

CMHC 'affordable' housing project won't help city's housing crisis: McKenney

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Ottawa city councillor Catherine McKenney says there's nothing "affordable" about the CMHC helping developers build "affordable housing." PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /Postmedia

The affordable housing apartment in Alta Vista announced last week by the federal government isn't affordable and won't do much to alleviate the city's housing crisis, says Somerset Ward Councillor Catherine McKenney.

"I could not afford on my salary what they're going to build at Kilborn as 'affordable housing,'" McKenney said.

Canada Mortgage and Housing is providing a \$33.8-million low-interest loan to Greatwise Development Corp., builder of the 120-unit, nine-storey apartment on Kilborn Avenue near Playfair Drive. The money comes from the federal Liberals' Rental Construction Financing Initiative, part of the government's National Housing Strategy. Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and Minister Responsible for CMHC made the funding announcement last week at the site alongside Liberal MPs.

According to CMHC, 35 of the 120 units will have rents at or below 30 per cent of Ottawa's median household income. In addition, 24 units will have rents at or below 70 per cent of that 30

per cent level and they must stay there for at least the next 11 years. The remaining units will be held at 10 per cent below “achievable market rents.”

Ottawa’s median household income is \$109,500, so 30 per cent of that equates a monthly rent of more than \$2,700. The 24 cheapest units will still rent at more than \$1,900 a month.

That’s hardly affordable, McKenney said. The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa is about \$1,300 a month, she said.

“The federal government continues to call this affordable housing, when it is not affordable. It is a program that encouraged rental construction, new rental stock. But it does not in any way contribute to affordable housing.

“The goal of the national housing strategy is to eliminate chronic homelessness by 100 per cent and to reduce people’s core housing needs. The National Housing Strategy says they’ll cut that in half — and this doesn’t do it.”

There are 12,000 people on the city’s waitlist for affordable housing, said McKenney, who last year convinced the city to declare a “housing emergency.” What the city needs most of all, is cheaper accommodation, McKenney said.

“Those 12,000 people all live in adequate housing. They just can’t afford it. We don’t have to build housing for 12,000 people, we just have to help them pay their rent.”

McKenney said that as new units are built, access to affordable housing disappears.

“Between 2011 and 2016, for example, for every new unit that was built with government funding, we lost 10 or 11 units at the \$750 marker market. It’s like digging in sand. We need those units built that are in that \$800 to \$1,000 range so that we can help people with subsidies.”

A single person on the Ontario Disability Support Program is given no more than \$497 a month for shelter, McKenney said.

“It’s certainly not \$2,000.”