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To: Housing Committee

From: Jessica Hayes, Program Manager, Housing Policy and Planning,  
Regional Planning and Housing Services

Date: November 4, 2024 Meeting Date: November 8, 2024

Subject: **Streamlining Rental Housing through Standardized Designs and Regulations:  
Project Update**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Housing Committee receive for information the report dated November 4, 2024, titled “Streamlining Rental Housing through Standardized Designs and Regulations: Project Update”.

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The report dated November 4, 2024, titled “Streamlining Rental Housing through Standardized Designs and Regulations: Project Update” will be presented to the Regional Planning Committee at its November 8, 2024 meeting to consider a recommendation to receive the report for information. The report provides an update on the Rental Housing Blueprint project and resources available for member jurisdictions to advance implementation.

This matter is now before the Housing Committee for its consideration.

**ATTACHMENT**

1. “Streamlining Rental Housing through Standardized Designs and Regulations: Project Update”, report dated November 4, 2024

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To: Regional Planning Committee

From: Jessica Hayes, Program Manager, Housing Policy and Planning,  
Regional Planning and Housing Services

Date: November 4, 2024 Meeting Date: November 8, 2024

Subject: **Streamlining Rental Housing through Standardized Designs and Regulations:  
Project Update**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

That the MVRD Board receive for information the report titled “Streamlining Rental Housing through Standardized Designs and Regulations: Project Update”, dated November 4, 2024.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Metro Vancouver, in partnership with the Province, member jurisdictions, and other partners is developing a blueprint to accelerate the delivery of six-storey rental housing through simplification of regulatory requirements and standardized design approaches. The project is supported by both the Metro Vancouver Regional District Sustainability Innovation Fund (SIF) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Housing Supply Challenge Round 5 – ‘Level Up’ and is rapidly advancing due to recently confirmed additional funding from the CMHC program and associated timelines.

The Rental Housing Blueprint project is focused on six-storey multi-family apartment buildings, a housing form with strong potential to help meet the acute need for rental housing in the region. Project objectives include reducing overall housing delivery timelines, addressing skilled trade labour shortages, and creating a supportive environment for off-site construction. Using technology and innovation, and moving toward off-site construction, there is potential to reduce the cost and complexity of rental housing delivery, while still constructing quality housing with high standards for livability and sustainability. A final draft of the standardized regulation is being reviewed by key partners, and will be presented to the Regional Planning and Housing Committees in early 2025. It is also anticipated that a full suite of reference designs will be available by February 2025, as well as training and support for municipalities who want to move toward using digital Building Information Modelling (BIM) and e-compliance systems in their approval processes.

There are opportunities for ongoing collaboration with member jurisdictions who want to participate in shaping the outcomes of the standardized regulatory and design approaches, and project milestones will be presented to the Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC), the Regional Planning and Housing Committees and the Metro Vancouver Board at regular intervals. Resources will also be available through the project to support implementation and demonstration of the project’s outcomes in municipalities that are currently advancing initiatives related to simplification and digitization, and will be coordinated through the Regional Administrators’ Advisory Committee (RAAC).

This report provides a project update and overview, including upcoming opportunities for support to Metro Vancouver member jurisdictions, and is being presented to both the Regional Planning and Housing Committees for information.

## **PURPOSE**

To provide the Regional Planning and Housing Committees and Metro Vancouver Board with an update on the Rental Housing Blueprint project to streamline the delivery of six-storey rental apartment housing through simplification of regulatory requirements and standardized design approaches, including resources available for member jurisdictions to advance implementation.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Rental Housing Blueprint project was initiated in 2023 by Metro Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia to streamline multi-family rental housing delivery through standardization and modern construction methods.

At its September 29, 2023 meeting, the MVRD Board directed staff to send correspondence to member jurisdictions, inviting them to participate in the creation of standardized zoning and design standards for six-storey rental buildings as part of a collaborative project (Reference 1).

In November 2023, 11 member jurisdictions confirmed their interest in co-creating a standardized regulatory approach, participating in workshops and feedback sessions throughout Q1-Q3 2024. This phase of the project is nearing completion and will result in the development of an opt-in standardized and simplified regulatory approach for six-storey rental buildings (anticipated in Q1 2025). The second phase of the project has been advancing concurrently, and will result in vetted reference designs for six-storey rental buildings that are aligned with the standardized regulations, and be ready for pre-approval. These project components are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

The project components have been awarded multi-year funding through both the Metro Vancouver Regional District Sustainability Innovation Fund (SIF) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Housing Supply Challenge Round 5 – 'Level Up'. On November 1, 2024, CMHC announced the finalists in Round 5 of the Housing Supply Challenge, awarding an additional \$3M to support the project. Support, through expertise and funding, will be available for member jurisdictions to implement elements of the Rental Housing Blueprint as the project advances.

## **OVERVIEW OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The demand for rental housing in Metro Vancouver has significantly outpaced the growth in the supply of purpose-built rental units. Between 2011 and 2021, only 10,000 new purpose-built rental units were added in the region, compared to 87,000 new renter households. To help meet regional housing needs, *Metro 2050*, the regional growth strategy, highlights the importance of increasing the supply of purpose-built rental housing as a key component of providing more diverse and affordable housing.

### **A Focus on Six-Storey Rental Apartments**

The Rental Housing Blueprint project is focused on streamlining designs and regulations to enable six-storey multi-family buildings. Six-storey wood frame apartments were selected as a focus for the initiative given that this form is generally cost effective, economically viable, and widely accepted in the region. This building form maximizes the amount of density provided by light wood-frame construction, reducing per-unit and per-square foot building costs when compared to higher-density forms of development that require concrete or mass timber construction. Six-storey wood frame construction also tends towards simpler architectural forms and massing which works well with standardization and simplified regulations, guidelines and codes. Six-storey buildings are supported across urban and suburban areas, and in various land use designations, such as transitional areas, corridors, mixed-use zones, towns, and village centers as indicated in Official Community Plans (OCPs) throughout the region.

### **Reducing Overall Delivery Times**

Six-storey rental buildings can contribute to increased purpose-built rental housing supply in the region, particularly if current approvals and construction timelines across Metro Vancouver can be accelerated. The current average project delivery time is approximately 4.5 years, with 2-2.5 years in municipal approvals. A standardized regional regulatory approach could streamline and clarify this process, making it easier and faster to deliver rental housing.

### **Addressing Critical Labour Shortages**

In addition, the project aims to address the skilled trades labour gap by creating an environment that encourages and facilitates off-site construction and the use of prefabricated components. By 2028, 700,000 trades workers in Canada are expected to retire, which will continue to pose challenges for the delivery of new housing. There is potential to cut the cost of construction and significantly speed up rental housing delivery using off-site manufacturing when it is fully scaled.

### **Creating a Supportive Environment for Off-Site Construction**

Consequently, the project aims to create the conditions for scaling up new approaches to construction, by creating a supportive environment for using off-site and prefabricated building components and predictable, simple, and uniform requirements and processes that enhance certainty and enable cost and time savings. A regulatory framework that is simple and easy to interpret will streamline the planning process and lend itself to modernization of the housing delivery system by enabling the use of electronic compliance checks, reference designs, and modern methods of construction. In addition, the project seeks to research, document, and promote best practices and successful off-site construction prototypes, to combat negative perceptions of quality that conflate modern methods of construction with temporary forms of prefabricated or modular housing, most often used as workforce housing or as a rapid response to homelessness.

### **PROJECT STATUS UPDATE**

Metro Vancouver, in partnership with the Province and 11 member jurisdictions, is developing a blueprint to accelerate the delivery of six-storey rental housing (Reference 2). Metro Vancouver has allocated \$2.1M from the Regional District Sustainability Innovation Fund (SIF) to support this work over three years. This includes a \$1M+ contribution for demonstration of the learnings in a future

Metro Vancouver Housing redevelopment project. The Rental Housing Blueprint has two main elements:

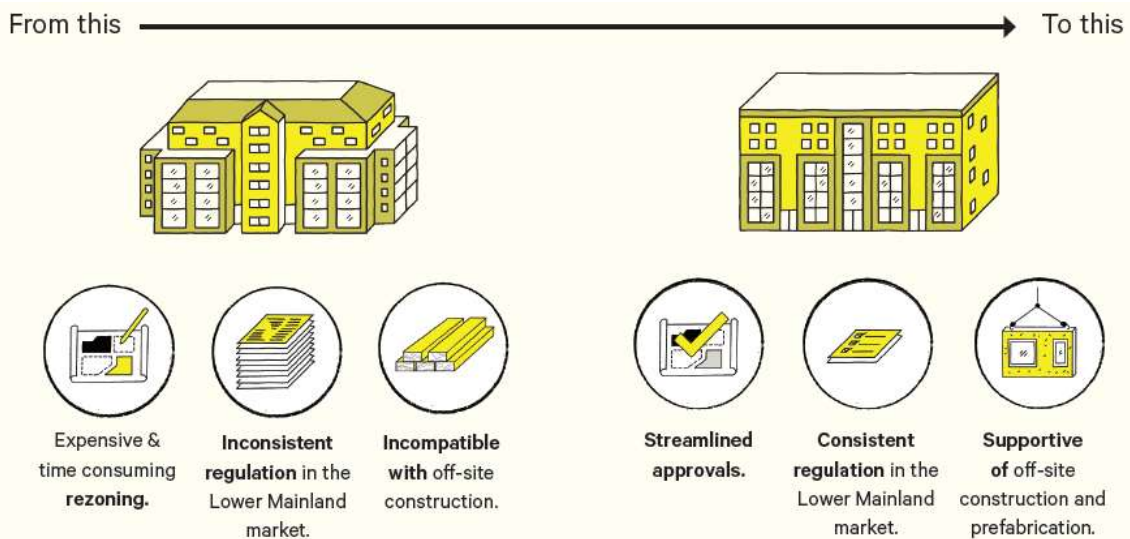
**1. Standardized Regulations**

In May 2023, SvN Architects & Planners and B Collective were contracted by Metro Vancouver to develop a regional approach to regulating six-storey rental buildings (e.g. zoning regulations and design standards). The regulatory framework is being co-developed in partnership with the following 11 member jurisdictions who signed up as local government champions of the initiative:

- Bowen Island Municipality
- City of Burnaby
- City of Delta
- City of Langley
- City of Maple Ridge
- City of New Westminister
- District of North Vancouver
- City of Richmond
- City of Surrey
- City of Vancouver
- City of White Rock

This phase of the project seeks to streamline approaches to governing building bulk and siting. In 2023, Metro Vancouver staff surveyed several off-site and modular construction manufacturers who identified a favourable regulatory environment as the biggest factor when evaluating potential markets for expansion. The opt-in regulation aims to use simplified measures such as maximum height, minimum setbacks and maximum unit depth values to control building bulk and siting. The approach seeks to eliminate complex calculations and variation between jurisdictions, which can be barriers to standardization. As a result, the use of Floor Area Ratio (FAR)/Floor Space Ratio (FSR) and lot coverage are not recommended. Instead, the regulations opt for an objective approach based on precedents in other leading jurisdictions, and the overall project objectives (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Rental Housing Blueprint Standardized Regulatory Approach**



Source: SvN Architects and Planners

In addition, the standardized regulations aim to move away from design guidelines that require interpretation and discretion, and instead toward design standards are:

- **Measurable and verifiable:** Requirements are specified through criteria that can be objectively assessed and verified through quantifiable data, with no grey area—discretionary and subjective components create the need for negotiation which add to the timeline and complexity of projects; and,
- **Machine readable:** Objectivity is required to enable electronic compliance review (using specialized software which is rapidly increasing in capability), which will in turn accelerate the regulatory review process. These approaches provide manufacturers of prefabricated building components with greater clarity on requirements and improved certainty, which is a precondition for investment in this emerging sector.

As shown in the diagram below (Figure 2), design guidelines can introduce subjectivity and increase the time it takes for a development applicant to achieve desired design outcomes.

**Figure 2: Design Guideline Subjectivity vs. Objective Design Standards**

Design Guideline	Design Standard
<b>Example:</b> <i>Incorporate frequent entrances along commercial frontages to create visual interest and support pedestrian activity.</i>	<b>Example:</b> <i>Locate entrances along commercial frontages no more than 7 metres apart.</i>

A final draft of the standardized regulation is being circulated to these municipal partners for staff review in Q4 2024 and will be presented to the Regional Planning Committee and Housing Committee in early 2025.

## 2. Standardized Design Approach

The second stream of work is to develop a standardized design approach for six-storey rental buildings. This phase of the project is led by BC Housing, with Metro Vancouver as a key partner, and is supported by grant funding awarded through the CMHC Housing Supply Challenge. Round 5 of the Housing Supply Challenge is called Level-Up: Transforming the Way Canada Delivers Housing. This challenge seeks to increase the adoption of system-level solutions that transform Canada’s ability to produce more community and market housing, faster. The project team has to date been awarded two prizes of \$1M and \$3M respectively, to continue scaling the project as finalists in the competition (Reference 3). In March 2025, there is an opportunity to advance to the final stage of the Housing Supply Challenge, with an additional \$5M prize available.

The project will produce several building designs that are vetted by local governments, funders, and industry, resulting in reference designs that are:

- **Simplified and cost effective:** Reduced design complexity and utilization of building components manufactured in controlled, off-site factories will maximize efficiency and cost effectiveness by reducing labour needs and customizations on a project-by-project basis;
- **Scalable and replicable:** Moving toward pre-zoning and pre-approval of replicable designs will de-risk projects and scale up production, increasing investments in rental housing;

- **Optimized for off-site construction:** Reference designs can create demand for off-site methods and opportunities for bulk production of prefabricated components to increase efficient delivery, particularly for frequent builders (e.g. public sector); and,
- **Flexible:** Standard unit types and other building components can be combined in different ways to adapt to site conditions.

While the first component of the project addresses the regulatory environment, this component of the project addresses all aspects of the design and construction process, applying new technologies and modern methods of construction, including hybrid approaches where a building is made up of a series of components, for example, design modules, flat packed wall panels, and structural components that can be scaled and modified for different site sizes and conditions (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Standard Design Approach**

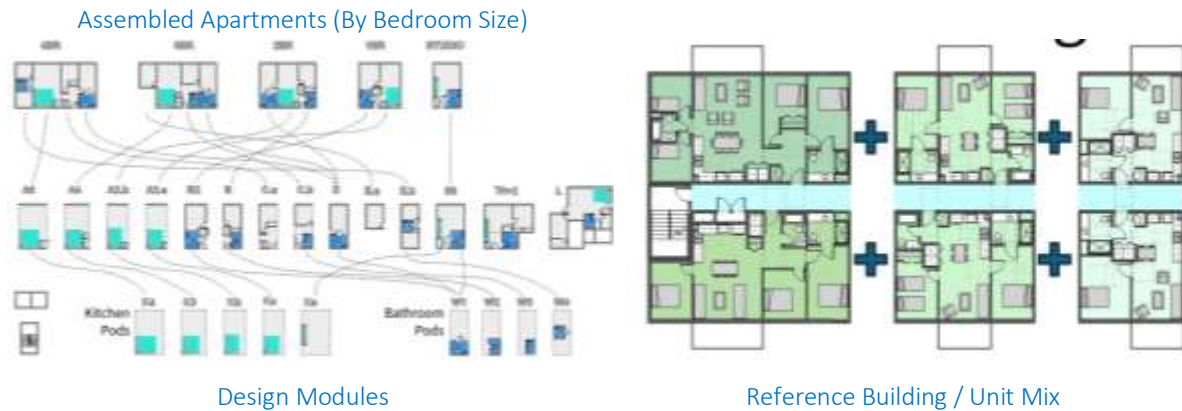
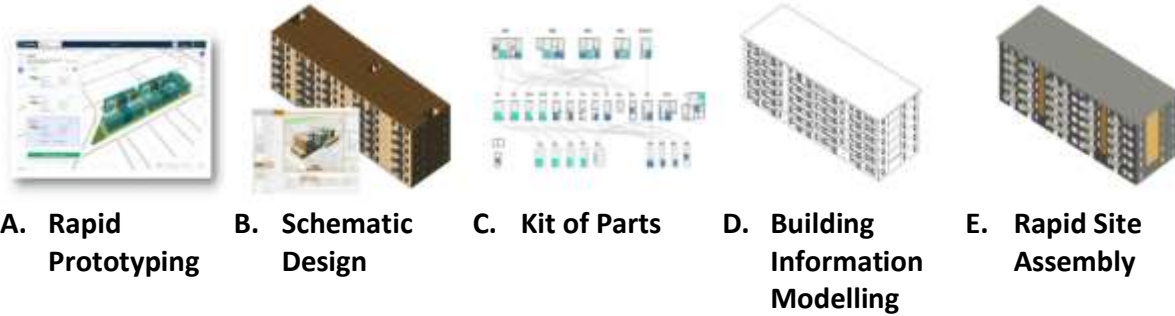


Figure 4 below further describes the innovations that will be integrated throughout the design and construction processes, including:

- Rapid Prototyping:** Ability to use rules-based generative design software to rapidly generate multiple viable building concepts for a site that fit with the standard regulation requirements and reference building design elements.
- Schematic Design:** Site concepts can be quickly expanded into more detailed designs by using and adapting the elements from open-source plan sets (reference building designs). This includes “modules” for units and structural elements which are non-proprietary and "open source," and which are designed to evolve based on experience of design consultants, manufacturers and builders.
- Kit of Parts:** The project will make a prefabrication optimizer widely available including an online platform and library of parts. A software system will allow design teams to easily test and apply prefabricated components. Manufacturers will have the ability to upload products to the library of parts.
- Building Information Modelling (BIM):** The design process will be integrated throughout using BIM – a system which creates a precise, three-dimensional set of plans and reduces waste from conflicts and errors in construction.

- E. Rapid Site Assembly:** The project is designed to progressively enable a greater percentage of building components to be produced off-site, starting with the simplest elements which can be easily produced and shipped, such as flat, open wall panels, and moving over time to include a full suite of building systems such as bathroom and kitchen pods, flooring, and structural elements.

**Figure 4: Accelerating the Design and Construction Process**



The use of technology and innovation, and moving toward off-site construction has the potential to reduce the cost of construction and speed up rental housing delivery, while delivering quality housing with high standards for livability and sustainability. The reference design and construction approaches will be tested through demonstration projects in future phases of the Rental Housing Blueprint project, including identifying demonstration projects on Metro Vancouver Housing sites. An initial version of the reference design adapted for non-market rental housing was created in the first phase of the project as proof of concept (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Reference Design Sample Rendering**



Source: Iredale Architecture



## **NEXT STEPS**

A final draft of the standardized regulation is being circulated to staff in the participating 11 member jurisdictions for review in Q4 2024 and will be presented to the Regional Planning Committee and Housing Committee in early 2025. Concurrently, the standardized design approach is advancing rapidly, and it is anticipated that a full suite of reference designs will be available by February 2025, as well as training and support for any member jurisdictions who wish to move toward using digital Building Information Modelling (BIM) and e-compliance systems in their approval processes.

## **Opportunities to Support Member Jurisdictions**

At this stage, Metro Vancouver is inviting all member jurisdictions to re-engage with the project, beyond the initial 11 member jurisdictions who signed on as local government champions in late 2023. As the project continues, there will be opportunities for ongoing collaboration with all local governments who want to participate in shaping the outcomes of the standardized regulatory and design approaches. Project milestones will be presented to the Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC), and the Regional Planning and Housing Committees at regular intervals.

In addition, resources are available through the project to support implementation and demonstration of the project's outcomes in municipalities that are currently advancing initiatives related to simplification and digitization. Examples of such initiatives might include planned implementation of electronic compliance, readiness to introduce or adopt changes to six-storey apartment zones to support increased standardization, or willingness to vet reference building designs through some form of pre-approval.

For jurisdictions that are interested and can demonstrate readiness to implement elements of the Rental Housing Blueprint, support through the grant could be in the form of consulting resources for making process improvements and/or bylaw changes that align with the objectives of the project, and other support as identified.

Metro Vancouver staff will work with member jurisdiction senior administrators through the Regional Administrators Advisory Committee (RAAC) to advance these opportunities.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

This is an information report. No alternatives are presented.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Stream 1 of the Rental Housing Blueprint project is supported through a mix of in-house staff and consultant support. Costs for consultant support are included in the 2024 and 2025 Housing Policy and Planning budgets and work plan, and supported through project-specific funding from the Metro Vancouver Regional District Sustainability and Innovation (SIF) Fund. Phase 2 of the Rental Housing Blueprint project is supported through a combination of SIF funding and additional grant funding awarded to a multi-agency team as part of the CMHC Housing Supply Challenge Round 5 – Level Up.

## CONCLUSION

The Rental Housing Blueprint project seeks to streamline rental housing through standardized designs and regulations. In November 2023, 11 member jurisdictions confirmed their interest in co-creating standardized regulations to expedite the delivery of rental housing. This phase of the project is nearing completion and will result in an opt-in standardized and simplified regulatory approach for six-storey buildings. The second phase of the project has been advancing concurrently, and will produce reference designs that are aligned with the standardized regulations. These project deliverables will be presented to the Regional Planning and Housing Committees in Q1 2025.

This report provides a status update on all aspects of the project and next steps, which include ongoing participation in shaping the outcomes of the standardized regulatory and design approaches, and opportunities for member jurisdictions to access resources to advance implementation of activities that align with the Rental Housing Blueprint in their communities.

## REFERENCES

1. Regional Planning Committee report dated August 14, 2023 titled "[Streamlining the Delivery of Rental Housing Through Pre-Approved Plans and Off-Site Construction](#)".
2. [Rental Housing Blueprint | Metro Vancouver](#)
3. [Funding Recipients for Round 5 of the Housing Supply Challenge | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](#)

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To: Housing Committee

From: Jag Gill, Director, Housing Operations, Metro Vancouver Housing

Date: October 3, 2024 Meeting Date: November 8, 2024

Subject: **2024 Canadian Multi-Residential Satisfaction Survey Results**

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## RECOMMENDATION

That the Housing Committee receive for information the report dated October 3, 2024, titled “2024 Canadian Multi-Residential Satisfaction Survey Results”.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Canadian Multi-Residential Satisfaction Survey gathers data on residents’ living experiences, preferences, and satisfaction levels in multi-family rental properties. The simplydbs survey team approached Metro Vancouver Housing (MVH) to participate in the survey to capture responses from the non-profit rental housing sector in addition to private rental. This report provides a high-level overview of the general survey results as well as some specific data for MVH. In future years, MVH could request additional questions to better understand trends and tenant preferences as well as measure satisfaction and performance.

MVH ranked as one of the top three performers in the overall survey with scores notably higher than the average rental provider across all categories for tenant satisfaction. MVH residents are more likely to feel they are getting good value for the rent they pay. Resident preferences also reflected walkable communities close to schools, jobs, and transit as well as energy efficiency.

## PURPOSE

To inform the Housing Committee about the results of the 2024 Canadian Multi-Residential Satisfaction Survey and share findings related to MVH.

## BACKGROUND

The *Metro Vancouver Housing 10-Year Plan* set key goals for MVH in different areas including operations and tenant engagement. This survey helps to measure tenant living experiences, preferences, and satisfaction levels. Results can help to identify areas that are working well, areas for continuous improvement, and preferences that can be considered in the delivery of new housing.

## SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The simplydbs survey team approached Metro Vancouver Housing (MVH) to participate in the survey to capture responses from the non-profit rental housing sector in addition to private rental. Simplydbs’ mission is to consistently measure user engagement, gather insights and create industry benchmarking for all asset classes to create industry benchmarking for the Canadian housing provider. The survey involved responses from 26,000 residents across Canada, and 200 tenants from across MVH’s portfolio. As a benefit for participating, the survey team also provided MVH

with additional data on MVH tenant responses to dig deeper into our tenant preferences and see how MVH's compares with other rental providers across the country.

### General Survey Results

The survey focused on several key areas including resident perspectives on rental housing options and challenges, satisfaction with their current housing, how residents search for potential rental homes, and preferences and priorities when choosing a rental home.

Some of the key findings from the Canada-wide survey include:

- **Affordability:**
  - The vast majority of respondents (91.7%) say rents are rising significantly where they live.
  - Over half (52%) of respondents say they cannot afford their current rental home.
  - 54% of respondents say they need more space but can't afford to move.
  - At least one third of respondents are getting help (e.g., parents, government, loans, scholarships) with the cost of rent, food, or other costs, and 43.5% anticipate needing help soon.
- **Location:** Suite size and price outweigh the importance of location for prospective renters
- **Suite Size, Amenities, & Balconies:**
  - The majority of respondents (62%) would choose a larger suite with fewer building amenities compared to a smaller suite with more building amenities.
  - Most residents (83%) prefer a private balcony to shared luxury outdoor areas.
  - 51% would opt for a larger suite with a Juliette balcony compared to a traditional larger balcony and smaller suite.
- **Sustainability:** Over one third of respondents (39%) would pay more to live in a zero-carbon building

### MVH Survey Results

MVH survey responses were also highlighted by the survey team and compared to overall responses. This provides a useful means of benchmarking MVH's performance across the industry. Key findings include:

- **Overall Satisfaction:**
  - MVH ranks among the top 3 performers in the nation-wide survey.
  - MVH's scores on average were 20 times higher than the average rental provider across all categories when asked "how likely are you to recommend your suite/building/property manager/rental experience to a friend?"
  - MVH tenants are more likely to feel they are getting good value for the rent they pay and more likely to feel comfortable planning a future at their current rental.
  - MVH ranks considerably higher than the industry average for rental experience which includes community programs, location and services.
- **Priorities when considering renting a home:**
  - MVH tenants are (%) more likely to prioritize the following items when compared to the average housing provider:
    - Proximity to public schools (+24%)

- Energy efficiency (+11%)
  - Housing provider website (+11%)
  - Friends in the building (+9%)
  - Smart home features (+7%)
  - Access to school and work (+7%)
  - Pet-friendly (+5%)
  - Access to nature (+5%)
  - Walkable access to retail (+4%)
  - Access to transit (+4%)
  - Rent/Price (+3%)
- MVH tenants are (%) less likely to prioritize having an onsite building manager (-13%).
  - **Preferences**
    - MVH tenants were more likely to:
      - Prioritize suite size over building amenities
      - Pay more to live in a net-zero building
      - Prefer a larger suite with a Juliet balcony than a smaller suite with a traditional sized balcony

#### **ALTERNATIVES**

This is an information report. No alternatives are presented.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The general survey results, and MVH specific results, were provided to MVH at no cost. In future years, MVH could consider a fee-for-service add-on to request custom questions for its tenants to dig deeper into specific issues or performance measures. This could provide valuable information and a reliable annual measure of performance and comparison to the overall rental industry.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The 2024 Canadian Multi-Residential Satisfaction Survey provides data on residents' living experiences, preferences, and satisfaction levels in multi-family rental properties. MVH participated in the survey and this report provides a high-level overview of the general survey results as well as some specific data for MVH.

#### **REFERENCES**

[Canadian Multi-Residential Satisfaction Study 2024 \(simplydbs.com\)](https://www.simplydbs.com)