Perceptions of Rooming Houses in Halifax and the Role of Regulatory Intervention

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Acknowledgments

Summary

Rooming houses in Halifax have experienced significant loss in recent decades. Up to 90% of the stock (AHANS, 2014) was lost due to social, economic, and regulatory factors. While only 17 licensed rooming houses remain in Halifax, over a hundred illegal rooming houses may exist in the city (Lee, 2016; SHS Consulting, 2015). The illegal rooming houses are often called "quasi" rooming houses by municipal staff and typically house students near the universities (Dunphy, 2005). The loss of this affordable housing option for low-income single persons is concerning, while little is known about quasi rooming houses. I conducted interviews with community stakeholders to study the social and policy context of this affordable housing option.

The interview respondents shared their perceptions on the challenges facing rooming houses in Halifax. They identified licensing and enforcement and a lack of higher-level government support as the major challenges facing rooming houses. Most rooming houses in Halifax are not recognized or monitored under the licensing regime. Respondents expressed concern for tenants in vulnerable situations and suggested landlords must be held accountable. There is a desire for more regulation but recognition that higher-level support is needed to address systemic issues related to poverty.

Victorian values of privacy and cleanliness and contemporary values of autonomy, contribute to a discourse that depicts rooming houses residents as helpless and in need of regulatory intervention. A dilemma arises with the realization that municipal regulation, even based on good intention, can lead to further rooming house loss and the displacement of people. Regulatory intervention does not address the social and economic systemic issues around rooming houses. The nature of the problem is too complex for a planning solution alone.

Background

Rooming houses, also known as single-room occupancies (SROs), are private market accommodations for single individuals. They provide an alternative affordable housing option that caters to people with low-income, the unemployed, newcomers, and students (Campsie, 1994; Freeman, 2014). Federal government investment in affordable housing has declined in recent years resulting in rooming houses playing an increasing role in providing more affordable housing in Canadian cities (Gaetz, Gulliver, and Richter, 2014). The Federal government announced an increase in funding in March 2016, yet the impact of previous funding cuts continues to reap consequences.

Rooming house operations face social, economic, and policy changes. In recent decades, their number has decreased significantly in Halifax, and many other Canadian cities. The loss of rooming house stock is worrisome for tenants in terms of safety standards, as well as the displacement of people. A recent study suggested over one-third of the rooming houses in Halifax have converted to apartments over the last two decades (Lee, 2016). Meanwhile, the city has seen an increase in "quasi" rooming houses – which are defined as properties that have 6 or more rooms to rent that are not licensed, advertised, or otherwise labelled as rooming houses (Lee, 2016).

Taking a closer look at rooming houses in Halifax, I explored the social and policy context of this form of housing by gathering insights from community members. I identified what stakeholders labelled as the major challenges facing the rooming house sector and explored the role of regulation for its ability to protect and encourage safe and affordable single-room housing in Halifax.[1]

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[1] The study is part of a broader investigation of neighbourhood change in Halifax. See
http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/neighbourhood/index.html

Previous Findings

In 2016, Uytae Lee completed the first phase of this study on rooming houses. He analyzed the location of rooming houses in Halifax and how the supply changed over time. The goal of his research was to "create a better understanding of SRO change in the context of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) where the decline of rooming houses and prevalence of quasi rooming houses are widely reported but poorly documented" (Lee, 2016, p.3).

Lee's research was the first of a broader two-phase investigation. Phase 1 investigated three research questions.

1. Where were rooming houses and quasi-rooming houses located in Halifax from 1995 to the present?
2. How many SRO units have been lost in HRM from 1995 to the present and how?
3. What are some differences between the location of rooming houses and quasi rooming houses?

In completing phase one, Lee identified over 200 rooming houses in Halifax that existed at some point between 1995 and 2016. He found 151 properties recognized as rooming houses and another 57 properties fitting the "quasi" rooming house definition. By early 2016, only 17 of the 151 rooming houses remained open, while quasi rooming houses clustered around universities (See Appendix A).

The loss of licensed rooming houses inconveniences low-income single people in Halifax facing barriers to housing, such as those created by mental health or addiction issues. The second phase of the research, which is the focus of this report, explored the impact of the loss identified in phase one by seeking perspectives from community members involved in the rooming house sector. The purpose of phase two was to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing SROs in Halifax and community perceptions on this form of affordable housing. Interviews with community stakeholders are used to examine the social and policy context of SROs.

Phase 2 investigates:

1. What are the challenges facing rooming houses in Halifax?
2. How are rooming houses understood and regulated in Halifax?

Literature Review

Social and Economic Context

Rooming houses, often called single-room occupancies (SROs), have existed since the late 19th century. They have evolved over time in terms of location, tenant demographics, and societal acceptance. Rooming houses generally appear in cities as a result of economic pressure, as individuals come together to share resources (Sandoval-Stausz, 2007). In the early years of the 20th century, widowed women rented rooms as a respectable business venture (Breckinridge & Abbott, 1910). These rooms would often occupy older homes, not originally purposed for high occupancy, which officials claimed posed safety and health concerns (Breckinridge & Abbott, 1910; Sandoval-Stausz, 2007). Concerns about privacy and "proper" living standards are also linked to this form of housing. In Chicago in 1910, renting a rooming house as a single individual was seen as acceptable and economical, but renting a single room to a family was thought to have a "demoralizing effect" (Breckinridge & Abbott, 307). Rooming houses were seen as an acceptable form of housing for some but not others.

In the 19th century, rooming houses were considered a suitable form of housing for the working class, immigrants, and visitors (Slater, 2004). Rose (1947) stated, "Living in rooming houses, or as a roomer in a family home, is now the most popular form of living arrangement for unattached person" (p. 433). Tenant demographics of rooming houses shifted in the 1950s with the growth of the suburbs and widespread homeownership (Campsie, 1994). Rooming houses became housing for the working poor, the unemployed, and students (Campsie, 1994). At the end of the 19th century, single individuals renting rooms "presented a serious challenge to

the desire to control the nature of life together in neighborhoods" (Alexander, 2005, p.1243). Housing law began to classify properties by "one family" in an attempt to restrict SRO uses (1247). Restrictive covenants were put in place "to protect the property values and aesthetic sensibilities of the wealthy, who sought the sanctity of segregated spaces" (1243).

Starting in the 1960s, community-based care became a topic of attention in planning (Skelton, 2012). Societal thinking began to shift toward normalizing disabilities and re-integrating people into society. A transformation of care occurred, called deinstitutionalization, where patients transitioned from institutions into neighborhoods. The movement had effects on urban form as concentrations of care facilities or group homes appeared in inner cities (Skelton, 2012). Through deinstitutionalization, many individuals with mental disabilities and addictions moved into rooming houses, causing another shift in SRO tenant demographics (Slater, 2004; Drake, 2014). This process further stigmatized rooming houses, as neighbourhoods often did not welcome individuals with mental challenges, in fear of the "stigmatised other" (Slater, 2004, p.321).

In the 1960s, many rooming houses were characterized as "urban blight" and a significant number were lost due to redevelopment (Mifflin and Wilton, 2005; Archer, 2009). By the 1980s, the remaining aging housing stock experienced landlord neglect and reactionary government policies often failing to address the changing status of SRO housing (Campsie, 1994). Rising land values and gentrification led to the more closures of many "larger traditional rooming houses" into more profitable uses (Archer, 2009, p.35). Remaining rooming houses became a "last resort" to those with no other option (35).

In 2006, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) described the average rooming house resident as a middle-aged, Canadian-born male, typically single or divorced, and living well below the poverty line – he may have physical or mental health challenges or other addictions which may prohibit employment. Other rooming house residents included students, recent immigrants, some women, and

individuals who desire a smaller space (CMHC, 2006). Recent studies describe tenants of rooming houses as a diverse population with the common need for low cost housing (Lottis & McCracken, 2014). Tenants increasingly include senior citizens, new Canadians, and international students (Freeman, 2014).

Today, an affordable housing crisis has increased societal reliance on rooming houses (Gaetz, Gulliver, and Richter, 2014). Canadian federal investment in affordable housing began declining in the 1980s, at the same time minimum wages have not kept up with inflation, and social assistance levels and pensions have been reduced (Gaetz et al., 2014). In Nova Scotia, for example, the province offers income assistance of $300/month and up to $535 for "certain circumstances" often meaning persons with a disability (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013). A housing advocate in Halifax said landlords often charge the full $535 for rent alone (Lowe, 2013). Even so, rooming houses tend to be the least expensive option in the private housing market (CMHC, 2002). They are frequently described as a form of functional homelessness or transitional housing, often the "last stop before homelessness" (Chan, 2014).

The need for SRO accommodation is widely recognized; however, the sector faces many challenges. A recent study in Winnipeg states that within two neighbourhoods "the decline of rooming houses can be attributed to: interactions between housing market conditions, an aging housing stock, potential gentrification, community renewal efforts, and rooming house fires" (Kaufman and Distasio, 2014, p.11). The forces in play may differ across cities.

Policy Context

Regulatory frameworks can affect rooming house stock. In Halifax, rooming houses are permitted in zones allowing multi-family buildings (SHS Consulting, 2015). However, in lower density zones around universities, rooming house accommodation appears profitable for landlords (Lee, 2016). Limiting the location of rooming houses to higher density zones combined with rising property values on the Halifax Peninsula

can result in many rooming houses becoming placeholders for redevelopment. Municipal staff recognize that current zoning for rooming houses may contribute to the decline in numbers, as owners often opt to convert these houses into more profitable uses (SHS Consulting, 2015). Current regulatory frameworks encourage revitalization where rooming house stock is allowed to exist while stigma may be reinforced by properties that are left unkempt.

Municipal governments respond to SRO conditions typically through licensing programs and fire safety measures to ensure safe housing conditions. In 1909, San Francisco banned cubicle-style hotels, rationalized by fire safety concerns, which resulted in a loss of many SRO units (Durning, 2012). In the 1970s, deadly fires in SROs caused the City of Seattle to tighten rules and require upgrades for multi-story buildings, for which funding was provided, but not for rooming houses (Durning, 2013, p.12). In Toronto, licensing and inspections for rooming houses was implemented in 1974. These regulations appeared during a time of changing land values and urban renewal and many landlords of SROs sold their properties to developers instead of bringing them into compliance with regulations (Campsie, 1994).

In Vancouver, in the mid-2000s, the real estate market caused the loss of many SRO hotels (Durning, 2013). In response, the provincial government bought a large portion of the SROs to preserve inexpensive housing, while the municipality created regulations to protect SROs from demolition and conversion in the city centre (Durning, 2013). Recently In Regina, Saskatchewan, landlords rallied against a licensing bylaw that threatened large fines and possible jail time (Stuckel, 2013). The city chose to deregulate rooming houses and no longer defines the term "rooming house" or requires a license to operate them (City of Regina, 2016). De-regulation in Regina is expected to increase SRO supply; however, Stuckel (2013) argues tenant safety cannot be ensured without licensing and inspections.

The province is the authority on affordable housing in Nova Scotia. Housing Nova Scotia offers the Rooming House Rehabilitation Assistance Program (Rooming House

RRAP) providing landlords of licensed rooming houses with forgivable loans to do home repairs (Housing Nova Scotia, 2016). The main responsibility of the municipality is to enact measures to support safe and affordable housing conditions. The city sets out policies for affordable housing in the 2014 regional plan. Policy S-30 states that the city is responsible for "identifying existing affordable housing and development of measures to protect it" (HRM, 2014, p. 58). Policy S-34 says, "HRM shall investigate other means of supporting affordable housing including reducing or waiving of fees" (HRM, 2014, p. 58).

Halifax introduced licensing requirements for rooming houses in 2003 under the M-100 bylaw, which governs standards for residential tenancies. In July 2016, the M-200 bylaw passed through city council and replaced the M-100 bylaw. The new bylaw defines a "rooming, boarding, and lodging house" as any building with "four or more rooms providing occupancy are rented for remuneration as separate units of residential accommodation whether or not meals or kitchen facilities are provided" (HRM, 2016a, p.2). Land use bylaws (LUBs) within the HRM have their own definitions for SRO housing, often out-dated.

In its early years, the M-100 bylaw functioned in a complaint-driven inspection system with little enforcement (Gulamhusein, 2005). In 2005, HRM recorded 77 rooming houses with many more undocumented and no licensing program in place (Gulamhusein, 2005). Between 2002 and 2007, inspections were carried out primarily by the Fire Prevention department (McGillicuddy, 2009). Around 2007, the Planning and Development department began tracking rooming houses. Inspections became the responsibility of both the Building Standards department and Fire Prevention (HRM, 2007). In 2013, a Coast article identified only 25 rooming houses, down from 153 in 2007 (Bousquet, 2013). In spring 2015, the city recorded only 18 licensed rooming houses (SHS Consulting, 2015).

A news article released in 2016 revealed that not much has changed: "it's a complaint-driven process — meaning without a complaint, there's no inspection of properties" (Chiu, 2016). With the passing of the M-200 bylaw, some changes were

made to rooming house regulation, including lengthening the licensing renewal from one year to two years and more details on the role of the inspector, orders to comply, and follow up requirements. A local Councillor in Halifax admits "the bylaw created more stringent rules around minimum safety...[and] the regime could cost the city money because additional inspectors may be required. He says inspections would be prioritized, with dwellings that have "more of a chance of risk" such as student rentals and converted properties being monitored more frequently." (Chiu, 2016).

Not all community stakeholders welcome increased regulation in the rooming house sector. Investment Properties Owners Association of Nova Scotia (IPOANS) assures that licensing is not the answer (Marie, 2013). IPOANS references a report by the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario (FROP), which reviewed the effectiveness and implications of licensing rental apartments. The report argued that implementing "broad-based licensing" of apartments does not address the problem properties, but instead "impose[s] burdens on the many to 'capture' the few" (Fenn, 2013, p.9). Recently in London, Ontario, landlords were faced with increased licensing fees resulting in many landlords choosing to operate "underground" (Fenn, 2013, p.9). Licensing small-scale apartment owners can result in widespread discontinuation of use and incentive to convert into condominiums. Fenn (2013) offers an alternative to licensing: targeted enforcement with collaboration among landlords, tenants, neighbours, universities, and local politicians.

Zoning also plays a role in regulating the number and location of SROs. Rooming houses are subject to zoning requirements, yet some zoning bylaws are more restrictive than others (Freeman, 2014). One reason for restrictive zoning could be to protect neighborhood character. With the expansion of group homes and other community care facilities after deinstitutionalization, municipalities faced community resistance to neighbourhood change (Stuckel, 2013). Sometimes municipalities enact minimum separation distance bylaws to avoid concentrations of group homes within neighbourhoods, which has been criticized as a form of discrimination against those with mental health issues (Finkler and Grant, 2011; The Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). Zoning is often used to protect neighbourhoods "constructed

exclusively for nuclear families" (Skelton, 2012, p.2). Skelton (2012) states, "While zoning formally controls land uses, it effectively also controls people who may or may not use the land and consequently their ways of life" (p.2). Freeman (2014) suggests restrictive zoning may turn a blind eye to rooming houses that exist in suburban areas.

Many rooming houses in the HRM are grandfathered into zones that no longer allow rooming houses. This phenomenon partly resulted from the Halifax Peninsula bylaw amendment in 2005. The amendment limited the number of bedrooms allowed within dwelling units, but allowed existing uses to continue (Dunphy, 2005). The amendment was a response to the presence of unlicensed rooming houses, called "quasi" rooming houses (single family homes subdivided for students) appearing in Halifax's south end near universities (Bornais, 2005). Unlicensed rooming houses can be problematic because they are unmonitored and may be in poor condition, contributing to a negative perception of the sector (Lottis & McCracken, 2014).

Many North American cities experience "studentification" (influx of students and services catering to them in a neighbourhood) with the expansion of universities and lack of sufficient accommodation (Sage et al., 2012). Numerous students in Halifax rely on off-campus housing and end up in SRO type housing (Foster, Williams, and Andres, 2014). Concentrations of student SROs create unique issues relating to noise, garbage, and overcrowding (Gumprecht, 2006; Richie, 2014). Foster et al. (2014) claim that the expansion of student SRO accommodation creates public resistance and increased competition for low-income housing. This housing may escape licensing and might not fit the SRO definitions set out by the city (Murphy, 2015). Freeman (2014) says re-defining rooming houses as 'shared accommodation' would broaden the definition and allow municipalities access into suburban rooming houses via licensing inspections to enforce safety standards and address any issues.

Waye Mason, Councillor in Halifax, claims "We have a pattern on the peninsula of some landlords trying to basically operate lodging houses or boarding houses without understanding the law" (Luck, 2016). Megan Deveaux of Dalhousie Legal Aid,

comments on illegal rooming houses claiming that landlords often take advantage of international students in rooming house situations. One common abuse is charging large security deposits above the legal amount, which is 50% of one month's rent (Luck, 2016).

Abuse of power by rooming house landlords and the perceived persistence of poor housing conditions lead many advocates to call on the city for action, often in the form of regulatory intervention. A media review of local news coverage indicated that in Halifax, the most common policy suggestion is "to enact tougher bylaws and enforcement" (Derksen, 2016a). Regulation is seen as a way to address issues surrounding rooming houses and monitor the availability of this affordable housing option. However, increased regulatory standards can lead to rooming house closures, which may deter advocates from speaking out on their concerns (Wiestmore, 2013). Klinenberg (2003), explores the effects of the 1995 Chicago heat wave on SRO residents. Many SRO residents died in the heat wave, yet political pressures to eradicate SRO hotels silenced advocates from speaking out about the traumatic impact (Klinenberg, 2003). Recently in Moncton, New Brunswick, a news article claimed, "at least 25 houses in Moncton have been torn down since the creation of the task force [in 2013]" (Fida, 2016). The "enduring tension" is that "rooming houses fill the ever present demand for affordable and accessible housing for those in poverty or low income, all while failing to meet common understanding of what constitutes appropriate housing" (Archer, 2009).

The desire for regulatory intervention stems from a standard of appropriate housing based on common societal norms. In this study, I explored the common understandings among stakeholders in Halifax on the challenges facing the rooming house sector and the role of regulatory intervention. I then explored the motivations behind the desire to intervene and the tension that arises with regulatory intervention as the solution. This research adds a valuable contribution to the literature on rooming houses and provides new understanding on the issues specific to Halifax.

Methods

Data Collection

This study employs a case study approach, using data triangulation as a method to gather information on rooming houses in Halifax. In summer 2016, I interviewed 37 community stakeholders. The type of stakeholder and number of participants is displayed in Table 1. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, individuals are labelled by stakeholder type and not by name.

Table 1. Interview participants

STAKEHOLDER	Code	Male	Female	Total Participants
Municipal and Provincial Officials	MU/PR	3	3	6
Housing Advocates	HA	7	7	14
Rooming House Residents	RR	5	4	9
Housing Providers	HP	2	3	5
Neighbours	RA	1	2	3
Total		**18**	**19**	**37**
Percent		49%	51%	100%

Housing advocates, including individuals advocating for or involved with affordable housing in the city, make up the largest cohort in the study. The second largest group is rooming house residents followed by officials, housing providers, and neighbours. Participants were contacted via email, phone, and through references of other participants. Housing providers often could not be reached or refused to participate. I was unable to recruit landlords of unlicensed rooming. Neighbourhood resident association members were difficult to contact and often refused participation, citing

unfamiliarity with the topic. This category is named "neighbours" as not all participants belong to a neighbourhood residents association, yet they all live near rooming houses.

Data Analysis

The interview data was transcribed and I developed a coding framework for analysis. I used two forms of content analysis: thematic analysis and discourse analysis. Some comparative analysis was used to evaluate differences in perspectives between stakeholders.

Thematic analysis is a method used to organize and describe a dataset by finding themes and patterns related to the research question or problem (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I used thematic analysis to identify emerging themes in the interview data. I coded the interviews for challenges facing rooming houses, identified by stakeholders. I grouped these codes under four major themes: physical and market challenges, social environment challenges, management challenges, and regulatory challenges (see Appendix B). My codes and categories were developed based on my research questions and my preliminary findings (Derksen, 2016b). I also consulted a previous study completed in Toronto, which used interview data to study rooming houses (Oriole Research & Design Inc., 2008).

I began the coding process by using the framework categories set out by the Toronto study and made appropriate adjustments to reflect my research questions. I then tested the coding framework on one stakeholder from each cohort. I noted key subthemes that emerged from the data. During this process, I added categories of "characterization of housing option" and "other." I also decided to note any explicitly stated challenges and emotions. As I coded the transcripts, I continued to add subthemes as they arose in the data. Upon completion of the coding process, regulatory challenges (including challenges in regulating rooming houses and sector support) proved the most prominent theme. Every stakeholder mentioned regulatory

challenges and often spent a lot of time discussing this type of challenge. I developed an evidence bank on the regulatory challenges for further analysis.

After discovering major themes in the data, I used discourse analysis to interpret narratives in the text. Discourse analysis studies language and how it is used to construct social realities by paying attention to both the structure and form of talk or text and seeking inconsistences and patterns in accounts (Talji, 1999). I identified literary features, such as metaphors and allegories, as well as statements of common knowledge (called evidentialities) via a keyword search of words such as "of course" and "obviously." I chose keywords that come up frequently in the interview data, however the list of keywords is not exhaustive. I also noted any quotes of interest where stakeholders would present opinions or persuasive arguments about broader issues or realities (see Appendix C).

I identified the major narratives in the text and then explored the practical consequences of the common understandings embedded in the narratives.

Limitations

A diverse range of stakeholders participated in the study. The interview data is rich with 37 interview transcripts; however, the study is not exhaustive. Interviewees represent small portions of the population and do not cover all views. For example, the study does not include any landlords of unlicensed rooming houses. A larger sample size would be required to better represent the diverse stakeholders.

Given the volatile nature of this form of housing, tenants may have withheld information due to fear of eviction. Ensuring confidentiality helped to mitigate this limitation to some degree. Another limitation came up in coding and developing conceptual categories for the interview data. This process is subjective and my research bias cannot be fully removed. I reviewed my coding framework with my supervisor to moderate bias and receive continual feedback on my interpretation of the data.

Findings

Major Challenges

The challenges discussed in the interviews were divided into four major categories: physical and market challenges, social environment challenges, management challenges, and regulatory challenges. Each challenge is summarized based on the comments of all stakeholders.

Physical and market challenges

Common challenges that came up surrounding the physical structure of rooming houses revolved around shared amenities, including lack of privacy and personal space, overcrowding, and lack of safety and security. One participant described shared bathrooms as a challenge: "That's another bad thing – sharing a bathroom with people, especially when sharing with like half a dozen or something like that. That can get kind of gross" (13RR02m). Often rooming houses were depicted as being in poor condition, with bedbugs, and typically inaccessible for people with mobility issues (13RR02m).

Market challenges mentioned by participants included the apparent loss of licensed rooming houses and a shift in location of rooming houses to suburban areas. One participant claimed there are rooming houses "way out in Dartmouth. It did not seem very convenient... And I know there are some in Highfield Park" (02HA02m). Access to transit and social services becomes another challenge as locations shifted. A few participants mentioned that more and more rooming houses are operating without a license in zones that do not allow this form of housing (01HA01f; 08MU03m).

Social environment challenges

The social dynamics among rooming house residents, housing providers, and neighbours present challenges. Many respondents spoke about landlord control and a lack of advocacy for tenants in vulnerable situations. A housing advocate claimed that rooming house residents are "really abused and taken advantage of" (01HA01f). One rooming house resident described an incident: "My rent was late a couple of weeks once, and he came and stole most of my belongings" (15RR04f).

Another challenging dynamic that came up in interviews was lack of supports for tenants with landlords who do not have the training or capability to deal with complex issues or conflicts. Landlord-tenant relationships are often described as either paternalistic or neglectful. A housing provider described, "I feel like a big mother here because like I do yell at them...And I send them to their rooms...we have a good relationship" (04HP01f). One rooming house resident said his landlord "came by once a month to collect his rent and then he'd leave. He didn't want much to do with the place really" (13RR02m). Participants recognized that the spectrum of landlords is broad with some landlords being exploitive while others are more supportive.

Conflicts arising between tenants and landlords are said to revolve around upkeep, rent, lease agreements, and eviction. Conflict between tenants is a major challenge identified by respondents due to differences in lifestyle, neglecting responsibility, drugs and alcohol, mental health issues, and abusive behaviour. Stealing is mentioned multiple times by participants (15RR04f).

Issues inside rooming houses can cause neighbour concern. Common challenges for neighbours of rooming houses are disruptions, anti-social behaviour, and fear for safety. One official explained, "I get complaints from the neighbours...about the noise they make at 5:00 in the morning when they're all like coming back from spending the early morning on garbage day collecting bottles and cans." (05MU01m). Other concerns were neighbourhood character and citizen obligation to learn appropriate regulations and educate others. Neighbours are affected by high turnover, increased

density, and property upkeep. These challenges contribute to stigma against this form of housing and a Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) attitude. For example, one official said "You know, nobody likes to have a rooming house in their backyard" (05MU01m).

Management challenges

Many interview respondents sympathized with the challenges involved in running a rooming house. Some repeated challenges included financial management, in terms of upkeep and inability to raise rents beyond income assistance rates, personality management, crisis management, lack of supports, a slow eviction process, and community opposition.

Housing providers mentioned specific challenges with limited access to supports and funding. A housing provider stated, "we don't get any funding from the government or anything for them" (04HP01f). Another participant stated, "They need more social help" in reference to her tenants (36HP05f). Landlords appear to face blame for the issues present in rooming houses and find themselves involved in the lives of tenants beyond their role as housing providers, as one housing provider stated, "That's not our forte to deal with any incidents...especially if the person has mental health issues, whether or not they should go to the hospital and be seen or those kind of things. That's what they're trained in. We're not trained in that" (35HP04f).

Most landlords saw their rooming house as a transitional form of housing, a "stepping-stone" for people. One housing provider stated, "I want them to succeed. You know, these rooms aren't fabulous but it's a place to start. So I want them to be as comfortable as they can be while they're there. And then I encourage them to move on" (36HP05f).

Regulatory challenges

Respondents discussed regulatory challenges at length in the interviews. I explore these challenges in more depth, looking at the regulatory challenges by stakeholder to allow for comparison of opinion.

Rooming House Regulation and Sector Support

Table 2. Regulatory challenges

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	Housing Advocates	Rooming House Residents	Housing Providers	Officials	Neighbours
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	**52**	**22**	**11**	23	6
Education/public information	14	10	1	4	**7**
Definitions/bylaw clarity	4	9	1	**27**	
Land use Bylaw				8	1
Reporting	11	2			1
Closures	16	3		3	
Policy/procedure	25	2	1	7	1
Departmental/ staffing/resources	2	2		9	3
Lack of initiative/incentives	11	1	5	6	1
Role of municipality	9	1	2	17	
Private market reliance	2		1	2	
Need for research/data	3		2	10	

The most common regulatory challenges facing rooming houses in Halifax were identified through systematically counting the incidences of each sub theme by stakeholder type. An incidence was counted every time a new challenge was mentioned, or re-mentioned after a shift in discussion. When discussing rooming house regulation, the most cited challenge was licensing and enforcement/oversight (see Table 2). Housing advocates, rooming house residents, and housing providers mentioned licensing and enforcement/oversight more than any other challenge. Officials discussed definitions and bylaw clarity the most and neighbours focused on

education and public information, yet licensing and enforcement/oversight proves the second most common topic for officials and neighbours.

Across stakeholders, the most cited sector support challenge was lack of higher-level support, including federal and provincial funding and other support (Table 3). Housing advocates focused on higher-level support but also talked about initiative barriers, such as time and resources, and mentioned an array of other challenges. Housing providers touched on coordination and communication as well as the need for research. Officials brought up coordinating and communication, whereas rooming house residents and neighbours only mentioned higher-level support.

Table 3. Sector support challenges

SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	Housing Advocates	Rooming House Residents	Housing Providers	Officials	Neighbours
Initiative barriers	11				
Coordination/communication	4		4	7	
Higher level support/oversight	**25**	**4**	**7**	**12**	**2**
Helplessness	5				
Tenant willingness to receive help	3				
Landlord willingness to collaborate	1				
Need research			2		
Approach (reactive/agency or individual)	4				

Housing Advocates

The most common theme talked about by housing advocates was licensing and enforcement, mentioned twice as many times as any other theme. Policy and procedure also came up many times in the interviews. Some less prominent themes included closures, education and public information, reporting, lack of initiative, and the role of municipality. Table 4 outlines the major complaints within each identified challenge.

Table 4. Challenges identified by housing advocates

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	• Complaint-based system • Need for action on substandard conditions • Need to balance enforcement with incentives
Policy/procedure	• Lack of monitoring • Existence of illegal rooming houses • Lack of encouragement for rooming house operation • Lack of provincial legislation and insufficient funding
Closures	• Lack of proper notice of eviction • Poor crisis management in the event of closure (especially for those with mental health challenges)
Education and public information	• Unawareness of current regulations for rooming houses • Need for tenant education on legal rights and responsibilities • Lack of public awareness on rooming house regulation and benefits of the rooming house model
Reporting	• Tenants responsible to report, but rarely do due to threat of losing housing
Lack of initiative and incentives	• Lack of support for well-managed rooming houses • Lack of accountability for landlords of poorly managed rooming houses • Lack of action on the same issues we've had for decades
Role of the municipality	• Lack of provincial and federal support for affordable housing • Lacking political will
Other Challenges	• Lack of communication between department silos • Lack of information on locations • Lack of information on rooming house resident needs • Private market affordable housing not ideal (often in poor condition) • Landlord responsibilities go beyond their role
SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	
Higher Level support/oversight	• Lack of federal and provincial investment and support for affordable housing • Lack of oversight on provincial programs • Little consideration for economic feasibility • Challenge gaining political will at the municipal level
Initiative barriers	• Face dilemmas in attempting to support the rooming house sector (attempt to avoid evictions) • Lack of time and resource • Need to pressure authorities to see action
Other Challenges	• Lacking a collaborative approach

Regulatory Challenges

The housing advocates interviewed for this study typically play a supportive role in the rooming house sector, often working with tenants in vulnerable situations. Many advocates described negative experiences working with the sector and communicated an urgency to see issues addressed. Most commonly, housing advocates identified licensing and enforcement/oversight as a crucial issue (mentioned 52 times). Common descriptions of the current regulatory system were "unregulated" "not transparent" "no oversight" and "no teeth." Most advocates noted that the current licensing program operates in a complaint-based system. Tenants are responsible to report any non-compliance to the city. If tenants do not report, rooming houses may operate in poor condition without any accountability. Advocates shared an overwhelming desire to see substandard conditions addressed, as one advocate stated,

> *Without adequate standards, then we are putting again some of the most marginalized people in our community at risk, right, by just offering them really substandard, unsafe, unsanitary places to live. And it's not good enough.*
> (31HA13f)

Advocates recognized the need for balancing enforcement with incentives. They suggested that well-managed rooming houses require support, while poorly managed rooming houses must be held accountable. However, enforcement proves difficult with the current policies and procedures in Halifax.

Challenges surrounding policy and procedure were mentioned 25 times by advocates. Some major complaints included lack of monitoring the sector, the existence of illegal rooming houses, and a policy environment that does not encourage rooming house operation. Policies for rooming houses are often contradictory. One advocate said "Well, my experience has really been around the locks on the door piece, and just the tension between Income Assistance requiring

locks on the doors and the City not allowing locks on the doors"[2] (10HA04m). The overall sentiment expressed by advocates was that the regulatory system presents barriers to running a rooming house instead of supporting and encouraging this form of housing. One advocate summed up this idea in the statement, "the community and the government at all levels have not been supportive of rooming houses. There are all sorts of regulations that make it difficult" (20HA10f).

Many housing advocates talk about the closure of a property on Gottingen Street in the north end of Halifax, an area affected by gentrification, as a case study on how current policies work in practice. Some of the complaints resulting from this event included that tenants were not given proper notice of eviction and crisis management efforts were not sufficient. One major issue was a lack of on-sight support for those with mental health and mobility issues. As a result of the closure, tenants were displaced, as one advocate said, "So at the end of the day, if you get these rooming houses shut down, where do people go? A huge problem" (31HA13f).

Housing advocates struggle with a regulatory system in which tenants are responsible to report complaints with their housing. A housing advocate stated "currently the tenant has to report. It doesn't work...They are dependent on this housing" (01HA01f). With the threat of losing their only housing option, tenants rarely report poor conditions and many rooming houses stay off the radar. As one advocate explained, "they were sympathetic but at the end of the day, they said, "We can't do anything unless someone who's living there reports"" (31HA13f).

Housing advocates stressed that the same issues have existed for years, yet no action is taken. As one housing advocate said, "Someone needs to walk the talk. We talk about and we study and we look at all the issues, and these issues are the exact same issues we had in 1994...We knew this was happening all along" (18HA08f). Housing advocates suggested that public awareness on rooming house regulation is

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[2] The City requires a license if there are four or more bedrooms rented separately with locking devices (HRM, 2015). Often landlords remove locks to avoid licensing requirements (Murphy, 2015).

lacking with little discussion on the benefits of the rooming house model. Many of those interviewed were unaware of the current regulations themselves.

Another challenge in regulating rooming houses is the role of the municipality. In Nova Scotia, the province is responsible to provide affordable housing. The city can encourage affordability through planning solutions, but faces challenges in terms of funding and provincial support. Multiple advocates claimed a lack of political will to take responsibility for affordable housing. One advocate stated,

> *Until the province and Housing NS recognizes rooming houses as a viable, useful, meaningful option for folks...then the city is kind of in a difficult spot. In that they can kind of make rules around the size and the number of bedrooms, and locks on the door or not locks on the door. But what doesn't get to the crux of the issue, is that landlords and tenants need support. And that comes from the province.* (10HA04m)

Sector support challenges

Lack of higher-level financial support, meaning federal and provincial investment and support for affordable housing, was the most commonly mentioned sector support challenge by housing advocates, more than doubling any other challenge. Initiative barriers was a strong second theme. Other challenges mentioned included helplessness, coordination and communication, approach, and tenant willingness to receive help landlord willingness to collaborate.

Due to lack of public investment in affordable housing and the limited role of the municipality, the private market has become the largest supplier of more affordable housing. Unfortunately, low-cost housing is often in poor condition. As one housing advocate said, "I think when the private sector is responsible for affordable housing, you just get terrible housing conditions. That's been my experience. It's just not very profitable to do otherwise" (02HA02m).

Advocates recognized that adequate affordable housing requires government investment and support, but said that political will is lacking (17HA07m). One housing provider stated, "somebody could just take responsibility for housing. Because it's one of those issues that, you know, there's no national housing strategy or plan" (25HA11m). Another complaint was a lack of oversight on provincial programs. One advocate claimed that social workers are "making decisions around people who are struggling, and they never met them. And they never saw their worker. And never visited the dump they're in" (34HA14ff). Another participant mentioned a lack of consideration for financial feasibility, she said, "[the] DCS [Department of Community Services] has to change their criteria...It's just it doesn't make any financial sense" (30HA12f).

Housing advocates face many dilemmas in attempting to support the rooming house sector. Many take caution to avoid rooming house closures and evictions by acting strategically and often secretly. As one participant said, "So you have to be really careful as to...you want to advocate but at the same time, you don't want to lose them [rooming houses] either" (06HA03m). Another advocate explained,

> *Let's say we got someone who's a resident and they actually did report to one of those three programs, what would happen? What would happen if the place was shut down? What would happen? Well, what would happen is people would be homeless.* (31HA13f)

The term "helplessness" came up in the interviews referring to the efforts of advocates (01HA01f). Advocates emphasized the challenge in accomplishing action without higher-level support and with tenants who face vulnerabilities and do not speak up (02HA02m).

The nature of the problem for housing advocates is a system that leaves tenants vulnerable to abuse while advocating for their rights can result in more harm through displacement. The complex nature of the issues surrounding rooming houses, such as mental illness and addictions, requires the support of many actors. Advocates lobby for all levels of government to get involved, most prominently for the

municipality to enforce housing standards to address the ongoing unacceptable conditions of some rooming houses in the city.

Rooming House Residents

Licensing and enforcement was the most commonly cited challenge for rooming house residents. Education and public information as well as bylaw clarity were two other prominent challenges.

Table 5. Challenges identified by rooming house residents

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	• Many rooming houses unlicensed and unmonitored • Need for randomized inspections • Desire for more regulations, such as occupancy limits, locks on cupboards and fridges in each room • High competition and no incentive for landlords to upkeep properties
Education and public information	• Decision makers lack "on the ground" understanding • Rooming house residents are often unaware of basic legal rights, especially international students • Lack of public information on housing standards and regulations
Definition/bylaw clarity	• Confusion around definition of rooming houses
Other Challenges	• Enforcement is unbalanced, based on councillor and neighbour involvement • Landlords have the control while tenants lack time and money to fight injustices • The goals between departments and levels of government are conflicting • Municipality is not taking responsibility for housing
SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	
Higher Level support/oversight	• Income Assistance is too low • Lack of political will

Regulatory challenges

Rooming house residents like housing advocates, mentioned challenges with licensing and enforcement more than any other regulatory challenge. Many rooming house residents live or lived in rooming houses that were unlicensed with no inspections and they urged the city do randomized inspections for greater landlord

accountability. They claimed that poor conditions are allowed to persist, which leaves many tenants vulnerable to landlord abuse. As two residents described, "It's a free-for-all freak show in those places" (15RR04f) and "You've got to put some pressure on these landlords. They're getting away with quite a bit." (21RR05m).

Greater enforcement and more regulation is desired by many rooming house residents, while they recognized that with greater enforcement there must also be incentives to balance profitability. As one resident said, "So there has to be some sort of consideration for recognizing them and incentivizing...making sure that students like myself can still walk to school in Halifax 20 years from now" (21RR05m). Residents of student-centric rooming houses were less enthusiastic about more regulations. A male rooming house resident, who asked not to be identified, suggested "flying under the radar is kind of what is protecting them [rooming houses] right now in a way too...part of me thinks some things are better off not regulated as well, as much."

Rooming house residents claimed that decision-makers lack an understanding of what it is like "on the ground" whereas people living in rooming houses lack knowledge both on regulations and basic tenant rights (21RR05m). In particular, newcomers may be unaware of housing standards as well as their rights and responsibilities as tenants. A rooming house resident who studied in Halifax as an international student said, "I'm not sure how to compare it because I can only compare it to my previous experiences...because living in Canada is quite different from being some place other than Canada." (27RR08f).

The definition of rooming houses is confusing for many rooming house residents. One rooming house resident said, "I don't know the definition of rooming houses versus lodging versus student house" (23RR06f). Another respondent said, "I think the main issue is that nobody really knows what is a rooming house" (23RR06f). A rooming house resident suggested differentiating based on whether or not the landlord lives on the premises, another advised, "it's just a matter of different regulations for different types. And not trying to do a blanket thing for all of it" (21RR05m).

Rooming house residents claimed that rooming houses in certain areas of the city may receive more community pushback and political will than others. One resident said,

> *And just depending on who your councillor is and whether they call the bylaw [city enforcement]...And that's how places have lost their ability to rent to folks, because the fire marshal comes in and says, "Excuse me, there's not enough egress here. There should be... If you've got this many locked doors, then you have to have this many fire alarms plus smoke detectors, plus this, plus that."* (03RR01f)

Feelings of having little control were expressed as landlords were depicted as arbitrary or capricious. When conflicts arise between a landlord and tenant, the tenant often does not report the situation due to lack of time and power. One resident stated,

> *The easiest thing that a rooming house landlord can do is just change the lock on the door, and you're gone. And then you can go and try to fight them in court or whatever but you're already fighting a losing battle. And most people aren't going to bother.* (28RR09m)

The municipality is often seen as responsible for affordable housing. A rooming house resident claimed, "So the whole issue, the municipalities don't want to take responsibility for affordable housing" (23RR06f). When rooming house residents describe government involvement, some key words that came up included "conflicting goals" (28RR09m) referring to the city and the province, and "overworked" referring to the municipal staff (23RR06f).

Many rooming house residents said landlords have little motivation to maintain adequate housing standards. As one rooming house resident put it, "There's no incentive for them to keep it up, to keep it well managed. Especially if you're really close to the student neighbourhoods, you know, someone's going to rent there anyway" (21RR05m). Overall, rooming house residents communicate a sense of

powerlessness in their housing situation: they find themselves dependent on the actions of landlords, politicians, and neighbours.

Sector support challenges

Higher-level support was the only sector support challenge mentioned by rooming house residents. The most common complaint was that income assistance is too low. Lack of political will was also mentioned as a challenge (28RR09m). From a tenant's perspective, the issues surrounding rooming houses can be attributed to neglectful landlords who have not been held accountable.

Housing Providers

Housing providers also identified licensing and enforcement more frequently than any other regulatory challenge. They mentioned lack of initiative/incentives multiple times as well as a few other challenges, but not in great detail.

Table 6. Challenges identified by housing providers

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	• Need more strict enforcement of licensing to get unlicensed rooming houses on the radar • Need to balance enforcement with incentives • Need for accessibility regulations
Lack of incentives	• Need a proactive approach to find rooming houses and ensure standards • City might be sceptical to partner with the private market
Other Challenges	• The city is lacking responsibility for housing • Lack of data on rooming house locations • Lack of awareness of any grants for rooming houses
SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	
Higher Level support/oversight	• Housing Nova Scotia uses fixed formulas and does not consider site-specific feasibility • Social services drops clients once they enter a rooming house • Residential Tenancy Board process is too slow
Collaboration and coordination	• Lack of partnership opportunities
Need research	• Lack of research on rooming house economic and social conditions and ideal rooming house models

The housing providers interviewed were all involved with licensed rooming houses in the city. The respondents spoke highly of the licensing program, yet many called for more strict enforcement. They recognized that many rooming houses exist under the radar. One housing provider stated, "And where they are, I can't tell you because they're all under the table. There's no regulations, there's no nothing because they don't really exist" (36HP05f). Action is clearly desired, as one housing provider said, "the city should be cracking down one way or the other" (16HP02m). At the same time, respondents claimed that action must be balanced with incentives. A housing provider used this analogy:

> *You know, the government should use a carrot and a stick. You can't just say these are all the regulations, you have to have your buildings to these minimum standards, and this type of inspection all the time, blah-blah-blah, and you can only charge this much money. Unless they're going to help subsidize it.* (32HP03m)

Housing providers expressed the view that licensing is a crucial measure, yet they recognized it might not address root causes of rooming house problems. One housing provider stated, "It's not a comprehensive solution. What we have is Band-Aids here and there" (16HP02m). One housing provider claimed that the current licensing system is a reactive approach to rooming house issues, as he stated,

> *I believe that the city has been...taking the easy way out. You know, instead of saying we're going to have minimum standards, and we're going to have everybody play by the same rules...they're saying, well, if you can make it happen, make it happen...And it's not ethical, it's not responsible, and it really exploits the most vulnerable.* (32HP03m)

Housing providers suggested that the city might be sceptical of the private market as a provider of affordable housing, which is a barrier to partnerships. One respondent stated,

> *We are the subject matter experts. We're the guys designing them, costing them, building them, operating them, managing them. We know what we're doing way better than the government does. And for them not to start with that*

acknowledgement is a major disadvantage…If they want transparent, open,
honest partnership, they have to get past the skepticism…the government
needs to recognize that there has to be profit. (32HP03m)

Housing providers recognized that the city lacks power to implement affordable
housing programs (16HP02m). Also, they suggested an unawareness of available
funding on behalf of housing providers. One housing provider stated, "I don't even
know what grants there are to apply for" (04HP01f). When developing policy around
rooming houses, housing providers suggested finding a balance of ensuring safety
and economic feasibility. One housing provider recommended moving away from the
private market to ensure tenants are adequately supported. She said, "I would love
to see provincial rooming houses. They're run by the government, they're paid for by
the government. Mental help would be available to them" (36HP05f). Overall,
housing providers expressed a general desire to see better supports for tenants as a
top priority.

Sector support challenges
Housing providers talked about higher-level support most frequently, yet also
touched on coordination and communication and the need for research. According to
housing providers, Housing Nova Scotia does not consider site-specific feasibility.
One participant stated, "The problem with Housing NS is they love the concept but
they have a fixed formula" (32HP03m). Often, landlords will take tenants who have
social support, but the support ends once the tenant is settled into the rooming
house. A housing advocate claimed, "the social system just drops them…They get
their money. And that's as much as they get from Social Services after that. Done"
(36HP05f).

The Residential Tenancy Board, a provincial body, also presents challenges to
housing providers due to the slow processes. As one housing provider stated, "It's so
difficult to try and remove somebody" (36HP05f). When a tenant becomes

dangerous, inability to administer a fast eviction can be problematic for the safety of other tenants (36HP05f).

Collaboration and coordination proved a topic of interest for housing providers as they face complex challenges managing rooming houses with little partnership opportunity. Housing providers suggested that more actors take a role in the rooming house sector. As one participant said, "I believe economic decisions now and in the future are going to require everybody – developers, tenants, condo owners, whatever – to put a concerted effort in creating affordability" (32HP03m).

The housing providers interviewed do not represent all the landlords in Halifax. To compare the perspectives of landlords not captured by the study I look to news articles that quote landlords of unlicensed rooming houses. Local media typically presents a negative view of landlords using terms such as "slumlord" "non-caring", and "unreachable" to describe rooming house landlords (Derksen, 2016a). Landlords are often depicted as villains who abuse tenants, yet landlords often describe themselves as heroic figures that take care of those whom everyone else has neglected.

In one news article, a rooming house landlord complained that his tenants required more assistance from the Department of Community Services or access to supported housing. He stated, "I can't provide this kind of facility" (Simpson, 2004). In another article, a renter blamed eviction on revenge, but the landlord claimed "He caused me some trouble and damage to the property" (Simpson and Legge ,2004).

One landlord of a "quasi" rooming house fought a fine issued by the city, stating, "If I have to do what the city says, I will have to evict some longtime tenants and convert the building into two apartments" (Power, 2013). The landlord noted, "the four-unit building fits in nicely with the neighbourhood, where there are many student rentals, about a four-minute walk from the Dalhousie University campus" (Power, 2013). Landlords often see their role as providing essential affordable housing and hope the city will recognize their efforts and support them in rooming house operation.

Municipal and Provincial Officials

The most common challenge mentioned by officials was definitions for rooming houses and bylaw clarity. A strong second theme was challenges with licensing and enforcement/oversight. Officials also identified the role of the municipality as a major challenge. Other less common challenges mentioned included departmental/staffing/resources, land-use bylaw, policy and procedure, lack of initiative/incentives, and research/data.

Table 7. Challenges identified by officials

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	
Definition/bylaw clarity	• The definitions for rooming houses are inconsistent across bylaws and are easily circumvented • Unlicensed rooming houses are a safety concern
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	• Regulations drive rooming houses underground • Zoning does not recognize rooming houses in suburban areas • Need for balance of enforcement and incentives
Role of the municipality	• The city has no mandate and no legal ability to administer housing programs • The city is limited to planning solutions and is only responsible for enforcing housing standards • Community expectation of regulators is unrealistic • Lack mechanisms to enable the Municipality to engage in affordable housing initiatives
Land use bylaw	• Land use bylaws are out-dated • Each land use bylaw has its own definition of what a rooming house is and where they can locate • The zones allowing rooming houses are typically not profitable for rooming house operation
Policy/procedure	• Provincial policy is slow to change and often disconnected from the reality in the HRM • Lack of communication between the city and the province • Lack of monitoring of provincial programs
Departmental/staffing/resources	• Responsibility for rooming houses is split between the Planning department and Fire Prevention • Lack of communication and coordination within city departments (partly due to geographic distance)
Lack of initiative/incentives	• Lack of promotion for grants and other supports • Need to monitor market shifts and find ways to incentivize rooming house operation
Need for Research/Data	• Lack of data collection and data sharing • Lack of research on the economic feasibility of rooming houses • Need to promote and gain community acceptance for rooming houses
Other challenges	• Reliance on the private market for affordable housing often results in substandard housing conditions

SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	
Higher level support/oversight	• The provincial grant designed for rooming houses has little take up • Lack provincial legislation around minimum living standards
Collaboration and coordination	• Disconnect between the city and province • Need for a partnership model and more collaboration between interested parties

Regulatory challenges

For officials, the most common challenge that came up in conversation was definition and bylaw clarity. Some keywords mentioned multiple times include "underground," "circumvented," "mismatch," and "inconsistent." Some of the common complaints against current definitions included being too broad, not fitting all forms of rooming house accommodation, failing to control density, and a lack of consistency across land use bylaws.

Officials recognized the confusion on what is considered a rooming house (08MU03m). Several officials commented on the existence of "quasi" rooming houses. One official stated, "A lot of the student housing is basically quasi rooming houses. And it's a different kind of thing" (05MU01m). Another official said, "Well, so they're not official rooming houses but they're sort of operating like rooming houses" (07MU02f). In the confusion, many rooming houses avoid licensing, as an official explained, "So the way that the municipality defines a rooming house is challenging and it doesn't work. It's easily circumvented. And it doesn't apply to most of the situations that exist in the municipality" (09MU04m).

Officials suggested that without licensing, safety becomes a concern. One official stated, "So we've affected those buildings that look like rooming houses while really being blind to the whole other set of buildings that are out there. They carry the same risk" (09MU04m). One official claimed a need to rework the regulatory system to reflect the actual form of rooming houses in Halifax:

I think they need to overhaul the whole thing. I think that the term rooming house needs to be ended. It should be replaced with something else that better represents the usage type that we're seeing. And the land use component needs to be looked at to allow them where it makes sense to allow them. (09MU04m)

Officials discussed challenges associated with licensing and enforcement at length. The major issues addressed included: first, regulations are driving rooming houses underground; second, lack of provincial support; third, the licensing program is poorly executed; and fourth, regulations fail to recognize the complexity of buildings. One participant said, "I think the licencing was necessary but I don't think that it was necessarily well thought out and executed…They made it really hard to run a rooming house in the city" (05MU01m).

Another challenge discussed was a lack of knowledge on where unlicensed rooming houses are in the city. One official said, "We're seeing them disappearing. So we have more unlicensed than licenced" (22MU05f). Licensing is portrayed as an essential measure to address conditions in rooming houses, yet officials recognized that licensing measures have not always had success in retaining this form of housing. Thus, they take caution in promoting enforcement. As an official stated,

> *So it's a question of having regulations and making sure they work. But then there's also the question of enforcement. And then with enforcement is that if we really going to go in under a situation where there's a problem, you have to have a back-up system to support the people that are living in that situation.* (07MU02f)

One of the challenges in regulating rooming houses is the land use bylaws in the HRM. After the city amalgamated in 1996, the counties within the HRM kept their respective land use bylaws (Lee, 2016). The bylaws do not coordinate; each land use bylaw has its own definition of what a rooming house is and where they can locate. Often rooming houses are allowed in zones where it is not economically feasible to run a rooming house, or there are more profitable uses for the property (09MU04m).

Officials recognized that many quasi rooming houses exist in zones that do not allow them. However, enforcing conformity to the current bylaws could mean the mass closure of rooming house type accommodation in the city. One official stated,

> *Unless you want to shut down a whole bunch of buildings, which we don't want to do, the land use has to be able to accommodate this building use. So the land use bylaws really have to come first [...] So if the land use was more...wasn't so restrictive, then I think you'd see more of these buildings just properly licenced.* (09MU04m)

Officials suggested that addressing unlicensed rooming houses must be done in tandem with reassessing the current zoning for rooming houses.

According to officials, the role of the municipality in the rooming house sector presents many challenges. With no mandate for affordable housing, the city has no legal ability to administer housing programs (05MU01m). The city is limited to planning solutions and is only responsible for enforcing housing standards. These challenges contribute to a sentiment that the city does not do enough to support safe and affordable housing. Yet the expectations of the community may be unrealistic, as one official stated, "I'm in a position where I regulate the state of the building, not the activities of the people within the building. That's where the challenge really is" (07MU02f). Another official explained, "So that is the core of the issue, is...the feds have the money, the provinces have the responsibility, and the municipalities have the problem" (05MU01m).

The city appears to lack ability to provide affordable housing, yet officials envision a more involved role for municipality. One official suggested if rooming houses fill a need than the city should support them (37PR01f). Another said, "It is definitely a provincial mandate to be involved in supplying and supporting affordable housing. Although I think now we realize we do have an opportunity to be involved in it" (07MU02f). Officials suggested recognizing rooming houses around universities and creating expectations for this particular form of housing:

> *You want a university downtown, you have to give them a place to live...So they are investment properties owned by people who can own them. And so we*

should know they're there and have expectations of the people that own them and the people that live in them. And I think we can do that. (08MU03m)

As regulators, the role of officials is to ensure basic housing standards are met. It is the role of the province to provide affordable housing. However, policy and procedure at the provincial level is seen as slow to change and often disconnected from the reality in the HRM. One official claimed, "the communication is next to non-existent with the province" (05MU01m). Beyond poor communication, officials claimed a lack of monitoring of provincial programs. One official stated,

I guess that's one of the issues that comes up, is that Community Services is paying… I don't know all the ins and outs of it but if they're paying cheques directly to landlords, they should be monitoring where those cheques are going. (07MU02f)

Part of the challenge to regulating rooming houses is departmental. Officials described a lack of communication and coordination within city departments. One official said, "in the background, fundamentally, it's broken because the responsibility for the bylaw and the administration of it is split in two divisions in the municipality [the Planning department and Fire Prevention]" (08MU03m).

The need for a more proactive approach is a municipal challenge as well as a provincial one. Officials recognized that the city could be more involved with landlords in promoting grants and other supports. One official said, "sometimes programs just sit there and people don't know how to apply for them or it's complicated" (22MU05f). Also, officials recognized a need to monitor market shifts that affect rooming house profitability and find ways to incentivize this form of housing.

Ideas for moving forward included completing an inventory of rooming houses and organizing a dedicated research team (08MU03m). One official said, "I think we need to take a hard look and make sure that they are viable forms of housing. But we also have to keep an eye on the other income side of things" (22MU05f). Officials also mentioned the need to promote and gain acceptance for rooming houses. One

participant suggested ensuring standards are met via the licensing program could help with community acceptance (22MU05f).

Officials attempt to ensure basic housing standards but recognized the broader issues and pointed out the flaws with relying on the private market for affordable housing. As one official stated,

> I think the Liberal government has some kind of notion that the private sector is going to build affordable housing for nothing, and that somehow we can do that through land use. And that is patently stupid and will never work. (05MU01m)

Respondents stressed that land use and other planning solutions do not make up for a lack of funded and supported affordable housing. Enforcement without appropriate supports can escalate the problem. An official explained,

> We are a little bit lax on enforcement unless like there's an eminent danger to life. Because we know that if we actually go in there, if the city goes in there guns blazing, that it will create a social crisis that the province has no ability to respond to. (05MU01m)

Officials are responsible for guaranteeing safe and affordable conditions, thus the nature of the problem for most officials is substandard condition. Regulation intervention is the tool officials have to deal with perceived poor housing conditions. However, treating rooming houses as a special category may play into a stigma against this form of housing.

Sector support challenges

The challenges mentioned by officials include higher-level support and coordination/communication. According to most officials, provincial support for affordable housing is inadequate. As one participant stated, "the provincial program to create affordable housing is dead" (05MU01m). The provincial grant designed for rooming houses has little take up with no grants administered in the HRM in ten years (37PR01f). Some potential challenges with the Rooming House Residential

Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) for landlords could be inability to increase rent, possible need for compliance to rooming house regulations, and lack of knowledge about the existence of the grant (37PRO1f). One official claimed there might be hesitancy on behalf of the province in developing more programs for rooming houses because they are uncertain if the model will meet the diverse needs of the clientele (37PRO1f).

Officials spoke about lack of coordination between the city and the province. When it comes to affordable housing, "The province isn't really there. And because we're not building affordable housing of any kind in the city right now, there is nowhere for them to go. And so there's a complete disconnect" (05MU01m). Lack of partnerships is another identified challenge. One participant said, "it really needs to be that partnership model" (07MU02f).

Neighbours

Education and public information proved the most prominent theme in conversations with neighbours. Licensing and enforcement/oversight also comes up often. Other challenges emerge but infrequently.

Table 8. Challenges identified by neighbours

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	
Education and public information	• Lack of knowledge on regulations • Citizen obligation to learn regulations • Need for publicly accessible information and education on the benefit of having rooming houses in the city • Need to communicate and ensure expectations for rooming houses
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	• Lack of inspections and little follow up on neighbour complaints
Other Challenges	• Loss of neighbourhood balance
SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	
Higher Level support/oversight	• Disconnect between the province and the city • Lack of oversight by the province on programs

Regulatory challenges

Neighbours often spoke about a lack of knowledge of regulations and citizen responsibility to educate themselves on the regulations. Participants attempted to understand the regulations but were confused. One participant said, "I was under the impression that...in our neighbourhood, we couldn't really have rooming houses. But we do. So either I'm confused about that, wrong about that, or they just have them anyway" (29RA02f).

Neighbours suggested the city make information more publically accessible, especially for newcomers. Communicating clear expectations is a step to gaining community acceptance. One participant stressed the need to educate people on the benefit of rooming houses for individuals who require them. She said, "I think needs to be conveyed, that these people are not going to be transients, they're not to be coming and going, and hanging out, and whatever. That they're serious people. Just people who need a house" (24RA01f).

Licensing and enforcement was the second most common challenge identified by neighbours. Lack of inspections and little follow up were common complaints. One neighbour stated,

>We called the city. And they did go and inspect. But I think he just kind of, you know, somehow got around it...Nothing is going to change if they can't do more inspections and sort of catch them when they're doing that kind of thing. (29RA02f)

Neighbours mentioned that land use bylaws are not being enforced, resulting in loss of neighbourhood balance. A lack of oversight by the city was identified, as one neighbour said, "I don't think there's ever any collection of fines" (33RA03m). Some participants expressed negative sentiments toward the city by suggesting a level of "corruption and incompetence" (33RA03m). One neighbour said, "knowing the city council, they are going to do buggar all [nothing]" (24RA01f). Yet others displayed more understanding for potential challenges, such as a lack of staff and resources (29RA02f). Overall, neighbours desired more action on behalf of the city in dealing

with rooming house challenges and more education for citizens on the regulations and benefits of this form of housing.

Sector support challenges

The only sector support challenge mentioned by neighbours was higher-level support. One participant stated, "I mean I don't know how you deal with this business between the province and the city, and the fact that now the province has pulled out of Bloomfield. It's just...there is that disconnect" (24RA01f). Lack of oversight, on behalf of the province, was described as a challenge: "I think they should stop the practice of...if they're still doing it, of the province paying the landlords the rent. That's ridiculous. It just encourages abuses." (24RA01f).

Key Messages

The common challenges identified by all interviewed stakeholders revolved around lack of enforcement of regulations and lack of higher-level government support. Most participants mentioned that the current approach relies on tenants to report lack of compliance with bylaws, which results in an unbalanced pattern of enforcement. Often little or no enforcement occurs, leaving landlords unaccountable and tenants vulnerable to abuse. Stakeholders expressed a desire for more regulation but recognized that higher-level support is needed to address systemic issues related to poverty. Rooming houses were often labelled a Band-Aid solution (16HP02m) and a "symptom" of larger systemic issues (01HA01f).

Recognition of broader issues, beyond the capability of regulations to address, may contribute to the barriers in moving forward with more regulation. However, based on stakeholder opinion, the province is distant and uninvolved, leaving the city to act alone. The municipality attempts to ensure adequate housing standards through regulation; however, municipal regulation is not equipped to address larger systemic issues.

Discussion

Regulatory and sector support issues were the most frequently discussed challenges facing rooming houses in Halifax. There was a high level of agreement between stakeholders that licensing is essential and requires stricter enforcement. At the same time, many stakeholders recognized the flaws in enforcing licensing too hastily. One housing advocate stated, "The city and the province and everyone else has made it hard for them to operate. So yeah, they've definitely closed down" (18HA08f). Similarly, an official stated, "we just shut them all down and it exacerbated the problem" (05MU01m). Some respondents take a step further and recognized that regulating rooming houses cannot solve the problems facing the rooming house sector because issues are complex. As one housing provider described, regulation is "not a comprehensive solution" (16HP02m).

A tension is shown in the data between the need for urgent action on poor housing conditions and the caution in avoiding the creation of more homelessness in the city. To unpack some of this tension, I analyze the main narratives in the dialogue, which present commonly believed truths about rooming houses. I then parse the thought process behind these truths that lead us to believe rooming house regulation is necessary.

Common Narratives

Narratives tell a story of how a community understands phenomena. The common narratives in the dataset include a negative perception of rooming houses, a need for regulatory intervention, and recognition that rooming houses are a Band-Aid solution.

Negative Perceptions

Stakeholders commonly suggested that rooming houses are generally in poor condition. The talk around rooming houses was largely negative, with emphasis on the desire to avoid ending up in or working with this form of housing. For example, an official stated, "I think generally the first image that comes to mind has been sort of one that why would anyone want to live in a rooming house and why would we want to have rooming houses in our community?" (07MU02f). Alongside recognition of poor conditions, there was a common desire to do something about the state of rooming houses in Halifax. An official stated, "I was in council the other day, and Council McCuskey asked the question – What are we doing about the terrible conditions in the rooming houses?" (08MU03m).

Some participants attempted to counter the common understanding that rooming houses are in poor condition. One housing advocate spoke about rooming houses as providing viable housing: "they're providing a good place for people, right. There are a few bad apples that are ruining the bunch" (18HA08f). Rooming houses are stigmatized, as one housing advocate claimed, "Nobody cares. But…everybody feels entitled to judge or regulate or whatever" (01HA01f).

Need for Regulatory Intervention

Many participants suggested that most rooming houses in Halifax exist "underground" or "off the radar." Often rooming houses or shared accommodations do not fit municipal definitions. An official explained,

> [T]here is really no difference between the two, except for one is in an area where if I'm calling it a rooming house, obviously it's allowed to be a rooming house where it is. If it's a quasi-rooming house then obviously it's either a building that doesn't want to meet the requirements of the M100 bylaw…or it's in an area where it's not allowed to be a rooming house thing. (09MU04m)

Underground rooming houses were often described as "bad" and "illegal" but sometimes they were called "good" and "viable" housing. One housing advocate said, "A lot of people don't know about them. They're not willing to get licensed. And

they're providing a good place for people" (18HA08f). One rooming house resident mentioned, "rooming houses, they serve students fine. A certain type of student fine" (21RR05m).

Some participants called for a system overhaul. As one official said, "I think that the term rooming house needs to be ended" (09MU04m). A housing advocate claimed, "All the legislation around rooming houses contradicts each other...[and] needs to change" (18HA08f). Many participants encouraged stricter regulation to ensure tenant safety (31HA13f). Other participants suggested more regulation might be a negative thing for the housing stock. One housing advocate said, "Skirting the law...but in some cases, they're doing a benefit to, you know, a certain population that needs it" (11HA05m).

A struggle to achieve balance is recognized widely in the data. One official sums it up well saying, "You just can't go with a sledge hammer and walk away, and say, "Well, we did our bit." People have to have a place to live" (07MU02f).

Rooming House as a Band-Aid Solution

Many participants recognized the benefits to the rooming house model, yet were sceptical about its success in the private market. As one advocate said, "they seem to keep existing and even operating under a murky legal framework. So they're obviously meeting a need. There's a market for them" (02HA02m). Another advocate claimed, "private landlords are good for...the middle and like upper section of the market but they're terrible when it comes to like this part of the market where it's just really poor people with a very fixed income" (25HA11m).

One participant described rooming house success as depending on multiple factors. She said, "rooming houses are good. It depends on how you do it, how are they used, and who's in it, and the philosophy behind it" (34HA14ff). The rooming house model itself can be a viable housing option, as one housing advocate explained,

For the lower income, always have...out of necessity...shared resources. It makes always sense. Always, it's the cheapest way. But not only this, for the social aspect too. It's a great form of living for people who don't want to live alone. And they can share a kitchen. And this could work really, really well. I see it more and more even of interest to young professionals because times have really changed. (01HA01f)

Generally, stakeholders expressed that the rooming houses existing in the market today, besides a few success stories, are typically "a good Band-Aid for all the shortfalls in our system" (25HA11m). A housing advocate claimed, "the system is broken. And we've got to change it" (34HA14ff).

Comparing Stakeholder Opinion

Looking at the how each stakeholder engages with the narratives present in the dataset, some similarities and differences are found.

Housing Advocates

Housing advocates typically described rooming houses as having unacceptable living conditions. Common issues discussed included incidents, poor management, and lack of basic amenities for tenants. Advocates described the definitions and bylaws governing rooming houses as ineffective or "broken" with "no teeth" to enforce standards. Many suggested the city turns a "blind eye" to avoid greater loss in the rooming house sector. Advocates recognized the need for this housing as a "saving grace" for those with no other option. For advocates, the rooming house model appears to follow "housing first" principles, providing a roof for individuals before attempting to solve other challenges individuals may face. The model has economic potential to save people money through shared resources and it serves a growing demographic of single persons.

The barriers to successful rooming houses identified by advocates included limited

support for rooming houses, landlord control with no oversight from the province, and stigma against individuals living in rooming houses.

Rooming House Residents

Rooming house residents often referred to rooming houses as unregulated. Some terms used to describe the situation included "jungle," "wild west," free-for-all," and "freak show." When talking about rooming house conditions, many spoke about negative experiences and advised people to "get out" and "stay away." Tenants of rooming houses often viewed this form of housing negatively. Some challenges contributing to this negative perception is the volatile nature of this form of housing, such as rent fluctuations and little control over personal autonomy.

Many rooming house residents recognized that rooming houses fill a need, particularly for students, low-income individuals, and those with mental health issues or other barriers to housing. Rooming houses were described as "affordable" and often "convenient." Tenants claimed that rooming houses provide a sense of community when tenants are "like-minded" or have similar lifestyles (23RR06f).

An identified barrier to the success of rooming houses was tenant lack of control. Tenants may face vulnerabilities and lack of power, which can make them feel as though they are "fighting a losing battle" when they attempt to stand up for their rights (28RR09m).

Housing Providers

Issues facing rooming houses mentioned by housing providers included lack of choice for tenants, paternalistic relationships between landlords and tenants, lack of supports, and challenging market conditions. The existence of unlicensed and often poorly managed rooming houses was said to perpetuate a stigma against this form of housing as well as threaten tenant safety – note that landlords of unlicensed rooming houses are not represented in the views of housing providers.

According to the housing providers interviewed, rooming houses fill a "genuine need" and their experiences with tenants were more good than bad. However, a comprehensive approach to tackling challenges facing rooming houses is recommended, which may require partnering which the private market. A barrier to successful rooming houses then, for housing providers, is hesitancy on behalf of the government to work with the profit-driven sector.

Municipal and Provincial Officials

Officials identified many issues surrounding rooming houses, one of the most prominent being the loss of licensed rooming houses. Officials described a tension over the responsibility for affordable housing between the province and city. Some other issues mentioned include poor conditions, poor execution of the licensing program, contradictory policies, land use that does not consider economic feasibility, and enforcement that is "not good enough." The current regulatory system attempts to address safety concerns, but instead it drives many rooming houses underground.

These challenges contribute to a negative image of rooming houses and can cause the community to protest substandard conditions. Officials recognized the need to address concerns, yet some suggest stepping back and examine societal views/standards that may be pushed onto individuals. They also recognized a lack of understanding for the need for rooming houses in Halifax, with no recently documented tenant profile. Officials suggested connecting rooming houses to social services and fighting stigma by re-branding the term "rooming house" to "residential income property." A residential income property would be a building that is rented out for profit. These properties could be differentiated by whether or not there is an on-site landlord, as the presence of a landlord could minimize safety concerns. Officials suggested that addressing the issues created by absentee landlords would contribute to a better reputation for rooming houses in the future.

For officials, the barriers to successful rooming houses revolve around regulatory challenges. A couple of these challenges include limits set by the Halifax charter and lack of government funding. They recognize that hasty action or a "sledge hammer" approach can have unwanted consequences; therefore, slow action with caution is suggested.

Neighbours

For neighbours of rooming houses, the issues of concern are a loss of neighbourhood character and citizen responsibility to report illegal activity. Neighbours feel as though "no one cares" when they experience compromised quality of life due to an influx of students in their neighbourhoods or individuals on social assistance "sitting on the porch drinking all day...with no supervision" (29RA02f). One neighbour stated, "Diversity is good, but not when it compromises quality of life" (33RA03m). Several participants suggested mandating a live-in caretaker to lessen the impacts of absentee landlords, such as garbage and unkempt properties.

Neighbours claimed that the barrier to successful rooming houses is conflicting interest between neighbours and landlords. Neighbours see themselves driven by quality of life and investment whereas they view landlords seeking maximum profit at the expense of the neighbourhood character.

The Story Told

The discourses around rooming houses tells a story of a form of housing once accepted in society, but now highly stigmatized. The antagonist of the story is the "slum landlord" who takes the blame for the reputation of rooming houses (01HA01f). Rooming house residents are depicted as powerless and vulnerable to landlord abuse (30HA12f). Lack of acceptance in terms of both community opposition and stringent regulatory frameworks drive rooming houses underground. Once off the radar, rooming houses become a breeding ground for prey and

predators (30HA12f). The popular solution to save rooming houses from substandard conditions is to increase regulatory intervention.

There was broad agreement among those interviewed that enforced regulations are the salvation for rooming house; however, many recognized that regulations are not capable of addressing the complex issues, which contribute to stigma against rooming houses. Reliance on regulatory measures to save rooming houses ignores the broader context, which is embedded in physical, economic and social challenges beyond the scope of municipal regulation.

Regulations are a simple answer to a complex problem. Throughout the interviews, many participants shared concerns for vulnerable individuals left under the control of abusive landlords. This concern is valid; however, it may cause participants to seek action in haste and reap unwanted consequences, such as the displacement of low-income people. Participants recognized both the need for balance and a collaborative approach, yet there was an overwhelming sentiment to enforce regulation as a first step. The recognition that licensing alone cannot solve the challenges facing rooming houses means the pursuit of a regulatory solution deserves critique.

The Advocate asks:

> And that's the issue that we always struggled with, is it worse to be living in those situations or is it better to be living on the street? (20HA10f)

The Official's quandary:

> We can't immediately start licencing buildings because there are major implications to doing that. We do not want to put people out on the street. (09MU04m)

Stakeholders hesitate to mobilize action as many fear losing rooming houses by "squashing them" with regulations (22MU05f). The barriers to action suggest a need to question the motivation behind attempting to solve rooming house issues via regulation.

Implications

Planning Solution?

Rooming houses are often described as a good model that can provide affordable housing, yet their success in the private market is contested. In Halifax, unregulated rooming houses appear to thrive while the few remaining licensed ones dwindle in number. Opinions on regulating rooming houses proved contradictory. Many participants identified a need for more regulations and stricter enforcement, yet others saw lack of regulation as beneficial those who require affordable housing. The motivation behind regulatory intervention goes back to societal understandings of appropriate housing standards.

Historically, rooming houses catered to a certain population: the unattached individual, often a professional or a visitor (Slater, 2004). Rooming houses became a problem when the "wrong clientele" occupied them. For example, in 1910, it was seen as "demoralizing" when families lived in furnished rooms (Breckinridge & Abbott, 1910). In contemporary society, people are concerned with the wellbeing of individuals on social assistance and international students living in rooming houses. It is more acceptable for seasonal workers or domestic students to occupy rooming houses because they are both less vulnerable and more likely to have social networks for support (21RR05m).

Societal norms and embedded stigmas contribute to a desire to intervene and impose standards on the lives of those perceived as "vulnerable," under the guise of "risk" and "safety." Whether it is Victorian standards of privacy and cleanliness (Breckinridge & Abbott, 1910), or contemporary ideals, such as individual autonomy, people find justification to intervene based on shared values. In the interviews, a housing provider suggested "younger people are again not looking for that kind of lifestyle anymore. They want their space, they want their privacy" (16HP02m). Another housing provider implied autonomy is requires for a person's "sanity" (32HP03). An official recognized these societal norms and challenged the motivations behind regulatory measures in the statement,

I personally find I have to leave my assumptions of what I think is ideal and works well for people, and say that may be based on my assumptions of what I think is right. And we really need to listen about what is comfortable for people. Where do they want to live? You know, what makes sense for them? How do they want to live? What would work for them? Where would they feel comfortable? And it's not trying to force people into, you know, what my sort of ideological position or whatever it is about what I think people need. (07MU02f)

Understanding the ideological position behind regulatory intervention can help illuminate social norms and potential stigmas. Alexander (2005) claims, "The bulk of our country today continues to be willing to tolerate restrictions on who counts as America's families, at least for purposes of living in the most economically privileged single family areas" (p. 1264). Regulations attempt to control the type of people that are allowed to live in certain neighbourhoods. Alexander (2005) also states, "the conceptual problem lies in the attitude that renting rooms and obtaining meals in a residential structure is somehow a business activity, while renting a "single-family" house to one family is not" (p. 1244). Using housing laws to control the nature of a family stems from the fear of the "stigmatized other" (Slater, 2004). Beck (1992) describes the "fear of the other" and the "politics of fear" as part of his concept "risk society." Risk is described as "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (Beck, 1992, p. 21). Modernity comes with unintended consequences of environmental and social risk. In a risk society, people seek to control the future (Mythen, 2004).

Skaburskis (2010) claims "The quest to mitigate the risk and hazards created by suburban sprawl supports planning efforts to 'revitalize' and 'intensify' deteriorating inner-city neighbourhoods" (903). Gentrification in inner-city neighbourhoods contributes to the loss of affordable housing options, such as rooming houses. As more affluent individuals move in and attempt to mitigate the "risks" stemming from lower income residents and older structures, displacement of the low-income residents often results. Less privileged individuals are often pushed further away from attractive neighbourhoods.

Wacquant (2016) describes the concept 'advanced marginality' as the segregation of marginalized individuals into 'territories of poverty' regulated by the state. Intense stigma is attached to these territories creating greater inequality and limiting individuals who live in these areas. Wacquant suggests that government policies and practices contribute to marginalization, producing "territorial stigmatization" in the city" (Marwell, 2015, 1096). Marwell (2015), reflecting on the work of Wacquant, argues that recognizing stigmatization in state action can enlighten us on "how governance arrangements are actively shaping marginality in new ways" (1097).

Regulatory intervention is often a response to stigma, which further marginalizes some housing options (Wacquant, 2016). Understanding the role of the state in perpetuating stigma is conductive to reframing the purpose and effectiveness of state action. In the case of rooming houses, tension arises when regulatory solutions result in unintended consequences – the displacement of people. Thus, the effectiveness of regulation as a tool to ensure safe and affordable housing is questionable.

Taking effective steps forward may require taking a step back to evaluate our intentions in regulatory intervention and reflect on the root causes of the challenges facing rooming houses and their occupants. The current discourse around rooming houses disempowers rooming house residents and results in a further marginalization as tenant lose their agency. If we understand the nature of rooming house issues as substandard conditions and a lack of landlord accountability, then regulatory intervention is the answer. However, if we understand that the rooming house issues are tied up in complex social and economic challenges, then we can focus on supporting tenants and increasing their agency.

Provincial and municipal policies and legislation in Halifax limit tenant agency. The income assistance rate in Nova Scotia is low and limits housing choice. Social services provide moving assistance only to people who find accommodations with a stove, thus excluding rooming houses (30HA12). Zoning restricts this form of housing

to areas that are not profitable for rooming house operation. Discouraging SRO housing through policies and bylaws limits the competition of this form of housing and may encourage landlord abuses with little incentive to improve conditions. Durning (2013) suggests,

> *A future unfettered by such rules would see the reemergence of inexpensive choices, including rooming houses and other old residential forms. Such units will not satisfy those of greater means and the expectations that accompany them. They would not try to. But they can meet an urgent need of young people, some seniors, and working-class people of all ages.* (p.16)

Regulation often exacerbates the problems facing rooming houses and planning policy may contribute to further loss through densification policies and resulting gentrification. The Centre Plan for the Halifax Regional Centre (Halifax Peninsula and Dartmouth) has published a draft, which sets the policy direction for the plan. The draft promotes supporting non-market housing and recognizes the current supply is not meeting the need for affordable non-market housing (HRM, 2016b). The draft claims "intervention from other levels of government will be necessary," (p.32) yet it explores possible actions for the municipality to take. One of these actions is,

> Explore options for supporting rooming houses in the Regional Centre while establishing contextually-appropriate requirements that address cumulative impacts of these uses. Requirements may include limits on the number of bedrooms or maximum lot coverages, or requirements for landscaping and open space. (HRM, 2016, p.32)

The Centre Plan Draft addresses the concern to support rooming houses but identifies a need for intervention to "address cumulative impacts." The focus in this policy is on the concerns brought forth by neighbours in the interviews, such as neighbourhood character. Also, the draft specifies rooming houses as a separate form of housing with its own unique category, which may lead to further stigmatization.

In Halifax, the municipal government does not have the tools to address the systemic challenges facing the rooming house sector. Advocating regulatory solutions,

although based on good intentions, can lead to the displacement of people and the further loss of this affordable housing option. The history of rooming houses and regulatory intervention reminds us that housing law is based on protecting the "single family" way of life. Concern for tenants in vulnerable situations is justified; however, regulatory invention does not achieve the desired outcome of ensuring safe and affordable housing. Instead it aggravates the problem. The desire for regulatory action stems from a stigmatized perception of rooming houses that perpetuates marginalization of rooming house residents. Addressing the discourse of disempowerment and embedded stigma is the first step to returning tenant agency and working toward more effective solutions.

Future research

Further research could consider ways to address the social and economic challenges facing rooming house residents and explore ways to increase tenant agency.

Rooming houses are described, in the interviews, as a good model for sharing resources and fighting social isolation. Looking further into the social environment context of rooming houses can help identify tenant preferences for ideal rooming house models, which may include the provision of supports for tenants and landlords. An examination of the successful rooming houses in Halifax and what contributed to their success would be beneficial. The results of this study suggest the need to explore potential partnerships with governments, non-profits, and private landlords in Halifax.

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