

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS TO SOLUTIONS

ADDRESS AFFORDABLE HOUSING GAPS



A SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

FURTHER TOGETHER

A WESTERN HOUSING FORUM

HOSTED IN CORNWALLIS ON SEPT 18, 2019



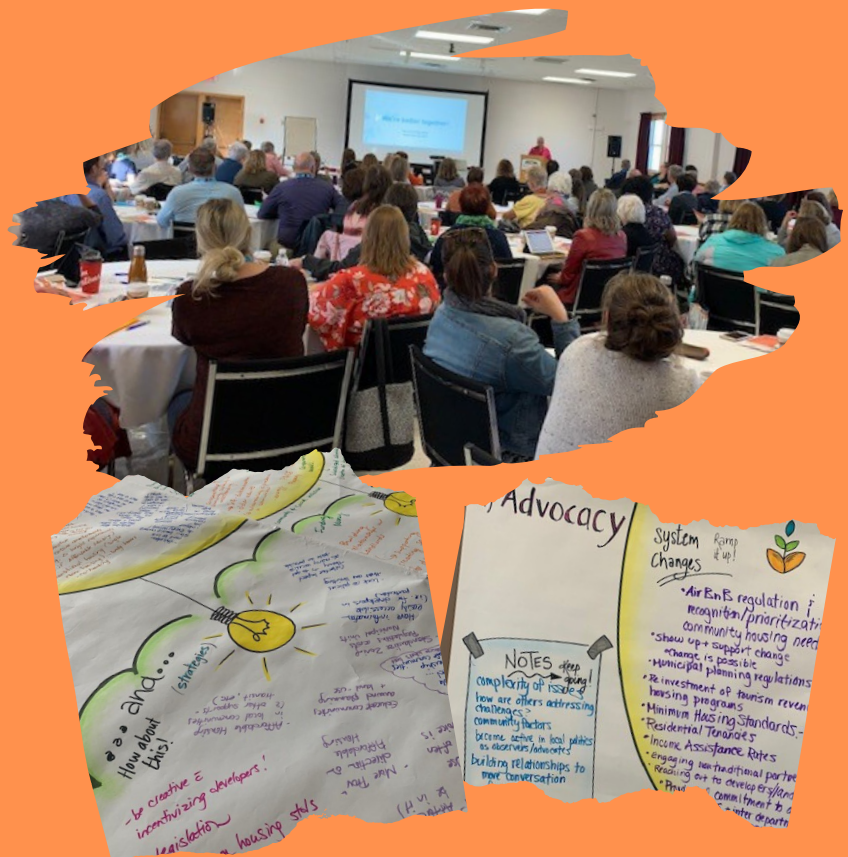
PURPOSE OF THE FORUM

Housing is a foundation of healthy, strong communities.

People with an adequate, suitable and affordable place to live are better able to take advantage of the opportunities in their community and contribute to society, both economically and socially.

The Rural Housing Forum purpose was to connect stakeholders and municipal leaders to identify regional solutions to address housing & homelessness issues across western NS communities.

All housing is part of the housing continuum. On the left, there are people who are in crisis, or without a permanent residence. In between, people are paying their own rent with assistance. On the right, there are independent renters and homeowners. A healthy housing market has a range of options across the housing continuum so people can find adequate, affordable housing suitable to their needs and get appropriate supports when they require help.



ATTENDANCE
150
people

- 16 CONCURRENT SESSIONS
- FIVE CAFÉ SESSIONS
- A DIVERSE WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

HOUSING SUPPORTS

THE CONTEXT

Without supportive services many people cannot become and/or stay successfully housed, nor can they access and make effective use of services in their community. These supports may range from simple help with daily living to enhanced community supports, services and programs, to the implementation of a comprehensive Housing First Approach.

Failing to address the housing related needs of individuals and families who could have remained in their communities, if they had access to the necessary supports, has compounded the affordable housing issue in rural Nova Scotia.



THE DISCUSSION

SERVICE AND SUPPORT NEEDS

- Navigator, a person not a phone tree
- Inventory of availability and contacts
- VON/Homecare
- Social Connections
- Basic Income
- Senior Safety Coordinators
- Transportation
- Zero eviction in city planning (Coordinated in Alberta)
- Standardization of services across the province (not everyone has shelters, services, or supports)
- Non-medical in-home supports
- Standards in quality of housing with a transition plan to prevent homelessness from safe, warm, dry.
- Housing departments more available
- Housing First Approach - province wide
- Tenant's Rights Education
- Energy affordability supports
- Co-housing matching
- Supportive housing (cooking, planning, paperwork, tenant skills, check-ins)
- Transitional Housing (shelter and second stage)
- Independent Living Support Programs

BARRIERS

- Availability of housing
- Housing prices / affordability
- Labels create stigma - "low income", "seniors", "affordable"
- Gaps in supports along the continuum
- Lack of real options for alternative affordable housing or transitional housing
- Fear of child protection if tenant complains
- Transportation, Internet
- Utilities are expensive, easy to slip behind
- Lack of housing support workers
- Food security issues
- Policies are misunderstood
- Silos in departments
- LGBTQ+ Barriers and stigmas
- Social Isolation
- Money, poverty
- Culture of exclusion (landlords & tenants)
- Addiction
- Municipal regulations
- No coordinated access across services
- Impact of precarious employment, working fewer jobs and fewer opportunities to connect with community
- Trauma
- Wait lists
- Lack of awareness of options
- Literacy
- Invasive process prevents people from accessing supports

SYSTEM CHANGES

- Coordinated case support management
- Housing navigators
- One access point (breakdown silos)
- Streamlined, triage system
- Guaranteed Basic Income
- Zero cost home support - income caps need to be increased
- Timely access to transition seniors into long term care (from "homes" to "levels of care" instead of "housing")
- Housing policy on standards for rentals
- Coordinated approach
- More rental wrap programs
- Rent supplements with built in supports
- Social inclusion
- Measure the social return / benefit to economic investment; this data is needed
- Reduce bureaucratic processes and fees
- Increase access to supportive programs
- Trauma informed system
- Comprehensive understanding of affordability
- Outreach EISA workers in rural areas, more outreach

OPPORTUNITIES

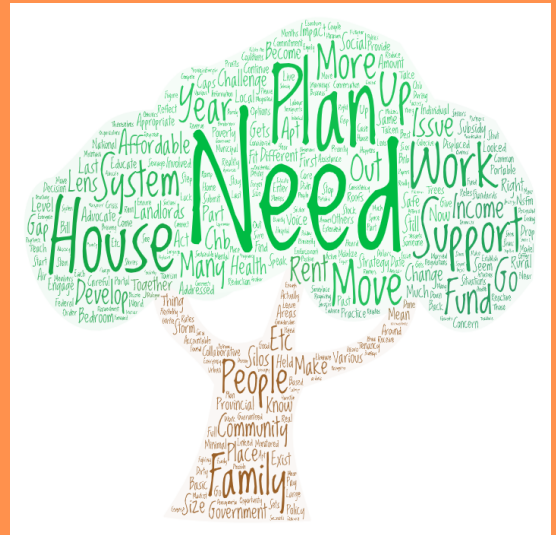
- Elections, council meetings
- Shared or public transportation, bulk buying
- Cultural norms: owning vs. renting

ADVOCACY

THE CONTEXT

Individual advocacy focuses on changing the situation of one person to protect his or her rights or to improve individual services, systems advocacy works to change the situations of a whole group of persons who share a similar problem.

Advocacy can be defined as a collective effort to bring about changes to political priorities, funding levels, legislation, regulations or policies. It's relevant to people working in the homeless-serving sector because, in addition to delivering services to clients on a day-to-day basis, many workers in that sector also want to see changes to public policy that would help address affordable housing gaps.



THE DISCUSSION

HOUSING GAPS

- Lack of affordable housing options
- Income
- Labour market
- Voice of community experience
- Rural lens in decision making
- Housing quality
- Tenants' rights
- Municipal engagement
- Homelessness supports and services
- Emergency planning (storms)
- Not enough rent subsidies (portable)
- Information gaps
- Appropriately sized rentals
- System flexibility in housing size (take into consideration other factors)
- Working in silos (e.g., portable rent supplement considered income and impacts other support)
- No model to help people live and stay in their community close to supports after a health concern - health system is not connected to housing

SYSTEM CHANGES

- Air BnB regulations
- Municipal planning regulations
- Reinvestment of tourism revenue into housing programs
- Minimum housing standards (national)
- Tenancy Act needs to change
- Income Assistance rates
- Engage non-traditional partners
- Reach out to developers and landlords
- Provincial committee to address challenges and interdepartmental dialogue, strategy and response
- A place for displaced people to go
- Income assistance amount are not appropriate - Guaranteed Basic Income
- Gov commitment to poverty reduction
- Provincial strategy on housing (involve NSFM)
- Mobilize and Advocate at the community level
- Bad landlords, bad tenants - provide supports and address the issues
- Equity lens

ACTIONS

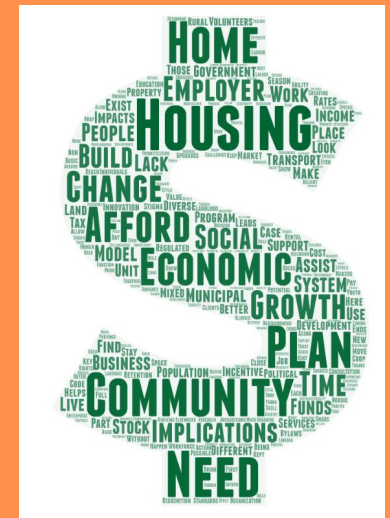
- Provide evidence and policy options
- Address income gaps
- Accountability for decision makers
- Collaboration - reduce silos
- Right to housing language
- National Housing Strategy
- Position papers and policy briefings
- Leverage existing networks to speak one voice
- Listen to first voice
- Education about "affordable" housing - it has now become a dirty word
- What's affordable, what's appropriate, what's safe?
- Address poverty!
- Gov sets up funding in ways that force organizations to compete with one another. Core sustainable funding opportunities for not-for-profit organizations, not 1-year grants
- Rent caps?
- More rent supplements, rent geared to income, repair and maintenance grants

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

THE CONTEXT

From an economic perspective, the reality of the labour market is that some people make lower wages than others, yet are critical to our labour pool. These workers and community residents need affordable housing, and they need it in order to work, to continue to contribute to the economy, and to avoid the risk of becoming homeless.

Investing in affordable housing promotes economic development in several ways, including: stimulating employment in construction and repair sectors; improving worker and employer attraction and retention; increasing discretionary income; stabilizing early childhood development, and reducing government expenditures on high-cost programs, etc.



THE DISCUSSION

IMPLICATIONS ON ECONOMY

- Linking social and economic implications and knowing the language and resources
- Function of our population (aging populations, youth retention, home ownership)
- Job insecurity and changes in desire to own a home
- Lack of community transportation
- Unregulated labour market (part-time employment, seasonal)
- Necessary for population growth and tax base
- Positive impact on sports teams, volunteering, community organization membership
- Incoming workforce - challenging if there is no place to live
- What role can you have in your community if you have to work 60 hours to make rent
- Stifles entrepreneurship and innovation
- Transportation implications
- Employer workforce is larger and more diverse (business growth)
- Internet and communication affects economic viability

GROWING DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS

- Air BnB regulations
- Support development of different housing models including co-housing, tiny houses, granny suites
- Visually make rentals and affordable housing look and fit into the "style" or "design" of the neighbourhood it is being built in
- Define the economic costs of social implications of homelessness
- Should housing be market driven or more socially regulated?
- Look at other jurisdictions
- Develop housing action plans
- Home share programs
- Mixed income zoning, co-op housing, social enterprise
- Transportation and housing planning
- Blended, commercial, housing, social services together
- Incentives for business
- Multi-source funding
- Investments in apprentice and trades

SYSTEM CHANGES

- Should housing be market driven or more socially regulated?
- Dependence on non-profits for system development
- Consistency across the province for minimum housing standards
- Coordination among levels of government for funding
- Political involvement by those impacted (inspiring communities model)
- Thinking outside the box (e.g., bartering system)
- Use existing housing models and invest in infrastructure development
- Address stigma towards economical diverse housing: communication about relationship of property value and taxes, pre-planning (land use planning that ensures economic diversity), allowances for downsizing and alternate housing in all neighborhoods
- Investments in apprentice and trades, mentorship strategies
- Education on housing as a human right
- Housing First Supports
- Supported employment
- Rural transportation

THE CONTEXT

A Housing Action Plan provides municipalities with a framework that allows them to implement strategies intended to create and develop market, affordable and non-market housing units. Municipalities have already begun to address and improve social integration through the development and regulation of mixed-use and mixed-income communities and to develop affordable housing policies that improve affordability, availability and accessibility.



THE DISCUSSION

- Look at minimum housing standards
- Explore implementing rental cap legislation
- Municipal education and awareness around housing action plans
- Converting public resources into affordable housing
- Identify next steps
- Incentives for affordable development
- Mixed housing developments, co-op housing, transitional housing, boarding homes
- Green spaces
- Integrate into community planning - housing connects to everything
- Provincial resources around affordable housing policies
- Engage first voice
- How do we use the stock we have when it doesn't fit the need
- Raised density, zoning changes
- Address NIMBY attitudes
- Coordinated, streamlined approach
- Air BnB taxation go back to municipalities

- Be creative, provide incentives
- Funding
- Legislation
- Minimum housing standards
- Communication strategies
- Statement of Provincial interest - provincially set planning standards
- More provincial direction on affordable housing
- Education on planning and land use
- Speak up about land use - often only the NIMBY voice is heard
- Involve First Voice
- Modernize municipal bylaws around rentals, including Granny suites
- Poverty reduction
- Standardize zoning regulations around municipal units
- Easily accessible information, grants, subsidies
- Look at policies that are limiting
- Collective impact theory to get as many voices at the table as possible
- Build relationships with landlords

- Internet access
- lack of strategic development in some communities
- Municipal Planning Strategy reviews
- Allowances for tiny homes
- Housing identified as a priority

- Housing as a human right
- Implications of stigma
- Advocacy issues
- Quality of life
- Identify prevalence of substandard housing, supports to mitigate displacement
- Link to National Housing Strategy
- Define the role of municipal governments in poverty reduction
- Needs Assessments can inform funding and affordable housing development
- Private sector vs. community groups

IT'S WIDE OPEN

THE CONTEXT

A home is more than just an address. Having a home makes it possible to access employment, enroll in school, and open a bank account.

A home provides shelter, security, and a place to raise our families. All Canadians deserve a dignified place to call home. Adopting a human rights approach means thinking differently about homelessness and the factors leading up to it. Above all, a human rights approach to housing recognizes that supporting people to access and maintain housing before they experience homelessness is the right thing to do.



THE DISCUSSION

Something else that would make a difference

- Education and awareness of the issue is critical
- Knowing what's available and easy access
- provide incentives
- Developers need data they can trust
- P3 arrangement possibilities
- Engaging the private sector, particularly developers
- Addressing the risk of mixed tenure housing developments (access to capital, good PR for socially aware developers)
- Require it in policy
- Strong leadership from municipal councils
- Support and leadership from the province
- Combat NIMBYisms
- Landlords don't want to be stigmatized as "low income developers"

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