) to convert portions of their stock to age-integrated housing.

Vacancy rates for seven of the nine original City Living seniors projects are shown in Table 3. The rate has decreased from 4.1 percent in 1989 to 2.1 percent in 1999. A breakdown by current target group (that is, seniors-only or age-integrated) is not available. However, records do show that in 1989, vacancy rates in projects which are now age-integrated were as high as 8 and 9 percent while in 1999 none exceeded 3 percent. In both time periods, the vacancy rates in seniors-only buildings remained below the average.

Table 3: Vacancy Rates in City Living Seniors Limited Dividend Projects, 1995-1999*

<i>Dec 1989</i>	<i>Sept 1995</i>	<i>Sept 1996</i>	<i>Sept 1997</i>	<i>Sept 1998</i>	<i>Aug 1999</i>
4.1	2.9	2.0	3.4	n/a	2.1

* Information for the two projects provided under provincial programs cannot be separated out from general program data and is therefore not included.

OCH does not have vacancy rates available in the same format as that shown for City Living. Vacancy statistics for the OCH seniors stock, 1996-1999, are shown in Table 4 as 'extended vacant months' that is, vacancies of more than 37 days. Vacancies have risen from 1996 to 1998, and are now showing a decrease in 1999.

Despite the conversion to age-integrated projects, vacancies in the OCH seniors-only portfolio continue to be a problem, particularly in the west-central and central areas of Ottawa. There is little problem in the east end and none in the small outlying seniors projects where there is little other rental accommodation.

Table 4: Extended Vacant Months in the OCH Seniors Projects, 1996-1999

	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>
<i>Extended Vacant Months</i>	88	188	578	208
<i>Estimated Revenue Loss*</i>	\$27,000.	\$58,000.	\$178,000.	\$64,000.

* Revenue loss calculated at the average rent of \$308 per month

Because vacancies represent both revenue loss and a wasted resource, the OCH Board and its Equitable Access Committee approved a plan for assessing the future allocation of seniors units. An element of this was to ensure that low-income seniors in the Region were aware of the availability of RGI housing before further conversions were considered. Staff subsequently implemented a marketing strategy, the results of which will be brought back to the Board in the fall of this year.

Incidents in OCH Age-Integrated Projects

Recognizing the importance of ensuring the safety and security of all tenants in their living environments, the OCH Board has directed staff to seek ways to promote stability in the existing age-integrated projects. Households in these projects come from both the chronological and priority (victims of violence, the urgent category and the homeless) waiting lists. A number of the age-integrated projects have become concentrated with persons with special needs, including deinstitutionalized persons with mental disorders and homeless persons with histories of substance abuse and anti-social behaviour. There is a serious lack of support services for these persons. Tenant profiles conducted in two age-integrated buildings indicated that less than half the tenants with mental health problems had known professional support service. OCH tenant relations staff are not trained to deal with issues arising in some of the projects with higher concentrations of non-senior singles. And as yet, OCH has no on-site services to provide community support.

OCH staff have prepared funding proposals for residential support workers to help achieve stability in five of the age-integrated projects. The success of this initiative will inform future decisions about project conversion.

Security incidents in the OCH age-integrated projects have increased as more persons with special needs become tenants. An OCH report on incidents in various buildings between January and June 1999 identified that two age-integrated projects converted in 1996 had 13 incidents each while two converted four years earlier had 48 and 33 incidents respectively. In comparison, two senior-citizen buildings had 11 and 15 incidents respectively.

City Living does not have available statistics on security incidents, but report that there has been no noticeable impact on security in their age-integrated projects.

*Approved by
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