Filling The Gaps in Housing: Evictions and the Pandemic in Vancouver CMA

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Introduction

The Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Vancouver is undergoing a housing crisis like other major CMAs in the country. To attempt to understand what is driving this crisis, this research focuses on one driving factor, that is patterns of eviction filings in the CMA of Vancouver. The goal is to identify eviction patterns as well as the causes behind these patterns, with an emphasis on the impact of policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely:
- Eviction moratorium implemented between March 18, 2020 and August 17, 2020.
- Rent freeze put in place between March 18, 2020 and December 31, 2021.
- Temporary rent supplement.

The goal being if these policies impacted in one way or another eviction filings.
But before conducting this analysis, we deemed important to investigate the state of play of housing supply and rental rates in the CMA of Vancouver.

As shown in fig.1, there was a steady increase of the purpose-built rental inventory between 2010-2021, estimated at 8.3% increase.
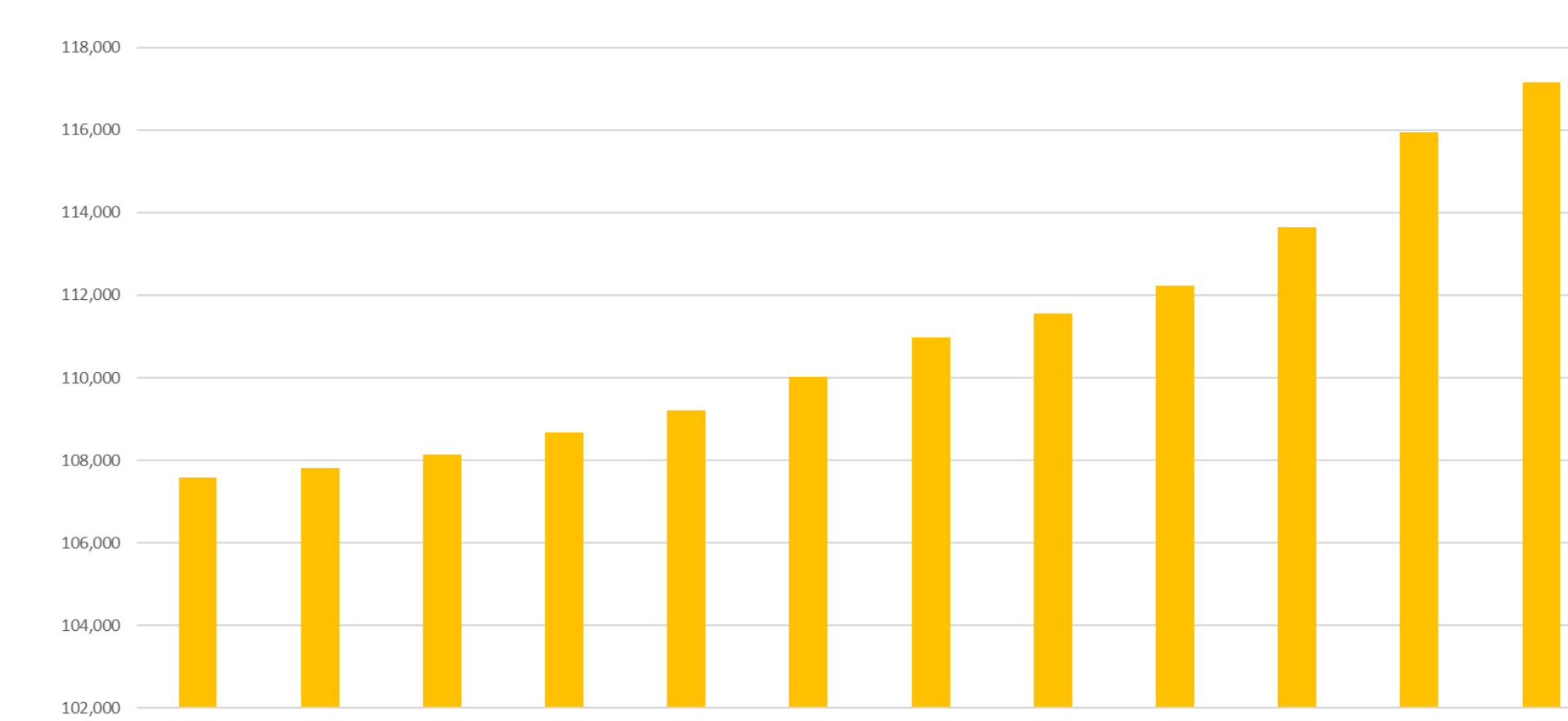

Fig 1: Purpose-Built Rental Inventory (apartments and Townhouses) in Vancouver CMA (2010-2021)

An increase in the supply, does not necessarily translate in lower or stable rents. In fact, rental rates in Metro Vancouver have steadily increased in the last 10 years, with Langley Township and Port Coquitlam scoring the highest rates increases between 2017 and 2021, as shown in fig.2. In Vancouver, rental rates have increased at the same rate as the Metropolitan area.
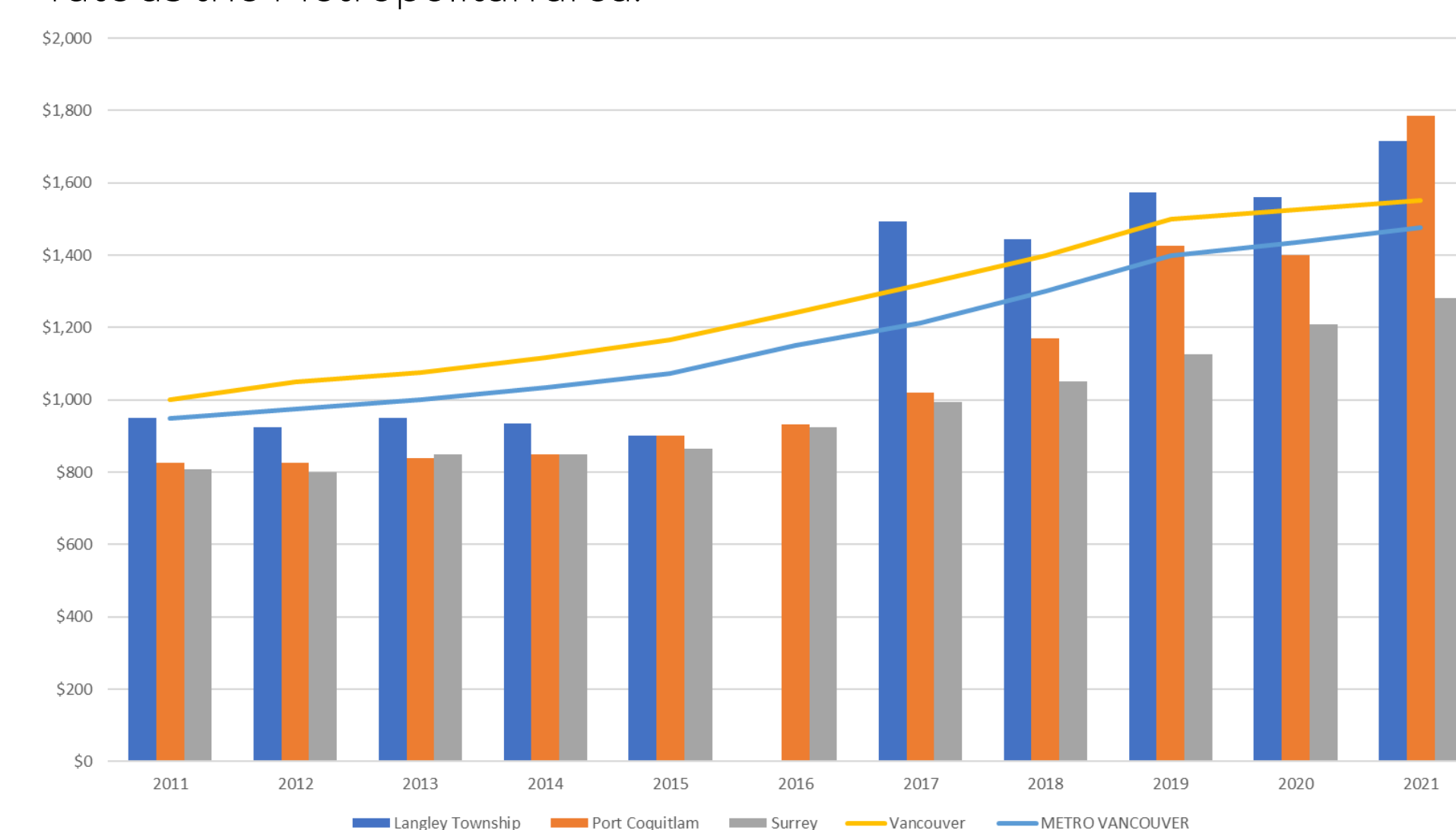

Fig. 2: Median Market Rents (Purpose-Built Rental Inventory) in Vancouver CMA (2011-2021)

Methodology

So how do policies introduced above impact eviction filings in a housing market marked by a slow increase in supply compounded with increasing median rent? For this purpose of answering this question, , we requested eviction filings from the Residential Tenancy Branch for the CMA of Vancouver, for the time period between 01/2010 and 05/2022. An FOI was submitted to the RTB, and requested the following information:
- Above Guideline Increase Applications
- Evictions Filings Before and During COVID-19
- No-Fault Eviction
- Rent Arrears Eviction Applications

We focused in this research on "Evictions Filings Before and During COVID-19" file that contains the following information: the case number, the data of reception of the filing, the case region (FSA), applicant type, dispute codes, decision date, dispositions, organization name.

After proceeding with the file cleaning, the data collected by the Residential Tenancy Branch in Metro Vancouver shows that 62,176 is the number of filings completed between 01/2010 and 5/2022. This is an average of 4,974 cases filed each year, and 414.5 cases filed each month. We then proceeded to extract the filings specific to the following dispute codes:

OPR-DR	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent that was not paid in the required time
OPU-DR	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Utilities that was not paid in the required time
OPR	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent that was not paid in the required time
OPU	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Utilities (and Rent) that was not paid in the required time
OPC	I issued a One Month Notice to End Tenancy Issued for Cause
OPE	I issued a One Month Notice to End Tenancy Issued for Cause of End of Employment
OPL	I issued a Two Month Notice to End Tenancy Issued for Landlord's Use of Property
OPQ	I issued a Two Month Notice to End Tenancy Issued Because Tenant Does Not Qualify for Subsidized Rental Unit
OPL-4M	I issued a Four Month Notice to End Tenancy for Demolition, Renovation, or Conversion to Another Use
OPLC	I issued a 12 Month Notice to End Tenancy for Conversion of Manufactured Home Park
OFL	I want an Order of Possession because the rental unit appears uninhabitable due to events out of my control and the tenancy agreement is frustrated
OPR-DRPP	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent (with repayment plan) that was not paid in the required time
OPU-DRPP	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent or Utilities (with repayment plan) that was not paid in the required time
OPR-PP	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent (with repayment plan) that was not paid in the required time
OPU-PP	I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent or Utilities (with repayment

We then proceeded with an initial analysis of evictions filings rates, followed by a normalization of these rates to be able to compare eviction filings by FSA. The results are discussed below, in the results section.

Results

Until 2017, most of eviction filings were completed by landlords. Starting from 2018, the number of filings completed by landlords and tenants equalized, as seen in fig.3. The number of eviction filings that are likely to result in evictions as seen in fig.4, is greater than those resulting in no evictions. Unclear outcomes refer to eviction filings that were retrieved, dismissed, or resulted in a split decision.
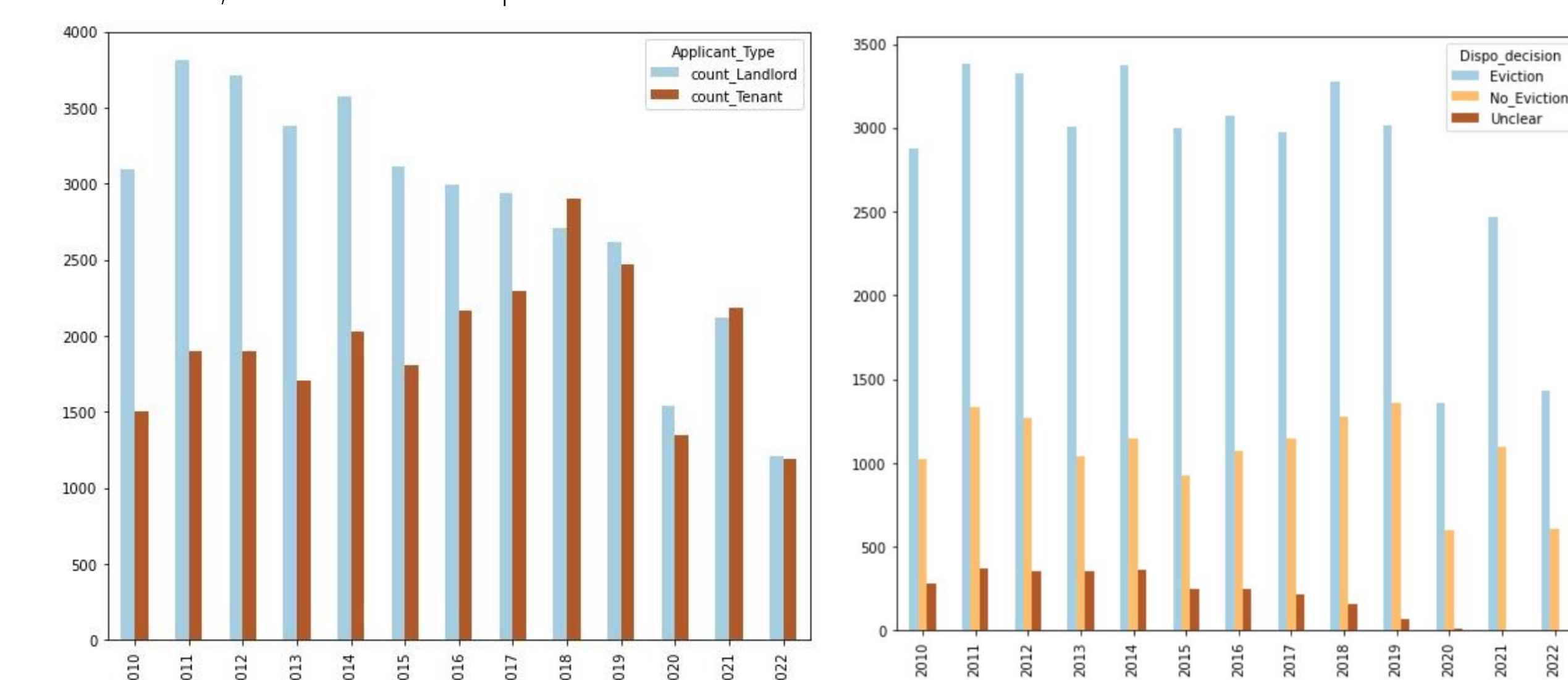

Fig. 3: Eviction filings by applicant type 2010-2022

Fig. 4: Disposition of eviction filings 2010-2022

As seen in fig. 5, analyzing eviction filings between 2019 and 2022 based on monthly intervals shows that the number of filings dropped in 2020, to reach its lowest level in the month of July, and increased sharply starting from August 2020. This can be attributed to the moratorium on evictions put in place during that time period. Conversely, fig. 5 shows that the rent freeze had no impact on eviction filings.

A further analysis of dispute codes shows that in Vancouver CMA, eviction filings including the dispute code OPR (I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent that was not paid in the required time), are the ones to likely result in an eviction outcome. Also, the number of filing including the dispute code OPR (I issued a 10 Day Notice to End Tenancy for Unpaid Rent that was not paid in the required time) has dropped considerably in 2018 and to increase again starting from 2021. Filings for eviction including the dispute code OPU have steadily increased since 2018, along with eviction filings including the dispute code OPL and OPL_4M, have steadily increased until 2017, and waned steadily, with a slow increase starting 2021.
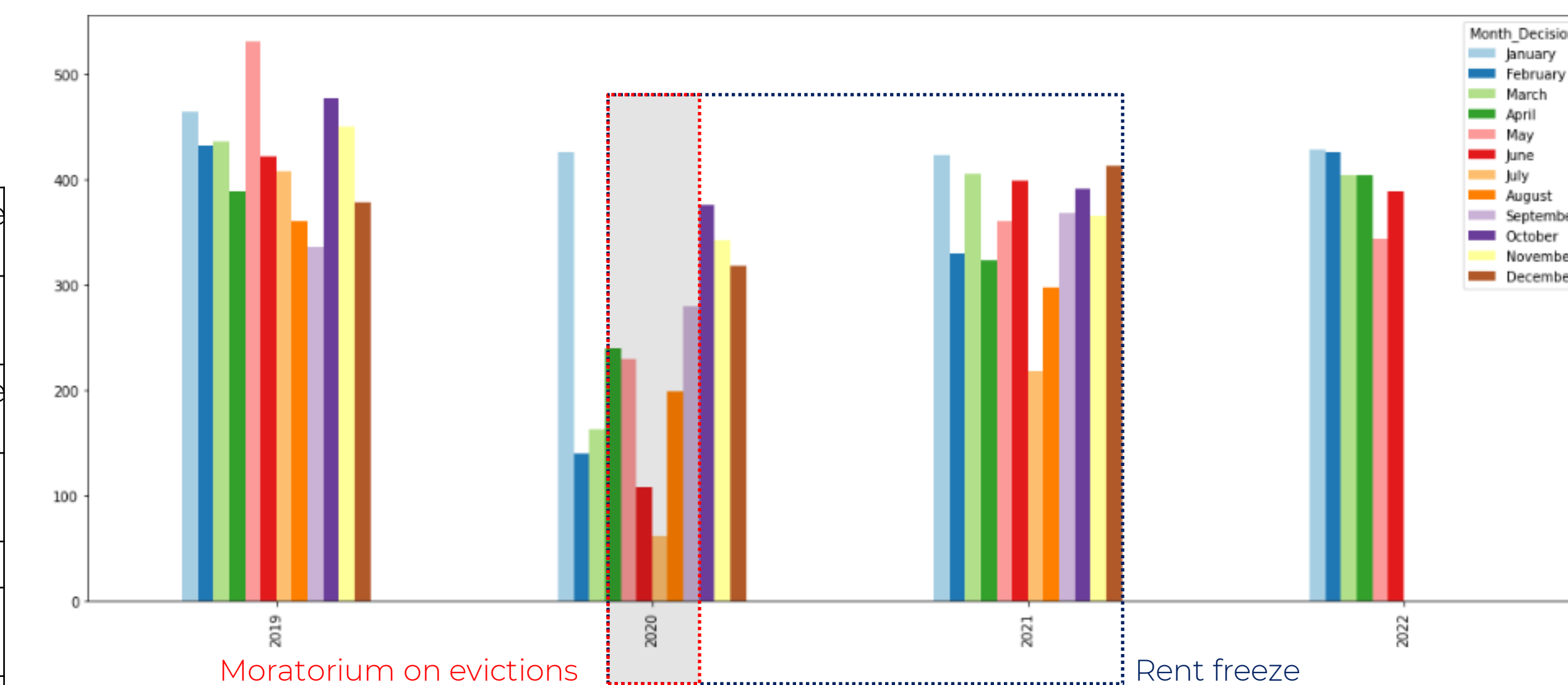

Moratorium on evictions   Rent freeze
Fig. 5: Monthly eviction filings 2019-2022

These initial findings provide us with patterns of eviction filings in time. What about the spatial unfolding of these patterns? And what are the possible drivers of these spatial patterns? A spatial analysis of normalized rates of eviction filings shows areas of continuous and persistent evictions. In fact, (Strathcona, Vancouver) and V3T in Surrey are the FSAs with the highest eviction rates in Metro Vancouver between 2010 and 2022, as seen in fig.6. Fig.6 also shows that the filing of eviction rates are higher in FSAs with a proportion of apartments higher than five-story, equal and greater than 57%.
A spatial analysis of filing evictions can also help us establish correlations between evictions and urban development orientations. For instance, as fig. 6 shows, eviction rates are higher along the sky train lines, that is in areas with higher densification, and high-rise condominium development.
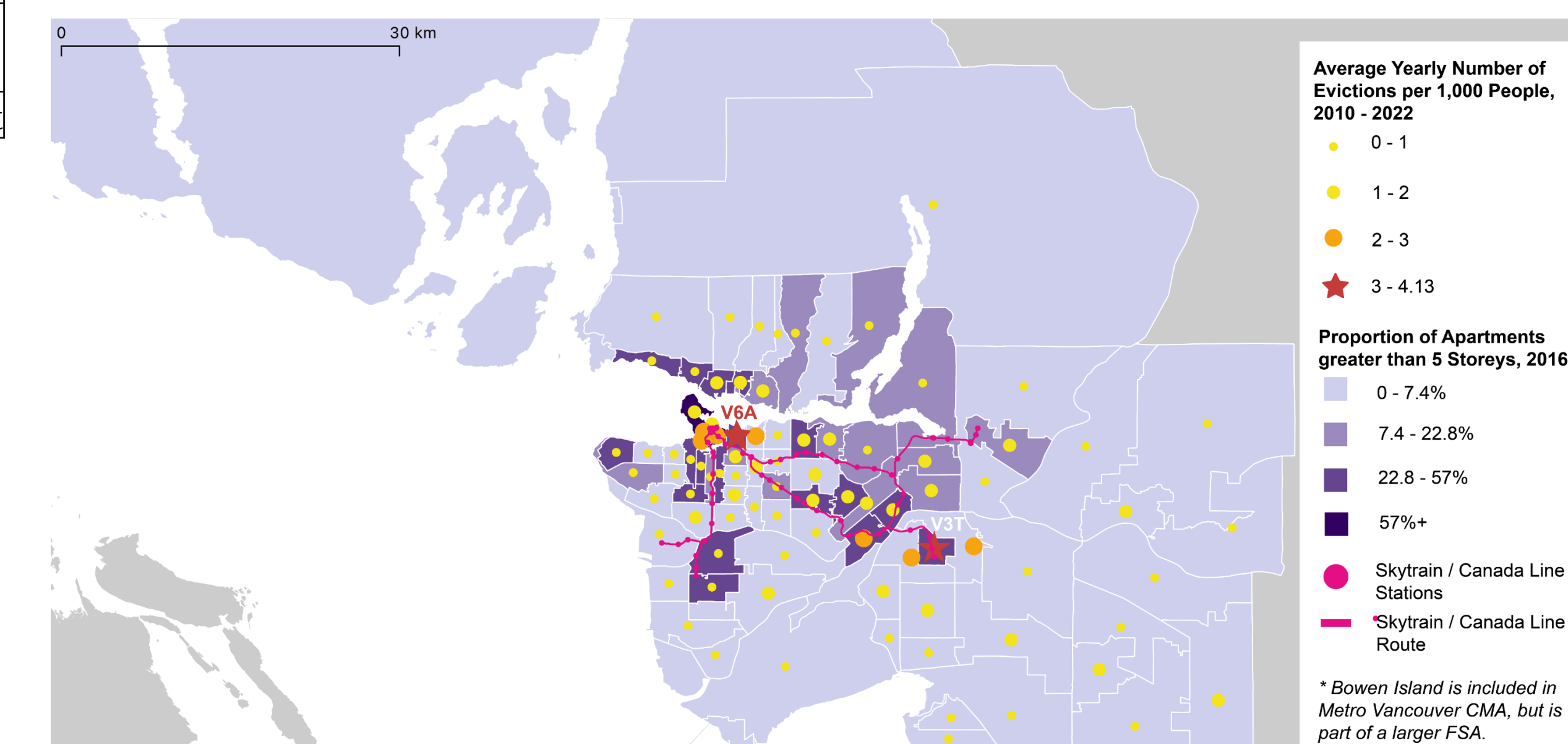

Fig. 6:
Proportion of Apartments Greater than 5 Storeys and Average Yearly Number of Evictions per 1,000 People by FSA, 2010 - 2022

Some FSAs were hubs of high eviction filings rates only for a definite time period. For instance, as shown in fig.7, V6C used to have high eviction rates until 2016, which marked – hypothetically - the 'completion' of the gentrification and the displacement in the area.
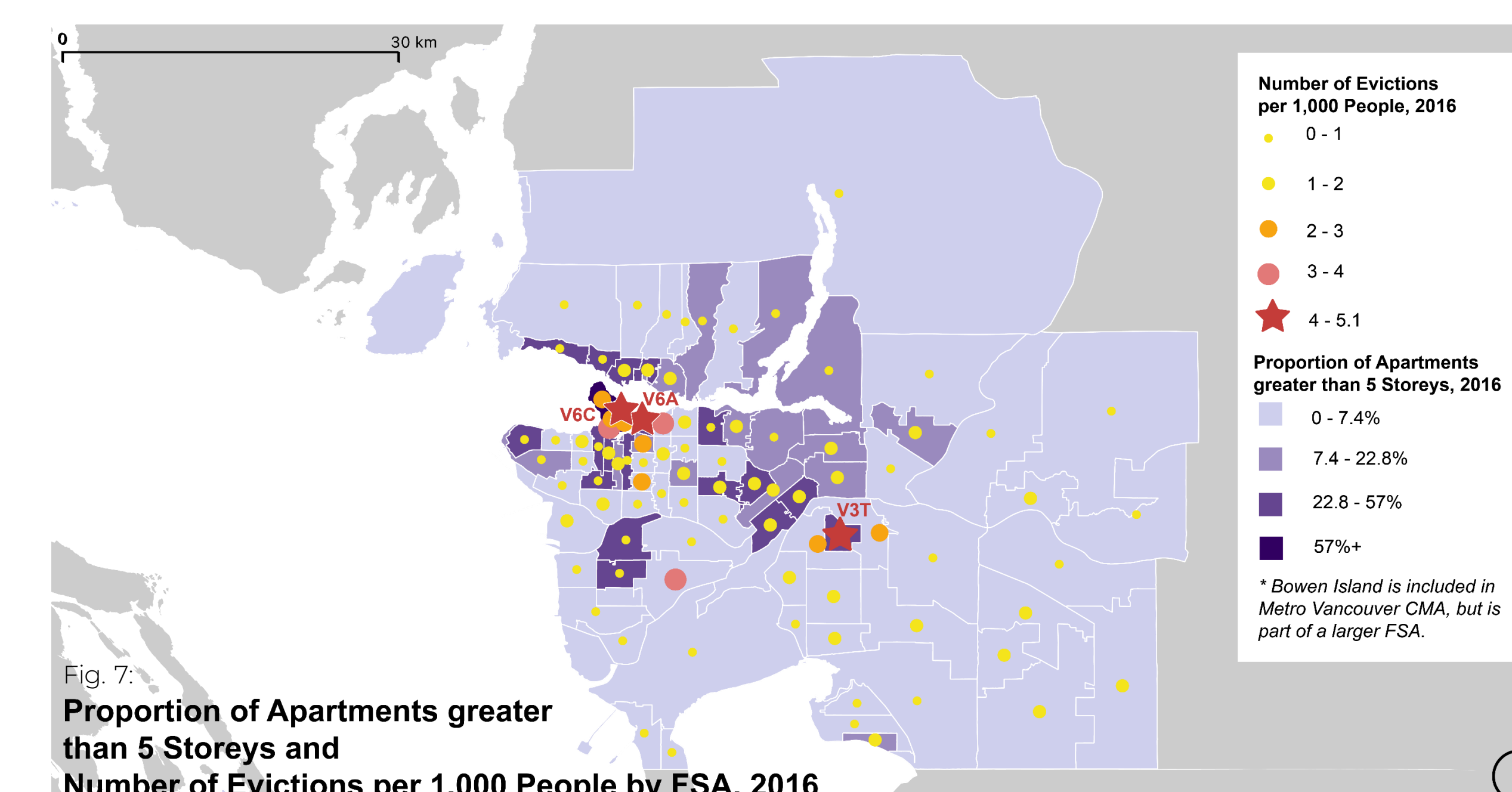

Fig. 7:
Proportion of Apartments greater than 5 Storeys and Number of Evictions per 1,000 People by FSA, 2016

A further spatial analysis investigating the correlation between eviction filings and FSAs, shows that there is no clear correlation between eviction filing rates and the proportion of total immigrants (figure not included).

Limitations

Eviction filing data inform us about the process of filing a dispute but does not inform us on whether these eviction decisions are enforced or not. Further research is required to establish the rate of eviction filing decisions that are enforced.
In addition, the data received via FOI, does not inform us about all the organization names who own and manage the buildings for which eviction filings are completed. Also, it does not inform us of the addresses in which these disputes are filed.
Access to organizations' names and addresses of buildings could have allowed us to establish a spatial analysis at a smaller scale, while also identifying any patterns of evictions landlords.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we found that eviction filing patterns are impacted by policies and legislation. The increase of eviction filing numbers completed by tenants starting from 2018 can likely be explained by the arrival of a new government – the NDP government.
Furthermore, unpaid rent remains the biggest driver for eviction filings, however further research is needed to establish other underlying drivers of eviction filings that may be under-reported in the RTB data, but present in everyday individual experiences of evictions.
In addition, a moratorium on evictions proved to be efficient in terms of reducing the number of eviction filings. While eviction filings can inform us of meso-dynamics taking place in the rental market, they also inform us about macro-dynamics of urban development and urban dynamics in cities and municipalities, as demonstrated by the spatial correlation between high filing eviction rates and the sky train development.
Further research is need to understand any other correlations between eviction filing rates and re-zoning for instance.

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