

Trends

by Ian Johnston

An upward trend in vacancy rates of apartments in the Halifax Metropolitan area has not translated into an increase in affordable student housing, a market analyst has concluded.

Sally Erskin Doucette, a market analyst for the Canada Mortgage and Housing corporation, said a rental market survey conducted by the corporation shows a rise in apartment vacancies in the Halifax metro area from 2.5 per cent in April 1986 to 3.9 per cent last April.

The survey indicated that in Halifax Peninsula South, roughly the area south of North Street in the peninsula including Dalhousie University, the vacancy rate has jumped from .3 per cent to 1.6 per cent in one year.

But Doucette said the figures for the Halifax Peninsula South are deceiving. She said the major reason for an increase in apartment vacancies in this area is the recent rise in construction of multi-unit housing, particularly condominiums. Doucette said rent for new housing is generally priced out of the reach of students.

"Renting a condo can cost over \$1000. Students are forced to double or triple up," she said.

The survey indicates Halifax Peninsula South maintains the highest rent levels in the metro area. The average price for a two-bedroom apartment in the metro area is \$537. In Halifax Peninsula South, two-bedroom apartments cost the renter an average of \$649.

"Most available units and virtually all of the new supply are priced at the upper end of the market," the survey concludes.

Doucette said students in search of affordable housing may have to expand their search beyond the area adjacent to Dalhousie University. In the north portion of the city, the vacancy rate is 4.7 per cent.

The market analyst said the increase in apartment vacancies may give students more of a choice when searching for housing.

"Students may be in a position now to not take the first thing available. But in most cases, what is available is either expensive or not well maintained.

"1.6 per cent is better, but it's still not ideal."

Doucette said replacing old buildings with new housing units will make it more difficult for students to find affordable housing in the future.

"Removing affordable housing units for luxury condominiums places housing out of reach for students," she said.

Doucette said the survey only dealt with privately initiated apartments of six units or more. She said many students find alternative housing such as basement apartments in single-family dwellings, which are not covered by the survey.

Premier brings beds but.....

TORONTO (CUP) — Ontario premier David Peterson announced funding for up to 5000 new residence beds for university students last week, but student leaders say the funding will do nothing to solve the housing crisis for off-campus students.

Peterson told students and Liberal supporters at the University of Toronto that the government will contribute about \$65 million in subsidies to universities to allow them to reduce their interest costs for the construction of the new beds.

Peterson said the need for the new beds has emerged in the last decade as the university enrollment has gone up by 25 per cent, while on-campus housing stock

has increased by only six per cent.

"This will not solve the entire problem, obviously, but it will go a long way to solving some of the problems we have," said Peterson.

However, Sheena Weir, chair of the Ontario Federation of Students, said Peterson's announcement will not help the 82 per cent disappeared this morning," said for affordable off-campus housing at all.

"I don't think it's really going to address the problem this fall," said Weir. "I was really hoping with the crisis situation we've seen, there would be something in the immediate term."

Chris Jones, the external commissioner of the U of T students'

administrative council, agreed.

"The problem is so acute that some students have decided against attending U of T due to lack of affordable housing," Jones said, adding that the problem is not limited to Toronto.

In April 1987, the average vacancy rate for 12 metropolitan areas in southwestern Ontario was 0.5 per cent. This means that out of every 1000 dwelling units, only five were available for immediate rental and were physically unoccupied at the time of enumeration. Only Ottawa and Thunder Bay manage to escape the housing crunch with vacancy rates of 2.1 and 3.1 per cent respectively.

Jones said the problem of low vacancy rates is compounded by the escalating rental costs students are facing. "The number (of available places) really doesn't make much difference if you can't afford the price," he said.

Jones said many students are spending more than one-third of their budget on accommodation. Some of those students are forced to live more than a reasonable distance from campus.

While undergraduate students can often turn to their parents for more money to pay the rent, Carol Nash, president of U of T's graduate students' union, said graduate students are not afforded this option.

"Graduate students support themselves," said Nash, adding that she knew of at least three international students who had lived for a time in a graduate building, "sleeping in chairs, working day and night."

Nash said she also knew of students who would spend nights in the library "because they had nowhere else to go."

Nash said U of T graduates have been forced to live in "deplorable conditions" since 1964, when a commission found that many students lived in dwellings infested with mice, cockroaches and sometimes

rats. She said no new graduate residences have been built, though U of T enrollment has skyrocketed.

To avoid borrowing money or sleeping in non-residential buildings, more and more students are teaming up with others to rent houses.

But Weir said students' cohabitation efforts are being thwarted by the emergence of municipal by-laws which prohibit more than a certain number of unrelated persons from living together in a single family dwelling.

Paul Davidson, vice-president external for Western University student council, said so far Waterloo, Kingston, Sudbury and Guelph have passed "exclusionary by-laws" which "are only serving to tighten the housing situation that has reached a crisis level."

Weir said the provincial government has refused to put pressure on municipalities to lift the by-laws, which she called "discriminatory and elitist."

Peterson also announced that \$5 million would be added to the Ontario Student Assistance program (OSAP) — \$3 million for the student bursary program and \$2 million for creating on-campus jobs.

Weir said even combined with the previous \$25 million increase last year, the increases to OSAP aren't measuring up to the actual cost of living for Ontario students.

"It's good to see they've recognized it as a problem, but as for a solution, I'm disappointed."

And while Peterson introduced his announcements with the statement that post-secondary education has been and will continue to be a government priority, Weir said she is doubtful.

"If those are the grand announcements, it's hard to believe post-secondary education is a priority for this government."

Housing Blues

By Paul Creelman

Student housing is "always bad, but much better this year than the year previously," says Sheila Fougere, Dal's off-campus housing manager.

The search for off-campus housing is more spread out this year, says Fougere. The housing centre advertised in mid-July in the media, and students are still using the housing centre now. Thus there has not been so much of a crisis with everyone looking at once for accommodations.

"Students are all looking for the exact same thing," says Fougere. "They want their own place under \$400 a month, which is pretty limited and the first to go." These students are often compromising by sharing accommodations.

Prices are stable this year, and similar to prices last year. However, there have been cases where the landlord has lowered prices in hopes of attracting a tenant. Some landlords are also

expecting to be matched up with a "nice young man", a service not provided by the housing centre.

Residences were full as of Tuesday morning, with a waiting list that included some King's College students, according to Pat Donahoe, Dean of Men. "We had a vacancy which disappeared this morning," said Donahoe.

Fougere said international students have been having difficulties with finding housing as well. Their search for housing encounters obstacles such as racism, preparing for the Canadian weather, and trouble understanding the new terminology of the housing market.

Money is also a problem for some foreign students. They will arrive with \$400 budgeted for housing, and bring their "wife and three kids", says Fougere. Then they must pay extra for furniture or winter clothing, leaving even less for accommodation.

