



Governance & Services Committee

TO: Governance and Services Committee

FROM: Todd Cashin
Director of Community Services

DATE: March 12, 2020

SUBJECT: Central Okanagan Rent Bank (6430-40)

Purpose: To provide an overview of the BC Rent Bank program.

Executive Summary:

Rent banks are an established practice in BC for assisting households facing a financial crisis that threatens their housing security and have proven to be an effective homelessness prevention strategy for some populations. BC Rent Bank is the title of the project established by Vancity Community Foundation with seed funding provided by the Province of BC.

The Regional Housing Needs Assessment has outlined that the Central Okanagan is experiencing unintended consequences of growth – a lack of suitable affordable housing, notably for workforce, family, seniors, and low-income households. To assist low- to moderate-income Central Okanagan renters, there is potential that a rent bank could be established in the Central Okanagan region.

If the Committee is interested in supporting this type of service, staff could bring forward a full report and recommendation at an upcoming Board meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Governance and Services Committee receives for information the Director of Community Services March 12, 2020, Central Okanagan Rent Bank report.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Cashin".

Todd Cashin
Director of Community Services

Approved for Committee's Consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Reardon".

Brian Reardon, CAO

Prepared by: Janelle Taylor, Planner

Implications of Recommendation:

Strategic Plan:	Receiving the report for information achieves the Regional Board Strategic Priorities 2019-2022 with respect to “Sustainable Communities”.
Policy:	Receiving the report for information complies with the Regional Growth Strategy: Our Housing, Our Health, Our Governance.

Background:Regional Board Strategic Priorities 2019-2022

RDCO’s strategic priorities, developed by the Regional Board, speak to important goals, services and needs on which the Board wishes to focus the organization’s attention and resources. Sustainable Communities has been identified as a priority:

- We will initiate and support efforts to create a healthy built environment in which all people throughout the region enjoy a high quality of life with access to safe neighbourhoods including a diverse range of housing options.

Regional Growth Strategy

The Regional Growth Strategy, adopted June 23, 2014, is a long-range planning tool that assists the Regional District and member municipalities to plan a coordinated future for their communities, while dealing with regional issues and decisions that cross local political boundaries. Ten regional issues were identified in the RGS, which include:

- Our Health
 - Goal: To contribute to the improvement of community health, safety and social wellbeing
- Our Housing
 - Goal: To improve the range of housing types and tenures to meet the social and economic needs of the region
- Our Governance
 - Goal: To respond to the needs of the region with an effective and efficient governance service model

Regional Housing Needs Assessment

Housing is one of the key social determinants of health. People facing barriers to accessing healthy housing are more likely to also struggle with other determinants of health, such as accessing health care services, income, and food security. When housing is improved, the burden of the other determinants is reduced. Project No. 3 of the RGS Priority Projects Plan, the Regional Housing Needs Assessment was completed in 2019.

The Assessment outlines that the Central Okanagan is experiencing unintended consequences of growth – a lack of suitable affordable housing, notably for workforce, family, seniors, and low-income households. While the development of a Regional Housing Strategy has been identified in Community Services 2020 Work Plan, an opportunity has come forward to assist low- to moderate-income Central Okanagan residents who rent.

BC Rent Bank

In December 2018, the Provincial Rental Housing Task Force, released 23 recommendations to the premier, including Recommendation #4: provincial funding for rent banks.

BC Rent Bank is the title of the project established by Vancity Community Foundation in response to that recommendation and established funding provided by the Province of BC. The funding is to be used to support existing rent banks and to help establish a province-wide rent bank system. The goal being that regardless of where you live in the province you can be supported to help maintain your housing.

Rent banks are a homelessness prevention tool that is focused on providing housing stability for low- to moderate-income renters. Rent banks provide financial assistance in the form of repayable loans, to households at risk of eviction for reasons such as non-payment of rent or utilities. Rent banks can also aid with individuals moving between housing, who might need to borrow the funds for a damage deposit to make the move.

There are four steps to complete while preparing for the launch of a rent bank:

1. Review BC Rent Bank Toolkit and Workbook
2. Apply for Development Grant
 - a. The Development Grant was created to help provide critical funding for establishing the right team and model in setting up a rent bank.
3. Establish a Cross-Sector Planning Team & Build a Model
 - a. Utilizing the principles outlined in the Toolkit, strategic teams can build models best suited for your region. Bringing together the right voices and model will help sustain a rent bank over the long term.
4. Apply for Seed Funding from BC Rent Bank
 - a. Lead agencies looking to operate a rent bank are encouraged to apply for seed funding. Applicants are asked to demonstrate community investment and support that will work to ensure long-term sustainability. We look for partners that are willing to be part of a larger network of rent bank providers in the province.

Central Okanagan Rent Bank History

The opportunity to consider a Central Okanagan Rent Bank was identified as a result of City of Kelowna staff researching rent banks. Given the regional nature of the housing market and high-level of integration among Central Okanagan communities, exploring the opportunity at a regional level was brought forward.

On December 11, 2019, Rent Bank BC provided a presentation to the RGS Steering Committee. The Committee supported the concept of further exploring a regional approach.

On March 3, 2020, a BC Rent Bank Information Session was collaboratively hosted by the RDCO, EDC and City of Kelowna at the Coast Capri. The workshop provided an overview of rent banks, explored the local need and discussed next steps for establishing a rent bank in the Central Okanagan.

Non-profit organizations were invited to share local knowledge on the need for a local rent bank and to express interest in operating a rent bank in the region. 29 individuals representing various non-profit agencies in the Central Okanagan registered for the event.

At the end of the workshop, 27 exit surveys were completed with the following results:

- 96% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that Central Okanagan residents would benefit from a rent bank.
- 93% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that a rent bank should be established in the Central Okanagan.
- Eight (8) organizations in attendance are potentially interested in managing a Central Okanagan Rent Bank.

Organizational Issues:

Given the interest at the March 3rd workshop, staff is currently exploring a Request for Expressions of Interest process with our partners. Regional District staff will be bringing forward a report to the March 23rd Regional Board to identify next steps.

External Implications:

There is potential that a rent bank service could be established in the Central Okanagan region, if a non-profit organization can be identified as the project lead and BC Rent Bank funding for the non-profit is received.

Financial Considerations:

As the applicant, the selected non-profit organization would accept responsibility to apply for, receive and manage the grant funding. The non-profit organization would assume responsibility for the completion of the project, reporting requirements and maintaining proper fiscal management.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

- *General*
- *Legal/Statutory Authority*
- *Alternative Recommendation*

Attachment(s): n/a