

# Frequently Asked Questions: Employee Rental Housing Eligibility and Program Changes- July 2019

## Why has the eligibility criteria for employee rental housing in Whistler changed?

The goal of Whistler's housing program is to provide access to a mix of housing for Whistler's full-time workforce that contributes to our tourism economy. Changes to housing eligibility have been endorsed by the WHA Board of Directors and were approved by Council on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2019.

This work s one initiative that was directed to be implemented as part of the Mayor's Task Force on Resident Housing: *"To refine the employee restricted housing program's eligibility criteria and enforcement framework"* with the goal of optimizing the use of the existing employee restricted homes in the community by making sure they are available for the individuals and families they were intended for.

The recommended changes that Council has endorsed were developed as the result of significant research on other communities' employee housing programs and community engagement through the Mayor's Task Force on Housing.

The following outlines the 6 aspects of the program that will be changing:

### **Definition of Employee: Minimum Full Time Employment:**

Updating eligibility from 20 hours per week to a 30 hour annualized average employed by a Qualified Whistler Business, recognizes Whistler's progression to a year round resort. This reduction of shoulder seasons has enabled Whistler's workforce to work a full-time equivalent job (either a single job or multiple part-time jobs which may be seasonal or year round in nature). It is anticipated that demand for housing in Whistler will always outstrip supply and as such fulfilling the needs of those working full-time is the most optimal and efficient use of inventory available.

### **Qualified Whistler Businesses:**

A more specific definition of a 'Qualified Whistler Business' has been established and approved by Council, to assist in greater clarity.

A Qualified Whistler Business is...

This change reinforces the specific intent of the employee housing program, as defined in the WHA Mission statement whereby Whistler's long-term success as a vibrant resort community

is contingent upon retaining a stable resident workforce. It also supports Whistler businesses by ensuring the workforce is servicing the resort community. Technology trends are creating an increase in telecommuting residents working for national or global companies or clients with little to no affiliation to the resort business, this change will keep Whistler consistently aligned to meet the goal to have 75% of Whistler's workforce residing within municipal boundaries.

### **Definition of a Retiree**

Retirees who have worked extensively in the resort economy will continue to be recognized for their contributions.

The definition of a retiree was updated to require an applicant to be at least 55 years of age and has ceased active full time employment but who meets the WHA definition of employee for at least ten of the past twelve years, prior to ceasing full time employment in Whistler. The change to 10 out of the last 12 years continues Whistler's support of in-place retirement for the long term contributors to our resort economy.

### **Align the Seniors Processes with General WHA Processes**

By bringing the senior's waitlist criteria in line with WHA's general waitlist, the WHA is able to provide a single waitlist process that reduces administrative overhead and provides a fair and consistent approach. It also continues the support of Whistler's in-place retirement for the long term contributors to our resort economy.

The upcoming initial tenant intake for the purpose built senior rental housing at Rainbow will be based on seniors applicants who meet the employee definition, , and prioritized by age, from oldest to youngest senior.

### **Occupancy Standards**

To support the most optimal use of the available housing for the resorts workforce, Occupancy Standards will be applied to determine an applicant's need for housing. Occupancy Standards are defined based on BC Housing's standards, and specifies the standards for household sizes relative to the number of bedrooms in a Residential Unit.

The following Occupancy Standards now apply for WHA rentals:

- a) No more than two (2) and no less than one (1) person per bedroom.
- b) Spouses and couples share a bedroom.

These occupancy standards have the effect that a single applicant wishing to live alone, or a couple living together, would be eligible for a studio or 1 bedroom unit only

- 1. No more than two and no less than one person per bedroom.
- 2. Spouses and couples share a bedroom.

This means singles and couples qualify for studio and 1 bedroom units only. A single parent of one child would qualify for a two bedroom unit. Single and couples can apply for a larger unit only if additional bedrooms will be occupied by a qualified employee. All occupants are required to be identified in the lease and meet the income and asset test.

### **Income and Asset Testing**

The rental waitlist and tenancies will have income and asset limits in place to determine eligible applicants, the rate they will pay and the rental units they will have access to renting.

The MAXIMUM combined household income and assets an applicant can have are:

Total Household MAXIMUM Income Limits	
Unit	Maximum Income
Studio	\$100,000
1 BR	\$200,000
2 BR	\$250,000
3 BR	\$250,000
Total Household MAXIMUM Asset Limit	
Maximum Assets – any Unit size	\$300,000

(For a deeper understanding of the Income and Asset Limits, and how they will help determine what rent you will pay, please [click here.](#))

## FAQ's: WHA Rental Program Eligibility and Program Changes

### 1) Q. What is official launch date for program?

#### A. Effective date for applicants to meet eligibility policy:

*For the Rental Program:*

- All rental waitlist applicants, regardless if their registration on the rental waitlist was prior to July 24, 2019, are required to meet the eligibility policy prior to signing a lease agreement with WHA for the rental of an employee housing unit; and
- Any rental applicant that was on the rental waitlist prior to July 24, 2019, that no longer meets the eligibility outlined, will be entitled to remain on the waitlist & maintain their position until December 31, 2020 to provide time to meet eligibility. Should they not meet eligibility by December 31, 2020, they will then be removed from the rental waitlist.
- Any applicant that applies to the rental waitlist after July 23, 2019, will be required to meet eligibility prior to being approved for the waitlist.

### 2) Q. What does “Full Time” employment mean?

A. Full Time Employment means: An employee is either employed or self-employed for a minimum average of at least 30 hours per week on an annualized basis, employed by one or multiple Qualified Whistler Business(es).

Average weekly hours worked = **total annual hours\*** worked **divided** by **50** weeks.

*\*Total annual hours worked is calculated by taking all jobs and contracts worked, minus any hours that are not for a Qualified Whistler Business.*

**3) Q. I am on the Rental waitlist, but may no longer be eligible under the new eligibility rules. Will I be immediately removed from the waitlist?**

- A.** No. To accommodate how the changes in eligibility will impact our waitlist, the following timeline has been adopted:

The Employee Housing Policy will apply to all applicants to the rental waitlist after July 23, 2019, and will be required to meet policy prior to being approved for the waitlist.

All *rental* applicants will be required to meet the policy prior to signing a lease agreement with the WHA. For applicants on the rental waitlist prior to July 24, 2019 that do not meet the policy outlined, they will be entitled to remain on the waitlist & maintain their position until December 31, 2020 to provide time to meet the policy. Should they not meet policy by December 31, 2020, they will then be removed from the rental waitlist.

**4) Q. I'm on the waitlist to rent through the WHA but I only work 20 hours a week. Do I still qualify?**

- A.** Under the new criteria, in order to be eligible to be on the RENTAL waitlist for WHA rental housing, you need to be either employed or self-employed for a minimum average of at least 30 hours per week on annualized basis by one or multiple Qualified Whistler Business(es). Question 4 outlines how much time you have to bring your eligibility in line with the new criteria.

**5) Q. I work 30 + hours in Whistler but my employer isn't based in Whistler. Do I still qualify?**

- A.** No. A Qualified Whistler Business must have an office or premise that is physically located in Whistler. The full definition of a Qualified Whistler Business or self-employment is:

1. Has a valid RMOW business licence, or be legislatively exempt (e.g. schools); and
2. Has an office or premises that are physically located in Whistler; and
3. The business must be a permitted use under the municipality's zoning bylaw; and
4. The business must primarily\* and directly service Whistler local residents, Whistler homeowners, Whistler businesses or Whistler tourists, and, either:
  - i) For Commercial (non-residential) premises, provide services within the RMOW boundary; or
  - ii) For a home based or mobile business, have more than 75% of business income from Whistler local residents, tourists or Whistler local businesses

\*Primarily is defined as the main purpose of the business/operation, which would translate to gross sales being generated predominantly by this group of customers. This includes Whistler start-ups that were initially established & operated to produce goods and services for the Whistler local market and met criteria 1) - 4) above during start up, and continue to operate and produce in Whistler.

*For rental applicants who were on the list prior to July 24, 2019, there is a staggered introduction to eligibility. Please see the full description, found here on the WHA website.*

**6) Q. I work in Whistler for a Whistler employer and meet the eligibility criteria but my partner does not. Do we still qualify?**

**A.** FOR WHA RENTALS: Adults in the workforce must meet the eligibility to be on the WHA rental waitlist. Spouses and dependants may reside in a WHA rental unit with the qualifying applicant .

*For applicants rental list prior to July 24, 2019, there is a staggered introduction to eligibility. For details, please refer to question 4 of the FAQs.*

**7) Q. I have a lease right now with WHA but only work 20 hours a week on average all year- am I going to be evicted?**

**A.** No. All **new** tenancy agreements will require eligibility compliance with new policy. If you are currently in a rental home with a tenancy agreement, that does not change unless you sign a new tenancy agreement.

*For applicants who were on the rental list prior to July 24, 2019, there is a staggered introduction to eligibility. For details, please refer to question 4 of the FAQs.*

**8) Q. My partner and I are on the WHA waitlist because I worked for a Whistler employer full-time however, since then we have had a child and I have decided to leave the workforce to stay home with my child. My partner does not work for a Whistler employer.**

**A.** If neither parent is working in Whistler full time you no longer qualify to participate in the employee housing program. Exceptions will be granted, however, for the duration of a government Maternity/Parental Leave. If neither of you are working 30 hours or more for a Whistler employer upon termination of a qualifying maternity/paternity leave you will not be eligible to sign a lease on a WHA home and you will be removed from the associated waitlist.

**9) Q. I am self-employed and live and work in Whistler. I do not have a business license though from the RMOW. Do I qualify?**

**A.** No. Self-employed applicants must meet the policy - must have a business license from the RMOW, work 30 or more hours a week on average (on annualized basis) and operate a business that qualifies under the definition of Qualified Whistler Business.

**10) Q. Who is considered a dependent child?**

**A.** A child, stepchild, adopted child or legal ward, mainly supported by the applicant, who is:

- Under 19 years of age; or
- Of any age who, because of mental or physical infirmity, is accepted as a dependent for income tax purposes; or
- Between 19 and 25 years of age and registered and attending full-time school, university or vocational institute which provides a recognized diploma, certificate, or degree.

*Note: Full-time attendance means enrolment in the minimum of credit courses specified by the institution to be considered full-time, or if not specified by the institution,*

*enrolment in a minimum of 15 hours of classroom instruction per week in each school term.*

**11) Q. Do the changes apply to both purchase and rental inventory?**

- A. The eligibility criteria changes will apply to rental applications only. The income and asset limits only apply to WHA rental inventory. Existing tenants and owners are not affected, unless a new new rental agreement is signed. Purchase program review is underway and will be presented to council for consideration in due course.

**12) Q. What if I don't have a tax return?**

- A. In order to be eligible for the WHA rental housing program, you must be able to provide the most recent two year's income tax return for all adult members of the household. Should an applicant's gross household income fluctuate significantly from year to year, they may choose to use either the most recent year's income tax return, or the average of the past two years, to determine their gross household income.

**13) Q. How do I know what units I have access to?**

- A. WHA Rental Waitlist Applicants will have access to rental units that fall in their income category, or higher. Rent will be based on the higher of either the base rent for the unit or the category your income and assets place you in. To find out which units are available in each category please [click here](#).

**14) Q. How are you protecting my private information?**

- A. Your privacy is an important element of this implementation plan and all steps will be taken to ensure security of personal information provided to, and maintained by the WHA and its agents. Third party verification services are screened to be an experienced service provider that ensures the protection and security of your personal information. WHA staff will only have access to information on a needs only basis – to determine eligibility and qualification of applicants and for ongoing operational management of the employee housing program.

## FAQ's: Eligibility Changes Affecting Seniors & Retirees

**1) Q. Why has the qualification criteria for seniors changed?**

- A. The eligibility for seniors changed to bring the senior's waitlist criteria in line with the WHA's Rental Waitlist. Eligible seniors will still get priority access to purpose-built seniors' projects, where applicable.

By bringing the senior's waitlist criteria in line with WHA's general waitlist, the WHA is able to provide:

- A single waitlist process that reduces administrative overhead and provides a fair and consistent approach.
- Continued support of Whistler's in-place retirement for the long term contributors to our resort economy.

The upcoming initial tenant intake for the purpose built senior rental housing at Rainbow will be based on eligible senior applicants, and prioritized by age, from oldest to youngest senior.

2) **Q. I am a senior & retired - how do I prove I am retired and eligible?**

- A.** The definition of a retiree is an applicant that is at least 55 years of age and has ceased active full time employment but who meets the WHA definition of employee for at least ten of the past twelve years, prior to ceasing full time employment in Whistler. To qualify, you will need to provide records of employment or other documentation to substantiate your prior employment with Qualified Whistler Business(es).