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Poor struggle with home upkeep

Report reveals growing affordable housing shortage in Hamilton

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Low-income families in Hamilton face a shortage of affordable housing and many live in overcrowded and inadequate units that are in need of repairs, according to a new report.

The finding was part of the Social Planning and Research Council's first-ever report on affordable housing in Hamilton released last week.

Report co-author Renee Wetselaar said the study was produced in an attempt to get the issue of affordable accommodations back on the city's agenda.

"We're trying to raise the temperature on this issue," said Wetselaar, who is also project director of Affordable Housing Flagship, a volunteer group of community leaders working to ensure everyone in Hamilton has affordable and adequate housing.

Wetselaar said one of the most shocking findings in the report was the high need for repairs.

Low-income families pay an average of \$102 less per month in rent than higher income families. However, the study found their homes are in more than twice the level of disrepair.

"We heard that time and time again from folks, that repairs were a major problem," Wetselaar said.

The report also revealed that overcrowding is a problem, particularly among immigrants because many have larger families.

"Landlords didn't like it and some families reported being discriminated against," Wetselaar said.

There are about 14,600 social housing units in Hamilton, said Wetselaar, adding they need another 626 to accommodate the growing wait list. Last year 169 units were added but it wasn't enough to ease the problem.

Hamilton still saw the largest increase in the province for the number of people joining the wait list for social housing.

Last year, Hamilton's list grew by 21 per cent, to 5,045 from 4,166 people who were waiting for subsidized housing.

By comparison, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association reported that wait lists for social housing in Ontario jumped almost 10 per cent in one year. Almost 142,000 households are on wait lists in Ontario.

The problems around affordable housing are not unique to Hamilton or the province, said Wetselaar, adding that Canada is the only G8 country that does not have a national housing program.

Several of Hamilton's leaders in social housing met to discuss the report. They included staff from Wesley Urban Ministries, Mission Services, the Good Shepherd Centre and Urban Native Homes.

"We're hoping by fall when things start heating up for the municipal election that this issue will get back on the agenda," Wetselaar said.

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