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The Context: Surrey

Surrey is quickly becoming the largest urban centre in British Columbia. As Surrey continues to grow exponentially, dealing with issues of housing and poverty will become more and more important. As with any city, Surrey has a population of vulnerable individuals living on the edges of our society. Some are facing barriers such as addiction, mental health concerns, acquired brain injuries, low skills, lack of education, and conflict in their lives. Others are struggling with the challenges of poverty, and find it difficult to support and shelter themselves in an increasingly expensive environment.

Every three years, a study is conducted to count the number of homeless in Metro Vancouver. On the night of the last count, 403 homeless people were identified in Surrey¹. This number has remained fairly consistent since the 2005 count¹. Surrey's population represents 15% of the total number of homeless counted, second only to Vancouver¹. In Surrey, 65% of the individuals identified were considered sheltered (e.g., in transition houses, shelters, hospitals, or jails), with the remaining 35% without any form of shelter¹. Finally, 68% of Surrey's identified homeless population had been living on the streets in Surrey for more than five years¹, suggesting long-lasting difficulties in finding housing for these individuals. This may be due to a lack of available supportive housing, or affordable housing in general.

These figures suggest a consistent and enduring homeless population in Surrey. It is important to recognize that these counts are widely recognized as an underrepresentation of the actual number of homeless individuals present in the community¹. They depend upon individuals being willing to identify themselves as homeless, as well on the researchers' abilities to actually locate each individual. Therefore, these numbers must simply be considered a baseline.

Although they may represent the most visible of our vulnerable population, the homeless are not the only people at risk in Surrey. There are also those who fall into the category of "Core Housing Need." For those in this category, housing costs take up 1/3 or more of their total income². They may also be unable to secure suitable housing based on their resources². According to the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition (Surrey PRC), an estimated 38% of renters in Surrey fall within this category². Moreover, 11% of Surrey residents are currently living in substandard homes, which have either been deemed unsuitable or overcrowded².

¹Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness. (2014). *Results of the 2014 homeless count in the Metro Vancouver region*. Retrieved from: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/homelessness/HomelessnessPublications/2014MVHomelessCountJuly31-14Results.pdf>

² Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition. (2015). *The facts on poverty in Surrey: Housing*. Retrieved from www.surreyprc.ca

When both the homeless population and those residents living on the edge of their means are considered, it is clear that there is a need for shelter and affordable housing in Surrey. As part of Surrey's Master Plan for Housing the Homeless, a comprehensive inventory of the beds and units available in Surrey was undertaken. At the time of this review (July 2013), it was determined that Surrey had "85 beds at three co-ed emergency shelters, 26 beds at two women's shelters, six beds at a youth safe house, 48 additional beds at safe houses, and 688 transitional and supported housing beds and units for individuals. These facilities regularly operate at full occupancy and there are regular turn-aways during the winter months."³ Clearly, with these units operating at full capacity, the available services are falling short of the demand in Surrey.

This report also identified a number of gaps in the housing being provided in Surrey. These included shelters, transitional/second-stage housing, supportive housing, and low barrier housing³. In order to address some of these concerns, the Master Plan includes the creation of 450 new supportive housing units over 5 years, coupled with the steps to achieve this goal³. However, no additional shelter beds are provided for in this Procurement Plan³.

In Contrast: Vancouver

In the 2014 Homeless Count, 1,803 individuals were identified as homeless in Vancouver⁴. This accounts for 65% of the total number of individuals counted in 2014, and is also a 14% increase from the last count in 2011⁴. In contrast to Surrey, Vancouver's homeless count has been steadily increasing over the past 5 counts. 70% of this year's individuals were considered sheltered, with the remainder classified as unsheltered⁴. Similar to Surrey, however, the majority of Vancouver's homeless population reported having been in Vancouver for 5 years or more (63%).

The homelessness situation has garnered considerable attention in Vancouver, and the City committed to ending street homelessness by 2015⁵. While not having achieved this lofty goal, the City made considerable gains between 2011-2014. As of 2014, the City had leveraged nearly 10,000 units of rental housing, with 4,000 completed and the rest underway⁶.

³ CitySpaces Consulting Ltd. (2013). *Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey*. Retrieved from http://www.surrey.ca/files/130703_NS_Surrey_MasterPlan_FINAL.pdf

⁴ Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness. (2014). *Results of the 2014 homeless count in the Metro Vancouver region*. Retrieved from: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/homelessness/HomelessnessPublications/2014MVHomelessCountJuly31-14Results.pdf>

⁵ City of Vancouver. (2014). *Vancouver's housing and homelessness strategy, 2012-2021*. Retrieved from <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancouvers-housing-strategy.aspx>

⁶ City of Vancouver. (2014). *2014 housing report card: Progress over the last three years*. Retrieved from: <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2014-housing-report-card.pdf>

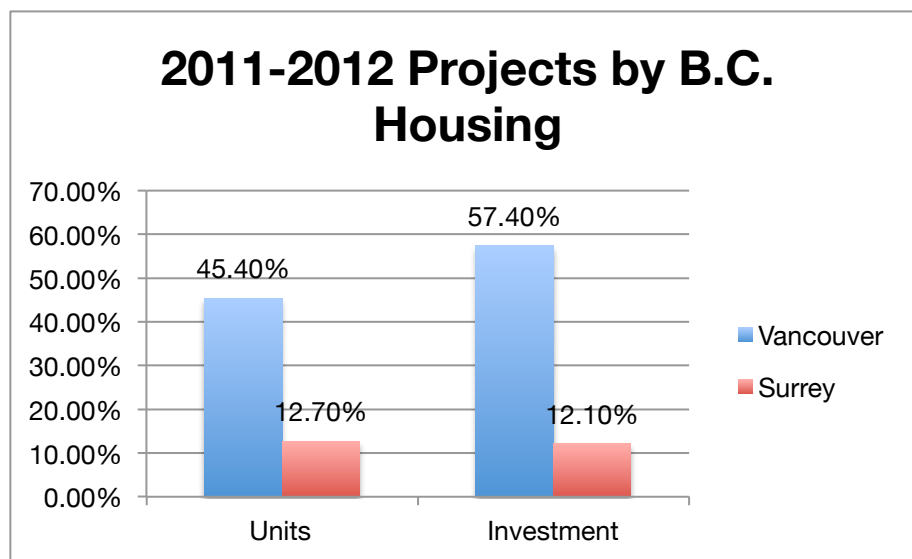
1,700 units of supportive housing were opened between 2010-2014, with 439 opening in 2014 alone⁶.

Vancouver is making rapid progress in developing housing for at-risk individuals. According to the most recent homeless count, Vancouver has over 4X more homeless individuals than Surrey. However, as Surrey is growing considerably faster than Vancouver (800 new residents per month in Surrey⁷ versus 5,000 per year in Vancouver⁶), it is clear that Surrey's needs will continue to grow.

Provincial Funding

How has the Province of British Columbia responded to the needs of these two cities? Over the past five years, BC Housing's investments have been stacked considerably in Vancouver's favour. The following figures demonstrate the percentage of the total units and investments by BC Housing allocated to both Surrey and Vancouver for the last 5 years. "Units" are defined as shelter spaces, bedrooms, rent supplements, or households. Housing subsidies, rent assistance, building repairs and maintenance for public housing, and operating costs are all included under the "Investments" category. These data were provided by members of BC Housing's Research & Corporate Planning and BFR Departments⁸. Interestingly, the data provided does not appear to include any capital projects.

Figure 1



In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, BC Housing counted 56,947 units total in Metro Vancouver, with 25,837 (45.4%) in Vancouver and 7,210 (12.7%) in Surrey. Their financial

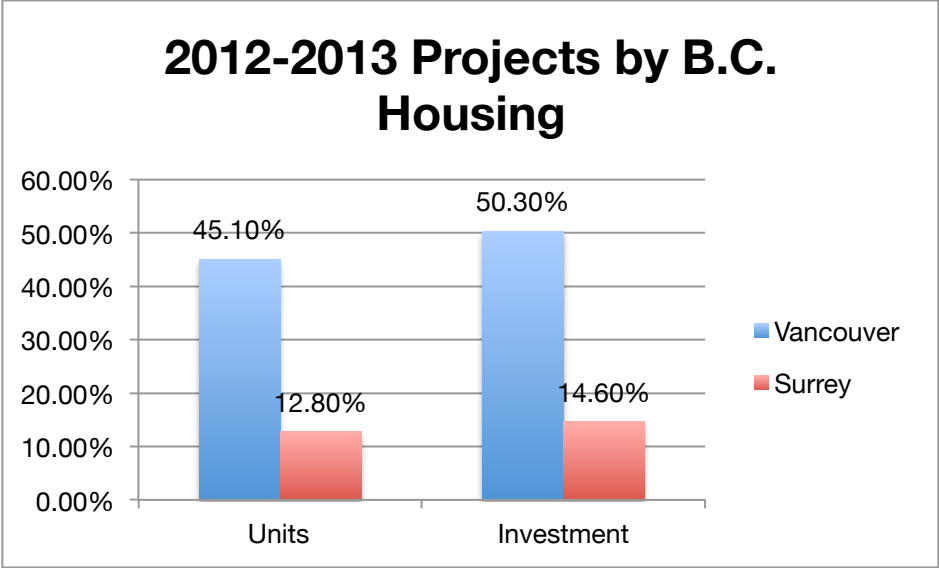
⁷ City of Surrey. (2015). *Surrey Facts*. Retrieved from: <http://www.surrey.ca/6554.aspx>

⁸ BC Housing. (2015). *BC Housing investment in subsidized housing and rent supplements by location*.

investments totalled \$404,273,488 for the entire Metro Vancouver region, with \$232,224,000 (57.4%) going to Vancouver and \$48,878,000 (12.1%) to Surrey.

The DSBIA was interested in determining how much of the \$48,878,000 allocated in Surrey had gone to housing subsidies, rent assistance, building repairs and maintenance, and operating costs. These data were not available for the 2011-2012 year, but have been included for the three following fiscal years.

Figure 2



The total number of BC Housing units in Metro Vancouver for 2012-2013 was 57,995, with 26,092 (45.1%) in Vancouver and 7,321 (12.8%) in Surrey. They invested a total of \$359,720,000. Vancouver received \$180,991,000 (50.3%) and Surrey received \$52,456,000 (14.6%). Figure 3 shows how Surrey’s total investments were dispersed among projects for the 2012-2013 year. The figure shows the majority of the funding went to housing subsidies.

Figure 3

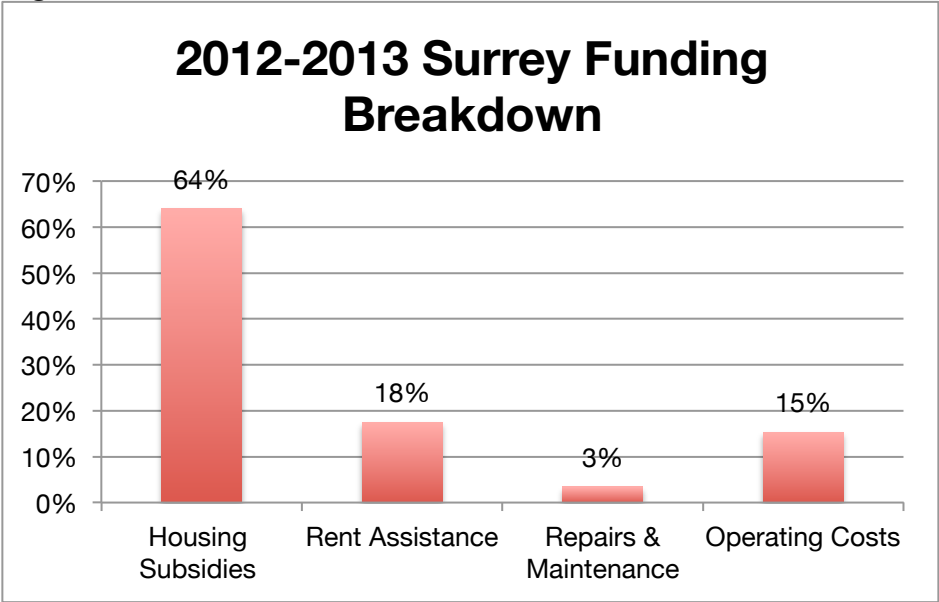
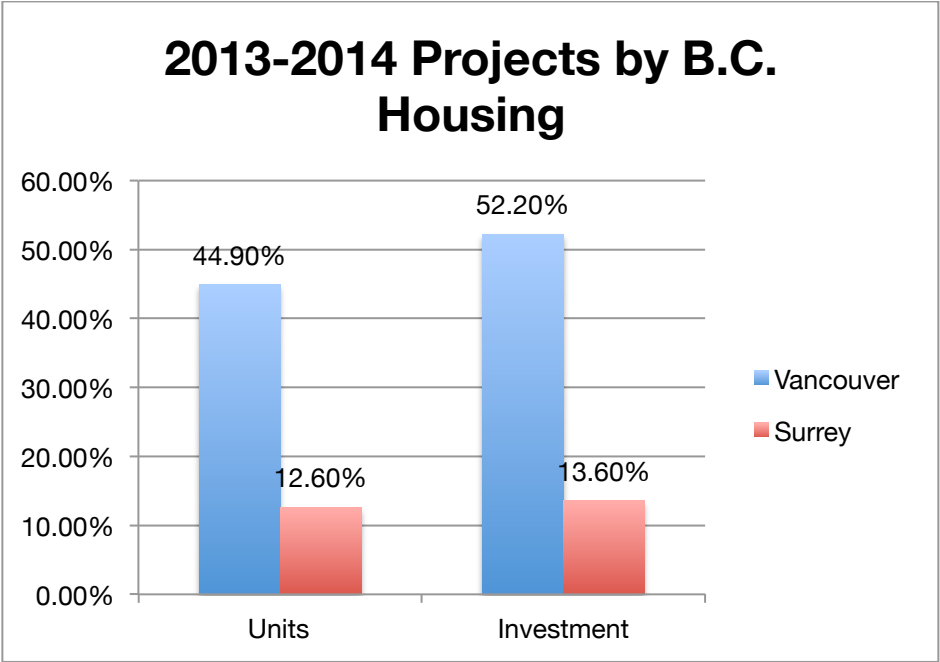


Figure 4



BC Housing was involved with 58,735 units in 2013-2014, of which Vancouver received 26,481 (44.9%) and Surrey 7,533 (12.6%). Of the total \$347,845,000 invested in Metro Vancouver, Surrey received \$47,195,000 (13.6%) and Vancouver the majority with \$181,532,000, or 52.2%.

For 2013-2014, the majority of the funding in Surrey again went to housing subsidies, however it was a smaller percentage than the previous year. The percentage allocated to rent assistance, repairs and maintenance, and operating costs all went up slightly as compared to the previous year.

Figure 5

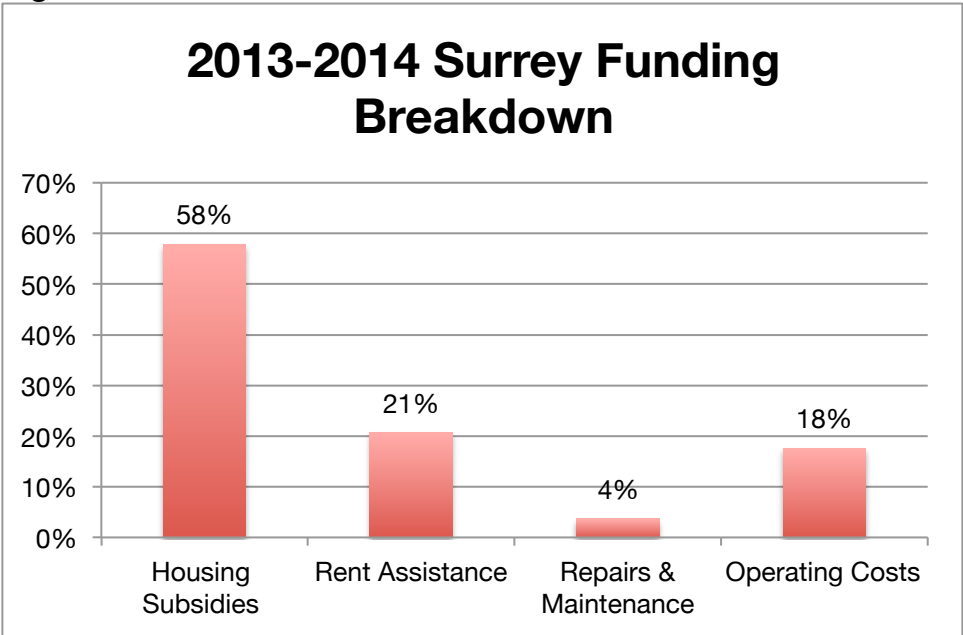
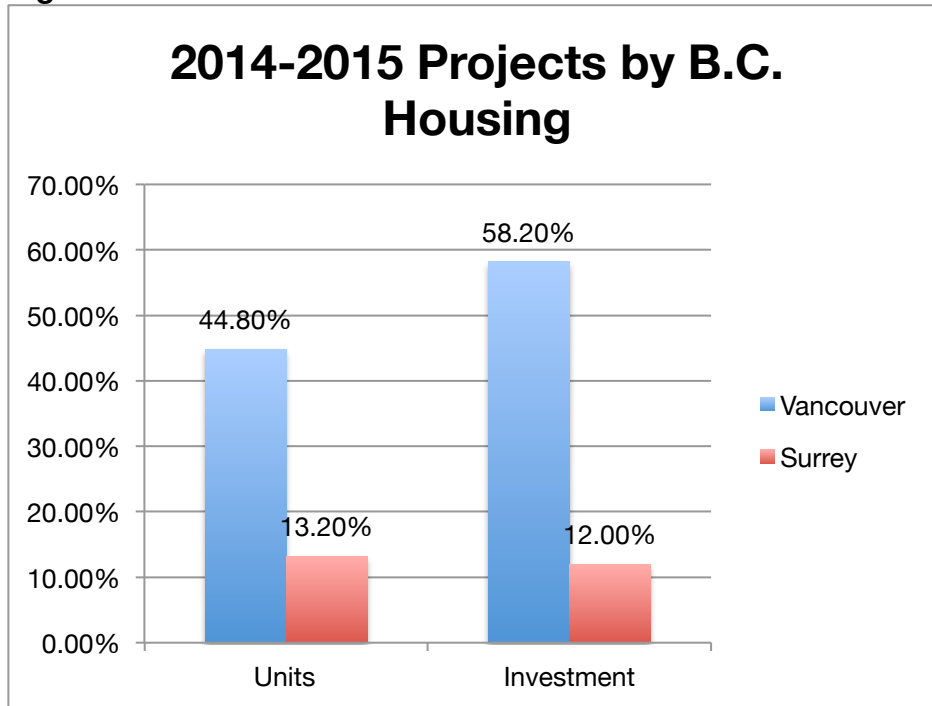


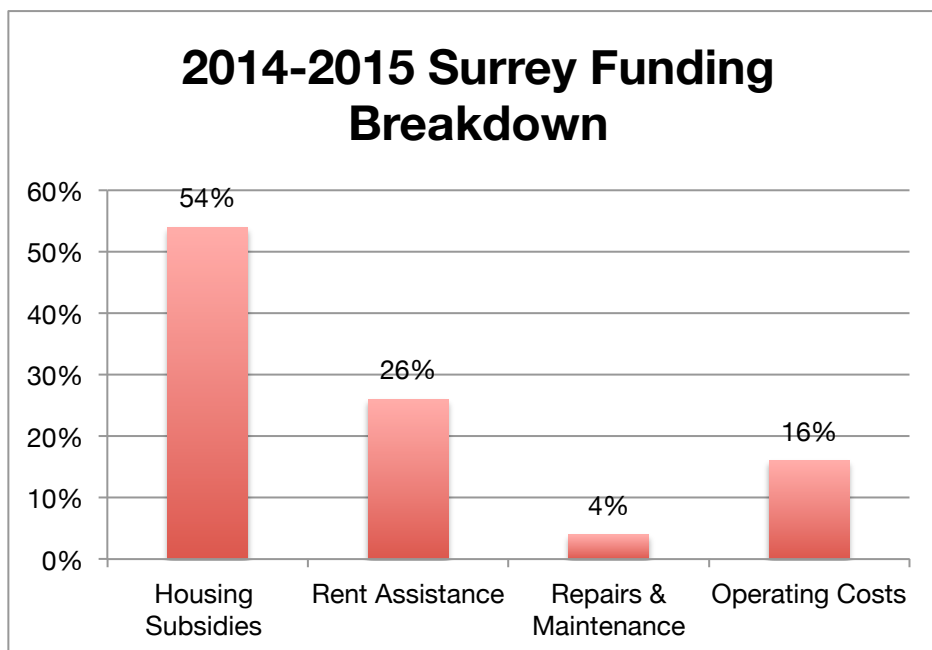
Figure 6



Finally, this past fiscal year saw a total of 60,556 BC Housing units in Metro Vancouver, with 27,136 (44.8%) in Vancouver and 7,988 (13.2%) in Surrey. Of the \$394,736,000 total investments, \$229,753,000 (58.2%) went to Vancouver and \$47,503,000 (12.0%) to Surrey.

The majority of Surrey's funding again went to housing subsidies this year, however it was again a smaller percentage than previous years. In contrast, the percentage allocated to rent assistance rose 5%, while repairs & maintenance and operating costs remained largely the same.

Figure 7



Recommendations

These figures demonstrate that Surrey has received substantially less support from BC Housing than Vancouver since 2011, both in terms of actual units and financial investments. Moreover, there have only been three capital projects completed in Surrey in the last ten years – Timber Grove, Phoenix Centre, and the Atira project. Considering that Surrey will soon surpass Vancouver in terms of population, steps should be taken now to better protect and support our vulnerable population. As a new, rapidly growing urban centre, Surrey has the benefit of a clean slate, and can learn from the examples of other, more established cities. Vancouver, the only city in the province currently larger than Surrey, has an entrenched homelessness problem. The right actions now could help Surrey avoid following in Vancouver's footsteps.

Homelessness and lack of affordable housing are already an issue in Surrey. A lack of stable shelter puts individuals at risk for victimization, health concerns, and extreme stress. Beyond the individuals themselves, it also places considerable strain on other members of the community, such as local businesses. The DSBIA's 2015 Safety Audit demonstrated that homelessness ranks as one of local businesses' biggest safety concerns (65% of respondents indicated it was a concern). They feel that a large amount of people living on the streets contributes to a feeling of disorder, which may ward off potential customers from this area. These concerns have remained relatively consistent over the past five years.

However, when examining the trends in these concerns over the past five years, an interesting pattern emerged. For all the major concerns investigated in the 2015 Audit (breaking and entering, homelessness, violence, vandalism/graffiti, drug users, drug dealing, and theft), a significant drop was recorded in 2013. The data for 2013 were gathered directly after the area's only winter shelter was implemented – in that span of five years, it was only open in 2013. There are no other immediately apparent factors that could account for these trends, suggesting that the winter shelter may have contributed to *decreased* concerns for businesses.

Clearly, increased support and housing services can have a positive impact on vulnerable populations, as well as the entire community. For these reasons, and the inequity in funding dispersal by BC Housing, the DSBIA should research and advocate for the following projects.

1. Winter Shelter

The City is currently involved in looking for a location for a future winter shelter in Surrey. There are considerable obstacles and competing interests to be considered. The DSBIA should continue its involvement in this process to ensure the best option is implemented.

2. Research and Advocate for Increased Supportive Housing

Supportive and transitional housing are needed to assist at-risk individuals transition into safer and more permanent housing. As of 2013, there were 688 transitional and supported

housing beds and units available in Surrey, although they were all operating at full capacity⁹. The DSBIA could advocate for the procurement more of these units.

. Encourage Long-Term Leases of City Property

Long-term leases of City property have been shown to be effective at facilitating the development of transitional and supportive housing, as well as emergency shelters¹⁰. This type of agreement, as well as other measures, played a large role in the development of the Timber Grove facility in Surrey¹⁰. When such projects are considered, the DSBIA should advocate for this type of agreement with the City.

. Encourage an Increase in Affordable Rental Housing

Roughly one-third of all households in Metro Vancouver are renters¹⁰. Surrey is slightly more affordable than other municipalities in the region, however for residents at the poverty line, the average rent here is still \$100-\$150 more than they can afford¹¹. When new developments are being considered for Downtown Surrey, the DSBIA should advocate that a portion of the units being built are reserved for social housing, affordable rent options, and by offering bonus density to developers.

The DSBIA can also encourage the City to implement other policies to help preserve and increase affordable housing. Vancouver has implemented a number of policies that may also be applicable and beneficial in Surrey. For example, developers who tear down old rental buildings in order to create new buildings are required to replace the rental units they destroyed, in order to ensure the supply of affordable housing is not negatively affected by new developments¹². Further, Vancouver also offers incentives to encourage developers to build buildings consisting of 100% rental units¹³. Similar policies should be considered for Surrey.

⁹ CitySpaces Consulting Ltd. (2013). *Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey*. Retrieved from http://www.surrey.ca/files/130703_NS_Surrey_MasterPlan_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ Metro Vancouver Regional Housing. (2012). *What works: Affordable housing initiatives in Metro Vancouver municipalities*.

¹¹ Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition. (2015). *The facts on poverty in Surrey: Housing*. Retrieved from www.surreyprc.ca

¹² City of Vancouver. (2007). *Official development plan regarding areas of real property in certain RM, FM, and CD-1 zoning districts*. Retrieved from: <http://former.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/BYLAWS/odp/RHS.pdf>

¹³ City of Vancouver. (2012). *Secured market housing rental policy*. Retrieved from: http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/secure_market_rental_policy.pdf