

17 August 2015

Residential Tenancies Act Review
Consumer Affairs Victoria
GPO Box 123
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Dear RTA Review at Fairer Safer Housing,

Residential Tenancies Act Review, Laying the Groundwork - Consultation Paper

The City of Boroondara would like to thank the Victorian Government for the opportunity to comment on the consultation paper for Fairer Safer Housing. We believe that everyone has a right to safe and secure housing, and welcome this commitment to review the Residential Tenancies Act.

Boroondara is one of the most unaffordable housing markets in metropolitan Melbourne for both renters and home-buyers. In the March quarter 2014, the City had the highest median private weekly rents for two and three-bedroom units, and two, three and four-bedroom houses compared to other municipalities in Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne. Flexible and accessible rental housing options are central to meeting the needs of our diverse local community.

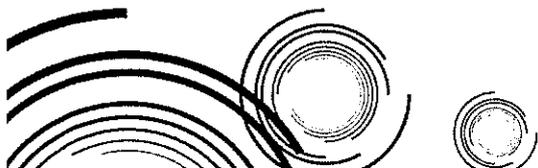
Our community is continuing to grow, diversify and age. The health impacts surrounding a lack of safe and secure housing are acknowledged in the Boroondara Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. We hope that the Victorian Government review will examine the need for:

- increased supply of social and community housing to meet the needs of low-income and disadvantaged residents
- retaining existing rooming and boarding houses
- a coordinated and integrated approach to homelessness and low-income housing.

Important issues that need consideration when discussing regulating the private rental sector in Boroondara are:

1) Key workers living local

There is growing concern that many people working in Boroondara are unable to afford to live within the municipality. This has a range of negative impacts on the individual and the local community. If key workers were able to reside locally to their work place it would have a positive impact on the individual's wellbeing, reduced traffic congestion



and reduce urban sprawl. Boroondara is also within the inner metropolitan ring of Melbourne, which allows a person to have easier access to public transport and services. It is important to have housing diversity available in these areas so that key workers may have the option to live in the inner metropolitan ring of Melbourne.

2) Older people's housing needs

Older residents have specific needs in terms of housing support. Boroondara's population is ageing. Accessible and appropriate housing options are central to enabling older community members to age safely in their local area with their established geographic and social support networks. Local findings show that the ability to down-size into smaller dwellings in the local community is important to many older residents. Research by the University of Melbourne has found that there are neighbourhoods within the municipality where the lack of dwelling diversity makes it impossible to down-size into a smaller dwelling and remain in the same neighbourhood.

3) Social housing

In June 2012, there were 846 social housing dwellings in the municipality, which represent approximately 1.3% of all Boroondara dwellings, compared to the Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne which is 2.0% of dwellings. There is a shortage of social housing for those in the bottom 40% of the income distribution scale living within Boroondara, and there are extensive waiting lists for social housing in the region. The Office of Housing June 2015 waiting lists for the Box Hill Regional Office (covering the cities of Boroondara, Whitehorse and Manningham), show 2,205 people waiting for social housing and an additional 396 people waiting to transfer to more suitable housing within the social housing system. It is important to note that most social housing tenants in Boroondara have low household mobility; Census data reveals that 59% of households have members that have been at the same address for five years.

4) Rooming houses

Rooming house tenants are more likely to experience multiple forms of disadvantage and require support to meet basic needs such as access to food, transport, health and social services. In the City of Boroondara there are currently 16 registered private rooming houses and six community rooming houses adding up to a total 22 rooming houses. There are 328 beds in 296 bedrooms across these rooming houses. Since February 2014, the number of rooming houses has decreased by two (four have closed down and two have opened). There are different types of rooming house residents with different needs, including residents who are students, unemployed, have a mental illness, have a substance abuse issue, or are working on a low income. We need to understand more about this diversity. In Boroondara there is a trend towards rooming houses opting for student accommodation, as these residents are often perceived as easier to house.



In 2014, Council conducted a Rooming House Survey to collect information about the operation of, and tenants living in, registered rooming houses in Boroondara. Twelve of Boroondara's registered rooming house operators completed the survey, which revealed that of the 165 residents living in the surveyed rooming houses:

- almost all residents (96%) were single adults
- most residents were aged between 30 and 60 years (63%)
- half the operators (50%) indicated that residents were most likely to stay more than 12 months
- weekly rents across the surveyed rooming houses ranged from \$90 per week to \$504 per week, this variability often related to the range of services included
- 54% were identified by the operators as having a mental illness
- 38% were from a non-English speaking background
- 19% were female
- 7% had a physical disability.

5) Homelessness

In 2009, the City of Boroondara was the first local government in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne to develop a homelessness protocol. The Boroondara Homelessness Protocol aims to ensure that homeless people are treated appropriately and are offered relevant support services. Council has seen an increase in the number of people being observed as homeless. In each case, Council has worked with SalvoCare Eastern and the Boroondara Police to ensure that individuals have been assisted.

Homelessness affects males and females of varying ages. In recent times, Council has seen an increase in the frequency of people considered as homeless and the complexity of their needs makes it very difficult to find secure and safe housing options.

6) Older women

Some older women's risk of homelessness, or being unable to stay in their local community, is exacerbated when living alone is coupled with living in private rental accommodation, low-income, limited or no superannuation, limited social and family support networks, and unemployment or inability to work due to age or illness. This has been identified as a recent and growing trend by homelessness services across Victoria. There are also less low cost accommodation options available to women, as the rooming house sector is often inappropriate for single women, who make up less than 20% of rooming house residents according to the 2014 Boroondara Rooming House Survey.

Flexible and accessible rental housing options are important in increasing social diversity, building community capacity, and meeting the needs of the local economy from within the community. We look forward to the outcomes of this review and the opportunity to provide comment on the upcoming series of issues papers.

Yours sincerely



Dr Helen Molnar
Manager Community Planning and Development

