HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No.   10.2.1

Request for Women's Advisory Committee Consideration

X **Agenda Item** (Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office by Noon at least 5 working days prior to the meeting)	☐ **Added Item** (Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office by Noon at least one day prior to meeting)	☐ **Request from the Floor**

Date of Meeting: December 2, 2021

Subject: Review of municipal services to address housing affordability, housing insecurity, and homelessness using an intersectional gender lens.

Motion for Women's Advisory Committee to Consider:

It is recommended that the Women's Advisory Committee recommend that the Executive Standing Committee:

1. Request a staff report about the use of an intersectional gender lens on housing and homelessness initiatives within the mandate of the Halifax Regional Municipality; and

2. Review the recommendations emerging from the Home for Good research project attached in the December 2, 2021 Request for Women's Advisory Committee Consideration form.

Reason:

The Women's Advisory Committee has identified housing security for women (e.g., homelessness and shelters, and affordability) as a key issue arising in the community. To learn more about gendered housing issues, the Women's Advisory Committee received a presentation from the Home for Good Project on February 4th, 2021.

The Home for Good Project ("the Project") is a research collaboration between Alice House, Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, The Marguerite Centre and YWCA Halifax. The Project investigated the barriers women face when trying to access safe, secure and affordable housing in Halifax. The Project was the first of its kind and highlighted the lack of gender-based analysis in relation to housing research.

The presentation shed light on numerous detrimental housing issues women face in HRM, including:
- Women carry the burdens of debt from poverty, instability and prior relationships which can be a barrier to securing safe and affordable housing.
- There is a clear link between the Child Welfare System and homelessness. Mothers forced into homelessness are at greater risk of having child protection intervene in their family. This link is unaddressed in existing policies and programs.
- Women may experience stigma, discrimination and harassment from landlords due to their gender and other intersecting facets of their identity such as racial identity, sexual orientation, income and past interactions with public housing.

- There is no coherent and integrated "Housing System" for women to access when looking for housing support.

Understanding these issues is vital for Halifax Regional Municipality to properly exercise its powers with respect to housing as provided by its Charter.

The Home for Good Project has provided a list of different recommendations that the Halifax Regional Municipality could implement to help women experiencing homelessness in Halifax. We recognize that some of these recommendations fall outside the Municipality's jurisdiction. However, we hope that they can provide some insight into the recommended policies and programs that can be implemented for women facing homelessness.

The recommendations include:
- Applying an intersectional gender analysis to housing programs
- Providing women with financial and employment support
- Providing low-barrier, trauma-informed and harm-reductions models of housing
- Providing transitional and third stage housing
- Providing women with economic stability
- Stipulating landlord education and accountability
- Offering race and culture specific supportive and emergency housing
- Providing mental health support beyond systems involvement
- Providing collaborative models of care

Please find the detailed list of these recommendations attached.

Outcome Sought:
That the Halifax Regional Council applies an intersectional gender lens to identify and reduce barriers for diverse women, girls, non-binary gender diverse people with regard to housing and homelessness programs and services within its municipal mandate.

Haneen Al-Noman, Member of Women's Advisory Committee

Attachment 1

Understanding and Committing to Meeting Women's Housing Needs

The findings from the YWCA Halifax *Home for Good* and *When the Roof Falls In* research projects, in partnership with Alice House, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, and The Marguerite Centre, identified barriers to support for women experiencing violence and housing insecurity on individual, community, and systems levels.

Poverty
- **Negative impacts on employment performance, security, and income -** *Women living in poverty are not afforded time off work to heal*
- **Arrears, debts, and bad credit -** *As a result of financial abuse, many women experience difficulties applying for essential utilities and apartments*
- **Safety and Location -** *Affordable housing located in unsafe neighborhoods increase women's risk of future housing destabilization*
- **Increased risk of exploitation -** *Women may be forced into unsafe and exploitative living arrangements with acquaintances or by landlords*
- **Landlord Discrimination -** *The discrimination women faced with landlords was often related to simply being a recipient of Income Assistance. However, it also presented itself in relation to being a single mother, involvement with agencies, and coming from abusive relationships.*

Violence and Trauma
- **Mental health and wellness -** *Trauma and violence have a profound impact on everyday life*
- **Barriers to mental health support -** *Violence and trauma contribute to the development and exacerbation of mental health concerns*
- **Substance use and survival -** *The interconnected nature of trauma and addictions increases the risk of housing destabilization*
- **Complicated history with the police and criminal justice system -** *Lack of trust creates barriers to support, resources, and safety*
- **Heightened sense of risk and interpretation of safety -** *Minimizing triggers and fostering security are paramount in enabling housing security for women experiencing violence*

Gender, Racial, and Ability Diversity
- **Institutional violence against BIPOC communities -** *Racial profiling and stereotyping by agency and institutional actors impact women's ability to seek and receive support*
- **Lack of diversity -** *Limited staff diversity within agencies and culture-specific supportive resources*
- **Language and cultural barriers -** *newcomer women face additional barriers when accessing supportive housing programs*
- **Limited gender-expansive services -** *services may not support the unique experiences, support needs, and safety requirements*
- **Few physically accessible housing units -** *limited accessible housing units severely limit women's options to leave violence*

Systemic Trauma
- **Lack of gender analysis for housing subsidies and support -** *Women face gendered barriers to affordability when it comes to searching for housing in the neighborhood of their choice*
- **Disconnected and uncoordinated services -** *The housing "system" is less like a system and more like a patchwork of disconnected services that leaves women feeling lost and helpless*
- **Criminalization and institutionalization -** *limited transitional housing creates barriers to safe transitions out of institutions and increases women's vulnerability to violence*
- **Child Welfare involvement -** *fear of disclosing experiences of violence and punitive agency actions*
- **Children and youth in care -** *lack of support of skills to live independently create additional vulnerabilities for housing insecurity and exploitation*

<u>Recommendations</u>
The following recommendations are made to overcome barriers noted above:

Applying an Intersectional Gender Analysis to Housing Programs
- *<u>Gender-based, intersectional analysis of housing data</u> that considers gender and race as they are related to specific barriers and challenges accessing housing*
- *<u>Prioritization of housing subsidies</u> which considers housing barriers related to gender, race and history of violence and trauma.*
- *<u>Adjudication of housing applications which considers the intersectional barriers to housing</u>*

Economic Stability
- *Housing instability for women experiencing violence is inextricably linked to poverty; without <u>a livable wage and employment opportunities that foster independence and improved quality of life,</u> women remain vulnerable to the perpetual cycle of poverty, experiences of violence, and housing destabilization.*

Financial and employment support
- *<u>Short-term and direct financial support</u> that allows women to pay down debts to maintain housing.*
- *<u>Portable housing subsidies</u> empower women to leave violence and unsafe housing situations more readily.*
- *<u>Employment and skills development programming</u> fosters financial independence and housing security.*
- *<u>Increased access to quality affordable childcare</u> to increase the ability to achieve economic independence*
- *<u>Access to low-barrier, credit repair programs</u> to raise their credit score and allow them to access quality housing*

Low-barrier, trauma-informed, and harm-reduction models of housing
- *<u>Housing for those with active addictions who do not meet the intake requirements for most housing programs</u>*
- *<u>Choice and collaboration</u> in housing options, and <u>flexible substance-use policies</u> increase women's access to safety and housing security.*
- *Housing must come with <u>wrap-around supports essential to providing supportive services</u> that meet the diverse needs of women experiencing addictions, trauma, and housing insecurity.*
- *<u>Incorporation of peer-support programming models of care</u> that center women as the experts in their experience and programming tailored to specific cultural or community needs*

Transitional and Third Stage Housing
- *<u>Transitional and recovery housing programs</u> for women struggling with mental health, addictions, and criminalization provide women with a safe space to heal from trauma.*
- *<u>Third stage housing programs for women who have "graduated" from transitional housing programs</u> that empowers women to regain their independence, while maintaining connection to supports and services.*

Landlord Education and Accountability
- *Landlords and property managers need to be better educated* on the effects of trauma and how it can impact their tenants in terms of their safety needs
- *System of reporting discrimination* against BIPOC women, gender diverse tenants, single mothers, victims of intimate partner violence and income assistance recipients
- *System of accountability and reporting of landlords and property managers who sexually exploit vulnerable tenants*

Race and Culture Specific Supportive and Emergency Housing
- *Supportive and emergency housing for BIPOC and gender-expansive communities* encourage those experiencing violence to seek safety.

Mental Health Support Beyond Systems Involvement
- *Mental health support for women* with a history of trauma and living in poverty are necessary
- *Counselling extending beyond systems involvement* is necessary to provide women with continuity of care

Collaborative Models of Care
- *Developing relationships among all the different agencies supporting* women experiencing violence and housing insecurity could reduce the number of barriers women face in accessing support.
- *Collaborative-care models reduce the siloed and fragmented nature of our systems of care and support,* creating holistic services that meet the varying needs of women experiencing violence and housing instability.

CONTACT
Miia Suokonautio, Executive Director, YWCA Halifax, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮