

# Low cost housing shortage may force some to streets

## Housing activists to hold sit-in

By Nelson Alfonso  
SHERBROOKE

A community group will take its fight for more and better social housing for low-income families to the city of Sherbrooke's backyard in a few weeks when it hosts a sit-in.

With the support of local community and social groups such as Concertation femmes Estrie, the La Chaudronnée soup kitchen and the FTQ, the Association des locataires de Sherbrooke has set aside May 15 for a march through Sherbrooke streets and

the beginning of an 24-hour sit-in at an undisclosed public building or vacant lot to emphasize the need for more affordable housing.

"These people (low-income families) must make a difficult choice between staying at their apartment and paying more in rent or trying to find another apartment," said Association spokesman Normand Couture. "There are no longer many options for them because of rent increases."

Couture said Sherbrooke will face a crisis on July 1 because tenants unable to pay rent hikes and unable to find other affordable housing in the area will be forced out onto the streets.

"The sit-in is a way of getting infor-

mation about the critical situation out locally and demanding that our provincial and federal governments be more active in putting an end to this problem," added provincial housing group Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU) spokeswoman Lucie Poirier.

The May 15 march and sit-in are part of the FRAPRU's week-long protests organized throughout the province including Montreal, Quebec City, the Saguenay region and Gatineau.

The Association will take advantage of the demonstrations to demand the government build at least 176 social and affordable housing units per year in the Sherbrooke area to meet the needs of low-income families and one-parent households.

"We think it's important because there is a housing shortage and the situation has become worse since 1996. There are about 6,700 families in Sherbrooke who spend over 50 per cent of their income on rent," said Poirier, adding that Sherbrooke's occupancy rate of 97.7 per cent is above the balanced rate of 97 per cent.

Occupation rates in Montreal and Gatineau are 99.4 per cent and 99.2 per cent in Quebec City.

Couture, who estimates there will be up to 570 apartments available in Sherbrooke on July 1, said the Association has received three times as many calls from concerned low-income families who are looking for affordable housing than usual at this time of year. Many face intimidation from owners who want them out so they can raise rents.

"We are also discussing creating an emergency plan with city officials (urbanism committee) to ensure that people who cannot find an apartment by July 1 will have a temporary place to live and somewhere to put their furniture," said Couture, adding that many low-income earners are discriminated against because of their financial situation, their accent or because they are one-family households.

The march will be held on May 15 between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. The site of the sit-in will only be made public on May 15.

For information about the demonstration, call the Association des locataires de Sherbrooke at 819-823-9135.



(FRAPRU) spokeswoman Lucie Poirier said the May 15 protest is part of a week-long campaign to raise awareness of the shortage of affordable housing for low income families

PERRY BEATON/SPECIAL