



**To:** New Westminster City Council  
in Regular Council

**Meeting Date:** February 23, 2026

**From:** Dave Bains, Director, Energy &  
Climate Action

**Report No.:** 2026-76

**Re:** **Vulnerable Buildings Assessment Pathway One – City-Funded Cooling Assessments for Rental Buildings**

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### **Staff Recommendation**

1. *THAT the cooling assessment pilot program as part of Pathway One of the Vulnerable Buildings Assessment project as outlined in the report titled “Vulnerable Buildings Assessment Pathway One – City-Funded Cooling Assessments for Rental Buildings” dated February 23, 2026 from the Director, Energy and Climate Action, be endorsed.*
  2. *THAT staff be directed to enter into an agreement with the Rental Apartment Retrofit Accelerator program administrators to offer the cooling assessment pilot program within the Rental Apartment Retrofit Accelerator program.*
  3. *THAT staff report back with outcomes of the cooling assessment pilot program.*
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### **Purpose**

To seek endorsement to launch a City-funded cooling assessment pilot program within the Rental Apartment Retrofit Accelerator (RARA) program for up to ten eligible rental buildings over a one year pilot as part of pathway one of the Vulnerable Buildings Assessment (VBA) project.

### **Background**

The City has undertaken multiple initiatives to protect residents from overheating, including: distributing air conditioners to those who are high-risk and low-income, mapping public cooling locations, expanding extreme heat communications, and providing access to incentives through Energy Save New West. At the July 7, 2025 Regular Council meeting, the City approved a bylaw prohibiting landlords from restricting air conditioners or heat pumps in rental units, unless exempted; empowering tenants to maintain indoor thermal comfort and establishing fines for non-compliance.

On December 1, 2025, at the regular Council meeting, staff reported on, and presented, an update on the Vulnerable Buildings Assessment (VBA) project (located [here](#) page 8 - 57). This provided the outcomes of the phase 1 research for this project highlighting data findings regarding high heat zones within the city, social vulnerability within rental buildings, physical characterization of purpose-built rental buildings and identification of incentive program eligibility gaps. This report also highlighted the federally and provincially funded [Rental Apartment Retrofit Accelerator \(RARA\)](#)<sup>1</sup> program and the current collaborative partnership the City has with the program administrators to amplify the program to potential participants in New Westminster. Based on analysis outcomes, three pathways were recommended for advancement to reduce the risk of overheating within rental buildings. Council endorsed the three pathways approach, and directed staff to report back with proposed pilot program designs prior to launch.

Included within the proposed 2026 Capital Plan, a budget of \$100,000 is allocated to the VBA project (for design and delivery of work to advance the three council endorsed VBA pathways in 2026), and is accounted for within the budget item for implementation of the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

## **Analysis**

VBA Pathway One aims to leverage the RARA program and augment the existing energy-focused opportunity assessments with a City-funded cooling-focused assessment for RARA eligible rental buildings. Staff recommend entering into an agreement with RARA program administrators to pilot the delivery of the enhanced assessments for up to 10 buildings over a one-year term.

RARA currently does not include assessing or identifying cooling opportunities, leaving a gap in addressing the overheating risk experienced in many rental buildings. A cooling assessment pilot program would provide insight into the rental building characteristics, cooling needs and opportunities within rental buildings, validate assessment approaches, and gather information to inform pathways two and three of the VBA project.

In March 2025, the City collaborated with the program administrators to amplify the program through direct mail out packages to drive program participation. The package highlighted the opportunity and benefits of RARA and offered additional support in navigating the program through Energy Save New West.

Following promotion, an increase in inquiries from rental building owners in New Westminster was reported. As of December 2025, since program launch (in July 2023), 15 buildings have expressed interest in the program and from that, 7 buildings have completed opportunity assessments and one building is currently participating in a separate pilot program for window mounted heat pump installation.

## **RARA Program Overview and Status Update**

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<sup>1</sup> Rental Apartment Retrofit Accelerator program: <https://landlordbc.ca/rara/>

Based on phase one research outcomes, between 36 – 239 rental buildings in New Westminster may be eligible for RARA. The actual number of buildings can only be ascertained by a site assessment, as they must have a centralized heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system to meet the eligibility requirements.

Buildings participating in RARA have the option to progress through the following steps if they chose to continue through the program, with associated costs covered by funds provided by the RARA program:

- 1) **Opportunity Assessment:** On site assessment of building energy efficiency and decarbonization retrofit opportunities, no cost to participant up to a maximum of \$5,000.
- 2) **Feasibility Study:** In-depth analysis of specified retrofit opportunities, as determined by the building owner based on the outcome of the opportunity assessment, no cost to participant up to a maximum of \$30,000.
- 3) **Retrofit Implementation:** Implementation of the selected retrofit opportunities that have passed the feasibility study will be eligible for incentive funding of up to 50% of the project cost, to a maximum of \$500,000 per building.

Attachment 1 provides an overview of how a building progresses through the RARA program.

The recommendation in this report, to deliver cooling assessments for RARA eligible buildings, is intended to integrate into program *Step 1: Opportunity Assessment*, described above. The program Opportunity Assessment will identify energy efficiency and low carbon emission measures. The City aims to provide a top-up to expand the assessment scope to review additional factors such as building surface heat exposure, building envelope thermal performance, and cooling capabilities to determine relevant cooling solutions as well.

The cooling assessment delivery cost for the City would be minimized by leveraging planned on-site work as part of the opportunity assessment. The value to the building owner would be maximized by including energy management opportunities that result in maintaining cooler indoor temperatures. The building owner would continue to receive this service at no cost to maintain alignment with the RARA program principles.

#### City-Funded Cooling Assessment Delivery Process

The proposed cooling assessment pilot program would be carried out in three steps:

- 1) **Pilot program launch:** Formalize an agreement with RARA program administrators to conduct cooling assessments within the existing Opportunity Assessment, at no additional cost to eligible buildings in New Westminster. Launch the pilot program by distributing tailored outreach communication packages, highlighting the cooling assessment enhancement to the traditional program, to rental building owners in spring 2026.
- 2) **Pilot program delivery:** Between spring 2026 and Q2 2027, RARA program administrators complete integrated opportunity and cooling assessments for up to 10 eligible rental buildings participating in RARA.

- 3) **Analysis and reporting:** For each building, on-site assessment outcomes will be delivered through two reports:
- a. Baseline RARA Opportunity Assessment report providing suitable energy efficiency/GHG reduction retrofit opportunities and;
  - b. A Thermal Resilience report based on the cooling assessment, providing a list of cooling solutions and identifying key factors contributing to overheating risk. Cooling solutions may include both passive and active interventions that are low cost and easy to adopt, as well as long-term retrofit opportunities. For example, shading, ventilation and airflow strategies, targeted envelope improvements, and in-suite active cooling options.

Further details on the cooling assessment delivery process are outlined in Attachment 2.

Consistent with the traditional Opportunity Assessment outcomes, building owners have the choice to implement recommendations from the reports and progress through the RARA program steps (outlined above) or implement independently, depending on the solution. Building owners benefit from gaining perspective on overheating risk within their buildings and available opportunities to cost-effectively retrofit.

Reports shared with the City will deepen the understanding of overheating risks in rental buildings and technical and financial viability of cooling solutions.

### **Financial Implications**

The proposed cooling assessment cost is based on the eligible building's current stage within the RARA program and will be offered to RARA eligible New Westminster rental buildings at no additional cost to the building owner. Two cost scenarios have been considered:

- **New Program Sign-ups – Integrated assessments:** Rental buildings that sign up to RARA after launch of the cooling assessment pilot program will have an integrated assessment (opportunity and cooling). This scenario leverages existing on-site assessment in progress resulting in a cost to the City of \$3,250 per building to conduct the cooling specific portion.
- **Early Program Adopters – Standalone cooling assessment:** Rental buildings who have been engaged with RARA before launch of the City-funded cooling assessment pilot, and have completed the on-site opportunity assessment, will be provided an option to have a standalone cooling assessment conducted at their site. This scenario will require additional cost above the integrated approach to fund a net new site visit resulting in an estimated cost to the City of \$5,750 per building.

The projected pilot program cost is \$40,000. Since RARA program launch (July 2023), 15 buildings have expressed interest and 7 buildings have completed opportunity assessments. Staff anticipate similar participation over the proposed one-year pilot program and are proposing cooling assessment delivery to approximately 10 buildings, allowing for 2 standalone and 8 integrated assessments, plus the cost associated with promotion and program management.

Included within the proposed 2026 Capital Plan, a budget of \$100,000 is allocated to the VBA project (for design and delivery of work to advance the three council endorsed VBA pathways in 2026), and is accounted for within the budget item for implementation of the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

### **Next Steps**

Pending Council endorsement, staff will advance the *City-Funded Cooling Assessment Delivery Process*, outlined in the analysis section of this report. Following completion of the one-year pilot program term, staff will report back to Council with outcomes of the cooling assessment pilot and future program recommendations.

### **Interdepartmental Liaison**

The proposed approach was developed by the Climate Action division in collaboration with the Electrical Services division, Finance, and Purchasing departments.

### **Attachments**

Attachment 1 – RARA Program Process

Attachment 2 - Phase 2 Pathways Overview and Pathway 1 Cooling Assessment Details

### **Report Approval**

Authored By

Nirushan Rajasekaram, Utility Program Specialist

Agreed By

Laura Sampliner, Manager, Climate Action

Indeep Johal, Manager, Financial Services

Leya Behra, Deputy Director, Climate Action

Dave Bains, Director, Energy and Climate Action

Approved By

Donnie Rosa, Chief Administrative Officer