

# Stakeholder Gathering

Safe, Affordable & Supportive

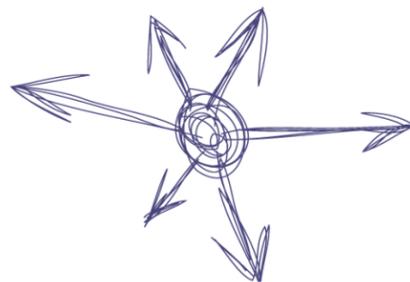


# HOUSING



for Digby County

# BLUEPRINT



What would be the ideal housing situation for residents of Digby County?

Stakeholder Gathering



**INTRODUCTION—15 minutes**

- Welcome - Lisanne
- Committee Background & Housing \$\$\$ - Bernadette
- Story Stats, Summary Report & Meeting Purpose - Denise
- Disclaimer: How today's information will be used...

IDENTIFYING OUR ISSUES AND GAPS: 40 minutes

What are the issues getting in the way of achieving the ideal housing situation for residents of Digby County?

- 4 Topic Areas: Infrastructure, Information, Collaboration, Rules & Regulations.
- Participants spend 10 minutes at each topic area; identifying existing gaps or issues and building upon the previous groups brainstorm. *Carousel Style*, everyone moves around.
- Key nuggets should be themed by assigned committee members and posted on colorful paper under each topic area. Build the wall as we go.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: 40 minutes

What would help?

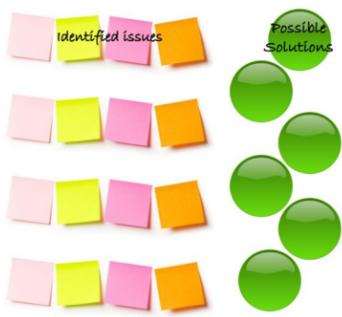
- Identify possible solutions to address the issues or gaps.
- Write your idea down on a green "go" sheet.
- Post each solution to the corresponding topic.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**  
(Emergency shelters, transitional housing, repairing current stock, developing new affordable options, help with fit-ups, subsidy programs, housing needing major repair, efficiency, transportation systems)

**INFORMATION**  
(Access to information like mold and grants, education around homelessness, support for tenants not sure of their options, accessibility of the system, system navigators, usage of available programs)

**COLLABORATION**  
(Informal & formal support networks, increasing resilience, reducing stigma, addressing health care issues, access to activities that help people feel good, direct interventions, supporting mental health and addictions)

**RULES - REGULATIONS**  
(Rules that prevent problems in the first place by lessening housing conditions, regulated properties, fixing things up, tenancy rights, standards codes, health and safety, enforcement, rent controls, fees to use the system, poverty, inequity)



PRIORITIZE ACTIONS: 15 minutes

What would make the biggest difference?

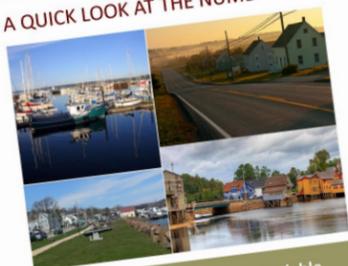
- Prioritize your top 5 areas of action.
- Identify your priorities by placing your sticker on the corresponding action

VISION QUESTION: 15-20 minutes

What would be the ideal housing situation for residents of Digby County?



## HOUSING IN OUR COMMUNITIES: A QUICK LOOK AT THE NUMBERS



Digby and Area Affordable and Supportive Housing Group (DAASH)

Additional background information and statistical data related to the core housing need in Digby County is available in the document "In Search of Affordable Housing: Digby County Statistics, Fall 2013" available by contacting Public Health Services.

Prepared by Denise Vacon, Public Health Services, South West Health

## IN SEARCH OF SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING: DIGBY COUNTY STATISTICS - FALL 2013



Digby and Area Affordable and Supportive Housing Group (DAASH)

With the recent release of "A Housing Strategy for Nova Scotia" and at a time when partnerships are being formed across South West Nova to explore the housing needs of its residents, this document aims to help inform decisions by providing relevant statistical information, specific to our communities, on its core housing needs.

Prepared by Denise Vacon, Public Health Services, South West Health

A safe, caring, affordable home that is accessible and meets my needs in my community.

Ideally, housing is community, safety, affordability and accessibility.

Housing in Digby County will be affordable, accessible and will meet the diversity of needs.

A safe, affordable, well maintained home in the community where I want to live.

A safe and economical home, with working utilities, that includes enough space for everyone living there.



TOPIC AREA	IDENTIFIED ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>INFORMATION</b></p> <p>(Access to information like mold and grants, education around homelessness, support for tenants not sure of their options, accessibility of the system, system navigator, usage of available programs)</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SYSTEM NAVIGATION DIFFICULT:</b> Need family skills workers for dealing with housing related issues, lack of information on grants, information overload, a real person on the telephone, credibility and trust of available information, advocates, information often too jargon based, terminology is a barrier, you need to be a lawyer to read and understand the act, who supports tenants or those who are homeless or couch surfing.</li> <li>• <b>NO CENTRAL HUB FOR HOUSING:</b> A clearing house for accurate information, long form census, bilingual services, help with forms, who has the information on mould, grants, what programs are available, who does what, online services problematic for elderly and low literacy individuals, publicity about resources, is tenancy board really impartial.</li> <li>• <b>LACK OF EDUCATION:</b> For both tenants and property owners on rights and responsibilities, handbook about issues. What life is like in social housing (e.g., you don't need to share a washroom or kitchen). Not in my back yard. Teach skills at school like maintaining a home, keeping it clean, budgeting, other domestic related topics. Respect for educational constructs. Respect choice.</li> <li>• <b>FEW SUPPORTS:</b> Structure of society to support each other has changed, less extended family, if any.</li> <li>• <b>GAPS:</b> Transportation to and from services impacts vacancies in some social housing units, volunteers are over taxed, difficult to get people on boards, literacy, age, disabilities.</li> <li>• <b>POOR HOUSING CONDITIONS:</b> Lack of housing units, unfit living conditions in rental properties, tenants get evicted if they complain, property owners constantly having to make preventable repairs, no health and safety standards that can be enforced.</li> <li>• <b>STIGMA:</b> Stigma and discrimination when accessing government programs, intimidation around being approved for various programs, feeling ashamed for asking, fear of low income, multiple generations in receipt of social assistance, keep social housing out of my back yard, don't build all social housing the same. Choice - the right to choose to be homeless or to live in "slums" without being judged. Choice of lifestyle. Some "slum" units are needed, not necessarily the fault of property owners.</li> </ul>	<p><b>MAKE SYSTEM EASY TO NAVIGATE</b> (11 priority stickers)  <b>SYSTEM NAVIGATOR</b> - a go to resource that is visible and knowledgeable. Needs to be well marketed and must have accurate, up to date information. (5 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>EDUCATION CAMPAIGN</b> - In schools, communities, doctors offices. On issues of housing, rights and responsibilities, awareness and reducing stigma. (10 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>SORT OUT THE TENANCY BOARD</b> - it's just too complicated and difficult to navigate. (4 priority stickers)</p> <p><i>Other suggested solutions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Skills Educators or Family Support Workers to improve skills</li> <li>• People who can act on behalf of tenants to enforce health and safety standards</li> <li>• No run around</li> <li>• Pay people to sit on boards</li> <li>• Helping tree model to organize information; list housing grants, programs and rental properties, etc.</li> </ul>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>COLLABORATION</b></p> <p>(Informal &amp; formal support networks, increasing resilience, reducing stigma, addressing health care issues, access to activities that help people feel good, direct interventions, supporting mental health and addictions)</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LACK SERVICES AND SUPPORTS:</b> No community based supports with medications (assessed, monitored, assisted regularly). Issues with accessibility and availability of services (e.g., need to report a violent incident to get mental health service). Some issues are stigmatized (e.g., mental health, domestic violence). Limited health care options. No respite care or adult day programs. Assistance with tenant rights.</li> <li>• <b>GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES:</b> Need to increase resilience. Education and awareness for consumers of what programs already exist. Some issues are age specific. Better ways of working together, especially in complex cases. Knowing who is doing what. Distance people have to travel to get together collaboratively can be a barrier. Working in silos, more case conferencing and relationship building is needed. Consumers need to be involved in the plan. Lack of Navigation. Hard to get to services, transportation. Trust each other, refer!</li> <li>• <b>SOCIAL CHANGES:</b> Nature of community has changed. Income levels are too low. Increased poverty.</li> <li>• <b>LACK SUPPORTIVE HOUSING:</b> Lack of mental health supports. People don't know that it is ok to ask for help. Lack of knowledge about how to treat persons with disabilities. Stigma. Fear. Not enough co-op housing. No half-way housing. Lack of accountability to ensure tenants are actively involved in programs like AA or NA or other addiction services. Lack of follow up with mentally ill tenants to provide care and assistance. Not enough care providers in the community.</li> <li>• <b>BUREAUCRACY:</b> Government gets in the way. Groups are often competing for the same funding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>HIRE A HOUSING NAVIGATOR</b> - include a "Schools Plus" model for housing to address a complex range of needs. (16 priority Stickers)  <b>DIRECTORY</b> - of present housing resources (2 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES</b> (9 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>FEDERAL HOUSING STRATEGY</b> (8 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>VOLUNTEERS</b> - provide volunteer training and a volunteer bureau with paid staff (4 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>REDUCE POVERTY</b> (3 priority stickers)</p> <p><b>SEEK FUNDING</b> - foundations, private, corporate to start-up projects. (2 priority stickers)</p> <p><i>Other suggested solutions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of the issue</li> <li>• Dialogue between landlords and consumers</li> <li>• Collaborate and network outside immediate community (ACORN-NS)</li> <li>• Become more informed about the NS Strategy</li> </ul>

## TOPIC AREA

## IDENTIFIED ISSUES

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### INFRASTRUCTURE

(Emergency shelters, transitional housing, repairing current stock, developing new affordable options, help with fix-ups, subsidy programs, housing needing major repair, efficiency, transportation systems)

- **GRANTS AND FUNDING:** Need housing stock (public housing) funded by the province. Address inadequate housing (slum housing). Funding for new affordable housing structures. Address long waitlist for property owners to get funding for construction (currently 5-10 year waitlist). Not enough support for seniors who cannot afford to repair their homes. Many homes do not qualify for grants as they are too run down. Maintenance on existing homes and housing units an issue, need more funding for improvements. Long waitlist for grants creating more emergency situations.
- **ACCESS TO FUNDING:** Lack of information regarding programs that assist individuals with housing needs. Complicated forms and no one to help fill them out. Inconsistent funding, no guarantees that funding will be sustainable. If you can't afford to pay your taxes, you do not qualify for repair grants. Application process to apply for grants to maintain your home is too complex.
- **HOUSING STOCK:** Limited affordable and supportive housing for seniors. Lack of planning information (e.g., most "granny" suites cannot be used as rental units without considering necessary modifications to meet current codes). Not enough insulated, affordable, safe housing stock. Units for those slipping through the cracks (e.g., single, no children, not a senior). Intergeneration housing needed (adapt structures). Not enough properties for smokers or those with pets.
- **HEATING & EFFICIENCY:** Unsafe heating systems with few affordable options. Lack of funds to help increase efficiency. Need ways of financing alternative sources of heating (e.g., municipalities funding and charging back to home owners at low interest rates).
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** Some buildings are not accessible or up to modern safety standards. Lack of automatic door and other infrastructure for persons with disabilities who live in group homes. Private homes that are not wheelchair accessible.
- **TRANSITIONAL HOUSING & EMERGENCY SHELTERS:** No transitional units to address a range of diverse transitional needs. Digby has no emergency shelters. Need to build recognition of the need for emergency and transitional housing.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING SOCIETY** - An organization that can oversee housing needs and address issues. (19 priority stickers)

**FUNDING:** Easy to access funding to help people repair existing units and upgrade heating sources. (12 priority stickers)

**TRANSITIONAL HOUSING** (9 priority stickers)

**TAP INTO TRADES:** Seek and organize community volunteers. Approach local trades people to work with housing society to address needs. Generate a list of trades people. (5 priority stickers)

**NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS** - including low income housing. (5 priority stickers)

**INCENTIVES:** Provide opportunities and incentives for the private sector to assist in solutions. (2 priority stickers)

**Other suggested solutions:**

- Increase accessibility
- Rent assistance
- Support to meet tenant needs

### RULES · REGULATIONS

(Rules that prevent problems in the first place, bylaws around housing conditions, neglected properties, fixing things up, tenancy rights, standards codes, health and safety, enforcement, rent controls, fees to use the system, poverty, inequity)

- **FEES:** Fees for using the tenancy board (\$40). No access to free test kits for environmental issues.
- **PAPERWORK:** No help to navigate the system. Too much red tape and paperwork. Not enough support to help with forms.
- **RIGHTS:** Knowing what your rights are as a tenant. The current system doesn't support a sense of ownership or caring in many tenancy situations. Lack of enforcement of tenancy rights and standards.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** Lack of transportation to outlying areas, difficult to access goods and services.
- **POWER:** Local municipalities should have more control. Tenancy board doesn't have enough power or authority.
- **UNFAIR RULES:** Rules around oil delivery minimums (\$100 vs. \$300). Unfair rules that financially penalize single people on social assistance when they form a relationship. The system gets you bogged down in red tape when you have an issue.
- **ADVOCACY:** If you complain you get into trouble or evicted. Lack of advocacy for tenants. Tenants left to fend for themselves. Complaints go to the legal system which is very overwhelming for tenants. No accountability for property owners. Moving rather than fixing the problem. No supports for tenants to help them stay in housing.
- **INCENTIVES and GRANTS:** Very little economic incentive to build low income housing. Cannot maintain low-rental properties at market rent. Lack of accessible grants to fix properties. Income thresholds too low to qualify for programs.
- **CODES and SAFETY:** Lack of accountability to ensure current properties are safe and up to code. Unsafe conditions with no one to follow-up. No inspectors, no enforcement. If things go to court it can take a long time to be resolved. Need mandatory housing inspections prior to renting properties so property owners take responsibility for repairs and development upfront. Need to update housing by-laws. Need minimum health and safety standards that are enforced.
- **INCOME and POVERTY:** Income assistance rates are too low. No resources for working poor. 2009 NS poverty strategy should be revisited. Guaranteed living income, look at Saskatchewan model. No consistency between community services offices with respect to funding. Social housing rent calculations place you in (or very close to) core housing need. Rent increases and rent controls.

**INSPECTORS** - mandatory housing inspections (legislation and enforcement) for rental properties with minimum health and safety standards to make property owners accountable. (13 priority stickers)

**EDUCATION** for tenants and community (11 priority stickers)

**EASE OF USE** - make the system easier to use with "one stop shopping" for information on rules and regulations. (3 priority stickers)

**RENT CONTROL** - 5 priority stickers

**Other suggested solutions:**

- An effective process for complaints and problem solving
- New legislation to better support tenants and property owners
- Make incentives easier to access
- Sustainable community-based transportation system
- Amend unfair rules (e.g., qualification criteria, social assistance rates, etc)
- Publicize and broadcast available services and what they offer using various media.