

ST. JOHN'S

Affordable Housing Working Group Minutes

July 30, 2020

10:00 a.m.

Virtual

Present: Simone Lilly, Affordable Housing & Development Facilitator, Chair
Deputy Mayor Sheilagh O'Leary, Council Representative
Jill Snow, CMHC
Judy Tobin, Manager of Non-Profit Housing
Ayon Shahed, Choices for Youth
Doug Pawson, End Homelessness St. John's
Grayson Kelly, NLHC
Emily Timmins, Poverty Reduction, Gov NL
Curtis Mercer, Canadian Home Builders' Association – NL
Shanna Fitzgerald, Legislative Assistant

Regrets: Gail Thornhill, Stella's Circle
Andrew Harvey, First Light

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair welcomed Curtis Mercer of the Canadian Home Builders' Association and introduced the members of the Committee.

2. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved By Doug Pawson

Seconded By Ayon Shahed

That the agenda be approved as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

3. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

3.1 Adoption of Minutes - May 12, 2020

Moved By Ayon Shahed

Seconded By Doug Pawson

That the minutes of May 12, 2020 be adopted as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

4. BUSINESS ARISING

4.1 Conflict of Interest - Required Statements

The Panel was advised that the conflict of interest regarding Andrew Harvey and Jill Snow on the Community Gardens project must be noted in all meeting minutes going forward. Any future references to this topic during the meeting will note Mr. Harvey's and Ms. Snow's conflict accordingly irrespective of whether it is a simple update or discussion among members or motions required.

4.2 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.

- The Community Housing Transformation Centre (CHTC) partnerships are moving forward and the next meeting with them is on August 17th.
- The City will use the Community Response funding it received to establish public wifi access points. This project would help close a digital divide that has emerged in the Pandemic. Many low-income individuals rely on public internet but due to COVID-19 closures, libraries, coffee shops and cafes are no longer accessible. Two open space park areas have been chosen near non-market housing and outreach service locations. These locations are owned by the City and have the infrastructure required for wifi to be set up. A limited call RFQ for Internet services has been issued and closed on July 29th.
- Jill Snow declared a conflict of interest on the Community Gardens project in reference to the update provided on the Eric Street Project. A

fast facts page has been developed on the project and has been posted to the main City of St. John's website.

- Planning for an affordable housing workshop series in partnership with CMHC has resumed. Logistics are under review so that this series can be put off in the fall virtually. Jill Snow advised the committee she has reached out to a non-profit group in Alberta called The Alberta Rural Development Network. This group was created by post-secondary institutions to help serve rural communities in Alberta. They have gone from doing research on housing for those communities to implementing housing themselves and have created a step by step guide which aligns with gaps identified in the current market. The topics are closely aligned in the stages of building with the housing workshops, so they are being considered to deliver the workshops for some of the topics.
- Discussion took place regarding substandard housing. Deputy Mayor O'Leary requested a general list of resources to provide to people who require help. The group was invited to provide any suggestions of resources to be directed to people who inquire. The following were suggested:
 - Empowering the tenant to use the options available to them under the Residential Tenancies Act was recommended. HomeConnect is an excellent resource for these types of issues and has in depth knowledge of the Residential Tenancies Act. The HomeConnect program connecting landlords, tenants and service providers can be found at homeconnect.wecanendit.com. End Homelessness will have a blitz in August/September to encourage landlords to come on board with HomeConnect. Every tenant who goes into a property that is registered with HomeConnect receives tenant insurance. The rent mitigation fund is offered to landlords as an additional layer of protection as well.
 - Find a way to engage landlords to help them understand that they do have a role in this and that the landlord can get support to bring their properties up to a better standard for the person who are living there.
 - There are additional resources about the Residential Tenancies Act on Service NL at <https://www.gov.nl.ca/snl/landlord/>.

- The Tenant Leadership Group is designed for aspiring tenant representatives and leaders who want to gain valuable skills and experiences to better enable them to speak on behalf of the tenant community. <https://chra-achru.ca/tenant-leadership-group/>.
- The Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Tenant document developed by the City and affordable housing partners was updated to reflect the Residential Tenancies Act changes that came into effect in 2019. The document has recently been translated into French and Arabic and has been uploaded to the City of St. John's website at <http://www.stjohns.ca/publications/your-rights-and-responsibilities-tenant>.
- Jill Snow advised that there is funding available for the maintenance for affordable housing. There can be a session offered around low interest funding to improve standards.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Requested Discussion - Housing Partnerships and Models

At the Committee of the Whole meeting on July 8, Deputy Mayor O'Leary requested that the Affordable Housing Working Group discuss creative ways to continue to ensure housing units are accessible to the people who need them. The City maintains a wait list, however the list is mostly for the rent geared to income (RGI) units; whereas vacancies are concentrated in the 3-4 bedroom lower end of market (LEM) units. The Chair invited suggestions from the AHWG for creative partnerships and models to consider with respect to this part of the City's housing portfolio (LEM, 3-4 bedroom units).

Considerable discussion took place with the following points from members summarized:

- Co-housing concept could be explored further to try to encourage mixed families to cohabitate. NLHC may have explored these models in the past. Grayson will review and report back to the Committee.
- A brainstorming session with Choices for Youth on partnership options will be set up by the Chair.
- LEM switched to RGI could be examined to see if the change could be justified.

- Successful co-housing projects for low income working public could be explored but this can be complicated with a leasing residential tenancies situation.
- CMHC is working to support this effort by researching to find cases across the country that center around co-living. The list is being compiled and can be shared with the group when complete.
- Innovation funding may be available for this initiative.

5.2 Healthy Cities Strategy

The Chair informed the Panel of a request for input from the Family and Leisure Services Division to review and discuss the section on Housing with the Affordable Housing Working Group, as experts in the field, to ensure that the Healthy City Strategy aligns with the language and work happening in community around housing. The Healthy Communities Fieldworker would like to hold a MS Teams meeting with the AHWG on August 19th at 11:00 am. More information about the housing section of the healthy city strategy will be circulated to members with the meeting invite for review prior to the meeting.

5.3 Housing Day

The Committee discussed National Housing Day on November 22nd. Housing Day marks the impact and achievements of the housing sector, and all those who ensure housing for people in Canada. Several events are typically planned to raise awareness and mark this important date.

The Committee discussed how to celebrate the critical work of the housing sector this year while highlighting the ongoing challenges in the housing system and new challenges that have emerged due to the COVID-19 health crisis.

6. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The proposed next meeting date is October 1, 2020 - 10 am - 12 pm.

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:22 am.

CHAIRPERSON, SIMONE LILLY