

Affordable housing woes

Mayor says 245 deteriorating units closed due to lack of provincial funding

BILL KAUFMANN

The province is shirking its role of maintaining affordable housing in Calgary, leading to hundreds of run-down units being shuttered, Mayor Naheed Nenshi said Wednesday.

Between April and December 2017, city officials were forced to close 245 provincially owned but city-managed units after they'd been vacated due to deteriorating conditions.

Nenshi called that intolerable, while noting the city is seeking to nearly double the operational grant for the housing from the province, from \$12 million to \$22 million for 2018, to repair that housing stock.

"Successive provincial governments of different stripes haven't been funding this

maintenance and it's gotten to an absolute breaking point," said Nenshi.

"We're not talking about cracked linoleum, we're actually talking about health and safety concerns."

Last month, the province provided a \$4.5-million emergency infusion for renovations but Nenshi said more was needed — and on a more reliable basis.

He noted Calgary's unfulfilled 10-year effort to eliminate homelessness by this year and said progress towards that will never be made if more low-cost housing units are being shut than are being opened.

"That is absolutely the danger and nobody wants that.

"We've had great, great success (in fighting homelessness) but the area we've had problems with is in affordable

housing," he said.

Nenshi said it's not hard to distinguish buildings maintained by the city and the decrepit housing under provincial upkeep.

"There's such a contrast between these provincial housing units versus other city facilities," he said.

The Calgary Housing Co., which operates much of the lower-cost lodging, has a waiting list of nearly 4,000.

During a meeting Wednesday of the city's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, the province also came in for praise for its focus on promoting inclusionary housing, or planning that ensures low income or subsidized lodging is included in residential development.

Nenshi also said the province, along with Ottawa, have recently launched much-

welcome and long-overdue affordable housing strategies aimed at municipalities that he called "historic."

But the mayor said they need to see the fruits of that strategy to ensure existing affordable housing is maintained, and more supply added.

"The money's got to flow and the shovels have to get in the ground," he said.

The city's also hoping to see \$70 million over the next decade from the province to build new below-market housing.

In a statement, Alberta Seniors and Housing Minister Lori Sigurdson said the province is considering the city's funding request ahead of a provincial budget expected in March and reiterated the \$4.5 million in recent support.

But she also blamed the

previous PC government for allowing the housing stock to deteriorate.

"The former government left a \$1 billion maintenance deficit in affordable housing," she stated.

"Mayor Nenshi and I are in contact and both levels of government are committed to ensuring Calgarians who depend on affordable housing receive the supports they need."

A Calgary Housing Co. report said, for now, \$6.9 million in funding has been committed to "support 2,000 units of affordable housing" which will also help the city leverage more money from governments to build more such lodging.

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CP rail says conductor fired over workplace violations

LAUREN KRUGEL
The Canadian Press

Canadian Pacific Railway says a conductor involved in a 2014 derailment was fired for because she disparaged the company and was photographed in unsafe situations.

Stephanie Katelnikoff was sent an evidence package before her dismissal in November. The package — which was provided to The Canadian Press — had screen grabs of her Facebook and Instagram profiles that include several revealing modelling photos.

While many photos in the package showed Katelnikoff nude or in lingerie, CP Rail said Wednesday her termination only concerned ones that were related in some way to railway safety and the company.

Some of the shots show her in cutoff jean shorts and a midriff-bearing top posing on railway tracks.

"Railway safety is a top priority at CP," the railway said. "Ms. Katelnikoff's termination related to her decision to post photos of herself in unsafe situations on railway property and equipment, committing railway safety violations, along with disparaging remarks regarding the company."

The package also included a warning letter from August 2016 regarding a YouTube video by Katelnikoff that she says was meant to be an open letter to then-CEO Hunter Harrison.

"Stephanie, your conduct in posting the YouTube video not only displayed gross insubordination and insolence, but also constituted a serious breach of CP's Code of Business Ethics," the warning letter read.

Katelnikoff said Wednesday that she doesn't buy the railway's explanation.

"I call shenanigans," she said in an email. "I don't know why the investigating officer would've commented on the rest of my photos, why they would've even been included in the evidence package, and why they made a general statement regarding my 'inappropriate social media content' in the dismissal letter."

Shopping centre on time for summer opening

SHAWN LOGAN

Calgary's newest megamall, which with 500 shops will make it the second largest in Canada, is on track to open the doors of the \$200-million multicultural shopping centre this summer.

New Horizon Mall, located across the road from CrossIron Mills in Balzac, has sold 98 per cent of its 500 retail units and will cater to the area's diverse clientele with a decidedly international flavour.

Eli Swirsky, president of the Torgan Group, which is developing the 320,000-square-foot mall alongside MPI Property Group, said the shopping centre is modelled after Toronto's multicultural Pacific Mall — another Torgan Group project — and should nicely fit in with Calgary's rich cultural mosaic, about a third of whose population are immigrants.

"People are going to get a totally different shopping experience," Swirsky said of the two-floor shopping centre that will be more akin to a marketplace than a traditional mall.

"The difference between this and, say, CrossIron Mills, is every time you go you're going to see something different."

While Toronto's Pacific Mall is targeted at a largely Chinese clientele, Swirsky said New Horizon will cater to a variety of ethnicities, including the city's Indo-Canadian and Middle Eastern communities.

First launched in 2014, the project broke ground in 2016 and is now putting the finishing touches on the exterior before preparing for its new tenants, who will almost entirely be owner-operators through a condominium-style ownership model.

Swirsky said developers are



ROBERT MOROTO/CALGARY PHOTOS

Supplied images taken this week show the New Horizon Mall under construction near Balzac, north of Calgary. The 320,000 sq. ft. mall has more than 500 stores with a multicultural flavour.

aiming to release the retail units to their owners in May, at which point the mall will be ready to welcome the public, though he notes it may take some time for all the boutiques to open.

With merchants able to acquire units for between \$190,000 and \$750,000 (ranging in size from 285 to 855 square feet), Swirsky said they create an attractive opportunity for business owners who

won't have to worry about fluctuating lease prices and other factors.

"For the most part, this isn't an option that's available for most small businesses," he said.

"People like to be the master of their own fate."

In addition to the shops, the mall will include a modern food court with 26 restaurants and room for 300 diners, a main stage that will feature

multicultural entertainment, and underground parking.

Its 500 stores easily eclipse Chinook Centre's 250 and CrossIron Mills' 192. The developers estimate the mall will create some 1,400 jobs at full occupancy, and will boast about twice as many shops as a normal city mall.

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