

Coalition wants more units

By TOBY SANGER

THE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE Coalition released its Blueprint for Action last week, a detailed series of recommendations to help solve the housing crisis in Halifax and Dartmouth.

The Blueprint, which recommends "urgent action to be taken to obtain 1,000 units of social housing for the Metro area," is a result of over three months of work by volunteers from three dozen church, labour and community organizations.

"One thing that all these groups were finding was that the housing crisis was the recurring cause of many other problems,"

coalition member Dennis Theman of the Dalhousie Legal Aid Clinic says.

"You can give hospital care to children with skin disease but they they return to inadequate housing with no running water so the problems continue. Some people in mental aid institutions could be released but they have no place to go," Theman says.

The blueprint outlines 36 different projects which would provide 1204 housing units for low-income families, senior citizens, single mothers, students, single men and women and mentally and physically disabled people.

It recommends that municipali-

ties take the lead role in the housing crisis by setting aside 20 per cent of all municipally owned land for non-profit housing and by bringing Metro housing needs to the attention of the provincial and federal governments. The Coalition is also seeking amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act to allow security of tenure as well as security from unjust eviction and amendments to human rights legislation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of family size or type.

Theman notes there are thousands of acres of government-owned land with housing potential in the Halifax/Dartmouth area but inaction and red tape from municipal departments has slowed down construction projects.

He estimates that a total of \$40 to \$60 million in loan guarantees and a \$3 to \$4 million annual interest rate subsidy would be

required from the CMHC to carry out the Blueprint's proposals.

The projects would provide work for the unemployed and substantially reduce social service expenditures caused by inadequate housing.

Ward Two councillor Ron Cromwell says he agrees with many of the proposals but adds, "it is not the municipal government's role to be involved in the housing business," which is the responsibility of the federal and provincial governments.

"The City of Halifax should be in a position to help groups find land and obtain loans" but further commitments would put too much pressure on municipal taxes, he says.

When asked whether he would support selective zoning amendments to allow group homes for mentally or physically disabled people in Ward Two, Cromwell said that would it would depend

on the particular merits and philosophy of each proposal.

Ward Three councillor Graham Downey says he supports the proposal in principle but feels Ward Three has "more than its fair share of public housing."

The latest statistics from CMHC's apartment vacancy survey show that apartment vacancies in the Halifax Metro area fell by 22 per cent during the period of April 1984 to April 1985, to a low of 0.7 per cent. CMHA estimates a three per cent vacancy rate represents an optimal level for both buyers and sellers.

The low vacancy rate has resulted in large rent increases. The Consumer Price Index for rental accommodations in Halifax has been the highest among major Canadian cities, with a seven per cent increase over the August 1984 - August 1985 period, compared to the national average of 4.1 per cent over the same period.

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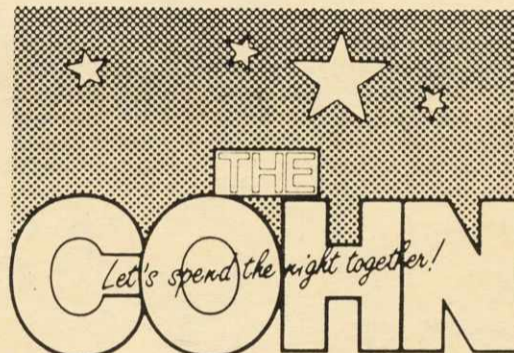
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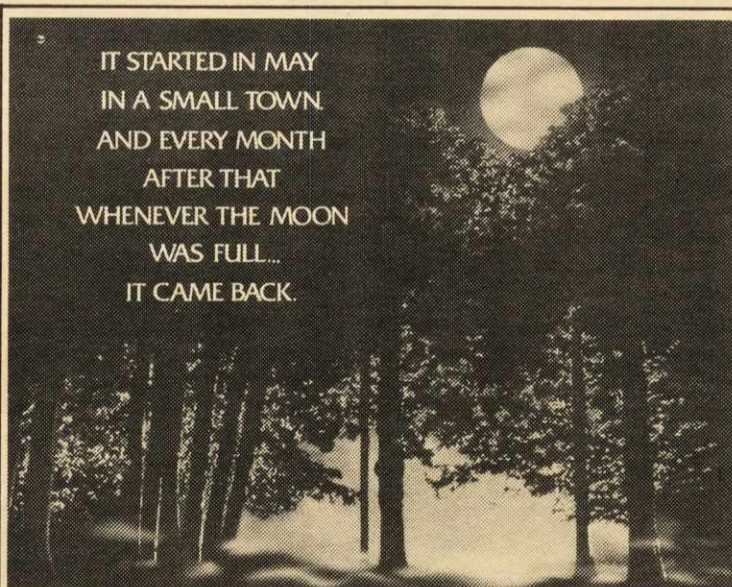


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Bus passes

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"Every major country has bus passes. Is it that all of them are making money but we are not?" asks Rizvi.

Don Mielke, service coordinator of Metro Transit, is aware that letters have been sent to the chairman concerning the passes. "At this point however, I can't make any comment until after it is formally presented to us by the DSU," he says.

For this formal proposal to be successful, the survey has to be accurate.

Phillip Doucette, a Dalhousie student who volunteered to distribute some of the surveys, says, "We were told by the Dalhousie Department of Statistics that in order to have a significant survey we need three hundred people surveyed. However, we took four hundred to make sure."

The four hundred people asked to fill out the questionnaire consisted of the students in a large commerce class, a first year law class, a couple of Arts and Physical Education classes, and a few students who were randomly picked around the SUB.

After it is tabulated, a report of the data will be sent to candidates running in the municipal elections on Oct. 19 and a press conference will be held with candidates sympathetic to the cause.

James LeBlanc, chair of SUNS, says, "our success depends on politicians being able to apply pressure through civic elections. We can't do it by ourselves." He says the point should be made that university students are just as badly off, money-wise, as high school students.

On Oct. 19, there will be an all-candidates forum for Ward One. "We will make the bus passes a public issue at this forum and get the candidates' reactions," says Rizvi.

After the press conference, the DSU will formally present their proposal to senior management and board members of Metro Transit.

Rizvi says the DSU will present their case diplomatically. "But," he says, "if there is no response then we'll have to do something like depositing sixty-five cents worth of pennies to make our point clear."