



FILE PHOTO: STEFFI ROSSKOPF

RENTAL RATE WORRIES Students who are having trouble finding an affordable place to live this semester await help.

U of A faces housing crunch

TOM WAGNER
News Staff

With a 0.2 per cent vacancy rate and the highest average rent in Edmonton, the area surrounding the University is perhaps the hardest-hit from the City's ongoing housing crunch—a situation that has sent many students into a frenzy to find housing for the upcoming year.

Students looking for housing are now faced with more obstacles than ever before, the first of which is the high cost of rent. This predicament can be seen on the Students' Union Housing Registry, where, as of 27 August, only 50 of the 894 listings were available for less than \$400 per month.

According to the SU Vice-President (External) Steven Dollansky, this has even become an issue in University-run residences, where a ten-per-cent fee increase will bring their affordability into question.

"Students are on a fixed income and do not have the same flexibility as many other populations in the general market," Dollansky said. "Residence beds are supposed to be an affordable and available option for students,

and right now many would question whether they are either."

Availability is also a major issue for students trying to find a place to live, whether in residence or through renting. As of last fall, the University had only 3919 residence beds in Edmonton to accommodate the 40 per cent of freshmen from outside of Edmonton, and the other undergraduates in need of a place to live.

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STEVEN DOLLANSKY
SU VP (EXTERNAL)

Don Hickey, U of A Vice-President (Facilities and Operations), maintained that the University was doing its best, although it appears that no action will be taken for this upcoming year.

"We are in the process of developing

our Residence Master Plan that analyzes future demands and examines the types and blend of residence spaces that will be required going forward," Hickey said. "We are very committed to providing our first- and second-year students with the residence experience."

This situation was highlighted most starkly when, earlier this month, the SU was forced to put out a call to landlords when the number of listings sunk to only a few hundred. Although nearly 500 listings poured in after that, many are far from the University, or worse, far out of an average student's price range.

That said, Dollansky suggested that students who are still searching for housing should use resources already at their disposal to find residences.

"I encourage students to investigate transit service lines to utilize their U-Pass, which allows them to look in areas further from the University where vacancy rates are higher."

Students can also get involved in the fight for better student housing by joining SU lobbying efforts during Student Housing Week, occurring from 24–28 September.

ALSO READ HEISE ON PAGE 11

Edmonton-based student alliance set up

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

Postsecondary institutions may not receive funding from municipal governments, but that doesn't mean student issues aren't being tackled at the city level.

Student representatives from the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan College, and NAIT met with media at City Hall yesterday to present a unified front for the launch of the Edmonton Alliance of Students (EAS).

EAS claims to represent over 100 000 postsecondary students in the region. According to Students' Union President Michael Janz, when combined, this represents a diverse group of people who have a shared interest in solving affordable housing and public transit issues.

"Students in the Edmonton area are deeply affected by municipal issues," he said.

But it seems the alliance is already finding backing on Council as City of Edmonton Ward 2 Councillor Kim Krushell and Ward 4 Councillor Michael Phair were present at the event to show their support.

"Ten years ago, when I was a student leader in the Graduate Students' Association at the U of A, we weren't able to do this," Krushell said, adding

that solving housing and transit issues are already top priorities for Edmonton's Council.

Kerri Wyspianski, NAIT Students' Association President, highlighted the challenges the Edmonton housing crunch has forced on students, and noted that it becomes difficult for students to focus on their grades when trying to find affordable.

"All we're asking is just for ... the City of Edmonton to give us that backup," Wyspianski said, suggesting the creation of a joint residence for students at any of the three postsecondary institutions involved in the EAS.

"Housing crosses all sectors of society, and at this particular time period it is extremely significant. It is absolutely imperative that we have a comprehensive housing program," Phair agreed. "Housing provides that ground level to make sure that everyone does well."

MacEwan Students' Association President Justin Benko also noted that despite the successful launch of the U-Pass this year at the U of A and MacEwan, there are still a lot of improvements to be made to Edmonton transit services.

"Public transit is and always has been an integral part of postsecondary students' lives. We rely on it as an affordable option to get to school,



RYAN HEISE

COMING OUT SU Prez Michael Janz opens the City Hall launch party.

part-time jobs, and for travel around the city," Benko said, explaining that postsecondary students are four times more likely to use public transit than the average citizen.

"The City of Edmonton and our transit partners need to ensure that the transit system is expanded and improved in order to meet the growing demands," he added.

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