

Using City-owned land to address Vancouver's housing crisis: A case study of the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency

**by
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Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Urban Studies

in the
Urban Studies Program
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Spring 2024

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Abstract

In 2014, the City of Vancouver established the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency (VAHA's) as a response to the city's deepening housing crisis. This research project analyzes the role of the Agency between 2014 and 2021 in the City's affordable housing agenda. Through analysis of documents and interview data, this case study offers a critical policy analysis that details the number of housing units delivered through the VAHA, but also several factors that shaped the role VAHA was able to play in addressing the housing crisis. The research concludes by proposing that new theorization is needed to understand the role of local governments within this current moment of Canada's housing system that stands in-between established neoliberalization of housing policy and renewed senior government engagement in housing. Ultimately, it recognizes the City's key contribution via the VAHA was the dedication of publicly owned land towards affordable housing.

Keywords: housing policy; housing strategy; affordable housing; social housing; Vancouver; public land

Acknowledgements

This thesis was researched and written on the unceded and ancestral territory of the hə́nq̓əmiḥə́m and Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh speaking peoples, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́ilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. As an immigrant settler, I am grateful to be an uninvited guest on these lands.

I have enormous gratitude for the Urban Studies faculty members who supported and challenged me throughout my master's experience. Special mention goes to my supervisor Tiffany Muller Myrdahl whose intellect, genuine interest in my work, and kindness made this research possible. Thank you to my second supervisor Meg Holden for her feedback and suggestions.

I am grateful for the funding I received from the Canada Graduate Master's Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Urban Studies Alumni Award during my studies.

Finally, I am so thankful to my family and friends who supported me throughout this thesis process. Most of all, I want to recognize my partner Will who provided me with support, encouragement, and much-needed levity throughout this process. Finally, I am grateful for my incredible daughter Skye who provides me with endless inspiration and incomparable joy.

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List of Acronyms

CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CAC	Community Amenity Contribution
DCL	Development Cost Levy
HILs	Housing Income Limits
ODP	Official Development Plan
SHORT	Social Housing and Rental Tenure
TMH	Temporary Modular Housing
VAHA	Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency
VAHEF	Vancouver Affordable Housing Endowment Fund

Glossary

Affordable Housing	Refers to the City of Vancouver's definitions of below-market and social housing (see rows below)
Below-market housing	Units affordable to households earning less than \$80,000 per year with rents targeted to 30% of tenant's before-tax household income
Community Amenity Contributions (CACs)	A development contribution program implemented by the City of Vancouver that requires property developers to pay in-kind or cash contributions for public benefits when they are granted development rights through rezoning
Community Land Trust Model	A model of land ownership where a non-profit organization holds land 'in trust' to fulfil the needs of the community
Co-operative housing	Provides housing to its members. Members are neither landlords nor tenants but own their homes collectively. Many different co-op housing models exist, but in Canada, non-profit co-ops are the most common model
Social Housing	100% of units in the building must be owned by a non-profit or government agency, with at least 30% of units affordable to incomes at or below HILs
The City	The City of Vancouver

Chapter 1.

Introduction

In 2014, against a backdrop of inadequate federal and provincial support for affordable housing development, the centre-left Vision Vancouver-led City of Vancouver Mayor and Council established the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency (VAHA). The VAHA was created to “expand and expedite the supply of new affordable homes in Vancouver” (City of Vancouver, 2014b). The Agency was a City-controlled but legally separate entity which did not build or operate housing; it instead focused on streamlining processes and creating partnerships to deliver affordable housing on City-owned land.

The VAHA operated in this role until the end of 2021, when the City decided to transition the function, staff and funding for the VAHA to the City’s Arts, Culture and Community Services department (City of Vancouver, 2020b). While it still exists as a legal structure, the VAHA has essentially been decommissioned and the work of enabling the development of City-owned land for affordable housing is being delivered from within the City. This thesis is a case study of the VAHA during the period 2014 to 2021, and it evaluates the Agency’s role in the City of Vancouver’s affordable housing agenda in that time-period.

1.1. Research Question

The following question guides my research:

What are the factors that shaped the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda?

To answer this question, I will provide an overview of the affordable housing projects and partnerships that the VAHA enabled. I define *enabled* in this research to mean housing units that were either completed or held an approved development permit by the end of 2021. By using the term affordable housing, I am replicating the language used by the VAHA when they set an initial goal of enabling 2,500 units by 2021. I recognize that the term affordable housing is highly contentious due to its often conflicting definitions and its cooptation as a term to describe market developments that

are rarely affordable to those most in housing need (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Stein, 2019; Union, 2020). In using this term, I am referring specifically to the City of Vancouver definitions of below-market rental or social housing because these are the housing types the VAHA focused on enabling¹. The City of Vancouver defines below-market rental as units affordable to households earning less than \$80,000 per year with rents targeted to 30% of tenant's before-tax household income (City of Vancouver, 2019) and it defines social housing as housing where "100% of units in the building must be owned by a non-profit or government agency, with at least 30% of units affordable to incomes at or below Housing Income Limits (HILs)" (City of Vancouver, 2021d). HILs are an income threshold for households set by the provincial housing Crown Corporation BC Housing.

In answering my research question, I first provide a numeric answer that specifies how many of the 2,500 affordable housing units were enabled by the end of 2021, but I also offer qualitative evaluation that describes the types of housing projects that were enabled. I also provide a brief overview of projects that were in the development 'pipeline' by the end of 2021, meaning projects which had been publicly announced by the VAHA or partners as being underway, because these projects also provide insight into the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda in the time period. I then identify the factors that had both positive and negative impacts on the VAHA's ability to enable the creation of new affordable housing units. I entered into this research with certain assumptions, informed by my positionality and literature review, about what some of these factors would be, such as changes in policy and leadership at different levels of government, the model and approach of the VAHA, and the City's role in regulation and processes. I used my data collection and analysis to test these assumptions and to identify further factors which I did not anticipate.

The ensuing case study situates analysis of policy documents, news coverage, campaign literature, and interview data within a conceptual framework that brings a unique set of urban governance literature into conversation. What emerges is not simply a set of numbers reflecting housing units enabled but a critical policy analysis that

¹ The City of Vancouver's own definition of affordable housing is broader than these two categories and does not refer to a specific form of tenure but instead uses the common definition established by Statistics Canada and CMHC that "housing is considered to be affordable when it comprises 30 per cent or less of a household's total income before taxes" (City of Vancouver, 2021d).

theorizes how local housing policies and programs developed under an emergent but incomplete turn away from neoliberal urban governance, with financial support from reengaged senior levels of government, are still unable to adequately respond to housing crises that are entrenched by the commodification of land and housing.

1.2. Positionality

Housing is both political and personal. I have lived in Vancouver for six years, and in that time, I have experienced the deepening housing affordability crisis. From a political perspective, I have witnessed debates between “supply-siders” and “demand-siders” (Cheung, 2018) grow increasingly vitriolic, with rezoning frequently at the centre of such debates. For example, the rezoning of 2086-2098 W 7th Ave and 2091 W 8th Ave (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) to allow for the development of 129 units of social housing, resulted in hundreds of speakers signing up to speak over multiple days of public hearings (Global News, 2022), a “mobbing” of BC Housing’s Chief Executive Officer by opponents to the proposed housing (BC Housing, 2022), and attempted legal action from a neighbourhood collation against the City that suggested the development infringed on the “rights of homeowners” that was ultimately circumvented by new provincial legislation (Bula, 2023). While this development may have been particularly divisive, it is emblematic of many of the debates at the core of Vancouver’s division over what should be done about the city’s housing crisis.

From a personal perspective, I believe it’s imperative that those who are researching housing policy interventions position themselves within the housing crisis and identify how their own positions and politics inform how they define the notion of housing crisis. I am a white, cis-het, able-bodied, middle-class settler who is currently, and who has always been, comfortably and securely housed. Politically, I identify as left leaning which informs my understanding of the housing crisis as an outcome of interlocking systems of oppression, those systems being capitalism, racism, colonialism, ableism and patriarchy. My politics inform my position that those marginalized by these systems are also those most impacted by the housing crisis, the significance of which is captured by Canada’s federal housing advocate Marie-Josée Houle² when she said

² Houle was appointed as the first ever federal housing advocate in February 2022. The Office of the Federal Housing Advocate is “an independent, nonpartisan watchdog, empowered to drive

“those who have the least, people who are in poor housing, the result for them is not just, 'I'll never be able to save a deposit for a house,' it's 'I will die on the street.'” (Meissner, 2022). My politics also informed my decision to research the VAHA, because I believe that the most effective solutions to this crisis are those beyond the market. I recognize that my politics and my positionality shape and frame the way I approach my research.

1.3. Research Significance

The right to secure, stable and affordable housing is recognized in multiple international treaties and in Canada’s National Housing Strategy (*Canada’s National Housing Strategy*, 2017). Yet, it is abundantly clear this right has not been realized for the 1.4 million Canadian households living in unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable housing (Statistics Canada, 2022). While this is a national problem, in Vancouver the housing situation is especially dire with the city being in the top ten most expensive housing markets in the world (CBRE Research, 2020), with the average cost of rent increasing 46% across all units between 2011 and 2021 (City of Vancouver, 2022d) and a ten-year increase of at least 32% in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness (City of Vancouver, 2022a). In 2017 Miloon Kothari, the former UN special rapporteur for housing, who was returning to the city ten years after an initial visit, stated “When you look at Vancouver ... it seems to me very quickly becoming sort of an apartheid city, where it is not only off-limits ... to low income people... but it's also increasingly out-of-limits for middle-class residents” (CBC News , 2017). The effects of this crisis are not distributed evenly, with groups that have experienced systemic marginalization, including Indigenous people, people with disabilities, single mothers, and youth (City of Vancouver, 2017b), most acutely impacted.

In recent years the City of Vancouver has taken on a progressively larger role in attempting to address deepening housing unaffordability through a range of policy and planning measures (Gurstein & Yan, 2019; Tindal et al., 2017), such as the VAHA. This research project is significant because it seeks to advance understanding about the role a municipality can play in advancing the right to housing through one specific

meaningful action to address housing need and homelessness in Canada” (*Canadian Human Rights Commission*, n.d.)

intervention as part of broader housing affordability agenda, and to identify some of the barriers faced in attempting to do so. Research that focuses on housing interventions in Vancouver is especially critical due to just how extreme the housing crisis has become. Specifically, this research aims to provide a case study and analysis that can contribute towards improving housing outcomes for people who are currently priced out of the housing system in Vancouver. This thesis provides a thorough examination of the VAHA, to deepen understanding about what the Agency was, how it fit within Vancouver's broader housing affordability agenda, and what its failures and achievements were. An underlying ambition of this effort is to identify areas worthy of further study and possible solutions to the barriers faced by the VAHA.

I hope that this research can be a valuable resource to policy makers, municipal staff, the community housing sector and academics seeking to learn more about the VAHA or agency approaches to housing, specifically municipalities seeking to create new municipal housing authorities such as the City of Burnaby (Cheung, 2023) or restart existing ones in the case of the City of Surrey (City of Surrey, 2023). Information about the VAHA is dispersed throughout the City of Vancouver's and the soon-to-be-archived³ VAHA website, and this thesis aims centralize that information and provide a broader context for it by situating the VAHA within the City's housing affordability agenda.

Beyond Vancouver, urban professionals or academics working in other cities facing similar housing crises may also benefit from this case study and use it to inform research, support policy development, or to reconsider dominant theoretical approaches for understanding municipal responses to the housing crisis and instead consider a more nuanced theoretical framework.

³ Personal communication, Interviewee COV_VAHA

Chapter 2.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my research is composed of three bodies of literature that each serve a distinct purpose in framing and answering my research question. The first body of literature I introduce is housing governance and policy in Canada. I discuss this body of literature to establish the intergovernmental context in which the City of Vancouver's housing agenda, including the VAHA, was developed, and how the intergovernmental role shapes the City of Vancouver and the VAHA's ability to enable housing. I explain the roles different levels of government have played in creating housing and how those roles have changed over time, with the VAHA emerging within a context of reduced senior government support for affordable housing. I highlight the dominance of the market as a provider of housing in Canada and emphasize that market dominance is not an outcome of state withdrawal but instead has been actively shaped by the state through the increasing enactment of neoliberal policies. This helps to establish the significance of the VAHA as a case study because the Agency does not fit within this broad neoliberal shift to housing provision via the market. I then discuss how more recent changes in leading political power at the provincial and federal level have seen a return of senior government funding programs for affordable housing, which were essential to the VAHA's ability to enable housing. I suggest that these new programs destabilize the notion of a linear neoliberalization process in Canada's housing system, and how case studies such as this one can contribute towards filling a gap in the Canadian housing policy literature.

The second body of literature I discuss is urban governance, in which I discuss the City of Vancouver's housing agenda and the VAHA in relation to different governance concepts. First, I describe the urban entrepreneurialism mode of governance, which I suggest has broadly been the mode of urban governance implemented in Vancouver since the shift to neoliberalism outlined in the previous body of literature. In doing so, I reference the concept of "actually-existing neoliberalism" to emphasize that this categorization is not all-encompassing and does not intend to prescribe a pure, complete, and uncontested form of neoliberalism. I then introduce the concept of urban experimentation and suggest that the VAHA can be understood as an

urban experiment. I then go on to suggest that the politics of this urban experiment fits within the concept of entrepreneurial municipalism, a mode of governance which greatly contrasts with urban entrepreneurialism in that the municipality attempts to harness its own assets to achieve just outcomes rather than allowing the private sector to capitalize on its assets. These specific urban governance concepts were critically important in developing my data analysis approach, discussed further in Chapter 3.

Finally, the third body of literature is the commodification of land and housing. I include this body of literature to establish that housing crises are fundamentally rooted in land and the approach to housing from across the political spectrum, as a commodity rather than a right. I use this framing to inform my understanding of the City of Vancouver's housing agenda, which features a variety of approaches to addressing housing need, most of which rely on incenting the market but some of which, like the VAHA, seek to utilize or expand the use of publicly owned land. Through this analysis, I intend to emphasize the necessity of the latter type of policy approaches in actually addressing Vancouver's housing crises, whilst recognizing that the dominance of commodified approaches are deeply embedded within the intergovernmental and governance contexts described in the previous bodies of literature.

2.1. Housing governance and policy in Canada

Addressing my research question requires situating the VAHA within the broader context of what David Hulchanski calls Canada's "housing system" (2006). According to Hulchanski, countries do not just have individual housing policies, they have housing systems that determine how much housing is built, how housing is allocated and the maintenance of the existing stock of housing.

A defining feature of Canada's housing system is its reliance on the market mechanism to house its residents with 96% of the housing stock being provided by the private market and just 4% being non-market social housing (Chisholm & Hulchanski, 2019). The dominance of the private market is not the outcome of a lack of state intervention, but instead has been actively shaped by government housing policy (Bacher, 1993; Hulchanski, 2006).

The federal government and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the federal crown corporation responsible for housing, have always predominantly focused on policies that support private homeownership (Carroll, 1989; Hulchanski, 2006). However, in the post-war decades they also played a significant role in building and funding social housing (Bacher, 1993; Suttor, 2016; Wolfe, 1998). Federal efforts to build social housing for low-income households peaked from the late 1960s into the 1970s, with this peak attributed to amendments to the federal National Housing Act in 1964 and the Keynesian political ideology of the 1970s (Clifford, 2014; Suttor, 2016). However, in the 1980s and 1990s Canadian housing policy underwent a process of neoliberalization (Clifford, 2014; Walks & Clifford, 2015) featuring both “roll-back” measures that dismantled social welfare programs and “roll-out” ones that consolidated neoliberal ideology through new policies, reforms and regulations (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The federal government “rolled-back” by retreating entirely from funding non-market housing and devolving all social-housing responsibility to the Provinces and Territories in the 1990s (Suttor, 2015; Wolfe, 1998). Simultaneously, neoliberal policies were “rolled-out” through the introduction of new federal mortgage securitization programs and policies to expand homeownership (Clifford, 2014; Walks and Clifford, 2015). Combined, these changes have been tied to surging levels of homelessness in urban centres and increased stress in the private rental market (Suttor, 2016) alongside a growing wealth gap between renters and owners (Hulchanski, 2006); and rapidly increasing house prices from the 2000s onwards (Walks, 2014).

Greg Suttor notes that following the federal retreat, the provincial government of British Columbia made efforts to sustain social housing funding in the 1990s (2016). However, the election of the centre-right B.C. Liberals resulted in essentially no new social housing in their first term between 2001 and 2005, and modest increases throughout their subsequent terms in power (spanning 2005 until 2017) that failed to keep pace with housing need (Cohen & Klein, 2011).

As Penny Gurstein and Andy Yan note, local housing policies are the “consequences and intersections of often more powerful provincial and federal actions and inactions” (2019, p. 215). Amidst the federal and provincial policy shifts and facing constantly increasing levels of housing unaffordability and homelessness, the municipal role in addressing housing need has greatly expanded in recent decades. In a report on federal and provincial downloading in Canada, Duffy et al suggest that: “Cities used to

be hosts for federal and provincial social housing investments. Now, cities have to bring partners together, change their bylaws, develop proposals, apply for grants, commit land and funding, construct social housing and undertake to manage long term housing programs.” (2014, p. 23). Municipalities have inherited these increased responsibilities without also inheriting funding or additional powers to generate other forms of revenue from the federal or provincial governments, creating a fiscal imbalance for local governments throughout Canada (Tindal et al., 2017).

This intergovernmental context and the recent history of Canadian housing policy outlined above establish the broad conditions in which the City of Vancouver developed the VAHA in an attempt to address the need for affordable housing. However, the intergovernmental role in Canada’s housing system has continued to shift and evolve since the VAHA was established. At the federal level, a new National Housing Strategy (2017) offering new funding and financing streams was published, and at the provincial level, a change in government from the B.C. Liberals to the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2017 has brought with it increased affordable housing commitments, including the Homes for B.C 30-point plan for housing affordability in British Columbia which committed \$6.6 billion over 10 years for homes and housing supports across the Province (Government of BC, 2018). While there are active research programs (*Community Housing Canada, 2023; Home | Housing Research Collaborative, n.d.*) and some exceptional texts that have looked at how municipalities across Canada are partnering with Provinces and the new National Housing Strategy to address housing affordability (Thomas, 2020), there remains a gap in the Canadian housing policy literature regarding the impacts of the renewed federal activity on municipalities. My research can contribute towards filling this gap by providing a contemporary case study that situates the City of Vancouver’s housing affordability agenda within the legacy of past federal and provincial policies and analyzes the impact of present-day policies on the City and the VAHA’s housing objectives.

2.2. Urban governance

The intergovernmental role in Canadian housing policy and governance outlined above provides essential context for my research, but a specific focus on the different modes of urban governance enacted by the City of Vancouver is necessary to analyze the VAHA and the City’s broader housing agenda.

Urban governance emerged as a major theme in urban studies in the late 1980s (McCann, 2017), following the publication of David Harvey's seminal paper that outlined the shift from "managerialism to entrepreneurialism" (1989) in cities across the globe. This shift was characterized by municipalities moving away from the traditional role of service provision towards a more entrepreneurial role focused on local development and economic growth. The backdrop to this transformation were international trends such as "[d]eindustrialisation, widespread and seemingly 'structural' unemployment, fiscal austerity at both the national and local levels, ... a rising tide of neoconservatism and much stronger appeal... to market rationality and privatisation" (Harvey, 1989, p. 5). While Harvey does not use the term neoliberalism to categorize this new form of urban governance, the strategies he describes to typify this transition "would today be classified as early manifestations of neoliberalism's now-customary forms" (Peck, 2014, p. 397). These strategies include a focus on developing public-private partnerships, the emergence of place-marketing, the transference of risk from the private to the public sector, speculative investment, and increased focus on competition with other cities for resources and investment.

Harvey's description of urban entrepreneurialism is relevant to this study because the neoliberalization of housing policy at the senior government level outlined in the previous section resulted in a shift in local governance in Vancouver that saw many of the strategies of entrepreneurial governance deployed in Vancouver's housing agenda. Specifically, Vancouver's hosting of Expo 86 is widely cited as significant turning point in Vancouver's urban trajectory, towards "a post-industrial real estate-based model of urban growth" (Regan & Hall, 2018, p. 58). Preceding such growth was the displacement of thousands of low-income hotel residents in the Downtown Eastside to make space for tourists (Blomley, 1998), followed by the sale of the publicly owned Expo lands to the billionaire Li Ka-Shing. Ka-Shing's development firm Concord Pacific's transformation of the former industrial lands into residential condo towers, has been identified as the roots of the Vancouverism model, a model typified by a specific glass-condo tower urban design ethos, planning ideals such as livability, and sustainability, and the exchange of density for social amenities (Peck et al., 2014). The urban governance ethos of Vancouverism can be situated within Harvey's depiction of entrepreneurial governance due to the municipality's increasing reliance on such density agreements to provide affordable housing (Hyde, 2021; Punter, 2003). Vanwynsberghe

et al suggest that if Expo 86 can be understood as the beginning of Vancouver's urban transformation, then the city's hosting of the 2010 Winter Olympics could be viewed as its completion (2013). Vanwynsberghe et al frame the Olympic Planning Process as a case study in "neoliberal social inclusion" (2013), and Pentifallo points to the enactment of entrepreneurial governance as a key factor in why Vancouver failed on its promise to deliver a social housing legacy through the Olympics (Pentifallo, 2015). Pentifallo details how a failing public-private partnership with Millennium Development Group forced the City to reduce its commitments to building social housing units due to fiscal concerns, noting the distinctly neoliberal policy framework under which such decisions were made. However, Edelson provided a more forgiving review of the social outcomes of the Olympics, citing the "major housing commitments... between a center-right provincial government and a center-left City Council to help ensure municipal support in the plebiscite for the Olympics" including the "redevelopment of the Woodward's Site with its 200 units of social housing, and a commitment for 250 units of social housing at the Olympic Village following the Games" (Edelson, 2011, p. 818).

Edelson's assessment emphasizes the difficulty in categorizing the City of Vancouver's urban governance approach as explicitly fitting within the literature of neoliberal urbanism. While Vancouver's housing agenda has been dominated by approaches which centre the role of private real estate development, the City has also frequently used its powers to help deliver housing that sits outside of the market. For example, frequently cited as the City's greatest successes are the mixed-income and mixed-tenure False Creek South development (Punter, 2003), the public-private Woodward's development in which the City played a substantial role in ensuring a proportion of social housing units (G. P. Robinson, 2010), and the eventual delivery of 252 units of affordable housing at the Olympic Village as referenced by Edelson above.

In sum, the urban entrepreneurialism literature, while useful in understanding the City's housing agenda against the backdrop of federal and provincial neoliberalization, provides a limited lens through which to analyze the City of Vancouver's governance role in implementing affordable housing through the VAHA. The VAHA website states that "our mission is to create and implement innovative solutions for below-market housing." While Harvey made the case that innovation in urban entrepreneurialism is confined "to a very narrow path built around a favourable package for capitalist development" (1989, p. 11), the innovative solutions offered by the VAHA diverge from this narrow path.

Instead, they are better captured by an emerging body of literature in urban governance, that of urban experimentation.

Urban experimentation entails a distinct mode of governance that can be implemented by public, private or third sector actors attempting to instigate system change through the introduction of new solutions, services or policy innovations (Evans et al., 2018; Karvonen et al., 2014; Mukhtar-Landgren et al., 2019). While the urban experimentation literature is relatively recent, Evans situates the concept within a longstanding affinity “between experimentation and urbanism” whereby “the city has served as both ‘a site for’ and ‘an object’ of experimentation” (2016, p. 432). A key distinction in the urban experimentation literature is that experiment does not entail a formal scientific experiment, but instead more broadly signifies “purposive interventions in which there is a more or less explicit attempt to innovate, learn or gain experience” (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2013, p. 10). The majority of the urban experimentation literature has focused on sustainability or climate change initiatives, such as urban or living laboratories, but urban experimentation can refer to innovation activities in a diversity of areas including transportation, local economic development, social cohesion, policy evolution and infrastructure provision (Caprotti & Cowley, 2017; Evans et al., 2018). While a range of local actors can be involved in urban experimentation, municipalities are significant “enablers” of the concept, with enabling constituting both a role and a form of governance (Mukhtar-Landgren et al., 2019). Through this lens, we can envision the VAHA as form of urban experimentation enabled by the City of Vancouver.

Crucially, the urban experimentation literature contains a critical perspective. Diverging from the depoliticized celebration of innovation espoused by the creative city thesis (Florida, 2005; Florida et al., 2017) that reinforces the strategies of urban entrepreneurialism and its uneven outcomes (Peck, 2010), the urban experimentation literature emphasizes the importance of evaluating the politics of innovative or experimental activities. While pointing to the potential of urban experiments and innovations to create transformative change towards more sustainable or just outcomes, Karvonen et al caution that urban experiments “are not inherently positive activities ... but carry politics just like any other urban development strategy” (2014, p. 105) and can often be deeply embedded within standard “neoliberal urban development strategies” (2014, p. 114). This perspective provides a framework for analyzing the politics of both

the VAHA and the City, to determine whether the role the VAHA played in the City's affordable housing agenda was significantly shaped by its embeddedness within broader structures of entrepreneurial governance.

Another emergent form of urban governance that draws from the urban entrepreneurialism and urban experimentation literature provides a useful concept for analyzing the City's development of the VAHA, that of entrepreneurial municipalism. Entrepreneurial municipalism "involves urban authorities using their political, legal and financial powers to harness endogenous assets such as land and labour to build a more socially just and self-sustaining pathway to local economic development" (Thompson et al., 2020, p. 1190). The City of Vancouver's decision to harness City-owned land for non-market and below-market housing through the VAHA can clearly be situated within this description. However, Thompson et al emphasize that entrepreneurial municipalism does not yet represent a complete model of urban economic development, but instead "a possible future direction currently inchoate and entangled in an assemblage of municipal strategies exhibiting divergent tendencies" (2020, p. 1190). This description further captures how the VAHA is entangled among other housing policy approaches pursued by the City, chiefly the exchange for density for amenities outlined earlier which some scholars suggest further entrench the affordability problems that the VAHA seeks to address (Hyde, 2021; Stein, 2019).

The urban governance literature I have outlined provides useful concepts that help to frame and inform my analysis of the City of Vancouver's housing agenda which can be understood as involving the simultaneous pursual of seemingly contradictory modes of governance.

2.3. The commodification of land and housing as the root cause of housing crises

This research engages with what Ananya Roy calls the urban land question, specifically "who owns land and on what terms, who profits from land and on what terms, and how the ownership, use, and financialization of land is governed and regulated by the state" (Roy, 2017, p. A2). This research on the VAHA's success in developing social and below-market housing for low to moderate income residents on City-owned land is grounded in an understanding that it is the commodification of housing and land that is

ultimately at the root of Vancouver's housing crisis. Spatial development in Vancouver has followed the pattern of "highest and best use" where it is the "market potential" of a piece of land that defines this use (Blomley, 2004, p. 84). Canada's housing system enforces this pattern through its bias towards private ownership (Bacher, 1993; Hulchanski, 2006), making it increasingly difficult for those who cannot afford market prices to find adequate housing. As such, the housing crisis is not the result of an aberration in the system; instead, it is the outcome of the system working as intended.

My understanding of the connection between the commodification of land and housing and Vancouver's housing crisis has been greatly informed by literature that expands upon the Marxist concepts of use value and exchange value (Harvey, 2014; Madden & Marcuse, 2016). According to this literature, housing under capitalism results in an increasing conflict between housing's use value (its value as a place to live) and its exchange value (its monetary value) because those who need to live in housing may not be able to afford it, and those who buy housing may not be doing so to live in it. This tension has always existed when housing has been commodified, but Madden and Marcuse suggest that due to the increasing dominance of real estate as a key driver of local, national and international economic growth, we are now living in an era of "hyper-commodification" (2016, p. 26) where these values are increasingly in conflict with one another. What we are witnessing is a hypercommodified conflict between the use value and exchange value of housing in Vancouver, where local incomes are increasingly disconnected from the cost of housing, resulting in a significant housing affordability crisis where low and middle income residents struggle to find housing that meets their needs.

The negative impacts of the commodification of land and housing are not distributed evenly among populations; Madden and Marcuse emphasize that "residential oppression" (2016, p. 88), meaning the inability to find adequate or affordable housing, aligns with other forms of oppression. In Vancouver, this trend is visible, with seniors, youth, Indigenous residents and lone-parent households all identified as groups facing increased housing vulnerability (City of Vancouver, 2017b). That the City presented the VAHA as an opportunity to improve housing outcomes for these groups further emphasizes the significance of producing this case study to evaluate to what extent this was claim was realized.

A central argument made by critics of the commodification of land and housing is that governments cannot resolve housing crises by simply increasing the supply of housing delivered through policy tools such as upzoning and inclusionary zoning. This research engages with this argument by offering a critical political economic analysis of a set of policy tools aimed at increasing the supply of public and non-profit housing as the most effective long term solution available to address urban housing crises (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Stein, 2019). This case study of the VAHA bridges the gap between theoretical critiques about the commodification of housing and actual policy implementation with the hope of contributing towards ongoing policy conversations in Vancouver about what a more equitable system of housing might look like.

2.4. Conceptual framework conclusion

Taken together, these bodies of literature provide a framework for my analysis of the VAHA. The housing governance and policy in Canada literature, especially the impacts of the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s, is essential to understand the context for the City of Vancouver's increased direct engagement in housing policy and the creation of the VAHA. At the same, the housing governance and policy literature has yet to adequately address or theorize about how renewed interest at the federal and B.C. provincial level in housing solutions that go beyond subsidizing home-ownership has changed or challenged the structure of Canada's housing system. While I hesitate to suggest we have advanced beyond a neoliberal era of housing policy in Canada, there is a need for contemporary theorization about Canada's current housing system that takes account of how recent policy changes interact with the roll-back and roll-out neoliberal measures that are the dominant focus of much of the existing literature.

This reconsideration needs to grapple with existing and emerging theories about urban governance, including urban entrepreneurialism, urban experimentation and municipal entrepreneurialism. While urban entrepreneurialism has been the dominant framework for critical political economic analysis in urban studies and remains highly relevant due to the ongoing execution of policies which fit within this style of governance, there are ways in which this style of governance is being uprooted, such as the urban experiment. As noted, urban experiments in themselves are "are not inherently positive

activities ... but carry politics just like any other urban development strategy” (Karnoven et al, 2014, p. 105). Yet, there are cases where an urban experiment can carry an alternative style of politics from the neoliberal urban entrepreneurialism. If the VAHA can be understood as an urban experiment, its politics can be read through the emerging theorization of municipal entrepreneurialism, which wrests the concept of entrepreneurialism from the private sector and instead imagines the local state as using its powers and assets in a way that generates socially just local economic development. These theories of governance and associated concepts will support my analysis of the role played by the VAHA, as well as the City of Vancouver’s broader housing affordability agenda.

Ultimately, this research is guided by a political economic analysis that emphasizes the significance of utilizing publicly owned land for housing in addressing Vancouver’s housing crisis by prioritizing the use-value of housing over its exchange value and considering to what extent this prioritization was realized through the City of Vancouver’s housing agenda and the VAHA.

Chapter 3. Background

3.1. Context for the creation of the VAHA

It is difficult to decide where precisely to begin when writing a background to the VAHA. The Agency was first formally suggested in a final report from a Mayor's Task Force on Housing Affordability in 2012 that recommended the development of "an operational and organizational model for a new Housing Authority" (City of Vancouver, 2012b). The roots of the Agency, however, can be traced further back in history and situated more broadly within the national shifts in housing policy discussed in my conceptual framework. The shrinking levels of support that were available for social housing from other levels of government, outlined in Chapter 2, increased the pressure on local governments to deliver on a wide range of policy issues, including implementing solutions to the growing housing and homelessness crisis. In Vancouver, those solutions were largely shaped by the dominant municipal political party of the late 2000s and 2010s, Vision Vancouver. Established in 2005, Vision Vancouver could broadly be categorized as a progressive centre-left party committed to social and environmental issues. Unlike the traditional left-wing municipal party in Vancouver, the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE), Vision Vancouver placed a much greater emphasis on the role that entrepreneurship, innovation and the private sector should play in achieving progressive outcomes (Soron, 2012, p. 40).

Led by Mayor Gregor Robertson, Vision Vancouver first achieved a majority on Council in the 2008 election. Their platform for the 2008 election included commitments to end street homelessness and providing leadership to ensure the development of new affordable housing (Vision Vancouver, 2008). Their platform in 2011 built upon these housing policies, and included a commitment to "leverage city-owned properties with private and non-profit partners to use city assets to increase the stock of affordable housing" (Vision Vancouver, 2011). After securing a second majority in the 2011 election, a Mayor's Taskforce on Housing Affordability was established. The final report of the Taskforce included a number of recommendations and actions which instigated the creation of the VAHA, most specifically the recommendation to create "a new City-owned entity to deliver affordable rental and social housing by using City lands" and an action to develop "an operational and organizational model for a new Housing Authority"

(City of Vancouver, 2012b). Council accepted the final report in October 2012 and voted in a majority to pursue the action to develop a Housing Authority, with only the three non-Vision Vancouver Councillors voting in opposition to this action. Council then instructed City staff to implement the recommendations of the Taskforce.

Under the direction of the City's inaugural Chief Housing Officer, Mukhtar Latif, staff carried out strategic analysis to identify the most appropriate corporate structure for the Housing Authority. This process involved a comparative analysis looking at multiple other municipal housing authorities and other housing bodies, the findings of which were summarized in a report from Latif to City Council published in March 2014 (City of Vancouver, 2014a). The housing authorities studied included Whistler Housing Authority, UBC Properties Trust, SFU Community Trust, Surrey Development Corp, Toronto Community Housing Corp, and various US and UK housing authorities (City of Vancouver, 2014a). Based on the analysis work, the report put forward a recommendation that the VAHA should be set up as a "separate corporate entity and act as an 'Agent' for the City with clear delegated authorities", with the role of Agent being "a clear legal concept with significant advantages over creating a separate corporation or a nonprofit to undertake this role" (City of Vancouver, 2014a). The proposed advantages of this structure were that it would allow the City to retain ownership of its assets which would be designated to the Agency, it would minimize transaction costs, and it would enable the Agency access to third-party funding (City of Vancouver, 2014b). The report also included a recommendation from senior staff that the Agency should not manage or operate housing to instead allow for a sole focus on developing partnerships to create new housing supply on City-owned land. This report also included language about utilizing land offered by partners, such as private developers or religious groups, and piloting strategies for affordable home-ownership⁴. Housing units were to be targeted for households earning incomes between the British Columbia (BC) shelter rate of \$375 per month to a maximum annual income of \$86,500.

This report was presented by the Chief Housing Officer at an in-camera Council meeting on June 10, 2014. At this meeting Council authorized "the creation of a separate housing authority, Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency ("the Agency"), with the

⁴ These strategies were not pursued, with the only non-City owned land developed in partnership with the VAHA being two Temporary Modular Housing sites that were offered by private developers on a temporary basis, and with no pursual of affordable ownership pilots.

primary mandate of creating new affordable housing in Vancouver across the housing continuum through innovative partnerships with private developers, charitable and/or non-profit organizations, and senior levels of government.” Council also approved the VAHA’s mandate to enable 2,500 affordable housing units by 2021 (City of Vancouver, 2014e). The 2,500 units target was designed to contribute towards the overall housing targets specified by the City in their Vancouver’s Long-Term Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012 – 2021, which aimed to enable 2,900 new supportive housing units, 5,000 additional social housing units, 11,000 new market rental units and 20,000 market ownership units by 2021 (City of Vancouver, 2011). For context, at the time of the VAHA developing these targets the most recent housing needs data available for Vancouver included that there were 3,879 households on social housing waitlists in 2013 and 48,645 households in core housing need in 2011 (Metro Vancouver, 2016).

Following this in-camera meeting, Council asked to receive a report on the VAHA at a regular Council meeting on July 8, 2014. At this meeting, various Councillors asked City staff about the VAHA proposal, with most of the questions focused on what would be different about the City’s approach to affordable housing with this Agency in place. In response, Latif and then City Manager Penny Ballem highlighted that this Agency would allow for dedicated focus to expedite the delivery of affordable housing projects.

Council then referred the report on the VAHA to the next day’s Standing Committee on City Finance and Services meeting to hear from members of the public, with four people speaking in support of the Agency and seven speaking in opposition. Five of the seven speakers who spoke in opposition were members of COPE, who argued that the proposed Agency did not go far enough and instead spoke in favour of their own proposed housing authority, which would focus on directly building housing rather than the partnership model proposed for VAHA (Cole, 2014; McCormick et al., 2014). One of the speakers who spoke in favour of the Agency was Nathan Edelson, former planner with the City of Vancouver and a member of the Mayor’s Taskforce on Housing Affordability, who noted that VAHA would “make it as efficient as possible” to build affordable housing (City of Vancouver, 2014d). It is of note that despite there being an opportunity for members of the public to speak at this committee, the decision to create the Authority had already been approved at the previous day’s in-camera meeting. When Councillor Reimer questioned why the decision had been made in-camera, City Manager Ballem cited the legal and financial implications, but also noted

that “the decision to create the authority was made in public and was actually...visited by Council on two different occasions. One, when the City tabled the Affordable Housing Taskforce Report and the second time more specifically when the action plan was brought to Council for Council approval and there was a specific action that related to creating an Agency” (City of Vancouver, 2014d). At the conclusion of this meeting, Council approved a motion to release the report and decision from the previous in-camera meeting that authorized the creation of the VAHA (City of Vancouver, 2014d). Work then began to establish the Housing Agency as laid out in the presentations and reports to Council.

Approximately one year later, on June 10, 2015, Latif updated Council on the Agency’s progress. In this time, VAHA had been legally incorporated and established its Board of Directors. The VAHA Board consisted of four external appointees and three appointees from the City of Vancouver. The external appointees had a range of experience related to housing development, and the three City appointees were the City Manager, Chief Financial Officer and General Manager Real Estate and Facilities. The VAHA had also established its staff team including staff with experience in planning, real estate, law, finance and procurement. At the time of Latif’s presentation to Council, the VAHA staff team had analyzed around 20 City sites, selected 12 for development and issued a request for qualifications (RFQ) for development partners (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2015). The VAHA’s progress had been supported by funding allocated through the City’s Capital Plan for 2015-2018, which had designated \$62 million to fund developments enabled through the VAHA (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2015). At this meeting, Council asked Latif about the expected timeline for the first sites identified and stated that he would expect these to be developed out within the next 24 to 34 months (City of Vancouver, 2015).

The next public update about the VAHA was on May 31, 2016, where Latif again provided Council with an annual update on progress. By this point, three sites were at the permitting stage, with five sites at the request for proposal stage. The VAHA had also issued an RFQ for housing operators, had begun discussions with senior levels of government about funding opportunities, and begun exploring options for modular housing (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2016b).

In early 2017, new City Manager Sadhu Johnston terminated Latif from his position as Chief Housing Officer at the City of Vancouver and CEO of the VAHA amidst a “re-tooling” (Mike Howell, 2017) of the City’s housing strategy. One journalist claimed that the firing was an example of the City having to ‘clean up’ after former City Manager Penny Ballem, and that “the problem with Latif, according to industry sources, was that this mild-mannered and likeable fellow imported by Ballem from England couldn’t do the job. He was frustratingly slow at making decisions and not particularly skilled at cutting deals in the development community and the not-for-profit sector” (Garr, 2017). However, other media articles stated that it was “unclear” why Latif had been fired (City News, 2017), with the City’s official statement simply stating that “the City of Vancouver has made a change to how it implements affordable housing in Vancouver to meet its vision for a resilient, diverse and connected city where everyone has a place to call home. As part of that transition, Mukhtar Latif, who has served as the Chief Housing Officer (CHO) and CEO of VAHA, is no longer with the City of Vancouver, nor CEO of VAHA.” (P. Baker, 2017). The same statement identified that Luke Harrison, a planner with the VAHA would serve as interim CEO of the VAHA.

Later in 2017, the City launched its new Housing Vancouver strategy (City of Vancouver, 2017b) and correspondingly the VAHA’s focus was more clearly defined under Harrison’s leadership with the publication of a revised business model which did not include the language from the initial housing authority report that spoke about partner land and affordable ownership pilots (City of Vancouver, 2014b) but did retain the target of 2,500 homes by 2021. This model moved the VAHA away from a broader project management role towards a more concentrated focus on two objectives: “1) The brokering of resources, i.e. City land suitable for affordable housing. 2) The delivery of Temporary Modular Housing” (City of Vancouver, 2017c). These 2017 changes were accompanied with a revision to the governance structure of the VAHA which dissolved the VAHA Board of Directors and in its place installed an Oversight Committee comprised entirely of City of Vancouver staff and a sole Director for legal purposes who was also a City staff member. Despite these revisions, the VAHA remained a separate legal entity from the City with the City as the sole shareholder to retain the structural advantages of this model initially identified in the report issued when establishing the VAHA (City of Vancouver, 2014a).

In February 2017 the first VAHA site, a temporary modular housing pilot project at 220 Terminal Avenue opened and following the success of this project the provincial government announced funding for 600 further units of temporary modular housing in Vancouver in September 2017 as part of a program to develop 2000 units Province-wide (BC Gov News, 2017). The next significant milestone for the VAHA came in May 2018 when they announced a seven-site partnership with the Community Land Trust, cited as the “largest one-time municipal land investment into the Community Housing Sector in Canada” (Community fLand Trust, 2018).

In October 2018, the Vancouver municipal election resulted in a significant change in leadership for the City with the Vision Vancouver party failing to retain any seats on Council. Voters elected an independent Mayor, Kennedy Stewart, and Councillors from four different municipal parties with no majority on Council. The new Mayor and Council continued to implement the new Housing Vancouver strategy and to support the VAHA in its goal of enabling 2,500 units of affordable housing in Vancouver by 2021. However, the new Council opted to approve a plan to transition the function and staff of the Agency back within the City, viewing the 2021 goal as representing a completion of the VAHA’s mandate. By 2022, the VAHA team and the mandate of non-profit housing development on city-owned land had been transitioned to the newly formed Non-Market Housing Development and Operations department. By the end of 2021, the VAHA has completed or approved 2,041 units and initiated the development of a further 871 units.

Table 1 Timeline and key events for this study

October 2012	Mayor’s Task Force on Housing Affordability recommends the creation of a new City-owned entity to deliver affordable rental and social housing by using City lands
September 2013	City of Vancouver appoints Mukhtar Latif, Chief Housing Officer
June 2014	Creation of the VAHA is authorized at an in-camera Council meeting, Latif appointed CEO of VAHA
July 2014	VAHA discussed at a public meeting, motion to release the decision and report from the previous in-camera meeting
March 2015	VAHA issues RFQ for partners to develop affordable housing on City-owned land. 17 partner organizations were selected for future work.
March 2015	VAHA CEO provides update to Council on VAHA’s progress, recommends seven City-owned sites for development Vancouver
November 2015	VAHA issues RFP for first four development sites: 2221 Main, 3510 Fraser Street, 115 Marine, and 177 Pender

February 2016	VAHA issues RFQ for modular housing builders
June 2016	VAHA issues RFP for temporary modular housing pilot at 220 Terminal Avenue (previously known as 1500 Main Street)
January 2017	Mukhtar Latif terminated from role as Chief Housing Officer at the City of Vancouver and CEO of the VAHA, Luke Harrison appointed as Interim CEO
February 2017	Temporary Modular Housing pilot at 220 Terminal is completed
July 2017	The BC NDP forms a minority provincial government, ending the time in power of the BC Liberals who had led the Province since 2001
July 2017	VAHA issues RFPs for partners to develop 1,000+ units of affordable rental housing across eight City-owned sites worth \$72.5 million
September 2017	The Government of British Columbia announces \$66 million in funding to build 600 units of temporary modular housing in Vancouver and a total of \$291 million to build 2000 units province-wide.
November 2017	City adopts new Housing Vancouver Strategy
November 2017	Federal government launches National Housing Strategy
November 2017	Revised business and governance model announced for the VAHA
May 2018	Community Land Trust announced as successful partner to develop seven sites of City-owned land
September 2018	Council approves the creation of the Vancouver Affordable Housing Endowment Fund (VAHEF)
October 2018	City of Vancouver election, new Mayor and Council elected with no majority party
November 2018	Luke Harrison departs as VAHA CEO, Ryan Bigelow appointed as interim, and later as permanent, CEO of the VAHA
November 2020	City of Vancouver Budget for 2021 published with proposed plan to transition the function and staff of the VAHA to the City's Arts, Culture and Community Services department
December 2021	Target date for delivery of 2,500 units of affordable housing by the VAHA

3.1.1. Specific role of the VAHA

The VAHA did not build housing, and instead fulfilled a range of roles to enable new affordable housing on City-owned land. These roles varied throughout the Agency's lifespan and not every project followed the exact same process. However, the consistent role that the VAHA played was to build partnerships, typically through requests for qualifications (RFQs) and requests for proposals (RFPs), to develop the land which it had been assigned by Council. Beyond this role, the VAHA would also typically fulfil the predevelopment and due diligence work required to get the land entitlements and ensure a site was ready for development. The Agency would also apply for the rezoning of sites, work with selected partners throughout a project's development, and prepare the lease

terms for partners. This description of the VAHA's specific role was as much detail about the day-to-day operations of the Agency that I was able ascertain through my research.

Chapter 4.

Methodology and Research Design

This research can be understood as a case study due to it being “small-scale research with meaning” (Tight, 2017, p. 47). I consider this research to fit this definition of a case study as by looking specifically at one local “small-scale” municipal housing intervention, I am attempting to provide meaningful insights into Vancouver’s affordable housing policy agenda. The two methods I use to produce this case study are document analysis and semi-structured interviews. My rationale for combining these methods are that “the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each other, while overcoming their unique deficiencies” (2009, p. 301). This observation reflects my rationale for selecting this methodological approach because while I believe that the methods I used are well suited to answer my research question, they both have their own weaknesses and limitations. Combining these methods helps to mitigate those weaknesses and limitations, which I discuss further in the sections below.

4.1. Document Analysis

I chose to use document analysis as a method for this research because there is such a large amount of information about the VAHA recorded in documents that I do not believe my questions could be answered adequately without their inclusion.

The documents I collected and analyzed included both written and video material. The written materials consisted of reports, press releases, newspaper articles, minutes, strategies, agendas, budgets, municipal party platforms and blog entries. The video material was recorded council meetings from the City of Vancouver where the VAHA was an agenda item, which I listened to and transcribed, using the transcripts for analysis. I collected data relating to the VAHA from the City of Vancouver website by using the search function on the City’s website homepage, on the City’s online repository of Agenda and Minutes, and on the online archive of City of Vancouver website content. I collected further data from the VAHA website and extracted top line information about all of the VAHA projects from this website’s Projects map. I then used the addresses

from the project map to find further information about specific projects, using both the City of Vancouver webpage search function and Google. I also searched for media coverage about the VAHA and projects by using the Canadian Newsstream database and the Google news tab filter.

The table below highlights some of the most relevant policy documents from the City of Vancouver and other levels of government in my document analysis.

Table 2 Selection of relevant policy documents analyzed

Title	Author	Type of document	Date
Mayor's Taskforce on Housing Affordability (Bold Ideas Towards an Affordable City)	City of Vancouver	Report	October 2012
Creation of Housing Authority	City of Vancouver	Report	June 2014
Regular Council Meeting	City of Vancouver	Video recording	July 8 2014
Standing Committee of Council on City Finance and Services Meeting	City of Vancouver	Video recording	July 9 2014
Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency Progress Report	VAHA	Presentation	June 2015
Standing Committee on City Finance and Services	City of Vancouver	Video Recording	June 10 2015
Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency - Update to Council	VAHA	Presentation	May 2016
Regular Council	City of Vancouver	Video Recording	May 31 2016
The Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency 2 Year Business Plan Summary + Update	VAHA	Presentation	November 2017
Housing Vancouver Strategy	City of Vancouver	Strategy	November 2017
Affordable Housing Delivery and Financial Strategy (2018-2027)	City of Vancouver	Strategy	June 2018
Canada's National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home	Government of Canada	Strategy	November 2017

Homes for B.C.: A 30-Point Plan for Housing Affordability in British Columbia	Government of British Columbia	Strategy	2018
Vancouver Affordable Housing Endowment Fund (VAHEF)	City of Vancouver	Report	August 2018

As the reader will note, the majority of policy documents I reviewed were dated in 2018 or before. This was because after the election of a no-majority new Mayor and Council in Vancouver in 2018, there was a decline in official policy output. I did review hundreds of documents beyond this time period, due to the large number of individual documents from the City of Vancouver about each individual VAHA project, such as RFPs, development permits, urban design panel minutes, lease agreements, operating agreements and more. I opted not to include these in the table above due to their number and repetitiveness, but reviewing these documents was useful for me to gain a detailed picture of the VAHA's processes and progress. Alongside these government documents, I also read and analyzed media releases, media articles, blogs, and political party platforms that referenced the VAHA or VAHA projects to gather more contextual data to answer my research question. A selection of the documents of this type that were most relevant to my analysis is listed in the table below.

Table 3 Selection of relevant Media, Blogs, Political Platforms analyzed

Title	Author	Publication	Date
Platform 2011: A vision for Vancouver.	Vision Vancouver	Vision Vancouver	2011
<i>Go Forward with Vision 2014</i>	Vision Vancouver	Vision Vancouver	2014
City will go it alone on 250 affordable housing units in South Vancouver	Matt Robinson	Vancouver Sun	October 18 2016
<i>This Vancouver social housing took just 2 months to build</i>	Kenneth Chan	Daily Hive	February 17 2017
Province steps up with modular housing for the homeless	BC Gov News	BC Gov News website	September 29 2017
Nearly 1,000 new affordable housing units on the way for Vancouver	Richard Zussman	Global News	May 4 2018
More than 600 supportive homes open in Vancouver	BC Gov News	BC Gov News website	March 3 2019

<i>Residents opposed to Vancouver's latest modular-housing project near Nanaimo Station</i>	Celia Chan	Vancouver Sun	July 31 2019
Vancouver removes perplexing roadblock to affordable housing	Adrienne Tanner	The Globe and Mail	September 23 2018
<i>Vancouver mayor 'disappointed' over pushback to housing proposal for homeless.</i>	Mike Howell	Vancouver is Awesome	September 10 2019
<i>3,500 new affordable homes underway or completed in Vancouver</i>	BC Gov News	BC Gov News website	January 20 2020
Vancouver's affordable housing announcements remain unfulfilled years later	Frances Bula	The Globe and Mail	May 15 2021
Investing in Affordable Housing in Vancouver	CMHC	CMHC website	July 28 2021
<i>Vancouver Is Desperate for Affordable Housing. So Why Is This Project Stalled?</i>	Jen St. Denis	The Tyee	August 23 2021
Modular housing is a fast and innovative solution to addressing homelessness	CMHC	CMHC website	September 29 2021
Hundreds of new affordable homes on the way for Vancouver.	BC Housing	BC Housing website	March 23 2022
<i>A Queer-Centered Development Moves Ahead in Vancouver's Gay Village</i>	Jen St. Denis	The Tyee	July 29 2022
<i>BC Housing's CEO announces retirement.</i>	BC Housing	BC Housing website	August 2 2022
<i>Three of seven Vancouver co-op housing projects "stuck" waiting for provincial, federal funds five years later</i>	Susan Lazaruk	Vancouver Sun	December 1 2022

I stored documentation in the software program Nvivo, and also used this program to conduct preliminary analysis. I opted to draw from a grounded theory approach because this approach can be used to “provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge” and “has a built-in mandate to strive towards verification through the process of category saturation” (Goulding, 2002), which mean this approach was well-suited to answering my research question. Specifically, I drew from the constructivist grounded theory method to analyze my documentation, beginning with open coding using the annotation and memo features in Nvivo. Constructivist grounded theory differs from more traditional forms of the method as it emphasizes that the data is “not discovered, extracted or uncovered...rather the data is the outcome of the researcher’s active relationship with the research context” where the researcher “attends closely to the historical moment, social structures, and situations” in which their research is embedded

(Bryant & Charmaz, 2011). Once I had completed open coding for a substantial number of documents, I created some possible selective codes (see Appendix B for codebook) which I created corresponding 'nodes' for in Nvivo and applied these nodes to my documents. I used this preliminary analysis to prepare for and inform my semi-structured interviews.

4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The main weakness of document analysis is that it is “limited to the examination of recorded communications” (Babbie & Roberts, 2018, p. 255), however, I have attempted to mitigate the impact of this limitation by also using the method of semi-structured interviews to substantiate gaps in the documentation and to provide unique insights into the VAHA that would not otherwise have been accessible. I recognize that the main limitation of interviews is that they are illustrative not representative (Valentine, 2005), meaning that the data gathered through this method can be especially subjective and informed by the interviewee’s positionality and experience. This limitation is not unique to interviews and the documents I analyzed must also be understood as being highly politicized in nature and therefore are reflective of the narratives, discourse, and interests of the time in which they were produced rather than any type of objective truth. With that being said, I attempted to mitigate the limitation of unrepresentativeness in my interviews by recruiting interviewees with different connections to the VAHA, and by combining the interview data with the document analysis. I chose semi-structured interviews over unstructured ones because there were several themes I wished to cover with each interviewee. I had some standard questions prepared (see Appendix A) but I also frequently deviated from these to follow any new relevant threads that emerged.

The group of participants interviewed were a non-random sample of key-informants chosen for their experience of working with or for the VAHA. I initially planned to interview between a minimum of five and a maximum of ten interviewees, and I ended up interviewing six individuals. I chose to stop at this point as I had gathered a sizeable amount of data that revealed some common and repetitive themes, and I felt it was somewhat “evident that new insights [were] unlikely to occur from studying additional cases” (Babbie & Roberts, 2018, p. 153). These six interviewees were a combination of former City of Vancouver elected officials, current and former City of Vancouver and VAHA staff, and representatives from development organizations that have worked in

partnership with the VAHA. I recognize that this combination of interviewees all have some degree of conflict of interest due to their relationship to the VAHA or the City, but I felt that each person was able to offer valuable and unique insights despite their positional conflict. I was able to identify multiple potential interviewees through my preliminary scoping for this research project due to the individuals or organizations that appeared repeatedly when reviewing key documentation. I also used a snowball sampling strategy with interviewees, and through this was able to identify two additional interviewees.

I decided to not name interviewees because I wanted to create as much comfort for participants to express their views freely without concern about how their comments may impact their career or relationship with the VAHA or City of Vancouver. This felt especially important for City staff, former City staff, and partners working with the VAHA / now the City. To avoid using names but to provide some contextual attribution to interview data, I developed a naming convention which instead identifies their connection to the VAHA by participants their role or sector.

Table 4 Interview Participants

Interview Participant Code Name	Description of interviewee’s experience
FCC	Former City Councillor who was on Council from 2008-2018
FVAHA_CHS	Former VAHA staff member now working in the Community Housing Sector
CHS	Community Housing Sector leader working on numerous VAHA enabled projects
VAHA/CoV	VAHA Staff member, part of the team transitioning back into the City’s Arts, Culture and Community Services department
CoV_Regulator	Current City of Vancouver staff member working on housing permitting and approvals
FCoV –	Former City of Vancouver staff member who worked on the creation of the VAHA

Interviews were conducted over Zoom between September and December 2022. Interviews were scheduled for one hour and were recorded for transcription purposes. I manually transcribed each interview as soon as possible after ending the interview to attempt to begin some very high-level analysis while our conversation was fresh in my

mind. I used Nvivo to store the interview transcripts and to mark up the transcripts using the nodes I had developed in my preliminary document analysis. Through this process I was able to further refine the possible selective coding terms (see Appendix B for codebook) I had developed, and from these developed the final headings I use in Chapter 5 to discuss the various factors I identified through this analysis.

Chapter 5.

Research Findings

This section of my thesis is split into two sections. The first focuses on the VAHA's role in enabling affordable housing units, identifying how many units were enabled via the Agency and the types of housing it delivered. The second focuses on identifying and discussing the factors that shaped the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda.

5.1. Units enabled by the VAHA

In this section I focus on describing the number of housing units the VAHA enabled between 2014 to 2021. To do this, I provide a high-level written summary with accompanying tables to display the number of units enabled, meaning completed or approved, by the end of 2021. Then in the subsequent sections I provide an overview of the types of housing enabled with some specific examples of projects. This section concludes with a brief summary and some examples of projects that were in the development pipeline by the end of 2021. Appendix C contains detailed project information for every project discussed in this section.

Through my document analysis, primarily using City of Vancouver documentation, the VAHA website and the City of Vancouver permitting portal, I identified that by the end of 2021, the VAHA had completed 1,314 units and approved 727 units, representing a total of 2,041 units either completed or approved. This means that the VAHA failed to reach its original target of 2,500 units and instead was only able to achieve 81.64 per cent of the total target number. At the time of writing, this translates to 1,228 units open for use, or 49.12 per cent of the original VAHA target, due to the closure of 144 units of Temporary Modular Housing and the addition of 65 units of permanent co-op housing at 710 East 19th completed in September 2023. Despite not reaching its target, the Agency was able to enable a substantial amount of new affordable housing in one of the most prohibitively expensive housing markets in the world which merits analysis beyond simply presenting this fact as a binary pass or fail.

Table 5 below provides an overview of projects enabled by the VAHA and the number of units that were completed by the end of 2021.

Table 5 VAHA Projects completed by the end of 2021

ADDRESS	UNITS	COMPLETED	Temporary or permanent	Affordability Requirements
220 Terminal Avenue	40	February 2017	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
7430 & 7460 Heather Street (Reiderman Residence)	78	March 2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
1131 Franklin Street (Chartrand Place)	39	April 2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
525 Powell Street (Aneki House for Women)	39	May 2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
2132 Ash Street (Margaret Mitchell Place)	52	June 2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
4480 Kaslo Street (Sarah Ross House)	52	July 2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
Little Mountain – 137 East 37th Avenue	46	Q4 2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
610 and 620 Cambie Street (Larwill Place)	98	2018	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
5077 and 5095 Heather Street (New Beginnings)	98	2019	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
265 West 1st Avenue (Hummingbird Place)	52	2019	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance

258 Union Street (Nora Hendrix Place)	52	2019	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
3598 Copley Street (Naomi Place)	58	2020	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
River District – 3625 Sawmill Crescent (Alder)	120	2021	Permanent	119 below market rental homes, 36 units with rents subject to meeting HILs and 23 units earmarked affordable with rents at or below 24% of Vancouver's median household income. (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2021)
188 East 6th Avenue (also known as 2221-2235 Main Street)	145	2021	Permanent	A minimum of 30% of units must be rented below market (City of Vancouver, 2018d)
River District – 3183 Pierview Crescent (Kinship Housing Co-op)	89	2021	Permanent	At least 30% of the units rented to households with incomes below HILs. On or about 43% of units will be at the Low End of Market (LEM), rented at < 90% of the appraised market rent for a comparable unit in the local area & < 30% of the low and moderate income limit. The remainder of the units will be rented at market rate. (City of Vancouver, 2018j)
River District – 3245 Pierview Crescent (Kinship Housing Co-op)	51	2021	Permanent	At least 30% of the units rented to households with incomes below HILs. On or about 43% of units will be at the Low End of Market (LEM), rented at < 90% of the appraised market rent for a comparable unit in the local area & < 30% of the low and moderate income limit. The remainder of the units will be rented at market rate. (City of Vancouver, 2018j)
River District – 3185 Riverwalk Avenue (Riverwalk)	107	2021	Permanent	At least 30% of housing units in the building are rented to households with incomes below the then current HILs. (City of Vancouver, 2018e)
1580-1582 Vernon Drive	98	2021	Temporary	All units rent at the shelter component of income assistance
Total	1,314			

Table 6 below provides an overview of projects enabled by the VAHA and their number of units that were approved by the end of 2021.

Table 6 VAHA Projects approved by the end of 2021 (all permanent)

ADDRESS	UNITS	DEVELOPMENT PERMIT ISSUED	Affordability requirements
55-79 & 87-115 SW Marine Drive	102	September 2019	At least 30% of units rent to households with incomes below HILs. The balance of the units to be offered at Low End of Market Rents (City of Vancouver, 2018b)
58 West Hastings Street (also known as 46 West Hastings Street)	230	November 2019	This project would provide a minimum of 76 social housing units, occupied by persons eligible for either Income Assistance or a combination of Old Age Security pension and Guaranteed Income Supplement, and must be rented at rates no higher than the shelter component of Income Assistance.” (City of Vancouver, 2018c)
710 East 19 th Avenue (formerly known as 3510 Fraser Street)	58	June 2020	A minimum of 30% of the units with distribution across studios and one bedroom units must be rented below market. (City of Vancouver, 2018f)
3338 Sawmill Crescent	337	August 2021	“A minimum of 20% of the units must be rented at shelter rates... a minimum of 50% of the units with rents required not to exceed 1/40th of... current... HILs...”(City of Vancouver, 2021a). “A maximum of 30% of the units can be rented at market rent for a comparable unit in the community or, in the absence of comparable units in the community, CMHC’s Rental Survey for Vancouver for the applicable year of construction, currently the 2005+ category.” 4/9/2024 1:13:00 PM
Total	727		

In the next sections, I provide an overview of the completed and approved projects, split broadly into two categories of temporary modular housing and affordable rental and co-op.

Temporary Modular Housing

Of the 18 VAHA enabled projects that were completed by the end of 2021, 13 were temporary modular housing (TMH). These projects represent a total of 802 units, representing 39% per cent of the 2,041 completed or approved units enabled by the VAHA. TMH is a type of housing that can be constructed quickly and can easily be readjusted and relocated. TMH was a new form of housing for the City, and in 2016 the City tasked the VAHA with “exploring alternative and innovative solutions to provide temporary housing options on an expeditious timeline” (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2016a) to provide housing for those experiencing homelessness. A City of Vancouver report from October 2016 specifies how TMH fits into Vancouver’s housing system, noting that:

“TMH targets low- and moderate income households who have a need for transitional accommodation. These TMH projects will be located on underutilized or vacant sites awaiting development, and will be relocated when this occurs. The TMH design allows these projects to be developed with a minimal amount of new infrastructure, and to be moved and reassembled on another site very quickly when compared to conventional development projects” (City of Vancouver, 2016a).

At a public hearing on December 13, 2016, amendments to the City’s Zoning and Development By-law No. 3575 to include a definition and regulations for TMH were approved by the City of Vancouver Mayor and Council. Regulations for TMH in Vancouver include that TMH “must be used for social housing” and that a “development permit for temporary modular housing must be time limited to a maximum of five years, unless otherwise extended in writing for up to an additional five years by the Director of Planning” (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

The first TMH project to open was also the first completed VAHA project. This TMH pilot on a City-owned site at 220 Terminal Avenue opened in February 2017, providing 40 units of housing. Upon its opening Mayor Gregor Robertson provided the following statement:

“This modular housing development is an innovative, low-cost solution that quickly delivers affordable housing by utilizing vacant City land as we wait for more permanent social housing to be built.”

“City Hall will keep supporting the Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency (VAHA) and other partners to find creative solutions like this to tackle homelessness head on, and pursue all options and tools available to build more affordable housing as quickly as possible.” (Chan, 2017)

Following the successful completion of the 220 Terminal Avenue TMH pilot, the newly elected provincial government, via BC Housing, provided \$66 million in funding towards construction costs and additional operational funding to support the provision of a further 600 TMH units. The recommendation to build 600 of these units aligned with the City’s strategic commitment to provide housing on a housing first basis for people experiencing homelessness (City of Vancouver, 2017f). Housing First has become an increasingly mainstream policy approach to addressing homelessness (T. Baker & Evans, 2016) and is characterized by its provision of housing to those who could be classified as chronically homeless without any requirements that potential residents seek out treatment or support services prior to occupation (Tsemberis, 2010).

The VAHA issued an RFP on July 14 2017 for the design, supply, delivery and construction of 600 TMH units to be split across approximately ten buildings on ten sites (City of Vancouver, 2018g). Through this funding, VAHA enabled TMH on seven City-owned sites (1131 Franklin Street, 501 Powell Street, 4480 Kaslo Street, 2132 Ash Street, 610-620 Cambie Street, 265 West 1st Avenue and 258 Union Street), two developer-owned sites (7430 & 7460 Heather Street and 137 East 37th Avenue), and one site (5077 and 5095 Heather Street) owned by the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh (MST) Development Corporation. Following the completion of these 600 units in April 2019, the BC Government confirmed further funding commitments to build more temporary modular housing across the Province. In Vancouver, the VAHA partnered with the Province to open two further TMH on two City-owned sites (3598 Copley Street and 1580-1582 Vernon Drive).

A survey conducted by BC Housing six months after residents moved into the TMH buildings between September 2018 to September 2019 measured resident satisfaction with the housing. Of the 192 TMH residents that responded, 93% were satisfied with their unit, 80% reported that their overall wellbeing was better and 90% felt safe in their unit (City of Vancouver & BC Housing, n.d.).

Affordable rental and co-op projects

Alongside the 802 TMH units, the remainder of the VAHA enabled units that were either completed or approved by the end of 2021 were in affordable rental or co-op buildings. Of these units, 512 across four projects were completed by the end of 2021 and 727 across four projects were approved by the end of 2021. All of these projects are on City-owned land.

Four of the eight completed or approved affordable rental or co-op projects enabled by the VAHA are in the River District in the East Fraser Lands. The East Fraser Lands span 52-hectares in southeast Vancouver, on the north banks of the Fraser River. While most of the land in the East Fraser Lands is owned by real estate developer Wesgroup, the City of Vancouver has purchased multiple parcels of lands from the developer for the development of affordable housing through the VAHA. These purchases were enabled by the creation of a comprehensive multi-use development plan for the area, the East Fraser Lands Official Development (EFL ODP) which was approved by Council in 2006. The EFL ODP specified that “affordable housing is to comprise at least 20% of all dwelling units and at least 50% of those affordable housing units are to be suitable for families with children” (City of Vancouver, 2006). The ODP also stipulates that the term affordable housing means social housing, as defined by the Vancouver Development Cost Levy Bylaw. In 2010 the City approved a corresponding Public Amenity Financial Plan & Strategy, which gave the City the right to purchase designated land parcels from Wesgroup for \$35 (in 2006 dollars, to be adjusted for inflation) per buildable square foot to develop affordable housing to meet the targets in the EFL ODP.

Through the EFL ODP, the City purchased five land parcels for affordable housing development through the VAHA for approximately \$22 million (City of Vancouver, 2021b). Three of these parcels were designated to the Community Land Trust via the VAHA’s seven-site partnership announced in May 2018. Of the sites dedicated to the Community Land Trust, two parcels at 3183 Pierview Crescent and 3245 Pierview Crescent were developed collectively as Kinship Housing Co-op which was completed and occupied by March 2021 and the remaining site at 3338 Sawmill Crescent received its development permit in August 2021 and is currently under construction. In addition to the Community Land Trust sites, two affordable rental

projects were completed at 3625 Sawmill Crescent and 3185 Riverwalk Avenue by the end of 2021.

Outside of the East Fraser Lands, four additional VAHA-enabled affordable rental or co-op projects were completed or approved by the end of 2021. Only one site was completed by the end of 2021, an affordable rental project on a City-owned site at 118 East 6th Avenue that had previously been used as a surface parking lot. One further affordable rental site, 55-79 and 87-117 Marine Drive, is also now completed and occupied; however, as this happened in summer 2022 outside of the VAHA's initial deadline of 2021, it is included in Table 5 as an approved project. A further affordable rental site at 58 West Hastings Street received its development permit approval in November 2019 and is currently under construction. Finally, a co-op project at 710 East 19th Avenue received its development permit in June 2020 and is also under construction.

5.1.2. Units in the pipeline

Besides the 2,041 units outlined above, a further 871 units were initiated before the end of 2021, but had not received development permits. As these units did not fit the criteria of being completed or approved, they are not included in my total of units enabled by the end of 2021. However, I choose to provide an overview of these projects because they provide additional insights into the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda. Table 7 below provides details about each project, followed by a brief description of the projects.

Table 7 VAHA Projects in the pipeline by the end of 2021 (all permanent)

ADDRESS	UNITS	STATUS	Proposed affordability
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177 West Pender Street	76	<p>Rezoning application submitted June 2017, approved December 2017.</p> <p>Development Permit application submitted January 2018, approved March 2023</p>	<p>“At least one third of the units must be occupied by persons eligible for either Income Assistance or a combination of basic Old Age Security pension and Guaranteed Income Supplement, and must be rented at rates no higher than the shelter component of Income Assistance. At least 30 of the units will be secured at or below the shelter component of Income Assistance for singles. The remaining 60 units will rent at... HILs up to affordable market rents, if required to maintain the long-term viability of the building.” (City of Vancouver, 2017a)</p>
1190 Burrard Street	154	<p>Rezoning application submitted December 2019, approved July 2021.</p> <p>Development Permit application submitted June 2021, approved April 2023.</p>	<p>“A minimum of 20% of the units must be rented at shelter rates; A minimum of 50% of the units with rents required not to exceed 1/40th of the then current HILS for the applicable unit type;” (City of Vancouver, 2021d) “A maximum of 30% of the units can be rented at market rent for a comparable unit in the community or, in the absence of comparable units in the community, CMHC’s Rental Survey for Vancouver for the applicable year of construction, currently the 2005+ category” (City of Vancouver, 2021a)</p>

1001 Kingsway	66	Rezoning application submitted July 2019, application still pending.	“100% of the homes rented at, or below the low end of market” (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency et al., 2022)
5085 McHardy Street (also known as 3279-3297 Vanness Avenue)	102	Rezoning application submitted March 2019, approved October 2019. . Development Permit application submitted December 2020, approved July 2022.	“A minimum of 20% of the units must be rented at shelter rates; A minimum of 50% of the units with rents required not to exceed 1/40th of the then current HILS for the applicable unit type;” (City of Vancouver, 2019) “A maximum of 30% of the units can be rented at market rent for a comparable unit in the community or, in the absence of comparable units in the community, CMHC’s Rental Survey for Vancouver for the applicable year of construction, currently the 2005+ category.” (City of Vancouver, 2021a)
1210 Seymour	112	Development permit application submitted March 2022, approved July 2022 (no rezoning required)	“This development application proposes residential with 100% of the units secured as Social Housing through a Housing Agreement for 60 years or the life of the building, whichever is greater, The project will meet the City’s definition of social housing, with a minimum of 30% of the units rented to households with incomes which fall under the... HILs levels.” (City of Vancouver, 2022a)

<p>1406-1410 East King Edward Ave</p>	<p>109</p>	<p>Rezoning application submitted October 2021, approved June 2022</p>	<p>“Approximately 50% of the units would rent at the shelter component of income assistance. In BC, this rate continues to be \$375 per month for an individual. The balance of the units would rent at rents-g geared-to-income from \$375 up to an income limit of 50% of HILs... Flexibility is provided so that if a resident’s income changes, they would not need to relocate as long as their income does not exceed the maximum BC HILs.” (City of Vancouver, 2022e)</p>
<p>2086-2098 W7th Ave and 2091 W8th Ave</p>	<p>129</p>	<p>Rezoning application submitted October 2021, approved July 2022</p> <p>Development permit application submitted</p>	<p>“Approximately 50% of the units would rent at the shelter component of income assistance. In BC, this rate continues to be \$375 per month for an individual. The balance of the units would rent at rents-g geared-to-income from \$375 up to an income limit of 50% of HILs... Flexibility is provided so that if a resident’s income changes, they would not need to relocate as long as their income does not exceed the maximum BC HILs.” (City of Vancouver, 2022c)</p>

2009 – 2037 Stainsbury Avenue	123	Rezoning application submitted Dec 2021, approved July 2022 Development permit application submitted May 2022, approved March 2023	“20% of homes will be offered at “deep subsidy” rates; • 50% of homes will be offered at rent-geared-to-income rates, with an income maximum set at Housing Income Limits (HILs) levels; and • 30% of homes will be offered at Market Rents.” (City of Vancouver, 2022f)
Total	871		

Of the projects listed above, four are co-ops (1190 Burrard Street, 177 West Pender Street, 1001 Kingsway, 5085 McHardy Street, and 1210 Seymour) that are part of the seven-site partnership with the Community Land Trust. Two (1406-1410 East King Edward Ave, and 2086-2098 W 7th Ave and 2091 W 8th Ave) are to be deeply affordable permanent modular housing sites built in partnership with BC Housing and CMHC. One (2009 – 2037 Stainsbury Avenue) is an affordable rental project for a range of incomes. All of these projects are located on land owned and leased by the City of Vancouver. Detailed project information for each project is provided in Appendix C.

5.2. Factors that shaped the VAHA’s role in the City’s affordable housing agenda

Having detailed how many housing units the VAHA had enabled against its goal of enabling 2,500 units by 2021, and outlined the projects that were in the pipeline but not approved or completed, in this section, I focus on providing context for why this was the case by considering the factors that shaped the VAHA’s role in Vancouver’s housing agenda.

Through the combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews, I was able to identify numerous factors that had both a positive and negative effect on the VAHA’s ability to enable the development of affordable housing. Documents reviewed included City of Vancouver strategies, reports, presentations and videos of Council

meetings, as well as media coverage and press releases from the VAHA's partner organizations. The review of these documents helped me to identify likely factors that I then asked interviewees about. Interviewees also sometimes raised factors that I had not initially identified from the documentation, that I then went back to the document analysis to further corroborate.

I have organized factors into general categories and provide analysis under eight different headings: provision of City-owned land; senior government funding and financing; municipal politics; Agency model; municipal regulations; the community housing sector; economic climate and COVID 19; and targets. These headings are used to create an analytic structure, however, in my analysis I came to realize that these do not necessarily represent highly isolated factors and instead often categories bleed into one another due to the many interdependencies in the development of affordable housing. This realization is broadly indicative of the vast challenge the VAHA faced in enabling housing and how its role in addressing Vancouver's housing crisis is best understood within this broader context.

5.2.1. Provision of City-owned land

The cornerstone that underpinned the VAHA's ability to enable affordable housing was the provision of City-owned land for development. By offering long-term leases of the City's land at nominal rates, the VAHA was able to eliminate one of the most prohibitive barriers to creating new supply of affordable housing in Vancouver, the cost of land. A 2020 opinion piece written by a City Councillor and other housing advocates underlines the centrality of City-owned land in addressing the housing crisis: "Building publicly supported housing on land in municipal land banks will ensure affordable housing in perpetuity that will contribute to socially and economically sustainable communities" (Boyle et al., 2020). The City was able to do this through the VAHA because they opted to dedicate some of their existing portfolio of land to affordable housing development and to grow this portfolio through the purchase of further sites for affordable housing development, such as the purchase of \$22 million of land in the River District in 2017 (City of Vancouver, 2021b), as discussed in section 5.1.

Throughout the City reports and presentations that I analyzed, the concept of 'leveraging' City-owned land was centered as the key opportunity that the VAHA could

use to address housing affordability (City of Vancouver, 2014a, 2017c, 2018a; Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2016b). While this may be obvious, it must not be overlooked because, as discussed in my conceptual framework, the private ownership system and the commodification of land are, by far, the dominant approaches to housing provision in Canada. The relevance of the City's investment in land to the VAHA was highlighted in a presentation to Council on May 31 2016, when then CEO of the VAHA Mukhtar Latif stated: "the City has been fortunate that through the Property Endowment Fund we have secured land over many years" (City of Vancouver, 2016b). Latif's use of the word "fortunate" is significant because it illustrates that this is not always the case for governments, many of which have either not invested in land or opted to sell their land when the ideological turn toward neoliberalism and urban entrepreneurialism encouraged land sales as a path toward solving financial challenges. This was the case at the provincial level when the BC Liberals implemented their Non-Profit Asset Transfer program (discussed later in this chapter under the Provincial Government subheading) in the 2010s but is also a present-day threat, with the current Vancouver School Board considering the sale of their Kingsgate Mall (Chan, 2023).

A quote from previous City Manager Penny Ballem taken from a video recording of discussion of the VAHA at a Council meeting in 2015 further emphasizes the significance of investing in and retaining land: "the City's major fundamental principle and assumption is that we're not going to sell our land... there's never going to be more land in the city of Vancouver and there's grave concern about senior levels of government who are actually selling off their land and we're going to, whether through a long term lease or other arrangements,...hang on to the final tenure of that land" (City of Vancouver, 2015). By investing in and holding on to land assets, the City was able to assign multiple sites to the VAHA for development, utilizing one of the few tools municipalities have to influence Canada's housing system.

The City further bolstered its ability to provide land for affordable housing in 2018 with the creation of the Vancouver Affordable Housing Endowment Fund (VAHEF). Prior to the VAHEF, City-owned land used for housing was retained primarily in the Property Endowment Fund (PEF). The priority of the PEF is to "generate a reasonable economic return" (City of Vancouver, 2020a). In a 2018 interview regarding the motivation for the creation of the VAHEF, former City Councillor Andrea Reimer pointed to the "impasse" of the City being unable to renew leases for co-ops and non-profit housing on City-owned

land due to the “intractable problem of having affordable housing in a fund that must return profit” (Tanner, 2018). As such, the VAHEF was established to centralize all of the City’s affordable housing assets into one portfolio “to preserve and grow affordable housing for the benefit of current and future residents” (City of Vancouver, 2018h). The fund is intended as both a holding body for existing affordable housing assets, and as a fund to invest in new affordable housing assets.

The initial report proposing the VAHEF highlights that a key consideration for its mandate is that:

[u]nlike some of the City’s other funds which tend to have a broad range of objectives, VAHEF’s primary focus is to contribute towards housing and affordability needs in Vancouver by managing the City’s affordable housing portfolio across the asset life-cycle (separate from the regulatory and policy-setting role of the broader City organization), which must be done in a sustainable fashion to ensure the enduring nature of VAHEF. (City of Vancouver, 2018h)

In my interview with FCC, this participant described the VAHEF as being critical “for the very simple reason that it [the City’s non-market housing assets] needs to be taken out of this fund [the PEF] that everybody believes is there to make money... and move it into a fund whose sole purpose is to provide housing for people.” This participant’s quote underscores the dichotomy between housing’s exchange-value and use-value as laid out in my conceptual framework. The PEF model reinforces the notion of housing as being primarily of financial value, or exchange value, whereas the new VAHEF model is focused on housing’s value as a place to live, or use value. This quote also highlights how the VAHA, and subsequently the VAHEF, can be understood through the lens of entrepreneurial municipalism under which the state is “not financialising assets to trade on markets in order to generate revenues as cash transfers for under-funded services, but rather investing directly in self-sustaining projects, which harness the value of (de-commodified) land” (Thompson et al., 2020). This is further underscored by one of the VAHEF’s goals being “financial sustainability” (City of Vancouver, 2018h), so while the fund does not prioritize generating profit it does intend to make financial decisions which ensure the long term sustainability of the fund. To ensure its financial sustainability, the City identified Development Cost Levies (DCLs), Community Amenity Contributions (CACs), revenue from the Empty Homes Tax, affordable housings assets secured through rezoning and inclusionary housing

requirements, and any revenues generated through the VAHEF's assets as financial sources, and also identified, when available, the need for senior government contributions towards operating the assets within the VAHEF (City of Vancouver, 2018h).

The significance of City-owned land on the VAHA's ability to enable housing is evident in that almost all of the units enabled through the VAHA were developed on land owned by the City, with the exception of two TMH sites (7430 & 7460 Heather Street and 137 East 37th Avenue) owned by private developers, and one TMH site (5077 and 5095 Heather Street) owned by the MST Nations. The rest of the TMH sites were developed on land that was already owned by the City but that was underutilized, or vacant. Of the City-owned sites that were used for permanent rental or co-operative housing, some had been purchased in recent years by the City with the specific intention of developing affordable housing, such as all of the sites in the East Fraser Lands, 55-79 and 87-117 Marine Drive, 1190 Burrard Street and 710 East 19th Avenue. Other sites, such as 58 West Hastings, were transferred to the City from private developers as part of a Community Amenity Contributions (CACs)⁵ agreement. Additionally, some sites were part of the City's existing land holdings but were not yet being used for housing development, such as 188 East 6th Avenue which was being used as a surface parking lot before the site was assigned to the VAHA.

All of my interviewees agreed that the City's provision of its land at nominal lease was a component key to the VAHA's ability to play a role in the City's affordable housing agenda and agreed that in principle the VAHEF should generate more opportunities to create affordable housing. However, they also noted a lack of progress even with the VAHEF. FVAHA_CHS noted that:

"The way that the VAHA brought land via the way of nominal lease to market is a good one. The premise of combining part of the endowment fund and VAHA was, I thought, to sort of supercharge that whole notion [of leveraging City land for affordable housing] but [that] just doesn't seem to [have] happened."

This comments illustrate that despite the benefits of the City investing in land over many years, creating a dedicated fund for affordable housing assets and providing

⁵ Defined in more detail in section 5.2.3

land at nominal rates via the VAHA, challenges remained for partners attempting to develop housing.

One challenge is that land itself is always a limited resource, and in Vancouver where the land costs are so high, the City with its limited sources of revenue and multiple competing priorities is not in a financial position to acquire land at a rate that matches the need for new affordable housing. FVAHA_CHS noted that if the City was competing in the market for land they would end up “driving up land costs”, ultimately further entrenching the affordability issue. In the case of enabled VAHA projects, most of the sites developed were on parcels already owned by the City, some of which had been purposefully acquired prior to the establishment of the VAHA to develop social housing. However, the City did acquire new land after the creation of the VAHA to enable the projects at 55-79 & 87-115 SW Marine Drive and the projects in the East Fraser Lands. In the case of the former, the City paid what was considered to be the “fair market value” of more than \$11 million for the combined sites (City of Vancouver, 2014c). However, with the sites in the East Fraser Lands, the City through its regulatory role was able to acquire land at a fixed price directly from the developer without competing with other bidders due to the agreed acquisition terms in the EFL ODP. These acquisitions are discussed further in section 5.2.5, Municipal Regulations.

A further and highly significant challenge related to land that emerged through the documentation and the interviewees is that a nominal lease of City land, usually representing the equivalent of a grant of millions of dollars, is no longer enough to get affordable housing built (City of Vancouver, 2018a). CHS explained that “I think the idea that land alone will deliver affordable housing is not enough anymore”, and FVAHA_CHS also noted that “the grant alone doesn’t necessarily pay for the entire project and so there was a time when we could pretty much use a public grant and then financing from federal government to pay for a construction project... those days are long gone”. Even though land is typically the most significant cost in building new housing, even with nominal leases provided via the VAHA, non-profits faced substantial equity gaps and require additional funding and financing from senior levels of government to develop projects.

5.2.2. Senior Government Funding and Financing

When the VAHA was first established, it was within the ongoing period of restricted senior government funding for social housing that was illustrated in my conceptual framework (Suttor, 2016). The insufficiency of senior government funding at this time was outlined in the initial presentations, reports and discussions on the VAHA (City of Vancouver, 2012b, 2014a). In the interviews I conducted, several participants also contextualized the creation of the VAHA in relation to the senior governments of the time. Interviewee FCC framed the VAHA as response to the dearth of affordable housing commitments from both the Federal and Provincial governments, and this framing was reinforced by Interviewee FCOV who suggested the federal government had created somewhat of a “vacuum” for the VAHA to fill.

Despite this insufficiency, throughout the documentation reviewed there was still significant emphasis on the absolute necessity to work with senior governments to create deeper levels of affordability in the VAHA projects. In a presentation to Council in 2015 to provide the first annual update on the VAHA, City Manager Ballem addressed Councillor Andrea Reimer’s question about how to engage the senior governments by stating: “We’re saying to our senior levels of government take your pick, participate in whatever way works best for you whether it’s through capital, equity, financing, and a combination of those things but we’re very, very flexible. We don’t have just one size and but it’s really totally dependent on how much engagement we get around any one or all of those that will in the end determine the overall depth of affordability that we can get to” (City of Vancouver, 2015).

At this point in time in the context of restricted senior government funding, the City was very much focused on trying to leverage their contribution of land to incentivize the federal or provincial government to invest in affordable housing projects to deepen their affordability. FCC mentioned that the 2011 Vision platform commitment to put City land “on the table was... essentially about trying to... publicly draw in provincial and federal attention on these issues”. This approach is illustrated in a media article from 2016 titled “City will go it alone on 250 affordable housing units in South Vancouver” featuring a quote from then Mayor Gregor Robertson stating “we anticipate that the provincial and federal governments will contribute funding in the near future to deepen affordability, but in this housing crisis we need to get started urgently” (Robinson, 2016).

The intergovernmental context in which the VAHA was formed changed substantially with the changes in leadership in the federal election in 2015 and the provincial election in 2017. All my interviewees agreed that, overall, these changes had a positive impact on the VAHA's ability to enable housing, with VAHA_CHS pointing out that "there's never been a better time for gathering public incentive into home building and I mean that from an investment standpoint. Both the federal government and the provincial government are spending money on housing in a much bigger degree than probably they ever have... at least in my lifetime". However, even with that statement being widely echoed by most interviewees, all participants also pointed to significant challenges that existed within the new funding and financing landscape.

In the following sub-sections I offer an overview of the largely beneficial changes at the federal level, then the provincial level, and finally assess some of the challenges for the VAHA projects that emerged through my analysis even with these positive changes.

Federal Government

At the federal level, the Liberal Party was elected in 2015, ousting Stephen Harper's Conservative government which had been in power since 2006. The 2015 Liberal platform committed to increasing spending on social infrastructure, including affordable housing (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015), and this was most significantly realized through the launch of the National Housing Strategy in 2017 which contained multiple new funding and financing streams. Through my document review, I was able to identify numerous VAHA sites that received federal funding or financing through these National Housing Strategy streams. This included financing via the Rental Construction Financing Initiative (RCFI), which offers low-cost loans to support rental housing construction "for middle-class families in expensive housing markets" (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2021) for the projects completed by Catalyst at 188 East 6th Avenue (Aspen) and 3625 Sawmill Crescent (Alder). In a media interview, Luke Harrison, the CEO of Catalyst and former VAHA CEO, described the RCFI as a "game changer" for the development of truly affordable housing (Denis, 2021). The completed Community Land Trust project at 3183-3245 Pierview Crescent (Kinship Co-op) also received financing via the RCFI. A media release from the federal government confirmed further investment from the National Housing Co-Investment Fund, RCFI and the

Affordable Housing Innovation Fund for other CLT VAHA sites (Government of Canada, 2019), however specific details have not been released due to CMHC's communication policies ⁶.

Several TMH sites also received investment via the National Housing Strategy's Affordable Housing Innovation Fund which "supports new ideas that will drive change and disrupt the industry – ideas and approaches that will evolve the affordable housing sector and create the next generation of housing in Canada" (CMHC, n.d.). This included a \$1.5 million grant towards the 220 Terminal Pilot, followed by a further \$3.89 million towards 11 additional VAHA TMH sites. CMHC also cites the lessons learned from the TMH pilot as key to the development of the Rapid Housing Initiative, an additional investment program within the National Housing Strategy that was launched in October 2020 (CMHC, 2021b).

Further investments from CMHC towards VAHA projects came from the National Housing Strategy's Co-Investment Fund, which provides capital either as low-interest or forgivable loans for new, or renovations to, affordable housing, to organizations "that have partnered with another organization or a level of government and have secured some funding" (*Housing Co-Investment Fund*, n.d.). This included \$45.8 million, constituting a \$18.5 million contribution and \$27.3 million loan, towards 58 West Hastings, which began construction in the summer of 2021 (CMHC, 2021a). Further support via the Co-Investment Fund towards VAHA projects, came via an MOU signed by CMHC, BC Housing and the City of Vancouver in August 2020 to support the development of permanent supportive housing targeted towards those experiencing homelessness, with CMHC committing up to \$50,000 per unit in forgivable loans via the this fund (City of Vancouver FOI⁷ 2022-383, 2020). The first two sites from this commitment, 1406-1410 East King Edward Avenue and 2086 and 2098 West 7th Avenue, 2091 West 8th Avenue, are included in Table 6.3 as being in the pipeline by 2021, with both proposed in February 2021 and receiving rezoning by summer of 2022.

⁶ CMHC have received criticism about their failure to disclose details about recipients of the RCFI <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-cmhc-rental-housing-construction-loans/>

⁷ FOI proactively released by the City of Vancouver following a request by member of the public.

Provincial Government

As identified in my conceptual framework, in the face of federal retreat in the 1990s onward, BC remained one of the most productive Provinces in the creation of social housing (Suttor, 2016). However, this trend did not keep pace under the government of the BC Liberals who were in power when the VAHA was established. One of the most notable moves made by the BC Liberals was the introduction of the Non-Profit Asset Transfer program which sold provincially owned social housing sites, ostensibly to generate revenue to invest back into social housing. In an audit of the program, the B.C. Auditor General suggested that “the ministry has entered into this program without demonstrating that the sales will result in better outcomes for social housing, or those that depend on it” (Auditor General of British Columbia, 2017). Alongside this program, a key policy move by the BC Liberals during their tenure was to sell off large amounts of public land including the infamous sale of the Little Mountain social housing site, with the short-term goal of generating revenue to balance the budget.

The Province’s approach to social housing emerged as a relevant contextual factor for the creation of the VAHA in both my document review and my interviews. In a Council meeting on July 8 2014, when discussing the purpose of establishing the VAHA, Councillor Raymond Louie made the point that: “The Province has made the very clear statement that they are not in the business of creation of housing and they are moving to a rent supplement model and this [the VAHA] is meant to help fill the gap. Perhaps to leverage City resources into the equation and hopefully pulling others into the equation as well.” (City of Vancouver, 2014f). Interviewee FCC also reflected on the Province’s unwillingness to support the creation of new social housing in Vancouver as a driving factor behind the VAHA, stating that “we could have put a hundred sites on the table they [the BC Liberal government] weren’t going to do anything, for political reasons”. These “political reasons” can be interpreted as being the ruling BC Liberals’ commitment to a distinctly neoliberal style of governance and policy-making.

My document review confirmed that during the crossover period of the VAHA being established and the BC Liberals remaining in power, only one VAHA project was able to secure a promise of receiving any provincial funding (City of Vancouver, 2018f). It was not until the BC NDP took power in June 2017 that substantial funding began to

materialize for the projects being pursued by the VAHA. Throughout my interviews, there was agreement among participants that the new Provincial government's support for affordable housing had a positive impact on the VAHA. FCC described the shift in Provincial leadership as an "immediate and substantial change" in the VAHA and its partners' ability to enable housing.

One of the earliest areas of impact from the new Provincial government was the commitment in September 2017 of \$66 million towards TMH in Vancouver, which resulted in the completion of more than 600 units across ten VAHA sites by March 2019 (BC Gov News, 2019). In a media release when the funding was announced, then Mayor Gregor Robertson was quoted as saying, "It's fantastic to see the Province step up to help solve homelessness with support to deliver 600 units of temporary modular housing in Vancouver" (BC Gov News, 2017). The use of the phrase "step up" implies a clear delineation between the previous and new provincial government's role in supporting affordable housing. While discussing the Province's funding for the TMH in our interviews, FVAHA_CHS emphasized that the new Provincial government was eager to support more TMH after witnessing the success of the TMH pilot and FCC described the provincial support as "the gas in the tank" for these developments.

The new Provincial government launched their 30-point plan for housing affordability in 2018, with a range of supply and demand strategies to address the housing crisis. This strategy resulted in several new funding and financing streams through BC Housing that became critical to the viability of several VAHA projects. These streams included the Rapid Response to Homelessness program, which provided the support for TMH, and the Community Housing Fund, which "facilitates the development of mixed income, affordable rental housing projects" (BC Housing, 2020). In my interview with CHS, this interviewee referenced the huge importance of the Community Housing Fund in being able to achieve deeper levels of affordability in their VAHA projects. Another new program through BC Housing is the Deepening Affordability program, which provided \$10.8 million in capital grants to 3185 Riverwalk, which opened its 109 affordable rental units in November 2021.

Beyond these streams, BC Housing agreed to "fund, construct and operate the developments" (City of Vancouver FOI 2022-383, 2020) through the previously referenced MOU with CMHC and the City for permanent supportive housing in

Vancouver. This funding commitment was essential in enabling the two sites that are currently in progress under this MOU.

Challenges with new senior government funding and financing programs

When asking interviewees about the significance of senior levels of government on the VAHA's ability to enable housing, there was consensus that the availability of new funding and financing from both the federal and provincial governments was essential. Simultaneously, there was agreement that despite the net positive impact of these programs, there were some additional challenges presented by these programs. Multiple interviewees raised that if applying for both CMHC and BC Housing programs, there was the potential of conflicting requirements. FVAHA_CHS explained: "there can be complications at times when governments try to design procurement of housing, funding of housing, that are dependent on all levels of government being aligned, particularly on single projects", and described that in some cases this lack of alignment on requirements such as number of units, level of affordability and underwriting processes could even threaten to sink a project. VAHA/COV explained that key to success for projects involving multiple levels of government was "really lining up all of their different requirements and making sure everybody's around the table and working effectively together". The need to 'line up' financing was further evidenced through document analysis of the City leases for VAHA projects, which consistently stipulated that lease execution was contingent on the partner "having secured all required equity and financing to deliver a viable project over the term of the Lease at the target affordability" (City of Vancouver, 2018j, p. 7). Document analysis also unveiled that in the case of three of the CLT VAHA projects, previously agreed upon lease-terms had to be amended due to the CLT's success in securing new funding from BC Housing which required different levels of affordability (City of Vancouver, 2021a). These types of amendments can slow the progress in delivering housing in an expeditious manner.

In our interview, CHS addressed that the timeline of applying for and securing funding from the newly announced senior government programs was a relevant factor in why the VAHA did not achieve its goal of enabling 2,500 housing units by 2021. CHS explained that

"We made the collective decision as a partnership with VAHA to put the... sites through applications for the Community Housing Fund, that's

the provincial funding program. That alone caused a time delay because we felt if we could capture those dollars... we would hit a level of affordability that we couldn't otherwise. At the same time, the National Housing Strategy was launched. So there were two... things [referring to provincial and federal funding]. [The idea was,] 'Let's go after as many of the senior level government funding dollars as possible'".

This participant went on to state that while applying for and waiting for approvals for these programs has caused projects to run behind their initial schedules, that ultimately this delay is worth it due to the levels of affordability that can be achieved through securing senior government funding and financing that would not otherwise be possible within "today's marketplace". However, there is an element of risk with this approach because there are no guarantees applications will be successful, and even when applications are successful the time delay can result in delivering the housing under more challenging economic circumstances. This interview participant noted that in instances where funding and financing applications eventually turn out to be unsuccessful that "market forces start to get away with us", meaning that it has become even more difficult to deliver truly affordable housing. This assessment was emphasized in a 2022 media article, in which Thom Armstrong, Director and the CEO of the Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C which oversees the CLT, described three of the seven CLT VAHA sites as being "stuck" waiting for provincial or federal funding (Lazaruk, 2022). Armstrong explained that all the sites could have been built by now but only if they were willing to charge market rates and that "there is a difference between being able to build housing and to build them at the level of affordability for the people they were intended for" (ibid).

Another related issue that multiple participants raised, especially those with experience of working inside the City or the VAHA was that despite the new programs, there were issues with the predictability, consistency and sustainability in senior government financing and funding. FCOV noted that "you don't need to look very far to see the lack of sustainable, certain funding coming from the federal government", and VAHA_COV noted that "predictability, consistency...and sufficiency of senior government funding is critically, critically important" to the VAHA's pipeline of housing projects. In terms of predictability, COV_Regulator also noted that often federal funding opportunities come in at the "tenth hour", but that this was somewhat balanced by the availability of BC Housing funding at an earlier stage.

These findings from interviewees and documentation emphasize that even amidst a much-improved senior government funding and financing landscape, there are immense challenges to implementing affordable housing development on City-owned land and, ultimately, the funding is still inadequate to robustly address the extent of Vancouver's housing crisis.

5.2.3. Municipal Politics

As per the intergovernmental context laid out in my conceptual framework, senior governments are no longer the only major participants in enabling social and affordable housing and the role of municipal governments in this area continues to be critical even in the face of new funding and financing opportunities. My document analysis, including analysis of municipal election platforms, City of Vancouver documentation and newspaper articles, emphasized the significant role that municipal politics played in the VAHA's role in the City's affordable housing agenda.

From the most basic level of analysis, the Vision Vancouver majority government that introduced the VAHA were empowered to do so by the voters. In Vision's 2011 platform, one of their pledges was to "leverage the City's assets to build more affordable housing" (Vision Vancouver, 2011). This promise was further entrenched through the 2012 Mayor's Taskforce on Housing Affordability's commitments to create "a new City-owned entity to deliver affordable rental and social housing by using City lands" and develop "an operational and organizational model for a new Housing Authority" (City of Vancouver, 2012b). Vision's mandate to support the VAHA was then further strengthened when Mayor Gregor Robertson and a majority Council were again re-elected in 2014, this time with a platform promise to "[e]mpower the new Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency to use city-owned assets to create 500 new affordable homes in its first three years" (Vision Vancouver, 2014). While the VAHA failed to meet the timeline projected by this promise, there was ongoing support from Council to the Agency during its 2014 term.

One of the most significant actions undertaken in this term was the designation of City land assets to the Agency for development. This included the "largest one-time municipal land investment into the Community Housing Sector in Canada" (City of Vancouver, 2018k) when the Community Land Trust was announced as the successful

applicant to RFPs issued by the VAHA for 1190 Burrard Street, 1210 Seymour Street, 177 West Pender Street, 1001 Kingsway, 3279-3297 Vanness Avenue, 3310 Marine Way and 3183-3245 Pierview Crescent. When the seven-site partnership was announced, Thom Armstrong, who at the time was Executive Director of the CLT and the Co-op Housing Federation of BC, praised the City for “its leadership in recognizing the need for this kind of investment in the community housing sector and supporting a creative housing solution that will deliver benefits for generations to come”(Community Land Trust, 2018). In my interview with FVAHA_CHS, this participant reinforced that the investment of land assets for affordable housing can be attributed to the leadership demonstrated by then Mayor Gregor Robertson, pointing to his “strong directive” to bring City-land forward for affordable housing. This leadership can be contrasted with the passive stance on housing policy taken by the Mayor of neighbouring municipality Burnaby who consistently insisted that affordable housing was not a municipal responsibility (Jones, 2022).

Municipal leadership was, therefore, a crucial element in realizing this particular response to the housing crisis. Choosing to invest in and leverage city-owned land via the VAHA was not inevitable, but instead represented a distinct choice about how to enact urban governance. The following text from an interim report from the 2012 Mayor’s Taskforce on Housing Affordability, which laid the foundation for the VAHA, provides an indication of the approach enacted by the Vision-majority municipal government:

“Should we simply let the market decide what kind of city we want and who gets to live here? Or should we take the actions needed to increase the diversity of affordable housing options, and maintain the vibrancy, diversity and economic competitiveness of our city? This Task Force believes that we can and should take action to create more affordable housing for future generations in Vancouver.” (City of Vancouver, 2012a)

Here, the Vision Vancouver-led government still framed “economic competitiveness” as a desired outcome of its housing interventions, indicating a clear commitment to at least some of the tenets of urban entrepreneurialism. However, the opening sentence does somewhat challenge traditional urban entrepreneurialism approaches that are guided by “market rationality” (Harvey, 1989) by questioning the role the market should play. While Vision Vancouver were by no-means fully subverting the urban entrepreneurial governance approach, they exhibited some of the tendencies of the municipal entrepreneurialism style of governance through their willingness to

intervene in the market and harness their land assets to provide housing for those who were not being served by the private market. In contrast, in a 2014 newspaper article on the VAHA, then opposition Councillor George Affleck of the NPA demonstrated an alternative view on the role of municipal government: “We live in a capitalistic, democratic society. I worry about us getting too involved in the market as a government. It's a fact of life in Vancouver” (Bailey, 2014). I interpret Affleck’s comments to mean that should his party have held power on Council at this time, they would not have pursued a housing agenda which included non-market approaches such as the VAHA and instead would have almost wholly relied on market-approaches to addressing the housing crisis. This quote highlights that should a different political party have been in power, the VAHA would likely never have been implemented.

Despite exhibiting some of the tendencies of the municipal entrepreneurialism style of governance through their willingness to intervene in the market and harness their land assets to provide housing for those who were not being served by the private market, the Vision Vancouver-led government still framed “economic competitiveness” as a desired outcome of its housing interventions. Furthermore, the VAHA proposal report advocated that the market was “key to increasing supply of housing” and committed to “continue to find ways in which it can incent the market to deliver a higher level of affordability as well as incremental units” (City of Vancouver, 2014a, p. 3). These positions are much more in line with the established governance approaches adopted under urban entrepreneurialism.

Vision Vancouver’s approach to incenting the market relied heavily on approving rezoning applications from developers to generate Community Amenity Contributions (CACs) and approving developments in general to generate Development Cost Levies (DCLs). CACs are in-kind or cash contributions paid by property developers when they are granted development rights through rezoning that aim to recapture a portion (typically 70 to 80 per cent) of the projected increase in the land’s value for public benefits. When these contributions were first introduced in Vancouver in 1989, they were used to fund amenities such as a parks, community centres and daycares (Punter, 2003). However, under Vision Vancouver CACs became increasingly used to fund affordable housing projects to address Vancouver’s housing affordability crisis amidst the withdrawal of funding and support from higher levels of government and rapidly increasing land and housing costs (Hyde, 2021). DCLs were introduced in 1990

following a provincial amendment to the Vancouver Charter (Punter, 2003) and are charged at a flat-rate per square foot on all new developments. DCLs are one of the City's key sources of revenue to create amenities, including social housing.⁸ The approach of incenting real estate development to generate revenue for affordable housing has been framed as being more beneficial to the "needs of real estate" than the "housing needs of residents" (Madden & Marcuse, 2016, p. 138), and has been tied to further entrenching housing unaffordability (Stein, 2019).

Through an urban governance lens, the Vision Vancouver-led government's decision to implement the VAHA while also pursuing other market-based housing policies is representative of Thompson et al's description of entrepreneurial municipalism's being "inchoate and entangled in an assemblage of municipal strategies exhibiting divergent tendencies" (2020, p. 1190). In this case, Vision's desire to incent the market can be understood as divergent, even contradictory, from their decision to implement the VAHA which recognized that housing being delivered through the market was increasingly out of reach even for moderate-income households.

Vision Vancouver's tenure in power ended in the 2018 municipal election which saw the party wiped out from Council. This result was framed by some in the media as a response to the intensification of housing unaffordability under Vision's leadership (Little, 2018). The extent to which this intensification could be attributed to the municipal government's policy approach is beyond the scope of this project. However, it is of note that housing unaffordability deepened throughout the rest of Canada during this time period (Rozworski, 2019), so municipal government's response cannot be blamed exclusively.

The 2018 election returned a new independent Mayor, Kennedy Stewart, and no single majority party on Council. The outcome was a Council with a diversity of perspectives and a subset of Councillors with politically opposing viewpoints, where each was opposed to new housing but for distinct ideological reasons. When asking interviewees about how this shift in Council impacted the VAHA, some participants commented that a lack of alignment on Council inhibited progress. CHS commented: "We don't have that strong Council that's going to be aligned that says the priority is just

⁸ All projects facilitated through the VAHA were exempt from DCLs and CACs due to all the VAHA projects meeting the DCL Bylaw definition of social housing (City of Vancouver, 2023)

to get the housing to the market or... the non-profit sector. [Instead, Council says] we need x number of units at this affordability level which could kill a project and it is killing projects today". Similarly, FCC reflected that the lack of a clear agenda on the new Council meant that "staff really got caught in the middle. It was always 'more study, more information, more engagement, more something' and meanwhile inflation is skyrocketing, the cost of banking, everything is going up and the economics of these [VAHA] projects, as I understand it, just fell apart".

Other interviewees were less critical in their appraisal of the impacts of the change in leadership. FCOV, who was working on housing policy at the City at the time of the change in political leadership, commented that: "I think generally there was support for the Agency", but added there was "not maybe a great understanding of what it was really doing, maybe not until they started doing the modular housing which helped people understand that it was really about *tangible housing*. [Not] just some sort of QUANGO [quasi autonomous non-government organization] something but actually this was a group of people who were actually building housing". The general consensus from interviews was that support for the VAHA did continue with the new Council and that affordable housing remained a priority issue, but there was overall less clear direction for the Agency.

Document analysis corroborated these findings, with documentation showing ongoing support and work on the VAHA projects that were initiated through the goal of enabling 2,500 units. However, under the direction of the new Council this goal was seen as an end point for the Agency. This new Council oversaw the organizational changes that ultimately brought the staff and function of the VAHA back within the City's Arts, Culture and Community Services department. This decision was framed as part of the overall portfolio strategy of transferring the City's non-market housing assets into the VAHEF (City of Vancouver, 2020b, p. 150). FCOV speculated that Council and staff perhaps saw benefits in keeping the Agency closer to itself so it could control some of the outcomes and did not see the advantages in "taking that next step to make it more independent". From an urban governance perspective, if the Vision Vancouver majority government's decision to establish the VAHA were understood as a form of urban experimentation, the decision under the subsequent Council to bring the Agency back within the City could be seen as a much more risk-averse approach to governing.

In terms of the actual number of units, all 2,041 units enabled and 871 units that were in the pipeline by the of 2021 can be understood as being made possible by the leadership or ongoing support of the municipal government for the VAHA. By this I mean that while there were multiple other factors that were essential to these units being enabled, it was ultimately the decisions and policy approaches implemented by the municipal governments in power during the tenure of the VAHA that shaped this outcome. However, drawing from a Marxist political economy perspective it bears emphasising that due to the elements of entrepreneurial governance that continued to permeate the Vision housing agenda, another municipal housing policy agenda that aggressively prioritized housing as a human right above real estate development economics could have ultimately produced significantly more affordable housing within the same timeline.

5.2.4. Agency Model

Despite eventually being reabsorbed into the City towards the end of 2021, the VAHA was initially established as a separate legal entity from the City with the City maintaining ownership of the delegated land assets and City Council maintaining oversight of its overall direction.

As described in Chapter 3.1, the suggested advantages of establishing the VAHA as an ‘Agent’ for the City were that the “City retains ownership of its assets...; a simplified and focused structure to minimize transaction costs; [and] the ability to access third-party funding” (City of Vancouver, 2014b, p. 6). This operating model remained in place throughout the VAHA’s active period, however the governance structure changed in 2017 with the City’s housing strategy reset. These changes resulted in the dissolution of the VAHA Board of Directors, replaced with an Oversight Committee comprised entirely of City of Vancouver staff and a sole Director who was also a City staff member (City of Vancouver, 2017c). When I asked interviewee FVAHA_CHS about the impact of this change in governance structure, this participant responded that while it [this change] looked “good on paper”, in practical terms it did not represent a significant change for the Agency. However, through my document analysis and interviews, a number of other threads emerged relating to how this agency model enhanced and limited the VAHA’s success. These are discussed under three sub-headings below.

Singular focus

One of the most recurrent concepts that emerged as having a positive impact on the VAHA's ability to enable housing was its singular focus on enabling new affordable housing. In the initial proposal for the VAHA, it was suggested that:

“the creation of the Agency will allow an unprecedented focus of appropriately skilled staffing resources, Board expertise, and delegated authority from Council to expedite and leverage partners and opportunities for affordable housing” (City of Vancouver, 2014a, p. 4)

This point was further emphasised throughout the Council meetings discussing the VAHA on July 8 and July 9 2014, with members of the Vision Council, City Manager and the Chief Housing Officer referencing that the unique advantage of the VAHA would be its dedicated focus on bringing forward new supply of affordable housing on City-owned or partner-owned land which would make it a “nimble” Agency (City of Vancouver, 2014b).

FCOV, who had worked on the initial proposal for the VAHA, noted that “one of the main reasons to set up an Agency is its singular focus. It is a different environment to working at the City. At the City, you are part of a larger bureaucracy, and you have kind of competing agendas, competing things, motions from Council, other directions”. Similarly FVAHA_CHS reflected on how this focus and prioritization of one goal created opportunities for success: “I think that idea of having some kind of group to be hived off from the City and say ‘we don’t have all these conflicting priorities, our priority is to build this housing very quickly’ can be effective. We were effective with things like modular. Again, we were effective with VAHA in certain instances where we got the land into the appropriate parties’ hands and... helped govern the entitlement process”. Despite these successes, this interviewee did clarify that the VAHA's ability to deliver on its single priority was somewhat impeded by a lack of autonomy.

Level of autonomy

Both interview participants who are currently working in the community housing sector suggested that the VAHA's legal separation from the City did not translate into it being a fully autonomous Agency and that this lack of autonomy limited the VAHA's effectiveness. CHS explained:

“If I had my way, I would have [said to] VAHA here’s your land portfolio and they are completely arm’s length with more discretion and decision-making power. [Instead,] Everything that they do has to come back into the City siloes, being real estate and finance, and sometimes that’s where we run into the challenges. I think its biggest stumbling block is it doesn’t have autonomy, it’s really a conduit back to the City.”

CHS elaborated on this point, noting that the VAHA had not been provided more autonomy with how to use the land moved into the VAHEF, stating:

“With the Vancouver Affordable Housing Fund... VAHA could have... been given more autonomy and discretion with regards to how to manage those lands, hit the targets and get the housing built. [Instead, the current model results in the City saying] ‘we [the City] want the housing built and it must achieve this in affordability’ because it’s almost made it impossible for us [the Community Housing Sector] to keep up”.

FVAHA_CHS similarly discussed that most successful government-established agencies tend to have a greater degree of autonomy than what the VAHA had:

“When you really do separate it and say we’re going to fund it, provide resources, operate it independently and have independent governance, [such as] BC Housing, that] is a world model that most other provinces in Canada don’t have and...would like to have. The VAHA... just didn’t really go far enough, there were some ideas that were tried and experimented with but it didn’t go to that full separated Agency situation.”

In contrast, albeit not directly, FCoV also discussed the extent to which the VAHA was separated from the City but pointed to one of the short-term advantages of the model. They explained that one of the considerations that went into establishing its degree of separation was that a more fully third-party Agency would have required the City land assets to be transferred and that this would have incur enormous financial costs through provincial property transfer tax. This could have impacted the City’s ability to invest in the land it did acquire during this study period for the VAHA to develop for affordable housing.

While interviewees from the Community Housing Sector expressed a desire for the VAHA to have been given more autonomy, the decision by the City was instead to bring the function of the VAHA back within the City. COV/VAHA cited the benefits of this decision being that the City could take a “portfolio approach” to affordable housing and

the ability to “collaborate and integrate across [City] departments much better”. From the lens of urban experimentation, the decision to bring the VAHA within the City could be framed as a way of applying the ‘findings’ of the experiment to “more permanently embed the issue on the municipal political agenda” (Mukhtar-Landgren et al., 2019, p. 728). Arguably, Council’s decision to situate affordable housing development within the City itself rather than in an arms-length agency is an indication that the experiment of the VAHA made a highly compelling case for the City to take an even more active role in the delivery of affordable housing on its lands, a case that would not have been made if there had been no initial experiment. However, the extent to which this permanent embedding of affordable housing development actually materializes at the City now that the VAHA has been retired remains to be seen. A broad trend of increased social, supportive and purpose-built rental approvals and completions across all of Vancouver (not just City-owned land) can be observed in Table 8 below over the time period the VAHA was active, between 2014 to 2021. However, data is not yet available from subsequent years so it is too early to identify whether the embedding of affordable housing development in the City itself will have a noticeable impact on these trends.

Table 8 Social and Supportive Housing and Purpose-built rental approvals and completions in the city of Vancouver from 2014 to 2021

	Social and Supportive Housing Approvals	Social and Supportive Housing Completions (and acquisitions)	Purpose-built rental approvals	Purpose-built rental completions
2014	337	768	852	1,693
2015	71	280	1,166	1,495
2016	518	226	1,860	1,284
2017	1,702	190	822	585
2018	2,018	965	1,031	1,455
2019	738	402	1,239	504
2020	1,326	847	2,473	999

2021	1,344	1,669	2,956	689
Total	8,054	5,347	12,399	8,704

Data from Metro Vancouver Housing Books and City of Vancouver Housing Targets Report (City of Vancouver, 2022b; Metro Vancouver, 2016, 2018)

Resourced

One of the most significant determinants of the VAHA’s ability to enable housing was the degree to which it was adequately resourced with both budget and staff. One of the most vocal critics of the proposed benefits of the separate Agency from its inception was former Councillor George Affleck of the NPA, who, at a 2017 Council meeting stated: “I don’t think we need to spend hundreds if not millions of dollars of taxpayer’s dollars on an operation that can be done by existing staff and existing resources” (City of Vancouver, 2017g). The suggestion that the work of the VAHA could have been achieved without adding any additional resources seems to be rooted more in an ideological bias against government spending, which aligns with the NPA’s voting record during that period of Council. Moreover, Affleck’s position contrasts with the findings from my document analysis and interviews which indicate the dedicated resources of the VAHA played a role in advancing the City’s affordable housing agenda.

FCOV, who worked on the initial set up of the VAHA, noted that one of the reasons to create a separate Agency was to attract staff with expertise in housing delivery who many not typically have applied to jobs at the City. This comment was then reinforced in my interview with VAHA/COV who explained: “one of the best parts about VAHA and actually what encouraged me to come and work at VAHA... was the fact that it had that specific mission and that specific mandate. We weren’t pulled in a bunch of different directions; we didn’t have a bunch of competing priorities. We had one priority and I don’t think that mindset... would have been possible in a very large bureaucracy that is the City of Vancouver”. This interviewee suggested that the way the VAHA was set up and resourced allowed for “culture and innovation” to flourish that would not have emerged within the City. Moreover, they suggested that this culture and innovation continued on even now that the VAHA’s mandate and team has been brought back within the City. While this point be understood as being subjective to this participant’s

experience as a former VAHA employee who remains a City employee, it is of note that other interviewees commented positively on the VAHA’s increasingly effective role over time. Interviewees also noted that prior to the creation and eventual re-absorption of the VAHA into the City that the City did not have staff team exclusively dedicated to non-market development.

In terms of staffing, one interviewee did note that one limitation to success in the VAHA’s early days was that the original VAHA CEO had two roles, also serving as the City of Vancouver’s Chief Housing Officer. This interviewee noted that these two positions had very different areas of focus, so this undermined the then CEO’s ability to focus on the VAHA’s mandate. In 2017 when the City ‘reset’ its Housing and Homelessness strategy, a new CEO was appointed whose sole focus would be the VAHA (Johnston, 2017). In my interview with CHS, this interviewee noted that 2017 seemed to be a pivotal year for the VAHA and, due to it building up staffing and capacity, it went from being more of “hinderance” to becoming a “partner” to the community housing sector.

The staffing and capacity of the VAHA would not have been possible without ongoing dedicated operating and capital funding. When discussing the decision to establish a separate housing agency, FCC recalls that it felt important to “have it somewhere where it had a fighting chance” where the operating and capital funding could be “protected from general buckets”. I reviewed the City of Vancouver budgets from 2015 to 2021 and identified ongoing funding commitments to support the mandate of the VAHA, as displayed in Table 9 below.

Table 9 VAHA operating budget by year*

Year*	\$ million	Notes
2015	0.75	
2016	1.0	Increase of \$0.2 million from 2015 covers staffing, consultancy and Board expenses
2017	1.6	Increase by \$0.6 million from 2016, \$0.1 million to reflect additional operating costs approved by Council in 2014 and a further \$0.5 million to cover additional operating costs required to move forward on the agency’s mandate to deliver 2,500 affordable housing units by 2021
2018	1.3	Decrease of \$0.3 million from 2017, as the funding added to cover additional operating costs was not required, and the agency was able to manage its mandate within the original budget forecast

2019	1.2	Decrease of \$0.1 million, as the funding added in 2018 to cover additional operating costs was not required, and the agency was able to manage its mandate within the original budget forecast
2020	1.2	No change from 2019, as the same level of funding is required to cover operating costs.
2021	2.2	The 2021 Budget notes that as VAHA nears the completion of its mandate, the City's non-market housing assets (including those enabled by VAHA) will be consolidated into the VAHEF and the function and staff of the VAHA will be transitioned to the City's Arts, Culture and Community Services department. The additional \$1.0 million will be focused on new resources, roles, systems and consultation to achieve the new portfolio strategy.

*Table 9 shows that the VAHA's operating budget increased between 2015 to 2017, then slightly decreased in 2018 and 2019, remained steady in 2020, then substantially increased in 2021 to prepare for the consolidation of the VAHA into the City's Arts, Culture and Community Services department and its new portfolio strategy.

Throughout these years, there were also ongoing capital funding commitments to enable VAHA projects. The 2015-2018 Capital Plan allocated \$62 million to fund developments to enable projects by the VAHA (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2015), and the 2019-2022 Capital Plan allocated \$75 million towards housing site acquisition to enable partner-led development of non-market rental housing on City-owned land (City of Vancouver, 2018i) .

Resources in the form of adequate budget and staffing were critical to the VAHA achieving what it did. While I could not access the number of staff over time, by the time the VAHA team was embedded back into the City there were seven permanent staff members, all of whom were brought over to the City (VAHA website, n.d). The provision of these resources to the VAHA by the City are indicative of a governance style much more aligned with the entrepreneurial municipalism literature than with the traditional urban entrepreneurialism scholarship that emphasises the implementation of austerity in City budgets (Peck, 2014). Furthermore, this demonstrates that enabling housing for people who cannot afford to pay market prices requires not just policy commitments but accompanying adequate funding commitments. These type of funding commitments towards social goods, in this case housing, is what most tangibly aligns the VAHA with the municipal entrepreneurialism literature and separates it from the urban entrepreneurial literature.

5.2.5. Municipal regulations

The City of Vancouver's role as a regulator has had both negative and positive impacts on the VAHA's ability to enable housing projects.

Throughout the documents I reviewed, one of the most frequently cited barriers towards new housing development in Vancouver is the City's permitting process. In its 2017 Housing Vancouver Strategy, the City of Vancouver acknowledged that a significant increase in development had put immense pressure on the organization's development and rezoning application process. My interview with CHS corroborated this, noting that "we've dealt with issues with municipal approvals... VAHA wasn't the stumbling block with municipal approval challenges, so that's more to deal with how the City is broken up into siloes". By commenting on siloes, the interviewee is referring to the fact that obtaining a permit frequently requires the involvement and approval of multiple departments at the City. These comments are reflected in a media article specifically addressing the VAHA missing its target of 2,500 units by 2021, with journalist Frances Bula broadly pointing blame at the approvals process, noting that "those involved in social housing say it's particularly hard having a system where more than a dozen departments all get to weigh in on their individual priorities" (Bula, 2021). Similarly, in my interview with FCC, this participant agreed that, overall, the permitting process can be slow, describing it as a "clunky approval process".

The Housing Vancouver strategy committed the City to a number of strategies to expedite and improve these processes, with explicit direction to prioritize the delivery of affordable housing. One of the key outcomes of this direction was the implementation of the Social Housing or Rental Tenure (SHORT) program. Launched in October 2017, the SHORT program sought to reduce development approval times for affordable housing and all VAHA projects initiated after its launch date were processed through the program.

Initially the program accepted both social housing and rental projects, but, as confirmed in my interview with COV_Regulator, due to a recognized need to prioritize affordability, now focuses purely on expediting social, supportive and emergency housing approvals. In my interview with VAHA_COV, this participant confirmed that the SHORT program had been effective at reducing the timelines for permitting for some

VAHA projects. COV_Regulator explained that this was possible due to having a team within the City dedicated to SHORT applications who could take a proactive and pointed approach to managing social housing development applications. Both the interviewees who referenced the SHORT program noted improvements could be made, but that in general the program had been effective. They also noted that while blame was frequently placed with the City for a slow permitting process, that often the City cannot proceed without applicants confirming certain conditions that are beyond the City's control, such as funding, financing or legal agreements.

COV_Regulator also highlighted that the permitting process could involve hundreds of bylaws, policies and review panels depending on the project. Bula's media article suggests that "many non-profit housing groups, architects, consultants and advocates are at maximum frustration about what feels like a system where concerns about shadows, trees, and design details or rigid adherence to zoning rules have outweighed the need to get lower-cost housing built as quickly as possible" (2021). These processes are often framed as 'red-tape', including by the City itself who in 2021 implemented a number of changes to reduce waiting times for residential permit applications (City of Vancouver, 2021e). There are clear benefits, especially from a rights-based approach to housing, to minimizing what could be described as arbitrary barriers for housing projects that serve those most in need. However, 'red tape' can be a pernicious euphemism utilized by urban entrepreneurial governments that seek to create a "good business climate" (Harvey, 1989), and while there are clearly improvements that can be made to the City's permitting system these must not come at the cost of safety⁹.

Beyond the approvals and permitting process, another way in which the City's role as a regulator had an impact on the VAHA's ability to enable housing was through amendments made to existing policies to expedite the delivery of TMH. In September 2017, Council voted in favour of delegating authority to the Director of Planning or Development Permit Board to "to relax zoning provisions to facilitate the approval of developments where at a minimum of 70% of all dwelling units within the development are used for low cost housing for persons receiving assistance" (City of Vancouver, 2017e). Building upon this amendment, in November 2017, Council then voted in favour of amending Official Development Plans (ODPs) for Coal Harbour, Downtown,

⁹ There are documented risks to a purely ideological opposition to 'red tape' (Poole, 2017).

Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer, False Creek, False Creek North, Southeast False Creek and Southeast Granville Slopes to permit TMH development in these areas, subject to corresponding zoning bylaws (City of Vancouver, 2017d). These bylaw changes meant that unless rezoning was required, the City was no longer legally required to hold a public hearing in order to secure a development permit for TMH. Several interviewees noted that this change had a positive impact on the VAHA being able to quickly deliver TMH on City-owned sites.

The amendments resulted in significant public reaction, particularly for the TMH at 7430 & 7460 Heather Street which several community members protested against and even attempted to legally challenge the City on the lack of public hearing. These protests and other examples of 'NIMBY' culture were raised by several interviewees as somewhat of a barrier, especially for VAHA projects that offered either supportive housing or housing for very low-income residents.

While the TMH sites were not subject to public hearing, the permanent supportive housing projects on City-owned land were, including 2086-2098 W7th Av, and 2091 W 8th Ave. This project was first announced by the provincial government in February 2021, with the VAHA applying for rezoning in October 2021. From its announcement, the proposal and rezoning drew considerably more attention in the public and the media than equivalent projects. Public coalitions developed both in opposition to and in support of the project, and the public hearing for the rezoning lasted six days due to the vast amount of interest from speakers. In an unprecedented move, the then CEO of BC Housing Shayne Ramsay attended the public hearing to speak in support of the project, and following his remarks was "swarmed" by opponents (BC Housing, 2022). In his public retirement letter shortly after the incident, Ramsay wrote that: "small but vocal groups of people are increasingly angry and increasingly volatile. While one community faces the almost certain prospect of poverty, poor health, violence, and pre-mature death, others are now unwilling to provide a welcoming space, a space that could save lives" (BC Housing, 2022). These comments regarding how the public hearing process does not align with the realization of housing as a human right were also reflected in my interview with FCC who stated: "I think fundamentally the idea of putting a human right on trial in public hearings is... just got to be something that we stop doing as a society". Ramsay and FCC's remarks highlight the challenges social housing projects, including those enabled by the VAHA, face when they go through the

public hearing process. Whilst the project at 2086-2098 W7th Av, and 2091 W 8th Ave was ultimately approved, the City's processes made it a much longer and controversial approval timeline.

One further way in which the City of Vancouver's role as a regulator enhanced the VAHA's ability to enable housing was through the creation of specific policies to enable land acquisition for affordable housing development. In 2010, the City approved a Public Amenity Financial Plan & Strategy Official Development Plan for the East Fraser Lands which gave the City the option to acquire parcels for affordable housing for a fixed price. Specifically, this Plan gave the City the right to purchase designated land parcels from the developer Wesgroup for \$35 (in 2006 dollars, to be adjusted for inflation) per buildable square foot to develop affordable housing to meet the targets in the EFL ODP (City of Vancouver, 2010). Interviewee FVAHA_CHS commented that the best situation for the City to acquire land would be one in which it had a strategic advantage where it did not have to compete with other buyers and overpay, which is what the City was able to do due to the policies they approved for the EFL ODP. In 2017 the City completed the purchase of five sites for approximately \$21 million, with the VAHA leading development on these sites. Four were completed by the end of 2021, with the fifth site currently under construction. Another example of City policies enabling land acquisition for VAHA projects was the use of revenues generated from CACs from the Cambie Corridor to purchase 55-79 & 87-115 SW Marine Drive for approximately \$11 million, with the buildings on this site currently under construction.

5.2.6. The Community Housing Sector in Vancouver

From its inception, the VAHA cited the necessity of working with a variety of partners to enable housing (City of Vancouver, 2014a) and emphasized their role as a "builder of partnerships" (City of Vancouver, 2017c). Besides the partnerships with senior levels of government outlined earlier, the community housing sector represented the other key area of partnership that resulted in the VAHA being able to enable housing.

The community housing sector chiefly refers to non-profit and co-op housing providers and operators (*Non-Profit Housing FAQs*, n.d.), including supportive housing (CHRA-ACRU, n.d.), and more broadly also can include "municipalities, faith-based

groups, charities, service groups, cause-driven private sector organizations, and donors” (Housing Central & BC Rental Housing Coalition, 2017). BC is often referred to as being a leader in community housing with the best developed community housing sector in the country (Housing Central & BC Rental Housing Coalition, 2017; UBC, 2018). The Agency was designed with the community housing sector in mind, with the initial VAHA report specifying that the City would “continue to leverage non-profit operators in the role of housing operator and property manager” (City of Vancouver, 2014a, p. 7) and citing the necessity of partnerships with non-profit organizations.

The existence of this experienced and well-developed community housing sector in Vancouver emerged through my analysis as an essential component in the VAHA’s role in enabling housing. A City report highlighted that “non-profits bring a wealth of knowledge and value to help reach the City’s affordable housing goals” (City of Vancouver, 2021d, p. 5). Comments from my interview with VAHA_COV expanded on this, with this participant noting that an “important component of what we do, it’s the partnerships... with the not-for-profit sector because they are our key delivery partner in terms of... completing design, development, funding, financing, construction, operation and maintenance of the buildings themselves, right. So, the capacity within the non-market housing sector to do those pieces, and effective and good relationships with the not-for-profit sector is really, really important”. These comments highlight the interdependence between the City and the community housing sector in the delivery of affordable housing, and the necessity for the City to foster relationships and build trust with non-profit partners.

In terms of partnerships with housing operators, when I asked FCC in our interview why the VAHA model chose to not focus on managing or operating housing, this participant responded that “there’s lots of great housing operators in Vancouver, that’s not a skill we lack in Vancouver...there’s a big ecosystem with lots of layers, competency, knowledge, skills”. A 2021 report from the City provides an overview of this ecosystem, identifying that there were 56 different non-profit operators operating non-market housing on City-owned land, with this figure encompassing sites enabled by the VAHA (City of Vancouver, 2021c). This ecosystem of skilled housing operators was especially critical to the success of the TMH projects enabled by the VAHA. The City report referenced above notes that the diversity of operators served “a spectrum of populations including vulnerable groups” such as “Indigenous people, women fleeing

violence, persons with mental health issues, addiction issues, disabilities, LGBTQ2+, homeless, seniors, and families” (City of Vancouver, 2021c, p. 4). In the case of TMH, BC Housing selected experienced non-profit housing providers to operate the buildings and provide “support to tenants based on their assessed needs” (BC Gov News, 2019). A CMHC blog post about TMH notes that this included meeting the “cultural needs” of residents from specific populations, citing examples of the City and the VAHA working with an Indigenous operator to enable smudging at one TMH and working “with an experienced operator and a Black-serving non-profit that brought a cultural lens. Their input directly shaped some aspects of the project design, such as the landscaping and outdoor amenity space” (CMHC, 2021b). An indicator of how non-profit operators were essential to the VAHA is the results from a survey conducted by BC Housing six months after residents moved into TMH buildings. Conducted between September 2018 to September 2019, the survey found that that 89% of TMH residents in Vancouver said they were satisfied with the level of supports they received (City of Vancouver & BC Housing, n.d.).

Beyond housing operators, another key community housing sector partner for the VAHA were not-for-profit real estate developers, including the Community Land Trust BC, a major partner for the Agency. As a housing model, community land trusts create affordable housing by holding land and housing “for the benefit of the community in which it exists. With the shared value of housing as a right, the goal is to remove land and housing from the real estate market and hold it in a trust to preserve the affordability of that land and housing asset” (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2018). Prior to the establishment of the VAHA, the Community Land Trust had entered into a “groundbreaking” (“Our History,” n.d.) partnership with the City of Vancouver in 2012 to develop four sites of City-owned land into affordable housing, a partnership that helped to lay the groundwork for the partnership model deployed by the VAHA (Patten, 2015). While typically the community land trust model would see the Trust itself retain ownership of the land, in the case of the partnerships with CLT BC, the City remains the owner and grants the CLT BC long-term leases to develop the land. When the City and the VAHA issued three RFPs in 2017 for seven sites of City-owned land, the Community Land Trust emerged as the successful applicant for all three due to their ability to “manage the projects as a Portfolio, improving overall affordability and revenue generation across the seven projects” (City of Vancouver & Vancouver Affordable

Housing Agency, 2019, p. 5). When the partnership was first announced, then CEO of the VAHA Luke Harrison stated in media interview “with this land protected by the Community Land Trust, homes can remain affordable for the life of these developments, ensuring that people can rent and put roots down in these communities” (Zussman, 2018). The land is “protected” from the speculative increases within Vancouver’s real estate market. However, unlike other land trust models where this protection would be in perpetuity, the City retains ownership of the land with the CLT BC signing 99 year leases for the developments, hence Harrison’s qualifier “for the life of these developments”.

The mechanism by which the CLT BC is able to create affordability is by leveraging their portfolio to “allow for cross-site subsidies on capital and operating costs, thus creating deepening affordability over time” (False Creek South Neighbourhood Association, 2016). As the VAHA aims to provide housing for people with low-to-middle incomes, those living in CLT BC developments earning closer to the upper threshold may pay housing charges equivalent to market rates, but unlike rental housing provided through the market, they have security of tenure. Furthermore, the lease terms set out by the City establish minimum affordability requirements for the units, which further protects the developments as affordable housing. However, as discussed earlier in the section on Senior Governments, even with the nominal lease of land, the Community Land Trust has faced challenges in progressing with developing its sites. This is discussed further in following section 5.2.7.

While some in the Community Housing Sector have wielded criticism at the delays (Bula, 2021), many working in this area recognize the efforts of the VAHA and the City. In my interview with CHS, this participant spoke positively in broad terms about how the VAHA partners with the Community Housing sector: “they are the advocates on our [the Community Housing Sector’s] side and we’re all on the same team to get the housing built and I’ve seen that VAHA has advanced over the years from 2014 with higher level of capacity... and more alignment with the community housing sector. So, it has evolved from what I’d call more of a stumbling block and another bureaucratic step in the process to a true partner at the table”. This participant’s quote suggested that the usefulness of the VAHA to the community housing sector increased over time, which aligns with the earlier data presented regarding the impact of the introduction of increased senior government funding.

5.2.7. The economic climate and COVID-19 Pandemic

The wide-ranging economic impacts that have been associated with the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁰, including inflation (Khan & Sullivan, 2022), supply-chain issues affecting construction costs (Wall, 2021) and rising interest rates (Perrier, 2022) had a negative impact on progress on several VAHA projects. In my interview with FCOV, this participant suggested that the combination of the pandemic with “inflationary construction prices [and] rising interest rates” has resulted in “probably the most difficult environment to deliver affordable housing that I have ever seen in my career”.

In terms of interest rates, affordable housing projects on city land are especially vulnerable to increases in borrowing rates because being able to offer lower rental revenues from day one is contingent on “access to low-cost financing upfront during construction and upon project completion”.(City of Vancouver, 2018a). As outlined earlier, projects that were able to secure low-cost financing, have been able to progress but many others that are still awaiting those commitments are now ‘stuck’ and face a much more challenging economic climate to proceed in than when they were first announced.

In terms of the impacts of construction costs, in a media article the City provided a statement which cited “rapid construction-cost escalation” as a central reason for the VAHA missing its target of 2,500 units by 2021 (Bula, 2021). This sentiment was also echoed in interviews. When discussing why some of the projects they have partnered with the VAHA on have failed to materialize on the initial timeline agreed upon, CHS commented that “as time has gone on and construction costs have gone out of whack and interest rates start going up like they are now that we’re faced with a lot more challenges”. The impact of the construction cost escalation seems to have only had the most significant impact on projects which were not underway before the pandemic began. This was emphasized in my interview with FVAHA_CHS, who when asked if the pandemic and associated economic conditions had impacted the VAHA projects their organization were developing, responded: “not particularly, we might have got pushed

¹⁰ The extent to which these economic impacts are directly related to the pandemic itself is beyond the scope of this project, however it is my normative position that there were inherent issues in our economic system itself prior to the pandemic and that these were largely exacerbated by COVID-19 (The institute for gender & YWCA Canada, 2020)

back like a month or two but those were sites that were well into construction, they were considered essential services... but we didn't really have a huge set back. I mean there was little supply chain wobbles and stuff but it wasn't dramatic".

Timing, therefore, seems to have been the contextual factor which determined the extent to which the economic conditions associated with the pandemic impacted VAHA projects, with this timing being impacted by the previously addressed issues around senior government funding and the approvals process. CHS explained that with projects that had already been delayed due to these issues, and due to issues with affordability targets discussed in the next section, that "the market forces [referring to interest rate increases and construction costs] that we're layering on top...it's almost made it virtually impossible for us to keep up".

CHS did also add that there had been one positive impact related to the pandemic, which was that the change in work practices from in-person to online had made it easier to schedule meetings with the VAHA and City of Vancouver.

5.2.8. Targets

Housing targets emerged in both the document analysis and through interviews as factor that had both positive and negative effects on the progress of VAHA enabled projects.

On one hand, it was identified that the broad, overarching target of 2,500 units by 2021 provided the City and the VAHA with accountability and motivation. In the early days of the Agency, the target of 2,500 units was set to be, as said by former City Manager Penny Ballem, "very aggressive" due to the extent of the housing crisis, but it had to be a target that was "possible" due to the immense challenge the City would face in delivering on truly affordable housing (City of Vancouver, 2014f). The importance of having this measurable goal was emphasized by multiple interviewees with experience of working inside the City or the VAHA. Interviewee VAHA_COV explained that "you only improve what you measure so having those targets and driving towards those goals is really important". Similarly, FCC explained in blunt terms: "In government if you don't have targets, nothing gets done".

On the other hand, more granular targets about affordability levels and unit mix posed challenges to the community housing sector partners attempting to develop projects. In my interview with CHS, this participant noted that “setting targets too early with either the number of units, the type of units, the affordability levels early on in the game sets up expectations for everyone to fail both from a political perspective, for VAHA and the community housing sector”. CHS went on to explain that due to the City’s requirements that projects enabled through the VAHA be self-sustaining and not require ongoing subsidy, setting these type of highly specific targets early on could threaten the financial viability of a project due to changing economic circumstances, or result in the loss of a lot of much needed family-sized units in order to simply hit a unit target. So, while the 2,500 target was useful to ensure there was municipal support and accountability, a lack of flexibility in the more granular affordability targets that were set out in the leases may have impeded some of the VAHA partners in progressing with projects.

Those who had worked for the VAHA and City were cognizant of the need for targets to be “living and breathing”, as said by VAHA_COV. FCOV noted that context, referring to the economic conditions and instability of senior government funding, was key to understanding why the VAHA missed its initial target and that a missed target “doesn’t mean that what is being done isn’t a good contribution”.

5.2.9. Discussion and conclusion of research findings

In the following chapter I discuss the findings presented in this chapter and offer a conclusion to my research.

Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this case study of the VAHA I sought to answer the research question “What are the factors that shaped the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda?”. To answer this research question, I first described how the VAHA performed against its goal to enable 2,500 affordable housing, meaning social or below-market housing, units by 2021. I was able to provide a high-level answer to this question, which is that the VAHA enabled, meaning projects that were either completed or approved, 2,041 units by the end of 2021. Of this number, 1,314 were completed and 727 were enabled. Of the completed units, 802 were TMH and 512 were permanent rental or co-operative housing. In addition to this number, I also outlined that 871 units facilitated by the VAHA were in the development pipeline, with this meaning projects that had been announced or had some type of application in process by the end of 2021.

As such, the VAHA did not meet its 2,500 by 2021 target which was intended to be, as said by then City Manager Penny Ballem, ambitious but possible (City of Vancouver, 2014d). That this target was missed could lead to a conclusion that the VAHA simply failed. However, as I identified through my analysis of the various factors that shaped the VAHA's ability to enable housing, developing affordable housing projects within the time-period studied was an incredibly challenging feat. The fact that the VAHA was able to enable a substantial amount of affordable housing within such a landscape where, as per my conceptual framework, housing is treating as a commodity, merits some recognition. With that being said, the number of units it produced did not meet the target and did not keep pace with the demand for affordable housing in Vancouver.

The factors that I identified which both constrained and contributed to the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda were grouped under eight headings, but very often these categories bleed into one another due to the many interdependencies among factors. I summarize and discuss these factors below, with each heading emphasised in italics.

The provision of *City-owned land* at a nominal lease was a critical factor, with the price of land being one of the most prohibitive barriers for new affordable housing development, especially in the era of 'hyper-commodification'. However, in the current

economic climate, land alone was no longer enough to create deeply affordable housing and subsidies were required from senior government partners to enable projects due to Canada's housing system involving all three layers of government.

Changes in *senior government* leadership at both the federal and provincial level had a broadly positive impact on the VAHA's ability to enable housing, however there were challenges within new funding and financing programs. These challenges included conflicting requirements and the risk of construction or other costs greatly rising while waiting for receipt of funding or financing.

Municipal politics was the driving force behind the creation of the VAHA, with the Vision Vancouver-led Council demonstrating a desire to 'experiment' to address the housing crisis and through their investment and deployment of City land to provide housing for people struggling in the housing market aligned with the tenets of entrepreneurial municipalism. Yet, at the same time they cited economic competitiveness as a desired outcome of their housing interventions and continued to incent the market, with these being tendencies of the urban entrepreneurialism model of governance that can deepen housing crises. A change in municipal leadership in 2018 did not result in an immediate loss of support for the VAHA but did mark an end to the 'experiment' with a decision to move the staff and function of the Agency back inside the City to align with creation of the VAHEF portfolio.

The Agency model allowed for, as cited by multiple interviewees, a dedicated focus on enabling housing without having to also focus on the City's multiple priorities and the Agency was, as per the operating budgets listed in Table 9, provided with resources to achieve its mandate. At the same time, those working in the community housing sector that I interviewed expressed disappointment that the VAHA did not have more independence or autonomy from the City; they had also hoped the creation of the VAHEF in 2018 would have enhanced the Agency's role to deliver on its mandate. That the VAHA was brought back into the City in 2021 however reduced the opportunity to see how the Agency and the Fund could have worked in combination.

Municipal regulations could slow down the progress of certain VAHA projects, with the permitting stage being cited as a barrier. The City created a dedicated SHORT stream to expedite social housing, with this being somewhat effective at reducing wait

times, but some projects in this stream still end up being subject to multiple layers of bylaws and review panels. The City also used its role as regulator to change bylaws that expedited the TMH process, and to create opportunities to purchase land at a fixed rate without having to compete in the market for it, as exemplified by the East Fraser Lands ODP.

The *Community Housing sector* were vital partners, and Vancouver being home to a wide range of expertise in housing operations and non-profit development was essential to the VAHA. The land trust model implemented by the Community Land Trust, one of the VAHA's most significant partners, provides an opportunity to address the commodification of land and to create housing designed for its use value rather than its exchange value.

The worsening *economic climate and COVID-19* were highly prohibitive factors, with inflation, increases in interest rates and construction costs impacting multiple projects. For projects that applied for but have not yet received senior government support, this was especially deleterious with several projects now facing much more challenging economic circumstances under which to develop truly affordable housing.

Finally, municipal *targets* were helpful at a macro-level, creating accountability and motivation for the City and the VAHA to enable as much housing as they could. However, more granular targets around affordability levels and unit mix threatened the viability of some projects.

Taken together, these factors allow for interpretation of the VAHA's role in the City's affordable housing agenda, through the three conceptual bodies of literature discussed in my conceptual framework. My findings demonstrate the valuable context of the housing governance and policy in Canada literature, especially the impacts of the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s which were frequently cited through both documents and interviewees as the key driving force behind the VAHA. At the same, the factors I identify demonstrate that the housing governance and policy literature has yet to adequately address or theorize about how renewed interest at the federal and B.C. provincial level in housing solutions that go beyond subsidizing home-ownership has changed or challenged the structure of Canada's housing system. While I would hesitate to suggest we have advanced beyond a neoliberal era of housing policy in Canada, this

case study of the VAHA indicates that a contemporary theorization about Canada's current housing system must account for how recent policy changes interact with the roll-back and roll-out neoliberal measures that are the dominant focus of much of the existing literature. New theorization should grapple with the connections between some of the emerging urban governance theories I discussed in my conceptual framework with the neoliberalism literature.

For example, alongside the shifts in policy and governance at the national and provincial level, analyzing the factors which enabled and inhibited the VAHA through the lens of urban governance poses a definitional challenge. Different modes and theories of urban governance played substantial and overlapping roles throughout the VAHA's existence. With the VAHA being understood as an urban experiment, the politics of which, as per Karvonen et al (2014), were aligned with municipal entrepreneurialism due to the leveraging of public resources in a way which prioritized public, not private, investment, the spectre of urban entrepreneurialism still vastly influenced and informed decision-making at the City of Vancouver which ran counter to the ultimate goals of the VAHA. Fundamentally, I suggest that this tension in modes of urban governance is best understood as a proxy for the tension between the conceptualization of housing as a fundamental right and land as a public good that can enable that right, versus the dominant ideology that conceptualizes land and housing as financial assets that are best managed through private ownership. While this case study discovered that the provision of public land was not alone enough to get affordable housing built, it remains a fundamental piece of the affordable housing puzzle and demonstrates the powerful potential of when governments align and opt to utilize their land and financial resources to support the creation of housing beyond the market.

6.1. Contribution of findings

This case study of the VAHA has both practical and academic contributions. Firstly, at a practical level, even though the VAHA itself is technically no longer in operation does not mean that there is nowhere to apply the findings of my research as the City's newly formed Non-Market Development and Operations team will continue to do the work that the VAHA undertook but alongside broader management of the VAHEF portfolio. Interviewee VAHA_COV explained that there will continue to be a "development arm" but that there will also be a "portfolio planning piece...managing the

assets ...there's the acquisition piece...and then there's the actual operations of the housing itself'. This case study provides the City with an overview of the VAHA's formation, achievements and limitations, which can be a useful resource and reference for evaluation and research. I also believe that this case will be useful for City Council and future candidates for Councils in the formation of motions and platforms, because it can provide guidance on what has come before and areas for improvement in how to best leverage City-owned land. In the event that the City ever considers fully reinstating the VAHA, or floats the idea of another independent housing development arm, this thesis can provide useful history and context for development of such work.

At an academic level, one of the most valuable contributions of this research is that it helps to fill a gap in the literature about housing policy in Canada, especially the social housing literature which largely 'stops' at the point of neoliberal disinvestment at the federal level. This case study provides an insight into the contemporary Canadian housing system and the opportunities and limitations municipalities face in enabling affordable housing within a new era of senior government housing strategies and funding programs.

Another key academic contribution is that this case study attempts to build a bridge from the scholarship that critiques the commodification of land and housing to a practical policy case study. While the VAHA's impact on addressing the housing crisis via utilizing public land may seem miniscule, it demonstrates that such approaches are possible even amidst such adverse conditions.

6.2. Limitation of research

One of the obvious limitations of this research is that through my interviews and document analysis, I did not ascertain highly detailed knowledge of the VAHA's day-to-day operations or staff structure. While I did ask about these areas in general terms, I did not seek out extensive data points. These details could have enhanced the applications and overall usefulness of this research. However, I do not believe that the absence of these details detracts from my overall findings, which focuses more broadly on the contextual factors which shaped the VAHA's role within the City's affordable housing agenda in the time-period studied.

Another key limitation that I have been deeply aware of throughout producing this case study, is that it is highly limited through its lack of engagement, beyond mere acknowledgement, that the land which the City is utilizing for housing is the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations. In establishing my normative stance, I outlined my belief that the housing crisis is explicitly rooted in the commodification of land, but I did not interrogate further how the City's ownership of land, even though this ownership can be broadly understood as being used for public as opposed to private benefit, upholds colonial relations. The following quote from Glen Coulthard captures the significance of this limitation:

What must be recognized by those inclined to advocate a blanket "return of the commons" as a redistributive counterstrategy to the neoliberal state's round of enclosures, is that, in liberal settler states such as Canada, the "commons" not only belong to somebody – the First Peoples of this land – they also deeply inform and sustain Indigenous modes of thought and behaviour that harbor profound insights into the maintenance of relationships within and between human beings and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity, nonexploitation and respectful coexistence. (Coulthard, 2014, p. 14)

In other words, Coulthard is problematizing the progressive position of using 'public' land as a way to address inequities because this position does not acknowledge the territorial rights of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, it also does not adequately recognize the context of Indigenous dispossession which preempted the "neoliberal... enclosures" of land, and it erases the unique understandings of land derived from "Indigenous modes of thought and behaviour". While Coulthard is not specifically referring to the utilization of 'public' land for housing, his critique does offer valuable insight into the ways in which the City and the VAHA uphold colonial relationships to land.

While this research broadly advocates for the approach of utilizing land for public benefit as was enacted by the City through the VAHA, it does not intend to further the case for the settler state's claim to unceded land or to suggest that the only way to create public benefit is through the mechanism of the settler state. That this research does not engage more with these ideas is more to do with the scope of this project and my own positional limitations. Approaches to housing which engage more fully with the rights of Indigenous peoples and the ongoing impacts of colonialism, such as those advocated for in the Report of the UNDRIP Task Force to the City of Vancouver Mayor &

Council (UNDRIP Task Force, 2022), are key to advancing and conceptualizing a more just housing system in Canada.

6.3. Conclusion

When I first set out to undertake a case study to consider the VAHA's role in the City of Vancouver's affordable housing agenda, I was keenly aware that that the VAHA had failed to achieve its target and that during its tenure the housing crisis in Vancouver continued to deepen. Through the lens of a critical political economy analysis, it is undeniable that the VAHA did not significantly disrupt the dominant system of commodified land and housing and its impacts on people who cannot find housing they can afford in Vancouver.

However, this case study has also revealed that the City of Vancouver did take some notable steps in its affordable housing agenda during the time period of the VAHA, and that the VAHA through its partnership model did result in more people having access to adequate housing that they may not have otherwise due to the creation of more than a thousand units of new affordable housing. This is emphasised through the words of people now living in these very units. One of the occupants of the affordable rental building at 188 East 6th developed by Catalyst stated in an interview with CMHC:

I spent all my adult live in Vancouver. I really like it here. I've been looking for ways to come back, but we realized when we left, we thought there was no way we could come back. Once you get out of the rental market in Vancouver, how do you get back in? Catalyst enabled me to come back to where all my friends are. I had all my business contacts here. This is my hometown. I got to come back to my hometown (CMHC, 2023).

An occupant of the Kinship Coop, at 3245 Pierview Crescent similarly stated in a Vancouver Sun article "We feel really blessed to be here... this is really our forever home" (Lazaruk, 2022). These individuals' quotes highlight that whilst the VAHA's contributions were not substantial enough to significantly shift the direction of the housing crisis, there were several decisions made by the City including its creation of the VAHA which ultimately resulted in people being able to find housing in Vancouver who would likely not have been able to otherwise due to the dominance and unaffordability of the private market.

One of the largest takeaways from my analysis of the factors that shaped the VAHA's role in the City's affordable housing agenda was that there were a substantial number of highly influential factors that were beyond the control of the VAHA and the City, specifically the broader political and economic context which the VAHA was operating in. Within Canada's housing system, municipalities have fewer resources and tools to enable the development of social or below-market housing than senior governments, yet in recognition of just how extreme the crisis had become, the City opted to create a new Agency devoted to doing precisely that. It is important to emphasize again here that none of the VAHA's achievements were the Agency's alone, its successes were always tied to partnerships with the community housing sector whose role was absolutely critical. Yet, what the City did have control over was how it chose to respond to the deepening housing crisis.

To bring this case study to a conclusion, I want to highlight the words of FCC, the former City Councillor who I interviewed:

Unless you've got the capacity to bring down the global economic system and replace it with one that doesn't kill off the people who already most vulnerable in the current system, you kind of have to deal with the consequences of the system... The point is, do you use the City Council table as a pulpit to point out the fact that capitalism is failing people and continue to watch them being failed or do you *try to do something*... VAHA is both a way to deal with the failings of the current system and also a step towards the future system.

This statement encapsulates that while city governments may be highly aware of their own limitations to address issues that have such deeply entrenched roots, they are still left with a choice about what actions they do or don't pursue. In Vancouver, where the absence of adequate, affordable housing can literally be a matter of life or death (BC Gov News, 2022), choosing not to at least attempt to address these roots is unacceptable. The global housing crisis has many facets, but land is indisputably at the centre of it. The City's attempt to harness some of its land assets through the VAHA and the VAHEF provided a right to adequate housing for people who were being denied it and for working-class people whose incomes might no longer allow them to stay in the City. This outcome deserves recognition because it is certainly not inevitable that local governments in general, nor the City of Vancouver going forward, will use their limited tools and resources to provide land for housing for those who are not served by the market. At the same time, the affordable housing that was enabled by the City through

the VAHA simply wasn't enough, and it certainly did not materialize fast enough. As outlined above, many of the limiting factors on the VAHA were beyond the control of the City, but there were also further steps that could have been taken to better realize the Agency's goal, especially considering that the City's role as regulator was often the barrier or slowdown in the development process.

The task of providing genuinely affordable housing, housing that exists beyond the market, may seem Sisyphean, but it is, as evidenced through this case study, possible. The City's use of the VAHA as part of their affordable agenda, despite its limitations and shortcomings, created opportunities for people to have a "forever home" (Lazaruk, 2022) in a city that is increasingly harder to stay put in.

6.4. Future areas of study

A number of threads emerged from this case study of the VAHA that were beyond the scope of this project that merit future study.

There are numerous examples of potential policy options which the City could explore to enhance their capability to provide land to non-profit developers for the development of affordable housing. Research on the impact of the Right of First Refusal policy implemented by the City of Montreal, under which the municipality is given the exclusive opportunity to purchase land or buildings for social housing ahead of other potential buyers, could be especially pertinent to help guide how the City is able to grow the VAHEF to support the creation of more affordable housing.

With the City's approvals process so frequently under scrutiny, a case study of the SHORT program could provide valuable insight into where this program has been effective at expediting social housing projects and where it faces challenges.

Further research into Vancouver's public hearing process is merited, especially in regard to how the process may be mismatched with a rights-based approach to housing, such as the vast opposition to the 2086-2098 W 7th Ave and 2091 W 8th Ave permanent supportive housing project. While this project was eventually approved, the public hearing process took a full month to complete and was the subject of an ultimately dismissed lawsuit filed against the City (Howell, 2022) which sought to stop the project from proceeding. Similarly, this case study demonstrates that further research is

required on how the City's regulatory role, such as zoning bylaws and public hearings, could be impeding the realization of a rights-based approach to housing.

The efficacy of the community land trust model merits further research, and specific focus on how the Community Land Trust has grown its portfolio in BC and the impacts of this growth could be beneficial to local policy makers.

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Appendix A.

Sample interview questions

A selection of sample interview questions was:

1. What is your involvement with the VAHA?
2. What is your understanding of the VAHA's mandate?
3. What have been some of the significant achievements of the VAHA?
4. What do you think enabled the VAHA to reach these achievements?
5. What struggles or barriers do you think the VAHA faces?
6. What are the strengths of the VAHA model?
7. What are the weaknesses of the VAHA model?
8. Overall, how well suited do you think the VAHA is to addressing housing affordability in Vancouver?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about the VAHA?

Appendix B.

Codebook

Excerpts (selected examples)	Initial codes	Final code
<p>I think if you're setting an objective or a goal of doing anything quickly then you want to focus the activities of a team or a group specifically on that task and the problem when you say we're committed to building housing and we have expertise internally but we're also committed to improving the urban design realm and we're also committed to lowering property taxes and we're also committed to building green and you have too many moving targets and goals and commitments, it doesn't matter if you have housing expertise or not in your staff, there's too many conflicting priorities and so when you separate that, that always allows one group to say well those are maybe your priorities but our priorities is to build homes really quickly. And if there's a commitment by the City to do that you utilize that group that is hyper-focused on that one task.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus to achieve goal quickly • Team on one task • Too many other goals within the City • Conflicting priorities • VAHA always focused on building homes • City enables VAHA to hyperfocus 	<p>Agency model of the VAHA</p>
<p>I guess what I would say is if the same governments existed today like NDP, not just an NDP but this NDP and that Liberal government although one can say they would never be as housing focused ten years ago, but let's just say they were... VAHA would never have needed to happen it was to try and get around barriers everywhere right.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of provincial and federal of government • Housing focus increased for senior governments • VAHA response to provincial and federal barriers 	<p>Role of senior governments</p>

<p>Fundamentally you're not going to solve the problems of capitalism with more capitalism right like climate change is the same problem you can't capitalism your way our of capitalism but having said that unless you've got the capacity to bring down the global economic system and replace it with one that doesn't kill off the people who already most vulnerable in the current system you kind of have to deal with the consequences of the system you got it so i think, yes you have to build the housing so and this is the challenge for City governments you have no hands on the levers of the global economic system right it's just completely outside of your control and being able to build housing in Vancouver was a miracle at the time like nobody had really tried it before 2002 or so right so I guess the point is you do use the City Council table as a pulpit to point out the fact that capitalism is failing people and continue to watch them being failed or do you try do something. That's really the challenge for progressives in City governments in Canada.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing crisis outcome of capitalism • Housing system focus on profit produces vulnerability • Market makes it so difficult to build housing • VAHA attempt to address the failures of capitalistic system of housing 	<p>Housing crisis cannot be addressed by the market</p>
<p>I think another key piece of is... the partnerships that we have right so it's partnerships... with the not-for-profit sector because they are our key delivery partner in terms of you know completing design, development, funding, financing, construction, operation and maintenance of the buildings themselves right and so the capacity within the non-market housing sector um to do those pieces is and the effective and good relationships with the not-for-profit sector is really, really important and certainly the City takes that very, very seriously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with not-for-profits • Non-market housing sector 	<p>Community housing sector</p>
<p>The City as regulator has to be arms-length and separate because that has to be a fair and transparent and equitable process and so what the City has done there's a lot of relaxations that are available to social housing projects that wouldn't be available for market condo kind of projects but those relaxations aren't just available to the City projects they are available for all social housing projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City role as a regulator • Relaxations for social housing in regulations. 	<p>City as regulator</p>

<p>I can't say that Council deprioritized housing, I can't imagine they did, but the difference between having a Vision-majority and no majority on Council was frankly political. It's hard to get alignment across political boundaries sometimes and it was much easier with Vision and a Vision mayor to get that alignment. I feel that you do need to have collaboration and alignment across political parties to solve issues, to do housing fast, to build housing quickly and just to me it was apparent that that was going to be hard to do with the current Council make up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference between majority government and no majority • Political differences • Collaboration and alignment across political boundaries necessary to build housing 	<p>Municipal politics</p>
<p>You only can improve what you measure so I think it's important for targets to be realistic there's no point in overpromising and underdelivering I think it's really important to if you look at the Housing Vancouver strategy that's the need assessment, we have that and a huge part of that that the not-for-profit sector fulfils and then there's a component of it that the City can deliver just in terms of the capacity of the amount of land that we have, the budget we have to acquire new land, so that's why that portfolio planning and pipeline approach is really important so we can set effective targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to measure housing outputs • Housing needs assessment • City can deliver some of the housing needs assessment • Portfolio planning helps set targets effectively 	<p>Targets</p>
<p>The City's major fundamental principle and assumption is that we're not going to sell our land and you know we think non-profits play a key role but there's never going to be more land in the city of Vancouver and there's grave concern about senior levels of government who are actually selling off their land and we're going to whether through a long term lease or other arrangements we will hang on to the final tenure of that land.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City needs to hold on to public land • Land is a limited resource • Concern about senior government sale of land • Providing land via long term lease • City remains land owner 	<p>Provision of City-owned land</p>
<p>I think interest rates this past year were definitely impacted by the pandemic and you know we probably would have still faced increasing interest rates but not at the high escalation that we've actually seen.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest rates impacted by pandemic • Economics would have still been challenging, but pandemic increased challenges 	<p>COVID-19 and economic climate</p>

Appendix C.

Detailed project information for each VAHA development

Housing units completed by the end of 2021

Temporary Modular Housing

220 Terminal Avenue

Council designated a City-owned site at 220 Terminal Avenue (formerly known as 1500 Main Street) to the VAHA to manage and deliver a TMH pilot (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2016a). A policy report specified that this site was selected for the TMH pilot because “it is large enough to accommodate the project, it is City-owned and the existing zoning allows multi-family residential and rooming houses that are similar to the TMH design.” (City of Vancouver, 2016a).

The VAHA instigated the pilot project by issuing a RFQ “to supply prefabricated modular housing” (City of Vancouver, 2018g) in January 2016, with five qualified companies proceeding to a RFP stage. Canadian company Horizon North, who quoted the lowest budget of the five proposals at \$3,090,001, was selected to design and install this inaugural VAHA project. To achieve this budget the VAHA initially sought \$3 million funding from the CMHC administered Affordable Housing Innovation Fund, part of the federal government’s National Housing Strategy. The VAHA were ultimately awarded half of what they applied for, receiving \$1.5 million from the fund towards the project. The City of Vancouver covered a further \$1 million of the budget from a private donation, with the remainder of the costs covered by a contribution from the credit union Vancity (CMHC, 2021b).

Design development commenced in August 2016, and the installation was complete six months later in February 2017. This rapid timeline was possible due to the prefabricated modular structure of the building, whereas a permanent building of the same scale would typically take 14-16 months to construct (Morrison Hershfield, 2019).

The development contributed 40 units measuring 250 ft² for individuals on low and fixed incomes, including four slightly larger units for individuals with accessibility requirements. Units are rented to tenants at \$375, the BC shelter rate for individuals on income assistance. Each unit contains a bathroom and kitchenette, with the building also including shared laundry facilities as well as communal outdoor and indoor amenity spaces. In a survey of residents of 220 Terminal Avenue conducted in February and March of 2018, 84 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their housing (Morrison Hershfield, 2019). Unlike all other VAHA projects, 220 Terminal does not have a non-profit partner operating the building and is instead City-operated with full-time on-site management staff.

As of the time of writing, the TMH at 220 Terminal remains in place with no fixed redevelopment plans for the site. However, due to the time-limits stipulated by the City's Zoning and Development By-law No. 3575, the TMH can only remain on the site until 2027.

7430 & 7460 Heather Street (Reiderman Residence)

On October 26, 2017, the City, the VAHA and the BC government announced the first sites for their partnership to build 600 TMH units. Two TMH buildings containing 39 units, would be built on the Pearson Dogwood lands at 7340 and 7460 West Heather Street. The Pearson Dogwood lands cover ten hectares bounded from West to East by Heather Street and Cambie Street and from North to South by West 57th Avenue and West 59th Avenue. The site was purchased in 2015 by real-estate developer the Onni Group from former site owners Vancouver Coastal Health, and a rezoning application to develop a comprehensive mixed-used community was approved in July 2017.

Following the receipt of funding from BC Housing, the City had invited private land owners to provide land that was awaiting redevelopment for TMH and the Onni Group had responded by offering the Pearson Dogwood site because it would not disrupt their first five years of redevelopment plans and it was able to easily accommodate services such as sewer and water, and hydro power for the TMH (City of Vancouver, 2017b). A media release from the City of Vancouver, announced that BC Housing had selected supportive and low-income housing providers Community Builders as the non-profit operators for both sites, citing their experience in Vancouver working with tenants with a variety of needs (City of Vancouver, 2017g). In a presentation to the

community from the City, the VAHA and BC Housing, the partners specified that priority for the units would be given to people who were unsheltered or living in shelters, people aged 45 years and up, people with disabilities and people who were homeless living in the local neighbourhood (City of Vancouver et al., 2017a).

The announcement was met with substantial resistance from some members of the Marpole community who protested the suitability of the site due to its proximity to local schools. Protesters physically blocked access to the sites until the City of Vancouver and BC Housing were granted an injunction in December 2017 to restrict loitering on and near the site, resulting in construction delays (Ferrerias, 2017). Both buildings, which replicated the design and features of the TMH pilot including 14 accessible units, were completed, and tenanted by March 2018, two months later than the initial timeline had proposed.

1131 Franklin Street and 501 Powell Street

The VAHA, the City and BC Housing next identified two City-owned sites for TMH at 1131 Franklin Street and 501 Powell Street, both located in the East Vancouver neighbourhood of Strathcona. The site at Franklin Street was an industrial lot that was being used by people experiencing homelessness as an encampment. In a fact sheet from the VAHA and partners it was noted that “City outreach staff and BC Housing continue to work with members of an encampment on this site to find suitable shelter and housing options” (City of Vancouver et al., n.d.-d). The site at Powell Street hosted a community farm and a weekly market, which would be able to continue operating. The partners hosted a community information session about the sites on December 7, 2017, with a notification card for the information session stating that the sites had been selected because “they are waiting to be redeveloped; people can be moved into homes quickly; have space to accommodate the buildings; can easily connect to water, sewer, hydro; are close to transit and/or services; and will allow the homeless people living in the area to remain in their community”(City of Vancouver et al., 2017b).

The City of Vancouver issued a development permit to the VAHA for 1131 Franklin Street on February 1, 2018, and for 501 Powell Street on March 5, 2018, with the buildings opening in April 2018 and May 2018 respectively. Both buildings contain 39 units with seven accessible units. BC Housing selected the non-profit operator PHS Community Services Society to manage 1131 Franklin Street and Atira Women’s

Resource Society to manage 501 Powell Street, which would exclusively provide housing for women from Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DTES).

4480 Kaslo Street

A City-owned lot that was home to a community garden at 4480 Kaslo Street in the Renfrew Collingwood neighbourhood was the next site to be selected for TMH development. The same rationale that was provided for the selection of previous City-owned sites was offered in a notification flyer for community information sessions about the building hosted on December 13 and December 14 (City of Vancouver et al., n.d.-c). A development permit for 4480 Kaslo was issued on March 13, 2018, and a news release from the City announcing the permit noted that the Vancouver Park Board had worked with the gardeners operating the community garden that was presently on the site to find a suitable nearby location to relocate to (City of Vancouver, 2018i) .

BC Housing again selected Atira Women's Resource Society as the non-profit operator for 4480 Kaslo, however, in this instance the building would be for co-ed residents who were "vulnerable individuals who are sheltered and unsheltered homeless" (Atira Women's Resource Society, 2018). The 52-unit building, which contains 6 accessible suites, opened on July 27, 2018.

2132 Ash Street

The fifth site identified by the City and the VAHA for the BC Housing funding towards 600 modular units was a City-owned parking lot adjacent to the Olympic Village Skytrain Station in the South False Creek neighbourhood. Community information sessions about the proposed development, originally referred to by the alternative address of 599 West 2nd Avenue, were hosted on January 30, 2018 and March 6, 2018.

BC Housing selected the PHS Community Services Society as the non-profit operator, who specified that their tenanting process for the building would be "to identify and prioritize local homeless. Then we look at local shelters, then individuals who stabilized well in SROs to move in if they want to" (PHS Community Services Society, 2018c).

The development permit for the site was approved on April 9, 2018, and the 52-unit building with six accessible units opened on September 7, 2018.

137 East 37th Avenue (Little Mountain)

In March 2018, the City of Vancouver announced that they had identified a parcel of land on the Little Mountain site for development of TMH. Little Mountain was a social housing site in the Riley Park neighbourhood of Vancouver owned by the federal government, via CMHC, that opened in 1954 to provide 254 homes. In 2007, the federal government transferred the site to the BC provincial government, who then privatized the site in a sale to real estate developer Holborn in 2008. Holborn demolished all but one of the social housing buildings, with a promise to rebuild them and allow evicted residents to return once these were complete, alongside building approximately 1,400 market units. The sale of Little Mountain and the subsequent lack of progress on developing the site, which remains largely empty, has been a source of substantial controversy in Vancouver (Allingham, 2020).

The VAHA and partners held community information sessions about the proposal on April 5 and May 1, 2018. Information boards from the session in March noted that there were four planned phases to the redevelopment of Little Mountain with all of the permanent social housing planned for development in Phase 1 and 2 and the TMH being considered “on a Phase 2 parcel and would not delay delivery of the permanent social housing units” (City of Vancouver et al., 2018).

The development permit was approved on June 6, 2018 and the 46-unit building, featuring 6 accessible units, opened in late 2018. BC Housing selected Coast Mental Health as the non-profit operator, who specified that residents would be selected with “a first priority on homeless individuals living in or in the vicinity of the Little Mountain area” (Coast Mental Health, n.d.).

Due to the expiration of the lease and the planned permanent development on the site, the TMH at 137 East 37th was deconstructed between September and November 2021 and tenants relocated. The modular building itself has not been reconstructed on an alternative site.

610 and 620 Cambie (Larwill Place)

The next site to be developed for TMH by the VAHA and partners was a City-owned site that was being used as a surface parking lot in Downtown Vancouver at 610 and 620 Cambie Street. The site had already been selected to host a new Vancouver Art

Gallery, which as of writing has not yet broken ground. In an information card from the VAHA and partners it was noted that the installation of the TMH would neither “delay or impede” (City of Vancouver et al., n.d.-b) the delivery of the new Gallery.

The VAHA received a development permit on August 15, 2018 and two buildings offering a total of 98 units with 12 accessible units were completed in late 2018 with tenanting underway by December 2018 (MPA Society, 2018). BC Housing selected MPA Society as the non-profit operator who would prioritize housing homeless individuals living on or in the vicinity of the site (MPA Society, n.d.).

5077 and 5095 Heather Street (New Beginnings)

The Heather Lands is an 8.5 hectare site owned by the Musqueam Indian Band, Squamish Nation, and Tsleil-Waututh Nation (MST Nations), and the Canada Lands Company (CLC), bounded from north to south by 33rd Avenue and 37th Avenue, and from east to west by Ash Street and Willow Street. At the request of the landowners, the City of Vancouver developed a policy statement to guide the future development of the site. The policy statement included guidance on temporary use of the site as follows:

“In recognition that large sites are phased over 10-years or more, the site may also accommodate temporary uses such as modular housing, artist studios, farmers markets, sales centres, and community gardens to make efficient use of land and activate sites prior to redevelopment or during the construction phase” (City of Vancouver, 2018f, p. 39)

Under the guidance of the Heather Lands policy statement, the VAHA and partners proposed the development of two TMH buildings on the site and hosted community information sessions on June 25 and 26, 2018. A development permit was approved on August 30, 2018 for two buildings hosting 46 and 52 units respectively. A total of 12 units across both buildings would be accessible.

BC Housing selected Lu'ma Native Housing Society as the non-profit operator, with Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness receiving priority for the units. One building is reserved for women-only, with the other building being co-ed. Tenanting began in January 2019

265 West 1st Avenue (Hummingbird Place)

Nearing the target of 600 units of TMH through the \$66 million funding from BC Housing, the VAHA and partners next identified a City-owned site within the Southeast False Creek Development Plan area. A fact sheet from the partners acknowledged that while in the long term this Plan sought to deliver permanent affordable housing on the site, adding TMH would “not delay or impact delivery of any permanent housing” (City of Vancouver et al., n.d.-a). The proposed site would neighbour a social enterprise urban farm, which would not be displaced and had potential to provide programming for future tenants.

The partners hosted community information sessions on July 18 and 19, 2018 and a development permit was approved on September 20, 2018. BC Housing again selected PHS Community Services Society as the non-profit operator. Priority for the units would be given to “vulnerable people living in the local neighborhood, people who are unsheltered or living in shelters, and people who are over 45 years old and people with disabilities” (PHS Community Services Society, 2018b). Tenanting for the 52-unit building with six accessible units was underway by March 2019 (PHS Community Services Society, 2019).

258 Union Street (Nora Hendrix Place)

The final TMH project funded by the \$66 million in funding from BC Housing was 258 Union Street (previously known by the alternative address of 898 Main Street). The site is within the North East False Creek area, which the City of Vancouver had approved a comprehensive plan for in February, 2018. More specifically, the site is located on what was Hogan’s Alley, a Black community in Vancouver’s Strathcona neighbourhood that was destroyed and its residents displaced by the state-led construction of viaducts between 1967 and 1971 for a freeway through the city that was never built (Allen, 2019).

The VAHA and partners hosted community information sessions about the TMH proposal on August 15 and September 13, 2018. A fact sheet for the project explained that:

“The proposed temporary modular housing project will not delay or impede the delivery of the Northeast False Creek Plan, including the removal of the viaducts, the development of permanent social housing, and the

establishment of a cultural centre for the Black Community on the 898 Main Street block (Hogan's Alley block) as a place that will be welcoming and inclusive to all." (City of Vancouver et al., n.d.-e)

On October 9, 2018, the development permit for the project was approved. BC Housing selected PHS Community Services Society as the non-profit operator, who specified that prioritized residents for the building would be "Indigenous and Black people who are overrepresented among homeless populations due to ongoing systemic economic and social exclusion" (PHS Community Services Society, 2018a).

The 52 unit building with six accessible units began tenancing in March 2019 and remains in place and tenanted. Hogan's Alley Society have stated their desire for the site to become a non-profit community land trust and for the 52 homes for Black and Indigenous residents to become permanent (Smith, 2021).

3598 Copley Street (Naomi Place)

Following the completion of the 600 units of TMH, in April 2019 the BC Government confirmed their commitment to fund more temporary modular housing across the Province. A City-owned plot at 3598 Copley Street (formerly known by the address 2305-2355 Vanness Avenue) adjacent to Nanaimo Skytrain Station was identified as a site to develop TMH.

The VAHA and partners hosted a community information session on September 16, 2019. In a statement to media the City noted the site had been selected because it could "easily connect to water, sewer and hydro and is close to public transit" and could be constructed as quickly as possible (Howell, 2019). The TMH proposal received criticism from a neighbourhood group who objected to the spending of public money on temporary solutions and the lack of public consultation (Chan, 2019)

A development permit was issued on October 30, 2019 for a 58 unit building with six accessible units. BC Housing contracted Horizon North to construct the building and Community Builders Group to operate the housing. Residents began to move in to the TMH in March, 2020 with priority "given to applicants experiencing homelessness from the surrounding area" (BC Housing, 2021).

1580-1582 Vernon Drive

The BC Government announced a further partnership with the City of Vancouver to build more supportive housing in September 2020 through the Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund.

With this funding for capital and operating costs in place, the VAHA led the development process for two buildings delivering 98 units of TMH on “vacant and underutilized” (City of Vancouver, 2020c) City-owned land at 1580-1582 Vernon Drive. Before the VAHA could apply for a development permit, City Council first had to approve a temporary amendment for the Regional Context Statement Official Development Plan By-law to change the designation of the lands at 1580 Vernon from Industrial to General Urban to allow for the construction of TMH on the site. This temporary amendment was approved unanimously on October 6, 2020, and the VAHA applied for a development permit for the site on November 18, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the VAHA and partners hosted a virtual open house to receive public comments on the application between December 7 – December 13, 2020. The development permit was then approved on March 4, 2021.

BC Housing contracted NRB Modular Solutions Ltd. to construct the TMH and selected Community Builders Group as the non-profit operator. Priority for tenancing was given to homeless people living in the local area, and the 98 units plus 12 accessible units opened in September 2021.

Affordable rental and co-op projects

River District – 3625 Sawmill Crescent (Alder)

The VAHA issued an RFP for a development partner to build affordable housing on 3625 Sawmill Crescent (formerly known as 8501 Boundary Road) in August 2016. The site was subsequently purchased by the City in October 2016 for this purpose. In July 2018, the CEO of VAHA issued a report to Vancouver City Council recommending that Catalyst Community Developments Society be selected as the “non-profit partner to finance, build, operate and maintain the social housing project on the City-owned site located at 8501 Boundary” (City of Vancouver, 2018e, p. 1) and that a ground lease of 60 years, worth \$7.8 million, be granted for the site at a nominal prepaid rate of \$10. The lease conditions specified that no fewer than 30% of units must be rented at affordable

rates, with affordable meaning rents may not exceed 30% of HILs monthly rates. Further conditions sought to deepen the affordability of the remaining 70% of units by specifying that the “average rent across all units is no greater than 80% of the rents for for-profit affordable rental housing in the Vancouver Development Cost Levy By-Law” and that “the Housing Charge for non-HILs Units will be at least 10% below the rents for for-profit affordable rental housing in the Vancouver Development Cost Levy ByLaw” (City of Vancouver, 2018e, p. 6) These conditions meant that units would all remain below-market rates. The selection of Catalyst and corresponding ground-lease was approved by Council in July 2018.

The report to Council noted that the “VAHA is working with Catalyst to bring the project forward to building permit issuance, with construction anticipated to begin in January 2019. It is expected that the building will be completed by October 2020” (City of Vancouver, 2018e, p. 4), however this timeline was not achieved. In June 2021, Catalyst received a \$39.8 million low-cost loan from the federal government via CMHC’s Rental Construction Financing initiative (RCFI), a National Housing Strategy program to support rental housing construction “for middle-class families in expensive housing markets” (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2021), to support construction costs. The five-storey building providing 12 studios, 24 one-bedroom units, 47 two-bedroom units, and 36 three-bedroom units opened on November 4, 2021.

River District – 3183 Pierview Crescent and 3245 Pierview Crescent (Kinship Housing Co-op)

On July 24, 2017, the VAHA issued three RFPs for development partners to bring forward more than 1,000 units of affordable rental housing across seven City-owned sites. On May 4, 2018, the City announced that the Community Land Trust CLT, and their co-developer New Commons Development, had been selected as the development partner for all seven sites, representing “the largest one-time municipal land investment into the community housing sector in Canada” (City of Vancouver, 2018I). The CLT are a non-profit social purpose real estate developer that were created by the Co-op Housing Federation of BC. All seven awarded sites were projected to be completed by the end of 2021, however, only 3183 and 3245 Pierview Crescent were developed in time to meet this target date. The sites, located in the East Fraser Lands, were developed together to create Kinship Housing Co-operative.

On September 18, 2018, Council approved a recommended lease between the City and the CLT based on a report from the VAHA CEO. The recommended lease conditions were a 99-year prepaid lease for a nominal prepaid rent, constituting a grant of \$38 million. Affordability requirements laid out in the lease were that at least 30% of units must be rented to households with incomes below HILs, and in addition “on or about 43% of units will be at the Low End of Market (LEM) which is rented at <90% of the appraised market rent for a comparable unit in the local area & < 30% of the low and moderate income limit (as determined by BC Housing)” (City of Vancouver, 2018k) Remaining units would then be rented at market rate. The proposed lease conditions also stipulated that to achieve the target affordability, the CLT would need to secure a total of \$53.9 funding for development, including equity requirement and mortgage financing. In August 2019, the Federal Government announced that the CLT were the recipients of \$53 million low-cost loan from the RCFI via CMHC to develop 3183 and 3245 Pierview Crescent. Further funding was secured from Vancity the Credit Union.

At a groundbreaking for the buildings on October 25, 2018, former executive director of the Community Land Trust Thom Armstrong emphasised the importance of the partnership between the Community Land Trust, the City and the VAHA and stated “if you’re not prepared to embrace partnerships with all levels of government and all housing stakeholders, you’re not going to get any housing done.” (O’Connor, 2018a).

Construction was completed in early 2021 and Kinship Housing Co-operative was fully occupied by the end of March 2021. Combined the two buildings provide a total of 140 homes, 89 units in one building and 51 in the other, for a wide range of incomes. Adhering to the EFL ODP’s requirement for family-oriented housing, 65 units are two-bedroom apartments or townhomes and 37 units three-bedroom apartments or townhomes.

River District – 3185 Riverwalk Avenue (Riverwalk)

On May 26, 2015 Vancouver Council designated 3185 Riverwalk Avenue in the East Fraser Lands, to the VAHA for the development of affordable housing. The site was one of the option sites that the City had the right to purchase as per the agreement with Wesgroup for the EFL ODP. In July 2016 the VAHA applied for a development permit for the site to build 109 units of social housing building. The non-profit housing operator SUCCESS Affordable Housing Society was selected as the successful respondent to

build and operate the housing at 3185 Riverwalk Avenue in June 2017. SUCCESS originally proposed that 70% of units would be rented at HILs, however, “changes to several project parameters, including available funding opportunities, incremental cost increases due to design requirements and the price of construction” (City of Vancouver, 2018c) forced a revision to the proposal that reduced the percentage of HILs units to 30%. A lease agreement between the City of Vancouver and SUCCESS, approved in November 13 2018, detailed these revised affordability requirements, and specified a ground lease of 60 years at a nominal prepaid rent. The lease constituted a grant from the City of Vancouver valued at \$15.8 million, and further funding from the Province was required to make the project viable. This funding, delivered via BC Housing was a capital grant of \$9 million from the Investment in Housing Innovation program and mortgage financing of \$27.2 million. The federal government via CMHC also provided \$50,000 through its Seed funding program towards the project.

The building was initially projected to open in December 2020, however, this target was delayed by just less than a year with 3185 Riverwalk Avenue receiving its occupancy permit in October 2021. The building provides seven studio units, 30 one-bedroom units, 48 two-bedroom units and 24 three-bedroom units. While only 30% of the units are at HILs rates, the remaining 70% are rented at Low-End-Market (LEM) affordable housing rates, which are typically set between 10-20% below market rental rates for comparable buildings.

188 East 6th Avenue (Aspen)

This City-owned site at the intersection of East 6th Avenue and Main Street previously hosted a surface parking lot and was first identified as a potential site for affordable housing in the City of Vancouver’s Mount Pleasant Community Plan published in 2010. On May 26, 2015, Council designated 188 East 6th (formerly known as 2221 Main Street) to the VAHA for the purpose of developing affordable housing. Later in 2015, the VAHA issued an RFP to development partners for the site, and a joint proposal from construction company and developer Marcon Developments and Catalyst Community Developments Society was selected as the successful applicant in 2016. To be developed for housing, the site had to be rezoned from IC-2 (Industrial) District to CD-1 (Comprehensive Development) District, and the VAHA assisted Macron and

Catalyst with a rezoning application that was approved by Council, following a public hearing, on October 17, 2017.

A lease between the City and Catalyst was approved on July 24, 2018. The lease terms were a 60-year ground lease at a nominal fee of \$10, constituting a grant of \$16.85 million. Catalyst secured a further \$48.5 million in funding from the federal government via CMHC's RCFI and \$1.5 million from Vancity to enable the project.

On November 4, 2021, an opening ceremony for Aspen at 188 East 6th Avenue was held with then federal Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Ahmed Hussen, alongside Kennedy Stewart, Mayor of Vancouver. The nine-storey building contributed 145 units containing 28 studios, 45 one-bedroom units, 42 two-bedroom units and 30 three-bedroom units. Of these, 30% are rented at or under HILs, with the remaining 70% rented below the City of Vancouver published average market rental rates.

Housing Units approved by the end of 2021

55-79 & 87-115 SW Marine Drive

Council designated the sites at 55-79 and 87-117 Marine Drive, which has been acquired by the City in November 2014, to the VAHA in May 2015. In 2016 VanMar Constructors Inc., CPA Development Consultants and GBL Architects were selected as the successful applicants to an RFQ to develop the site. The developers recommended New Chelsea Society as the non-profit operator for the site, with this recommendation ratified by the VAHA oversight committee (City of Vancouver, 2018b) .

Following public hearing, a rezoning application was approved in December 2017, and a development permit was issued in September 2019 once New Chelsea had secured required funding and financing. The project was supported by \$10.2 million from the Province's Building BC: Community Housing Fund, as well as construction financing and annual operating funding from BC Housing. The city's contribution of the land at a nominal lease for 60 years constituted a grant of \$22.7 million, with the City also waiving \$1.6 million in development cost charges.

The project broke ground in January 2020, with Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart providing the following quote:

“Using city-owned land to provide homes for low- and middle-income residents is critical in tackling the lack of affordable housing in Vancouver. But, the real magic comes from the partnerships we forge with local non-profit organizations and senior levels of government. We’re grateful for our partnership with BC Housing and New Chelsea Society on this project, which will provide homes for hundreds of people who live and work in Vancouver.” (BC Gov News, 2020).

Construction was complete by summer 2022, with 102 units for seniors and families spread across two buildings. The unit mix is 10 studios, 38 one-bedroom units, 35-two bedroom units, and 19 three-bedroom units. In terms of affordability, 20 units are designated for people earning up to \$26,000 annually, 51 units are designated for households earning between \$25,000 to \$73,000, and 31 units are designated for households with incomes up to \$113,000 (BC Gov News, 2020).

58 West Hastings Street (also known as 46 West Hastings Street)

Despite being one of the earliest sites to be designated to the VAHA for development (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, 2015), the housing project at 58 West Hastings did not break ground until July 2021. This groundbreaking marked the culmination of years advocacy to build social housing on the site which had been purchased by private developer Concord Pacific in 2008 but was subsequently transferred to the City as a part of community amenity contribution agreement. In the years since, 58 West Hastings street was the epicentre of protests about housing justice in Vancouver, with housing activists calling for the empty site to be developed as 100% welfare rate housing (Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre, 2018). When the City designated the site to the VAHA in March 2015, the Chinatown Foundation approached the Agency with a proposal for a mixed-use development including social housing and a healthcare facility. This proposal resulted in the City entering an MOU with the Chinatown Foundation, in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health, in 2016 (City of Vancouver, 2016b). Rezoning for the site was approved in January 2018 and a development permit was issued in November 2019.

The Chinatown Foundation were able to raise \$30 million through a fundraising campaign, secured low-cost financing of \$30 million from the Province via BC Housing,

further funding from the federal government via CMHC's National Co-Investment Fund. Even with the senior government funding and the nominal lease via the City, it was established that there would be a substantial equity gap should all of the units on the site be rented at welfare rates, as was initially promised by the City (O'Connor, 2018b). On the project page for 58 West Hastings on the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation website, the Foundation explain they "worked closely with the City of Vancouver, BC Housing, CMHC, and Vancouver Coastal Health to define the right mix of housing that will provide access for a variety of low-income residents while ensuring the project remains financially viable."(Vancouver Chinatown Foundation, n.d.). As such, it was determined that for the project to be self-sustaining it would be able to rent 120 homes at welfare rate with the remaining 110 homes at HILs.

Construction is due to be completed in 2024, with the 230 units for both individuals and families intended to provide homes for the "most vulnerable" (Government of Canada, n.d.).

710 East 19th Avenue

Previously known by the alternative address of 3510 Fraser Street, this site was one of the first parcels of City-owned land designated by Council to the VAHA in May 2015. The site had been purchased in 2013 by the City for the purpose of creating social housing for seniors.

In 2015 VAHA issued a RFQ for a development partner to commence the initial design and rezoning process for the site, with a proponent team of Ventana Construction Corporation, and dys architecture selected. In June 2018 the project received approval for rezoning for a mixed-use development consisting of social housing and a seniors centre at ground level. Subsequently, the VAHA recommended to Council that the Community Land Trust be the non-profit partner to finance, build, operate and maintain the project with this approved in August 2018 (City of Vancouver, 2018d).

The project secured \$7.25M in funding from BC Housing's Investment in Housing Innovation program and a further \$500,000 from CMHC's Seed Funding program (City of Vancouver, 2018d), with a development permit issued in June 2020.

Construction is underway, and once complete the project will provide 58 units for low to moderate income seniors. The project is anticipated to open in early 2023, and will operate as a co-op with housing charges are estimated to range from approximately \$1,040 to \$1,700 (BC Gov News, 2020b)

3338 Sawmill Crescent

Located in the River District in the East Fraser Lands, 3338 Sawmill Crescent was one of the seven-sites assigned to the Community Land Trust by the VAHA in 2018. The site received its development permit in August 2021 and is currently under construction with an anticipated completion date by fall 2024.

The Community Land Trust secured \$36.8 million from the Province's Building BC: Community Housing Fund and will receive additional annual operating funding of approximately \$1.8 million from BC Housing. The City provided the land under a nominal lease for 99 years, and also provided approximately \$10 million in development cost charge waivers (BC Housing, 2022a).

The project is a partnership with M'akola Housing Society who will operate approximately half the homes with a focus on serving the city's Indigenous population. Once completed, the project will provide 220 rental homes and 117 co-operative homes, with the units split across a 21-storey tower and six-storey component. There will be a range of unit sizes, but most notably nearly 70 of units will be three-bedroom homes, responding to a recognized need for more affordable family homes in Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2014b). In terms of affordability, half of the units will have rents geared to 30% of the household's income, "some of the units will be rented to people with very low incomes, such as those receiving income or disability assistance" (BC Housing, 2022a), and the rest will be rented at or below market rent. To comply with the Province's Community Housing Fund, no more than 30% of units can rent at market rent¹¹. (City of Vancouver, 2021a).

¹¹ With market rent meaning "market rent for a comparable unit in the community or, in the absence of comparable units in the community, CMHC's Rental Survey for Vancouver for the applicable year of construction, currently the 2005+ category" (City of Vancouver, 2021a)

Housing units in the pipeline by the end of 2021

1190 Burrard Street, 177 West Pender Street, 1001 Kingsway, 5085 McHardy Street (formerly known as 3279 Vanness Ave), and 1210 Seymour

Four of the seven sites that were assigned to Community Land Trust in May 2018 had not been completed or received approvals by the end of 2021 but were in the development pipeline.

1190 Burrard Street is to be developed as a mixed-use building that will be home to 154 social housing units and a social service centre ran by the non-profit Qmunity to provide a range of resources and community space for queer, transgender, and Two-Spirit people. The site received rezoning approval in July 2021 and is currently awaiting its development permit. This site was included in a CMHC new release about funded projects in Vancouver under the National Housing Strategy {CMHC, 2019}, and is listed on BC Housing's funding map as a recipient of funding through the Community Housing program, however, more specific funding information was not available. The 154 social housing units are to be operated by McLaren Housing Society, a non-profit housing operator dedicated to supporting families and individuals living with HIV or AIDS. In terms of affordability, the site will meet the City's conditions for social housing with a minimum of 30% of the units renting at or below HILs, with final affordability requirements to be confirmed via the City lease (City of Vancouver, 2021e). In terms of unit mix, 31% of the units will be family units, either two or three bedrooms. A media article on the development speculated that the project was close to breaking ground and would be completed by 2025 (Denis, 2022).

177 West Pender Street is a partnership with Atira Women's Resource Society and is intended to provide 76 homes primarily for women and their children. The VAHA's rezoning application for the site was approved in 2017, however the site is still awaiting its development permit and is one of the sites in the Community Land Trust agreement "stuck" without federal or provincial funding or financing commitments (Lazaruk, 2022). Noting that some of the units will be intended for women fleeing violence who typically are leaving their income behind, former Community Land Trust CEO Thom Armstrong stated in a media interview that being able to offer the units at a true level of affordability would require "a deep level of subsidy from senior governments" (Lazaruk, 2022).

1001 Kingsway is also another site from this portfolio 'stuck' without provincial or federal funding. However, 1001 Kingsway has also faced issues at the municipal rezoning stage, and is still awaiting rezoning approval following a revised submission from the Community Land Trust and its development partners in July 2022. The revised rezoning application is for a 66-unit co-op that aims to "maximize the number of affordable homes along with ensuring an appropriate mix of studio, one bedroom and family homes", and states that "senior government funding is being sought to allow this project to exceed the City's requirements" (Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency et al., 2022).

5085 McHardy Street (formerly known as 3729 Vanness Avenue) is currently under construction, having received support from BC Housing's Community Housing Fund and through CMHC's National Housing strategy. Rezoning was approved in October 2019, and a development permit was issued in July 2022. Once complete, 5085 McHardy will operate as a co-op and provide 102 homes, with 37 family-oriented units and a minimum of 30% of units renting at or below HILs rates.

1210 Seymour is also yet to receive funding commitments from the senior governments and is awaiting its development permit. The development team designed a development application to fit with the site's existing zoning, so the project does not require a rezoning approval. The development application was submitted in March 2022 and proposes a nine-storey mixed use building with 112 social housing units, 20% of which will be family units (New Commons Development et al., 2022). According to the Community Land Trust website, residences in this development will be available for "moderate-income households, and will be managed as a co-operative" ("Seymour VAHA Site," n.d.).

1406-1410 East King Edward Ave and 2086-2098 W 7th Ave., and 2091 W 8th Ave

The VAHA, on behalf of BC Housing applied to rezone both of these site of City-owned land in October 2021.

The application to rezone 1406-1410 East King Edward Ave was approved in June 2022 following public hearing. The project will provide 109 deeply affordable social housing studio units, with 50% of the units at shelter rate and 50% at rents-geared-to-

income for households earning up to 50% of HILs. The homes are intended for adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as adults who are earning very-low incomes. The project was described in the rezoning report as having an “urban Indigenous focus” (City of Vancouver, 2022b), with the design process involving consultation with Indigenous stakeholders and the selection of an Indigenous housing operator.

The application to rezone 2086-2098 W 7th Ave., and 2091 W 8th Ave was approved in July 2022 following public hearing. This project will provide 129 deeply affordable social housing studio units, with the same 50-50 affordability mix as above and the same target group of residents. The MPA Society were selected by BC Housing to be the non-profit operator for the housing project.

2009 – 2037 Stainsbury Avenue (Vienna House)

A partnership between BC Housing, the City of Vancouver through the VAHA, and More Than a Roof Housing Society, this development will provide 123 units of affordable rental housing over seven-storeys on City-owned land. In terms of affordability, 20% of units will be at “deep subsidy” rates; 50% will at rent-geared-to-income rates, with an income maximum set at HILs and 30% will be at market rents.

The project is named Vienna House in recognition of a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the City of Vancouver and the City of Vienna signed in 2018 to share knowledge and advance innovation in the development of low-carbon affordable housing (City of Vancouver, 2022c). A rezoning application, submitted in December 2021, was approved by Council following public hearing in July 2022. The project is anticipated to break ground in 2023.