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Media Release

Seniors speak up about the pressures of the housing crisis in James Bay

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VICTORIA – Seniors’ connection to the community in James Bay is strong; however, many of those who rent are struggling to make ends meet.

A new community-led study by the Community Social Planning Council of Victoria and James Bay New Horizons Society, *‘Under Pressure: The Rental Housing Experience of Seniors Living in James Bay’*, profiles community housing and income data and brings forward seniors’ voices about their lived experiences in the tight rental market of James Bay. Over 122 senior (55+) tenants in James Bay participated in a survey, and two focus groups were held with senior renters and with senior service providers.

“James Bay has the highest population of seniors and some of the highest rent in the city of Victoria,” reports Diana Gibson, Executive Director with the Community Social Planning Council, “it is important to examine what that means for their vulnerability, particularly with COVID pressures.” This research was prompted by concerns the James Bay New Horizons for Seniors Society, a neighbourhood community hub for seniors, was hearing from seniors who were struggling to pay high rents, at risk of losing their housing due to renovation evictions, and struggling to find affordable housing.

The study reveals that low to moderate-income seniors in the rental housing market are facing a significant crisis of affordability, security of tenure, and rent stability, all while living in a neighbourhood they feel connected to and wish to stay in. According to the literature, this sense of connection is essential to positive health and wellbeing outcomes for seniors.

“To date, over 30 of our elderly members have been renocted from their homes [received notice to evict because of renovations],” states Kim Dixon, executive director of James Bay New Horizons Society, a seniors’ activity center in James Bay. “We do not know how many more landlords plan to use this method to evict long term residents in an effort to increase rent. With the current rents rising and the increase for pension being nominal, there will be many seniors that will be unable to pay their rent soon,” concludes Dixon.

Although there was a cap in 2018, limiting increases to the rate of inflation, rates are still rising faster than fixed incomes – some seniors in the study report spending up to 60% of their income on housing.

The average rent increased in James Bay by 20% between 2016 and 2020. In 2016, 47% of tenants in James Bay were spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs, placing them in core housing need.

Because of the tight rental market, senior tenants report living in inadequate, unsafe, and unaffordable housing conditions, causing stress and financial burden. When asked about the impact of a \$25 monthly rent increase (the average that would be allowed under the cap), 65% said they would be financially impacted and would have to cut back on social outings, groceries, and/or medications.

The report makes recommendations aimed at meeting the needs of seniors, including the development of affordable housing for seniors in the James Bay area, a seniors' navigator to provide in-person housing support and assistance, and extending a local food security program while housing affordability is addressed.

This community-based research project was made possible through funding from the Government of Canada's New Horizon for Seniors Program, the Victoria Foundation's Community Focus Grant, and the Hamber Foundation.

For the full report, please see:

<https://communitycouncil.ca/under-pressure-seniors-housing-and-social-isolation-in-victoria/>

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