

ST. JOHN'S

Affordable Housing Working Group Minutes

April 28, 2020

1:00 p.m.

Virtual

Present: Deputy Mayor Sheilagh O'Leary, Council Representative
Jill Snow, CMHC
Gail Thornhill, Stella's Circle
Ayon Shahed, Choices for Youth
Doug Pawson, End Homelessness St. John's
Grayson Kelly, NLHC
Emily Timmins, Poverty Reduction, Gov NL

Regrets: Andrew Harvey, First Light

Staff: Simone Lilly, Affordable Housing & Development Facilitator,
Chair
Judy Tobin, Manager of Non-Profit Housing
Maureen Harvey, Legislative Assistant

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
2. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Moved By Doug Pawson
Seconded By Sheilagh O'Leary

That the agenda be adopted as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

3. **ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES**

3.1 Adoption of Minutes - February 25, 2020

Moved By Gail Thornhill

Seconded By Ayon Shahed

That the minutes of the meeting of February 25, 2020 be adopted as presented.

For (7): Sheilagh O'Leary, Jill Snow, Gail Thornhill, Ayon Shahed, Doug Pawson, Grayson Kelly, and Emily Timmins

MOTION CARRIED (7 to 0)

4. BUSINESS ARISING

4.1 Affordable Housing Strategy Update

The Chair referenced the information note for a more detailed update on the City of St. John's Affordable Housing Strategy for 2019-2028 and main areas of work. She provided an update on End Homelessness St. John's and referenced Council's recent approval to revise the mandate of the Group. The revised purpose statement and the new strategy page on homelessness was provided to the Panel in an email. The Community Housing Transformation Centre (CHTC) proposals are in the works but temporarily delayed. Workshops have been on pause due to the Covid 19 pandemic and consideration may be given to move to virtual meetings if possible.

4.2 Covid 19 Pandemic impact on housing and vulnerable populations

1. Round Table Updates from AHWG Members - Identifying Gaps

- Doug Pawson of End Homelessness St. John's provided an update to the group. He stated that EHSJ received \$979,000 from the Federal Government to extend shelter capacity. They are currently working with Eastern Health on identifying potential supports. The main focus of their efforts has been the need for shelter and medical support.
 - Home Connect was just launched with Sherwin Flight. This is a landlord engagement project where landlords with one bedroom or bachelor vacancies shelter some of the homeless. The project has been in the works for about a year and a half and involves a landlord signing bonus that is

applied towards the rent to hold the rental for the month of May.

- Gail Thornhill provided an update on Stella's Circle. She referenced the Home Connect program and noted that it would be an excellent opportunity for an online information session. They are navigating the same challenges as all other organizations, prioritizing and addressing needs as necessary.
 - The programming has been reduced at Stella's Circle. Brian Martin Housing Resource Centre is open every day but there are not many participants. The location provides a large walk up window that facilitates contact with people on the street and allows them to communicate. They provide services such as food, wifi, faxing, and use of a telephone.
 - There is a real need for public wifi in the whole downtown area. People are congregating to access wifi which is not recommended from a health perspective.
 - Gail noted that they are operating business as normal as much as possible and have moved five people during this pandemic. They are being very creative on how landlords show units by taking pictures and videos. It has been difficult to do intensive case management with no personal contact as these times are challenging but they are improvising. There are vacancies at many of the publicly funded shelters. Many shelters have had to reduce capacity in order to observe the social distancing order.
 - While they have energy and momentum on shelter overflow, there doesn't appear to be huge demand for overflow at this point. There are 23 available beds in publicly funded shelters. Naomi Centre is open and it has reduced its capacity by only 1 bed. They are all single capacity rooms and it's a fairly large and open older building.
 - A notable gap would be incentives to keep people in place and at the shelter. They are working with the Province and EHSJ on PPE.
- Ayon Shayed of Choices for Youth echoed the need for digital devices so people can stay in touch with support networks.

Some of the ongoing issues are isolation, overdose, mental health and trying to stay in touch.

- Much of their work has shifted to mobile based work. They are still letting small numbers into facilities as needed with focus on distributed services wherever possible.
- Young families, particularly children in care and birth parents, are a notable concern. Choices for Youth has been doing advocacy work to ensure there is a balanced approach to long term well-being of the children and their families. There are some access issues between birth parents and children in care and they are working with authorities in developing protocols. They are doing a lot of site screening and triaging, and PPE is needed. They are looking for flexible undefined funding.
- Grayson Kelly of NLHC gave an update and noted they are seeing further delays on announcements for the first time house buyers program and affordable housing. Partner management groups are doing okay but a few were impacted by the funeral home cluster. They are dealing with cleaning issues in housing units.
- Emily Timmins of Poverty Reduction, Government NL gave an update on the Vulnerable Populations Task Force. This group now has 7 working groups. They are taking cues from the community on what is needed, and she echoed that the gaps are technology and young families. Children in low income households are at risk because there is a need for internet, art supplies and things for them to spend their time doing. They are looking at anything to help young families and children outside the school system.
 - Concern expressed about why there is capacity in shelters locally which is due to the pandemic and people spending time in situations that are less than ideal.
 - The young men's shelter and Naomi Centre residents are not always fully aware of the risk of hanging out with friends or just being out and about. The rules put in place at the shelter in an effort to follow health protocols may dissuade some young people from staying there because they do not

want to have those restrictions placed on them. There is a communication challenge in the community due to the pandemic and it was assumed that shelters were not taking people in.

- Judy Tobin, Manager of Non-Profit Housing with the City of St. John's, gave an update on the City response. The City is still processing housing applications and moving people where necessary. One home has been turned into a safe house for rescue personnel who have come in contact with Covid 19. The focus has been on people fleeing violence in the home but will be opened up to a broader scope as this is the new normal and there will need to be a shift to adapt.
- Jill Snow of CMHC gave an update and noted that they have been working at a federal level on a number of different things. Most recently the Canadian Commercial Rent Assistance program and multiple programs related to mortgage deferrals. There is expanded eligibility for people to access commercial and residential mortgage deferrals, but this is a deferral program so interest is charged and payable later. More information will be shared with the group as it becomes available. A public plea statement was put out to landlords to ensure there are no evictions at this time.
 - Jill was recently appointed as the Atlantic Representative and is sitting in on webinars on how Covid is impacting Atlantic Canada and invited members to discuss if they wished.
 - CMHC has been business as usual on insurance and affordable housing for clients with the exception of meeting people in person. The underwriters are still looking to advance the initiative so there is no stall on their end. Some construction companies have made changes to their processes and some projects have been put on hold but access to financing is still available.
 - Grayson Kelly shared the following link to the 3 Year Housing and Homelessness Provincial Action Plan: <https://www.nlhc.nl.ca/action-plans/>.

- The Group requested that Jill seek information on the timeline of the benefits. Information will be emailed to the Panel regarding the Insured Mortgage Purchase Program.

Deputy Mayor O'Leary requested an update on who they are accommodating in the affordable housing units and measures the City has taken in emergency shelter situations.

2. AHWG - Moving Forward

The Chair suggested groups look at hosting webinars in these challenging times. Getting all the players together would be an opportunity to identify gaps from outside this group and get perspective from others. Deputy Mayor O'Leary noted that MNL are undertaking engagement initiatives and it may be worthwhile to reach out to Craig Pollett to see what platforms they are using. The response from the group was that there is a level of webinar fatigue out there so maybe they should consider partnering with another organization. Deputy Mayor O'Leary will connect Simone Lilly to Craig Pollett via email.

The Chair requested that group members put forward agenda items for future discussion. She will review the gaps and look at scheduling the next meeting.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

6. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm

CHAIRPERSON, SIMONE LILLY