

# News Release

*For immediate release: 12:00 noon, Friday, May 20, 2016*

## **WBHDC announces tenant rent relief *Guarantees housing for tenants whose homes were destroyed; will replace ruined refrigerators***

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*Fort McMurray* – The Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation (WBHDC) announced today it will provide rent relief to all tenants beginning May 3, the first day of the mandatory evacuation, up to such time as tenants are allowed to safely re-occupy their rental units. Rent relief will apply, at minimum, to the months of May and June.

WBHDC Board members Maggie Farrington (Chair), Jennifer Best, Jason Schulz and Jag Singh attended a telephone meeting the morning of Wednesday, May 18, and voted unanimously to provide rent relief to all WBHDC tenants displaced by the wildfire evacuation.

“Though the law states we are legally entitled to collect rents, even during such a terrible disaster, the Board felt strongly we had a moral obligation not to impose additional hardship upon our tenants who have already suffered so much,” said Farrington.

The Government of Alberta has committed to cover the rent for all of WBHDC’s social housing and seniors’ lodge clients through the evacuation period, which amounts to about 10 percent of the rental property portfolio.

WBHDC hopes to recover lost rental revenues attributable to its affordable gap housing, the remaining 90 percent of its portfolio, through insurance coverage, and federal and provincial disaster relief programs.

“The Board’s decision enables us to credit rent paid by affordable gap housing tenants for the month of May to their accounts to be applied in the future when units are ready to be reoccupied,” said Greg Elsasser, Acting WBHDC President/CEO. “We will not collect any rent from any tenant before then.”

WBHDC had already projected a \$6 million cash deficit for 2016 due to the contraction of the local economy after the slump in oil prices and the resulting much higher vacancy rates.

“The loss of affordable gap rental revenue is significant for us as a not-for-profit entity,” said Elsasser, “so we look forward to the decisions of our insurers and government partners over the coming days and weeks that will enable us to be as fiscally responsible as possible during this crisis.”

WBHDC also promises all its tenants they will have a home to return to.

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“Though our losses to the wildfire were restricted to townhomes in Beacon Hill and our recently completed Siltstone project in Timberlea,” said Elsasser, “people who have lost their homes will be relocated immediately into appropriate accommodations in one of our other properties. Looking after existing tenants is our first priority.”

WBHDC also has a long-standing affordable housing partnership with public sector employers in Wood Buffalo, including all three school divisions, the Northern Lights Health Centre/Alberta Health Services, RCMP and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. The partnership has enabled essential workers – teachers, nurses and other health care professionals, police officers and municipal employees – to access well-built, well-maintained affordable housing in one of Canada’s most expensive communities. To the extent that existing vacancies permit, WBHDC will work with its public sector partners to provide housing for qualifying employees who have lost their homes.

Finally, many tenants whose homes have survived the wildfire have expressed concern to WBHDC through its emergency update website about the condition of appliances in their suites.

“The Slave Lake fire taught us that fridges and refrigerators without power for two or more weeks were generally ruined and had to be replaced,” said Elsasser. “We are preparing to replace all ruined refrigerators as required for our rental tenants. Removing damaged appliances and replacing them with new ones will be part of our clean-up effort prior to readmitting tenants to their units consistent with the re-entry plan announced by the Province.”

“The wildfire disaster that forced the evacuation of Fort McMurray, Anzac, Gregoire Lake Estates, Fort McMurray First Nation and Fort McKay First Nation is unprecedented in Canadian history,” said Farrington. “WBHDC was created to make it easier for people to call Wood Buffalo home. We will continue in the spirit of that vision to help our tenants, friends and neighbours in the wake of this tragedy.”

*Celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2016, the Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation has helped more than 7,000 individuals, families and seniors of low to modest incomes find affordable housing in Wood Buffalo.*

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# Backgrounder

*For immediate release: 12:00 noon., Friday, May 20, 2016*

## **WBHDC assesses property damage**

### ***Guarantees housing for tenants whose homes were destroyed***

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*Fort McMurray* – A small contingent of Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation (WBHDC) maintenance and operations staff were permitted to return to Fort McMurray to complete a preliminary assessment of the wildfire damage to all our properties.

- Only the townhouses at Siltstone and South Ridge Beacon Hill were destroyed.
  - 701 Beaconhill Drive: Siding damage and possible building envelope damage to be investigate further: units 2, 4, 7 and 9.
  - 711 Beaconhill Drive: 15 units destroyed by fire: 1, 4, 6, 8, 18, 46, 47, 48, 49, 53, 66, 67, 72, 74 and 76.
  - 137 Siltstone Place: All units destroyed by fire: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.
  - 139 Siltstone Place: All units destroyed by fire: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.
  - 141 Siltstone Place: All units fire damaged and deemed unsafe: 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- Water and water infrastructure have been turned off at all apartment buildings to reduce the risk of further damage.
- All fire panels and associated systems have been reset to reduce the risk of further damage.
- Mechanical requirements will include a complete preventive maintenance procedure to isolate and repair damage.
- Otherwise, the main requirements across the portfolio are as follows.
  - Air scrubbing and air movement to remove the smell of smoke from the buildings.
  - Removal and replacement of refrigerators affected by power outages. It is not yet known how many units this may be.
  - Immediate removal of food from all refrigerators that may be salvageable to ensure against contamination.
  - Removal of all exposed food and garbage.
  - Cleaning of all kitchens, walls, and flooring to eliminate the effect of dense smoke.

**NOTE:** No amount of air scrubbing and cleaning will be effective until smoke clears and air quality improves. This is also a condition of re-entry set by the Province.

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# Backgrounder

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## Unit clean-up and removing ruined refrigerators

*Fort McMurray* – Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation (WBHDC) will be cleaning rental units and replacing ruined refrigerators and/or freezers as required in all its units over the coming days and weeks as part of the phased re-entry plan to Fort McMurray. Cleaning of the units and disposal of ruined appliances is mandated as a public health and safety measure.

Cleaning will be of the rental units and common areas only – that is, and only as required, WBHDC will clean walls, floors and carpets, countertops, dispose of perishable food items, *etc.* Personal items will not be cleaned by WBHDC and will be the responsibility of tenants.

Refrigerators and freezers that have been without power through the evacuation are likely to have been ruined by decomposing food and will have to be replaced. Ruined appliances will be removed by WBHDC personnel for disposal. Refrigerators are the property of WBHDC and will be replaced. Freezers are the personal property of tenants and will have to be replaced by the tenant through arrangement with his or her insurer.

Rental unit inspections will begin Wednesday, May 24, 2016 with clean-up to follow. Tenants with any concerns about the clean-up of their unit or the disposal of appliances are asked to register that concern as soon as possible through WBHDC's emergency update website at [www.wbhadc.ca/contact/](http://www.wbhadc.ca/contact/).

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