

To: Members,
Parks and Community Services Committee

Re: Housing Standards Enforcement Proposed Operational Plan

BACKGROUND

The City of Regina, provincial and federal governments as well as the North Central Community Society formed a partnership in 2002 to revitalize the inner city. Specifically, the North Central neighbourhood was identified as a priority area whereby long-standing issues and challenges associated with the abundance of substandard housing, rental properties and transient residents have to be addressed.

The City, in collaboration with the provincial and federal governments, has facilitated the establishment of the Regina Inner City Community Partnership (RICCP) Steering Committee. Members on the Committee include personnel from the three levels of government, aboriginal organizations, the school boards, Regina Qu' Appelle District Health Authority, the business community, the North Central Community Society, as well as significant representation from the Regina Police Service. The RICCP was developed to engage the community in identifying the needs of the inner city and to develop actions that address the underlying issues that confront the people who live there. Based on priorities identified by the North Central residents, the Steering Committee has identified specific actions relating to housing, employment, as well as crime and safety. Sub-committees have been established accordingly to implement the respective action plans.

In January 2004, the Crime and Safety sub-committee of the RICCP, chaired by the Chief of Police, brought together representatives from a variety of agencies bearing responsibility for related housing standards to form a working group to establish an enforcement team and develop an operational plan pertaining to housing standards enforcement. The attached report (P04-32) regarding this matter was forwarded to the May 19, 2004 meeting of the Board of Police Commissioners. The recommendation to receive and file was concurred in by the Board members. The proposed Operational Plan was subsequently forwarded to the May 31, 2004 meeting of the RICCP Steering Committee and approved.

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding the housing standards enforcement initiative to the committee and request endorsement of the proposed Operational Plan (Appendix A).

DISCUSSION

The Crime and Safety sub-committee of the RICCP, led by the Chief of Police, met on January 28, 2004 with representatives from numerous affected agencies to discuss the impact of severely dilapidated and poorly maintained buildings and properties on neighbourhood environments within the older areas of the city. These representatives recognized the need to coordinate regulatory efforts in relation to sub-standard housing in the North Central community. A working group was formed to seek methods of jointly addressing those dwellings that were

below legislated standards in order to enhance the physical environment of the North Central neighbourhood and subsequently improve the quality of life of the local residents.

On April 28, 2004, the working group met and agreed on a proposed Operational Plan for collaborative enforcement of housing and property standards regulations. The plan is based on the creation of a Housing Standards Enforcement Team which is to be composed of at least one individual from Property Standards, Public Health, Buildings, Fire as well as Department of Community Resources and Employment and the police. It should be noted that an aboriginal representative will also be included as a resource person. A representative from the school board may also be added on an as-needed basis. The City Solicitor's office, Regina Police Services legal counsel, and legal counsel for the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region as well as the Department of Community Resources and Employment will advise and assist as required.

The primary goal of the proposed Operational Plan is to enhance the quality of life and reduce physical decay in North Central through the coordination of regulatory efforts and special focus on deteriorated housing within the neighbourhood. As part of this goal, no persons are to be displaced from their community or school enrolment area. Further, the plan is structured to share information, coordinate inspections of problem locations and rigorously enforce the law in relation to substandard properties and dwellings. The working group will follow a process consistent with the mandate of each partner agency and in accordance with relevant legislation. Listed below are the key elements of the proposed Operational Plan:

1. The enforcement team will meet weekly, and more often if required.
2. Each agency representative will share the addresses that have generated concerns.
3. Identified addresses will be evaluated jointly to determine the priority of response.
4. The appropriate lead agency will be identified based on the nature of the concern.
5. An inspection schedule will be developed to make the most effective use of combined resources to address community needs while still recognizing agency priorities.
6. Owners/occupants will be contacted for permission to inspect.
7. If permission is denied, legal counsel for the lead agency will be sought for assistance in obtaining a warrant.
8. Inspections will be conducted and appropriate orders issued.
9. Follow-up will take place to determine if orders have been complied with.
10. In the case of non-compliance with orders, the enforcement agency will determine the most effective remedy in consultation with the enforcement team.
11. The enforcement team will maintain records of its activities and will report these to the Crime and Safety sub-committee as required.

The presence of deteriorated housing and properties has a negative impact on the environment of a community and subsequently, the accepted standards of some of its residents. Initiatives that can affect a positive change on the environment will have a direct influence on the physical, psychological and the overall quality of life components of a neighbourhood. To that end, the mandate of the Housing Standards Enforcement Team will focus on the worst housing and properties within North Central, which will be in addition to the normal ongoing enforcement currently undertaken by Property Standards Inspectors in the area. The team will utilize all of the affected personnel, related expertise and legal powers collectively to ensure that the derelict housing and properties are repaired and cleaned up to an acceptable community standard.

As cited above, the affected agencies will be required to share information in order for the proposed plan to be successful. Although the focus of the plan is on properties, it is possible that

limited personal information may be involved. Consequently, the City Solicitor has forwarded written correspondence to the Privacy Commissioner for Saskatchewan requesting his comments on the implications for privacy protection in relation to the proposed Operational Plan.

It is intended that the implementation of the proposed Operational Plan will commence as soon as possible. Although the plan will initially proceed within a cautious context, the pace will become more accelerated as the enforcement team becomes more familiar with the related process.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Due to the scope of the proposed Operational Plan, affected landlords, occupants, neighbourhood residents and business owners as well as agencies providing related services will have to be contacted and advised of the process. Therefore, a comprehensive communication strategy will have to be developed by the Steering Committee, with assistance from the City and Police Public Affairs offices, in conjunction with the appropriate representatives from the provincial and federal governments.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The enhanced activity to be undertaken by the Housing Standards Enforcement Team, through the proposed Operational Plan, will result in the improved health, safety and general wellbeing of the residents within the North Central community.

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The Parks and Community Services Committee has authority with respect to the disposition of this report. This report will be provided to the Property Control and Licence Review Committee as well as City Council for information.

CONCLUSION

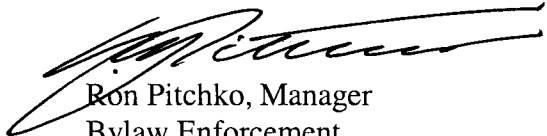
The creation of a Housing Standards Enforcement Team, in association with a proactive Operational Plan, will be able to focus on enforcing applicable housing regulations. Through coordinated regulatory efforts, there is an enhanced opportunity to significantly reduce the number of severely sub-standard dwellings and properties within the North Central neighbourhood.

RECOMMENDATION

Your Administration recommends that:

1. The proposed Housing Standards Enforcement Operational Plan be endorsed.
2. This report be forwarded to the Property Control and Licence Review Committee as well as City Council for information.

Respectfully submitted,



Ron Pitchko, Manager
Bylaw Enforcement

Respectfully submitted,



Peggy Clark, Director
Community Services

RP/mvc
Ps\gen\0500gen-Housing Stnds

PROPOSED OPERATIONAL PLAN

HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT TEAM

Regina Inner-City Community Partnership
Crime and Safety Sub-Committee
Housing Regulation Working Group

April 28, 2004

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**Regina Inner-City Community Partnership
Crime and Safety Sub-Committee
Housing Regulation Working Group**

**Housing Standards Enforcement Team
Proposed Operational Plan**

PART I: BACKGROUND

I. Introduction

In May of 2003, the Regina Inner-City Community Partnership received the *Report on the Community Vision and Action Plan*. This report identified the areas of greatest concern to the residents of Regina's North Central Community. A significant portion of this report addressed concerns about substandard housing:

Many respondents saw the lack of quality housing and poor property maintenance as major problems for the area. Renters and homeowners alike expressed dismay over the condition of many of the existing rental properties in North Central. Renters because they do not like to live in squalor and homeowners because they don't wish to see their property values diminished further.

Community as a whole

"Not thrilled about the rental houses, bringing down the property values of the owned houses."

"The run down state of things, houses not being repaired, people not caring for properties..."

"Slum landlords need to clean their properties up."

Area #1 (East North Central)

"Rundown houses."

"The slum landlords. They just want to fill the homes and make money without thinking about

the consequences. They don't take care of their properties."

"It looks dirty. Furniture all over...the houses are infested with mice."

"The condition of the rental units in my neighbourhood. It's the condition of the houses that the people have to live in. The vandalism. It's a direct result of not caring."

The community also identified aspirations in relation to better housing:

Community as a whole

"Make slumlords responsible for their properties..."

Area #1 (East North Central)

"Social Services should check the conditions of the houses they're paying rent for. There's a lot of landlords getting \$500.00 per month for shanties. If they're crap, they shouldn't pay for it."

"Landlords have to be held accountable. A checklist of standards for their housing or something."

"Better landlords and housing..."
(North Central Community Partnership *Report on the Community Vision and Action Plan*, 2003)

These responses identify a community concern with the condition of many rental properties in North Central Regina. Although housing standards are in place through federal, provincial and municipal legislation, there is a perceived lack of compliance in many situations: unsanitary, structurally deficient, unsafe, and unsightly houses continue to exist in North Central Regina, profiting some, but disadvantaging many.

Research indicates that the presence of these structures influences the physical, psychological, and social health of community members (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2003; Canadian Public Health Association, 1997). Because the environment influences behaviour, surroundings that attest to

lower standards can contribute to an acceptance of lowered social and behavioural standards (Kelling & Wilson, 1982): neighbourhood decay can lead to social disorder, placing significant demands on agencies bearing responsibility for addressing environmental and behavioural factors. Changing this environment through a focussed, collaborative process of enforcing housing standards can have an effect on both the structures and the behaviours associated with them (Kelling & Coles, 1996), thereby curtailing social disorder, enhancing quality of life, and reducing demands on service providers.

Several agencies are legislatively empowered to address substandard dwellings in a regulatory capacity. Tables 1 through 4 contain extracts from the pertinent pieces of legislation.

TABLE 1	The Public Health Act, 1994
<p>2(q) “health hazard” means:</p> <p>(i) a condition of premises; that is or may become harmful or dangerous to health, that hinders in any manner the suppression of disease or the prevention of injury or that is prescribed as a health hazard.</p>	
<p>21 A person who knows of the existence of a health hazard and who believes that the local authority for the jurisdictional area in which the health hazard is located is not aware of the health hazard shall notify the local authority.</p>	
<p>22(1) Where a local authority forms the opinion that a building or part of a building is unfit for human occupation as a result of lack of repair, filth, absence of plumbing or any other defect or condition, the local authority shall:</p> <p>(a) placard the building as unsanitary and unfit for occupation; and</p> <p>(b) order the owner of the building:</p> <p>(i) to carry out any repairs...</p> <p>(ii) to demolish the building...</p>	
<p>53(1) For the purposes of enforcing and administering this Act, the regulations or bylaws made pursuant to this Act, a public health officer may:</p> <p>(a) subject to subsection (2), at any reasonable time and without prior notification, enter any premises or detain any vehicle;</p> <p>(c) take one or more persons to any premises or vehicle to assist the public health officer...</p>	
<p>53(2) A public health officer shall not enter a private dwelling without a warrant issued pursuant to subsection (4) unless the occupant of the dwelling consents to the entry.</p>	
<p>53(4) A justice of the peace or a Judge of the Provincial Court of Saskatchewan may issue a warrant authorizing a public health officer to enter and search any place or premises or search any vehicle named in the warrant where the public health officer believes, on reasonable grounds, that:</p> <p>(a) an offence against this Act has been or is being committed and there is evidence of the offence to be found in the place, premises or vehicle proposed to be searched; or</p> <p>(b) a condition, substance, agent or thing:</p> <p>(i) is present in the place, premises or vehicle proposed to be searched; and</p> <p>(ii) is causing or is likely to cause, or is contributing to or is likely to contribute to, a serious public health threat.</p>	
<p>55(1) A public health officer who is conducting an inspection, investigation, inquiry or search pursuant to section 53 may call for the assistance of a peace officer.</p>	

TABLE 2 The Fire Prevention Act, 1992

18(1) For the purposes of ensuring compliance with this Act, the regulations or any order made pursuant to this Act, any fire inspector may, at any reasonable time, enter and inspect any building, structure or premises.

18(3) When entering on land or into any building, structure or premises pursuant to this section, the fire inspector may:

(b) take any person who or thing that the fire inspector considers necessary to assist him or her to fulfill the purpose of the entry.

18(6) A fire inspector shall not enter a private dwelling without a warrant issued pursuant to this section unless the owner or occupant consents.

18(7) A fire inspector may apply without notice to a justice of the peace or a judge of the provincial court for a warrant to be issued pursuant to this section where a person:

(a) refuses to permit the fire inspector to enter on land or into any building, structure or premises to carry out any of the activities mentioned in subsection (2).

18(10) Every peace officer is under a duty to assist the fire inspector in enforcing a warrant issued pursuant to this section.

19(1) If, in the opinion of a fire inspector, there is a contravention of this Act, the regulations or an order made pursuant to this Act in a building, structure or premises, the fire inspector may issue to the owner, operator or occupant of the building, structure or premises a written order in which the fire inspector:

(b) may direct the owner, operator or occupant to do one or more of the following within the time limit set out in the order:
(ii) repair, remove or demolish the building, structure or premises;

19(3) A fire inspector may request the assistance of a peace officer to assist in carrying out the provisions of this section.

28 Every owner of a building, structure or premises shall ensure that the building, structure or premises is designed, constructed, erected, placed, altered, repaired, renovated, demolished, relocated, removed, used or occupied in accordance with this Act and the regulations.

TABLE 3 The Cities Act

324(1) If this Act or a bylaw authorizes or requires anything to be inspected, remedied, enforced or done by a city, a designated officer may, after making reasonable efforts to notify the owner or occupier of any land or building to be entered to carry out the inspection:

(a) enter that land or building at any reasonable time and carry out the inspection authorized or required by the enactment or bylaw;

324(3) When entering any land or building pursuant to this section, the designated officer may:

(b) take any person who or thing that the designated officer considers necessary to assist him or her to fulfill the purpose of the entry.

324(6) Notwithstanding subsections (1) to (5), a designated officer shall not enter any place that is a private dwelling without:

(a) the consent of the owner or occupier of the private dwelling; or
(b) a warrant issued pursuant to section 325 from a justice of the peace or a provincial court judge authorizing the entry.

325(1) If a person refuses to allow or interferes with an entry or inspection described in section 20, 21, 22, 23, 324, 326 or 327, the city may apply to a justice of the peace or a provincial court judge for a warrant authorizing a person named in the warrant to:

(a) enter the land or building and to carry out the inspection authorized or required by this Act or a bylaw; and
(b) search for and seize anything relevant to the subject-matter of the warrant.

328(1) If a designated officer finds that a person is contravening this Act or a bylaw, the designated officer may, by written order, require the owner or occupant of the land, building or structure to which the contravention relates to remedy the contravention.

328(3) The order may do all or any of the following:

(b) direct a person to take any action or measures necessary to remedy the contravention of the enactment or bylaw and, if necessary, to prevent a re-occurrence of the contravention, including:
(ii)(b) remove or demolish the building or structure and level the site;

II. Members

The Housing Regulation Working Group consists of:

Yvonne Graff – Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region
 Mike Myslick – City of Regina Bylaw Enforcement
 Rick Rowland – Regina Fire Marshall
 Mitch Crumley – Regina Police Service Legal Counsel
 Neil Robertson – Regina City Solicitor
 Jana Odling - Regina City Solicitor's Office
 Rick Bourassa – Regina Police Service
 Pat Barth – Department of Community Resources and Employment
 Richard Foley – Department of Community Resources and Employment
 Brenda Towne - Regina Police Service
 Dwayne Flaman - City of Regina Building Division
 Mike Ferstl – Regina Police Service
 Dave Virgin – Regina Police Service

III. Discussions

The Housing Regulation Working Group met initially on February 17, 2004. Following introductions, discussion began on the condition of housing in the North Central community. There was agreement that the condition of many properties falls below standards. Property Standards Inspectors inspect properties and issue orders mandating repairs. There is an appeal process for these orders, and extensions are sometimes granted for long periods of time. In some cases, tenants are responsible for causing damage to dwellings. The City Solicitor's office prepared an overview of the pertinent legislation, identifying the responsibilities and powers of various agencies. There is room within these pieces of legislation for coordinated efforts. The working group adjourned with a commitment from each agency to assess the addresses that present repeated problems.

The working group met again on March 16, 2004. Several agencies identified the areas

to which they respond repeatedly. Discussion followed about the current state of housing inspections. Bylaw Enforcement Division and Public Health Inspectors do joint inspections on a regular basis, primarily in relation to complaints by tenants about the conditions of their properties. Public Health Inspectors do not generally inspect homes unless requested to do so by occupants. If a house is placarded, it may not be occupied until appropriate repairs are made; occupants may be given a short period of time to find other accommodation. Public Health Inspectors check placarded residences at least annually: if repairs have not been made and the dwelling is unoccupied, the placard is left in place and no further action is taken. Generally, however, placarded houses are repaired. Property Standards Inspectors direct significant attention to exteriors, and inspect interiors with the permission of owners or occupants. Permission, however, is often not granted, and many interiors are left uninspected. Health raised a concern for inspectors' safety: they prefer sending two inspectors or conducting joint inspections with Bylaw Enforcement Division. A police presence would be welcomed for many of these inspections. Although warrants can be obtained to enter houses for inspection, this is rarely done. The group adjourned with the commitment in place to create an enforcement team made up of Public Health Inspectors, Building Inspectors, Property Standards Inspectors, Fire Inspectors, police, and DCRE staff. This Housing Standards Enforcement Team will:

1. Meet weekly
2. Determine which houses each agency is concerned with
3. Decide which addresses are priorities for addressing concerns
4. Develop an inspection schedule
5. Have DCRE in place to ensure any displaced persons receive immediate shelter

As a result of these discussions, an operational plan was developed and reviewed at a working group meeting on April 28, 2004.

PART II: OPERATIONAL PLAN

I. Goal

To enhance the quality of life and reduce neighbourhood decay in the North Central community.

enforce the law in relation to substandard properties and dwellings.

II. Objective

By coordinating regulatory efforts in relation to properties, with special focus on dwellings in the North Central community.

IV. Process

Although there is currently much being done to address housing standards in the North Central community, a coordinated approach to sharing information and conducting inspections would be beneficial. The working group will follow a process consistent with the mandates of each partner agency and in accord with the relevant legislation. Table 5 provides a description of the operational plan, and is followed by an explanation of each component.

III. Plan

To share information, coordinate inspections of problem locations, and rigorously

Table 5

Housing Standards Enforcement Team Operational Plan

- 1. The enforcement team will meet weekly, and more often if required.**
- 2. Each agency representative will share the addresses that have generated concerns.**
- 3. Identified addresses will be evaluated jointly to determine the priority of response.**
- 4. The appropriate lead agency will be identified based on the nature of the concern.**
- 5. An inspection schedule will be developed to make the most effective use of combined resources to address community need while still recognizing agency priorities.**
- 6. Owners/ occupants will be contacted for permission to inspect.**
- 7. If permission is denied, legal counsel for the lead agency will be sought for assistance in obtaining a warrant.**
- 8. Inspections will be conducted and appropriate orders issued.**
- 9. Follow-up will take place to determine if orders have been complied with.**
- 10. In the case of non-compliance with orders, the enforcement agency will determine the most effective remedy in consultation with the enforcement team.**
- 11. The enforcement team will maintain records of its activities and will report these to the Crime and Safety sub-committee as required.**

1. The enforcement team will meet weekly, and more often if required.

From discussion with working group members, weekly meetings of the enforcement team will be an appropriate starting point. This will ensure there are sufficient cases to be evaluated and will thereby enhance efficiency, and allow for sufficient time to prepare for, and conduct, any necessary inspections. If circumstances necessitate more frequent meetings, they will be arranged.

2. Each agency will share the addresses that have generated concerns.

Information on addresses of substandard dwellings and properties is necessary for the group to achieve its goal. Information about the occupants need not be shared beyond what is reasonable to accomplish the goal—the addresses of dwellings are the focus. At times, however, in order to ensure appropriate social and subsistence supports are in place, additional information may be shared. There may also be circumstances in which identities of residents may be shared in order to ensure the safety of those members of the working group who may be contacting those individuals. This information will be kept confidential.

3. Identified addresses will be evaluated jointly to determine the priority of response.

The group will collate information and identify addresses that have come to the attention of several agencies, addresses that generate repeated complaints, and addresses that do not meet standards. A priority list will be developed to ensure those addresses presenting the greatest need are given immediate attention. Should the group not be able to deal with all addresses in a given week, those of a

lower priority may be carried over to subsequent weeks, at which time they will be re-evaluated and prioritized.

4. The appropriate lead agency will be identified based on the nature of the concern.

Each partner agency is responsible for housing standards falling within its domain. In situations posing a health concern, the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region will take primary responsibility for resolution; in those posing a structural or fire concern, the Fire Department, Bylaw Enforcement Division, or Building Division will take the lead as required. Each situation will be evaluated to determine the appropriate lead agency. The efforts of one agency may produce further information requiring the involvement of one of the other agencies.

5. An inspection schedule will be developed to make the most effective use of combined resources to address community need while still recognizing agency priorities.

Once the addresses have been prioritized on the basis of health and safety concerns, an inspection schedule will be developed. Again, the appropriate agency will take the lead role dependent on the circumstances: if a health issue is prominent, Health will lead; if a structural concern is of primary importance, Bylaw Enforcement Division or Building Division will lead; if a fire safety concern is the salient feature, Fire will lead. Police and DCRE will assist as required for safety or displacement reasons. Police will evaluate the address to determine what safety concerns may be present, and will deploy appropriate resources to ensure the safety of inspecting individuals.

6. Owners/occupants will be contacted for permission to inspect.

Depending on the nature of the problem and the legislative authority of the lead agency, the owners or occupants of the identified addresses will be contacted for permission to enter and inspect dwellings. In some cases, permission of the owner is sufficient; in others, the occupants must consent.

7. If permission is denied, legal counsel for the lead agency will be sought for assistance in obtaining a warrant.

Should an owner/occupant deny the inspectors access to a dwelling, the enforcement team will determine if the circumstances are sufficient to seek a warrant to enter. Legal counsel for the enforcement agency will direct the process of obtaining a warrant, in consultation with legal counsel from other agencies as needed.

8. Inspections will be conducted and appropriate orders issued.

In accordance with the inspection schedule, and after obtaining either permission or a warrant, the appropriate inspectors will enter and inspect the dwelling. Inspectors will, as authorized by legislation, take any person they deem necessary to assist in that process. Peace officers will assist as required. Deficiencies will be documented and appropriate action taken. Should the inspection result in an immediate need to displace occupants, DCRE will assist in relocating those persons to appropriate dwellings. Utilities such as SaskPower or SaskEnergy will be contacted to address problems within their areas of responsibility. Orders will be retained by the appropriate issuing agency, with

copies being filed with the enforcement team.

9. Follow-up will take place to determine if orders have been complied with.

Because orders allow a time period in which to effect repairs or to launch an appeal, the enforcement team will follow up to determine if compliance has occurred. This may need to be coordinated with the inspection schedule if further inspection is required to determine compliance. If compliance may be established without further inspection, a record of that compliance will be retained by the appropriate agency, with a copy forwarded to the enforcement team.

10. In the case of non-compliance with orders, the enforcement agency will determine the most effective remedy in consultation with the enforcement team.

If orders have not been complied with, the enforcement team will determine the appropriate action. If legal action is requested, the enforcement team will ensure the proper information is available to legal counsel, and will take whatever action counsel deems necessary to proceed.

11. The enforcement team will maintain records of its activities and will provide those to the Crime and Safety sub-committee as required.

In addition to the records maintained by each agency, the enforcement team will maintain records of its activities, including addresses, inspection schedules, complaints, orders issued, resolutions, and prosecutions.

V. Resources

In order for this effort to be meaningful and sustainable, sufficient resources will be required. Although each agency will determine what resources will be made available, it is suggested that at minimum

- one police officer,
- one Public Health Inspector,
- one Property Standards Inspector,
- one Fire Inspector,
- one Building Inspector,
- and one member from DCRE

be made available on a regular basis. Should warrants, legal advice, or prosecution be required, one legal counsel should also be available. At this time, it is difficult to estimate with accuracy the magnitude of the task: whether current resources will suffice or additional resources will be required should become apparent as the enforcement team proceeds with its task.

VI. Community Consultation

The North Central Community Partnership *Report on the Community Vision and Action Plan* (2003) identifies the need for community consultation in relation to proposed activities within the community. In this report, the community clearly speaks to the need for meaningful action to be taken in the area of what community members refer to as “slum housing”. This proposed venture, therefore, is consistent with the wishes of those surveyed within the North Central community. Should further consultation be desired in relation to this project, the Steering Committee and Crime and Safety Sub-Committee of the Regina Inner-City Community Partnership would be the appropriate bodies for seeking community input.

VII. Communication

Prior to implementation of this strategy, landlord associations, agencies involved in providing housing, business owners, community agencies and community residents will be advised of the process. A public communication strategy has

not been produced, but will be developed as required.

VIII. Scope

The efforts of the enforcement team will be focussed on enforcing housing regulations in the North Central community. Through enhanced, coordinated regulatory efforts, the number of sub-standard dwellings and properties in the community should be reduced. This may, however, increase the number of unoccupied homes or vacant lots, which may become breeding grounds for social disorder, drug abuse, prostitution, and criminal activity—threats to the safety, security, and health of the community. It is important, therefore, for the enforcement effort to be linked with the developmental work of the Housing Sub-Committee of the Regina Inner-City Community Partnership. The creation and sustainability of a safe, healthy, vibrant community is contingent on what replaces the substandard structures that may be removed.

May 19, 2004

To: Chairperson and Members
Board of Police Commissioners

Re: Housing Standards Enforcement

BACKGROUND

For a number of years, incidents of crime and social disorder have occurred disproportionately in Regina's inner-city communities, including North Central Regina. Research correlates this with environmental factors, including neighbourhood cleanliness and the poor physical condition of dwellings and other structures in the community. If the physical condition of a community correlates with social disorder and crime, then rigorous enforcement of housing standards to reduce neighbourhood decay may reduce the number of incidents of social disorder and crime, thereby reducing calls for service and enhancing the quality of life of community members.

DISCUSSION

The notion of environmental influences on behaviour is supported in police-related research and literature. In 1982, the "Broken Windows Theory" gained prominence in the police community. According to this theory, neighbourhood deterioration creates psychological and social frameworks conducive to disorderly behaviour; vacant lots and abandoned properties become sites for drug use and trafficking, prostitution, arson, and criminal activity. Community residents become fearful, eventually choosing to remain indoors or move to other neighbourhoods. Repeated calls to service providers increase, placing considerable strain on resources. As the service providers respond individually to these complaints, they address only specific incidents within their areas of authority. This insular response pattern does not resolve the underlying influences: neighbourhood deterioration and social disorder continue, leading to increased demands on service providers and frustration on the part of residents who perceive a lack of effective response by those providers.

An examination of the North Central Regina community identifies factors consistent with those predicted by the "Broken Windows Theory". North Central Regina houses 6.6% (11,699) of the City's residents, 48% of whom live in rental properties. 14% of the properties are substandard. In 2002, the Regina Police Service responded to 12,024 calls for service in North Central Regina, representing 24.0% of the city's total calls for service. Many of these incidents occurred in relation to a small number of dwellings: in 2002, 70 North Central Regina dwellings were the sites of 963 repeat calls for service. On a community level, therefore, social disorder and neighbourhood decay coincide in Regina, consistent with the "Broken Windows Theory".

In 1996, the concept of “Fixing Broken Windows” was published, chronicling efforts in a number of American cities to reduce inner-city crime and social disorder consistent with that seen in Regina. Successes in reducing crime, disorder, and repeat calls for service were attributed to stringent, collaborative enforcement of housing and property standards combined with urban renewal efforts to develop the neighbourhoods. Through processes of coordinated regulatory efforts, neighbourhood deterioration and social disorder were brought under control; community residents reclaimed their neighbourhoods, leading to healthy, sustainable communities. Similar coordinated efforts have been undertaken in Abbotsford and Victoria, British Columbia, with both cities reporting successes in reducing not only sites of crime and social disorder, but also repeated calls to service to those sites.

On January 28, 2004, the Crime and Safety sub-committee of the Regina Inner-City Community Partnership met and discussed the potential to coordinate the regulatory efforts of agencies responsible for property standards in the North Central community. Representatives from the Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region, the City of Regina, the Regina Fire Department, the Department of Community Resources and Employment, and the Regina Police Service created a working group to explore methods of cooperation, and to develop an operational plan.

The working group met over a three-month period, and on April 28, 2004 agreed on a proposed operational plan for collaborative enforcement of housing and property standards regulations. The plan calls for the creation of a Housing Standards Enforcement Team, comprised of Public Health Inspectors, Property Standards Inspectors, Building Inspectors, Fire Inspectors, Department of Community Resources and Employment personnel, and police officers. This team will meet weekly, discuss addresses of concern in North Central Regina, prioritize and inspect those locations in accordance with legislated authority and responsibility, issue appropriate orders, monitor compliance, and take lawful action up to and including demolition if necessary. The City Solicitor’s Office, Regina Police Service legal counsel, and legal counsel for the Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region and the Department of Community Resources and Employment will advise and assist as required.

The proposed operational plan will be presented to the Regina Inner-City Community Partnership Crime and Safety sub-committee on May 18, 2004, and to the steering committee on May 25, 2004, at which time approval will be sought from partner agencies’ administrations.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None with respect to this report.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

A communication plan will be developed as required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None with respect to this report.

CONCLUSION

The Housing Standards Enforcement Team will use existing legislation to ensure property and housing standards are maintained, reduce the numbers of substandard dwellings contributing to social disorder, and reduce the repeated demands on service providers.

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and file.

Cal Johnston,
Chief of Police.