

# Need expected to rise for subsidized housing

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Windsor and Essex County are facing a shortage of subsidized housing that is expected to get worse as the economy sours, housing officials say.

There are about 2,300 names on the waiting list for subsidized housing, an increase of 200 from two years ago, said Debbie Cercone, executive director of housing and children's services for the City of Windsor.

The wait for subsidized housing can last four to seven years, especially if a family or individual is waiting for a one- or two-bedroom apartment, which is the most popular type of housing.

"What people are finding themselves doing, they're in rental accommodations they can't afford," Cercone said.

"Most people are spending over 50 per cent of their income on shelter costs. It makes it very hard to manage

other expenses."

She said no more than 30 per cent of income should be spent on housing.

While Windsor has a low cost of living and a high apartment vacancy rate, affordable housing has become difficult to find for many, especially with rising utility costs, said Lorraine Goddard, executive director of youth and family resource network for the Homeless Coalition of Windsor and Essex County.

"The significant vacancies are because the units are unaffordable for those who need it," she said. "Utility costs have gone sky high; people need to have heat, water and electricity."

Josephine Heuton, director of the Windsor and Essex County central housing registry, said she expects a sharp increase in demand as laid-off workers exhaust their employment insurance claims.

"I'm thinking that with the economic downturn, we will get an influx. People are still on assistance and un-

employment insurance," she said.

Eligibility for social housing, which is funded provincially, is based on income level, family size and other qualifications. If an individual is a victim of domestic violence, they will be placed on the top of the waiting list.

Jim Steele, CEO of the Windsor Essex Community Housing Corporation, said the main problem is his clients' decreasing income level.

"We're experiencing that loss in revenue. It's a budget pressure for our corporation, it's an expense to us, we have to find that money," he said.

The Rent Bank, a government organization that offers financial support to tenants facing eviction, has also seen a lack of funding, said Lucy Sobczyk, manager of residential support services with the City of Windsor.

"In our community, there are a lot of people without employment. (Use of) the Rent Bank has increased," she said.