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Haney Pioneer Village Co-operative was built in the 1970s to provide affordable housing for retired low-income residents.

Fixed-income seniors fear looming rent hikes

Co-op housing subsidies coming to an end

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In August, residents of Haney Pioneer Village housing co-op will lose their federal rent subsidy, and residents there don't know where the extra money will come from.

The amount of their subsidy varies from household to household, but generally co-ops don't ask a subsidized resident to pay more than 30 per cent of their income for rent.

The co-op's past president, Alex Danko, said he has tried to quell residents' fears.

"They're not going to put you out in the street," he said. "But they are worried – they don't know what's going to happen when the subsidy stops.

"We're waiting for the government to make a decision, and it's going to be a last-minute decision."

There are six co-op housing units between Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, and by 2017 five will have lost their federal subsidy.

About 32 per cent of all households in the co-ops receive the subsidy – or 138 households between the two cities.

By 2020, the number will be 152 households.

Across B.C., 1,500 households will lose their subsidy by 2017, according to the Co-op Housing Federation of B.C. Most of those are seniors on fixed incomes, single parents with low incomes, and others who qualify for subsidies.

Haney Pioneer Village Co-operative was built in the early 1970s by a group of concerned seniors to provide affordable housing for retired low-income residents. It is 16 rows of single-storey townhouses, with 66 two-bedroom units, 18 one-bedroom units and some 120 residents.



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The village has 16 rows of single-storey townhomes and about 120 residents.

Danko said the village buildings are in good shape, with relatively new windows and good roofing. They're kept up. When people move out, their hot water tanks are replaced. The residents do what work they can to keep maintenance costs low – pressure washing the carports, and painting new lines.

"We try to do most of the work ourselves."

New board president Pam Leavett said it is frustrating for the co-op managers and boards to not know what will happen.

"Really, the government is the party who should be concerned with this, and they're the only party who isn't," said Leavett.

She said the co-op met with MLA Mark Dalton and also contacted provincial housing minister Rich Coleman, but has so far received no reassurances.

They recently met with Fiona Jackson of the Co-op Housing Federation of B.C., and from the 84 units at Haney Pioneer Village, 70 people crowded into the room to hear Jackson speak.

Jackson said senior governments have dropped the ball. The federal co-op housing program is ending as 35-year mortgages expire, but the government of B.C. – which is responsible for housing – is not taking over responsibility.

"We need the province to step up to help people who are at risk of homelessness," she said.

"These are people who are housed already," Jackson added, noting that for the sake of a few hundred dollars per month, they could stay in their homes.

"And the housing market, as we know – there's nowhere else to go."

Her organization has been compiling hard numbers to present to the government, and estimates the overall number to maintain the housing subsidies would be $2.5 million per year initially. By 2020, when all subsidies have ended, some 4,000 households across the province, it assures Victoria the funding would not exceed $20 million.

Glenda Pohl is the manager of Meadowlands, a 64-unit seniors housing co-op beside Hoffman Park in Pitt Meadows, where residents have made the generous decision to grandfather in all the subsidized rental rates for those who are living in the facility now.

So, the people who were subsidized by the federal government are now getting help from their neighbours.

Pohl said the co-op has been able to build up a surplus over the years, so residents agreed to keep the rates as they are, despite the federal government's funding pullout.

She said it was a relief to the residents getting a subsidy – generally seniors on fixed incomes who were suddenly facing higher rents.

"There was a lot of unknowns," she said.

Pohl said the Meadowlands building is well maintained, and the co-op has good reserves in place.

New residents will have to pay the full price, which she said is still below market price at $592 for a two-bedroom unit.

While impressive, Jackson said it is not surprising that Meadowlands residents made that generous decision.

"A lot of housing co-ops have a really positive spirit," she said.

However, she said many of the 35-year-old buildings around the province that are losing their subsidy will need significant repairs and upgrading. If there are no reserves, some co-operative boards are not in a financial position to financially assist some occupants.

