



City of St. John's Affordable Housing Strategy  
Annual Update - November 2021

The City of St. John's approved the [Affordable Housing Strategy, 2019-2028](#), in November 2018. The strategy will address the municipality's housing needs by working in step with partners, stakeholders, and residents to create and maintain safe, suitable and affordable housing throughout the city. The strategy is designed to be flexible and to address issues related to affordable housing as the cost of living, the housing market and vacancy rates fluctuate. This is an important feature given the unpredictable nature of COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the housing sector.

The following is an annual update on the Affordable Housing Strategy's main areas of work and other housing-related initiatives that the City implemented to support residents during the pandemic.

## **2021 COVID-19 Responses**

### **Community Response Fund**

The City of St. John's is a recipient of the COVID-19 Community Response Fund for Vulnerable Populations - a collaboration between the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Medical Association Foundation. This funding allows recipients to support vulnerable populations struggling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The City used the Community Response funding to establish public Wi-Fi access points at Bannerman Park and Victoria Park that are near non-market housing and outreach service locations. This was announced to the public in October 2020. Internet services will be in place for 3 years. This project will help close a digital divide that has emerged in the pandemic and allow residents to remain connected to health and support services.

The remaining funding was used to purchase 10 touchless hand sanitizing stations. Hand sanitizer and batteries for operating the units will be provided to non-profit partners until the funding is exhausted.

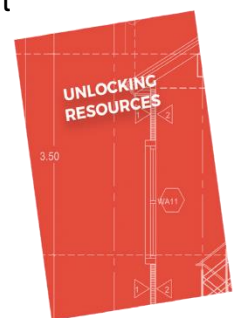
## **Unlocking Resources**

Identify and draw on the City's resources and assets to advance housing initiatives and create new opportunities.

- Create a Civic Housing Action Fund

Following best practices from other municipalities, Council approved for a civic housing action fund to be developed. This fund will support the development of affordable housing opportunities and provide a means to leverage provincial and federal funding.

- Create an Interdepartmental Committee to coordinate internal components of this strategy



An Interdepartmental Committee was established in 2019 to lead internal components of the Affordable Housing Strategy. Representation includes Transportation, Communications, Family & Leisure Services, Planning, Regulatory Services and Housing. Additional Divisions are brought in as necessary. The committee continues to meet on a quarterly basis.

- Continue to create a list of city-owned vacant land and buildings and evaluate the inventory for potential redevelopment as affordable housing

Four parcels of land have been identified as viable options for redevelopment as affordable housing to date.

A project is planned for one parcel of land at 28 Eric Street. A letter of Intent with Habitat for Humanity has been formalized which outlines the intended gifting of the property subject to successful rezoning, development approval and collaboration with the Eric Street Community Garden located on this site to either leave the garden undisturbed or to incorporate the garden into the design. The garden is to remain on this property owned by the City and retain open space zoning. Council has also committed \$2500 to support the redevelopment of the garden. The portion of land to be redeveloped as affordable housing was successfully rezoned in May 2021 from the Open Space (O) Zone to the Residential High Density (R3) Zone. This project has not yet received development approval.

In summer and fall 2021, engagement was launched for the remaining three parcels of land – 375 Waterford Bridge Road, 245 Forest Road and 80-90 Empire Avenue. There are no planned projects on these sites. Engagement sought to understand stakeholder use of these parcels of land, concerns about potential redevelopment of the sites, and to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to inform what they would like to see in terms of design and incorporated features if these parcels of land were developed as affordable housing. A 'What We Heard' document will be presented to Council in December 2021.

## **Building Homes**

Increase the stock and sustainability of affordable rental and home ownership opportunities.

### Rapid Housing Initiative

On July 29, 2021, the Government of Canada and the City of St. John's announced \$5 million to create an estimated 14 new affordable homes for individuals and families in St. John's through the Cities Stream under the expanded Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI).

The City launched a Request for Proposals for eligible non-profits and charitable housing providers in St. John's in August. More details about this initiative will be forthcoming.



- Make creating successful tenancies a priority

We continue to share information about landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, and about eviction prevention and community supports available through our Affordable Housing newsletter, New Lease newsletter for Landlords and Property Managers, and via information sessions such as Indigenous Cultural Diversity Training for Landlords and Property Managers which was offered in fall 2021 (in partnership with End Homelessness St. John's and First Light).

- Continue to engage multiple stakeholders in addressing the under-reporting of property standards violations in rental housing

A 'Safe and Healthy Housing' presentation has been developed to engage service providers in a collaborative approach to address inadequate housing in St. John's. A virtual presentation was delivered to staff from two organizations in 2021.

- Create a non-profit housing strategic asset management framework to guide decisions of housing unit renewal and redevelopment

The City of St. John's Housing Division was approved for \$100,000 from CMHC's SEED Preservation Stream for three of the City's Lower-end-of-market (LEM) project areas. This funding can be used to complete building condition assessments, age-friendly conversion assessments, accessibility assessments, and energy audits, among other eligible activities. Once these assessments are complete, this information will be used to guide decisions of housing unit renewal and redevelopment and support subsequent applications for funding to support this work.

- Leverage the existing City-owned housing portfolio to increase the supply of accessible and affordable housing units

The City partnered with Connections for Seniors on a pilot project to convert four vacant City-owned LEM housing units into 12 supported housing beds for Seniors. Partnerships with other non-profits for similar models are being explored.

The City was also successful in securing \$250,000 from the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's Provincial Housing and Homelessness Partnership Fund. This one-time funding from the Fund's Capital Contribution Stream will be used to reconfigure one of the City's vacant three-bedroom LEM units into two Rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units to serve low-income households.



## **Leading Innovation**

Inspire and facilitate creativity in affordable housing projects.

- Continue to offer the Housing Catalyst Fund grants yearly for affordable housing projects

Thanks to a partnership between the City of St. John's and The Community Housing Transformation Centre (CHTC), an additional \$100,000 has been added to the City's \$50,000, creating a new Catalyst Fund of \$150,000 to improve access to and availability of affordable housing in St. John's. Grants fund short term projects with a one-year timeline of completion and the maximum grant amount available to applicants is \$30,000. Five Housing Catalyst Grants were awarded in 2021:

| Organization                  | Project  | Grant Amount |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------|
| End Homelessness St. John's   | Hiring of a consultant to explore the prospects and problems associated with developing cohousing/house sharing projects for low-income individuals in St. John's.                           | \$30,000     |
| Association for New Canadians | Hiring of a consultant to identify best practices and provide key recommendations on operating a transition house, particularly for newcomer women seeking shelter from family violence.     | \$30,000     |
| Empower                       | Work with various partners on the development of a model based on current needs, and source various levels of funding, to build or renovate accessible housing for people with disabilities. | \$30,000     |
| Cohousing NL                  | Offering an affordable cohousing participatory design workshop and information series.   | \$10,000     |
| S.O.D. Housing Co-operative   | Energy efficiency upgrades to downtown properties.   | \$10,000     |

Applications for the 2021-2022 cycle were accepted until November 26, 2021. This year, the City of St. John's and the CHTC also co-hosted a Housing Catalyst Fund webinar to inform potential applicants about the fund. In addition to information about the grant, how to apply, and so on, attendees also heard presentations from previous Housing Catalyst Recipients including:

- Karen Noel, Stella's Circle – Portfolio Planning and Asset Analysis
  - Rick Boland, NL Gray Gays – Identifying the needs and wants of the Avalon LGBT Elder Community
  - Craig Reid, President of Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL / Past President of Universal Design Network – Universal Design Education
- Facilitate an Energy Efficiency Pilot Project, bringing partners together on a collaborative project that is aimed at reducing power costs and increasing affordability.

An energy audit was conducted on vacant Non-Profit units targeted for an energy retrofit project. Energy upgrades were implemented between fall 2018 and summer 2021, including installing digital thermostats and R30 insulation into the attics.

In addition, the Housing Division received a donation of over 4,000 LED bulbs from NL Power that will be installed in all units upon turn over. The bulbs will also be distributed to existing tenants who pay their own NL Power bill.

On October 28, 2021 the City of St. John's Housing Division received a Luminary Award from takeCHARGE NL in the Leadership for an Organization category, during a virtual awards ceremony.

The Leadership Award (Organization) recognizes an establishment's leadership and commitment to energy efficiency in Newfoundland and Labrador through activities such as planning, project development, energy management and employee engagement.



## **Revitalizing Policy**

Create municipal policy and plans that strive to meet affordable housing needs of residents

- Support building a diverse and inclusive housing stock.
- Support intensification and mixed-use developments throughout the City of St. John's

On September 7, 2021 the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan and Development Regulations were given final approval by Council. These new regulations are in effect as of October 27, 2021.

The following is reflected in Envision St. John's:

- ✓ Allow subsidiary dwelling units in as many residential zones as possible
  - ✓ Incorporate provisions for tiny homes
  - ✓ Support intensification and mixed-use development
  - ✓ Allow small apartment buildings in some residential zones
  - ✓ Make best use of land base to provide affordable housing
  - ✓ In new neighbourhoods, plan development around the parks and open space network, with an emphasis on compact, walkable residential neighbourhoods, with a mix of uses and employment areas along primary transportation corridors
  - ✓ Continue to require new developments to consult with the St. John's Transportation Commission regarding public transit infrastructure requirements.
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- Provide incentives for affordable housing developments.

**Parking Requirements:** when affordable housing applications are received, flexibility for parking requirements is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Municipal Fees: an exemption of municipal fees is given to all registered charities. The exemption expanded in 2019 to include private developers of affordable housing who have confirmed:

- ✓ 'Investment in Affordable Housing' funding from NLHC
- ✓ 'National Housing Co-Investment' funding under the National Housing Strategy
- ✓ 'Federal Lands Initiative' investment under the National Housing Strategy
- ✓ 'Innovation Fund' funding under the National Housing Strategy

Property Taxes: Real property may be exempted from the real property tax that is: held and occupied by a charitable organization or institution which is so registered under the *Income Tax Act* (Canada); or part of a low rental housing project as defined in the *National Housing Act* (Canada).

- Advocacy

### Vote Housing Campaign

The '[Vote Housing Campaign](#)' was a national non-partisan housing campaign to end homelessness and housing need in Canada. This campaign was the largest housing advocacy campaign in Canadian history to mobilize thousands of Canadians to pledge to Vote Housing in the upcoming federal election. The campaign was supported by The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, The Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

Mayors of 17 Canadian Cities, including City of St. John's Mayor Danny Breen, signed on to a federal election letter for Affordable Housing. The letter is available at <https://www.votehousing.ca/mayorsletter>

The Vote Housing Campaign was very effective. Election 2021 saw housing rise to be a dominant issue of the campaign for the first time ever.

### **Cultivating Partnership**



Work with all levels of government, private and community partners to address housing issues, support partner efforts and work collectively to create solutions.

- Continue efforts to align and combine the City of St. John's Non-Profit Housing and NL Housing applications and wait lists.

The City of St. John's had several conversations with CRA regarding granting direct access to Option Cs for applicants and tenants. CRA requires legislation that states that we can collect this information. The City of St. John's Act that governs the municipal affairs of St. John's does not reference setting rents, collecting rent, or verifying income.

We are advocating for this to be addressed in the review of the St. John's Act that is currently underway.

- Continue to act as an affordable housing facilitator.

The affordable housing facilitator continues to share housing related research, contacts and supports within the community. The Affordable Housing Newsletter continues and is released approximately every two months.

The Affordable Housing Working Group continues to meet every 2-3 months to inform priorities and actions under the Affordable Housing Strategy 2019-2028.

- Continue to support the work of End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ)

The City of St. John's is a member of the Board of Directors and the Community Advisory Board that governs EHSJ's work. The City participated in consultations to guide the development of the new St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness 2019-2024.

The City of St. John's enjoys a very positive working relationship with EHSJ.

- Support our community partners as they work towards building affordable home ownership opportunities in the community (ex. Habitat for Humanity and NL Housing's First Time Home Buyer's program).

A letter of Intent with Habitat for Humanity was formalized in 2019 which outlines the intended gifting of a portion of 28 Eric Street, subject to successful rezoning, development approval and collaboration with the Community Garden located on site. The portion of land to be redeveloped as affordable housing was successfully rezoned in May 2021 from the Open Space (O) Zone to the Residential High Density (R3) Zone. This project has not yet received development approval.

- Work with partners to improve transportation systems as they relate to housing affordability

The City continues to engage the Provincial Government and neighboring municipalities in discussions to develop and improve the regional transportation system so that affordable housing units can be accessed, particularly via public transit.

### Kelly's Brook Shared-Use-Path

On October 2, 2020 the provincial and federal government joined the City to announce funding to move ahead with Kelly's Brook Trail upgrades, with over 80% of the cost being covered by other levels of government. Kelly's Brook Shared-Use-Path is the first catalyst project coming from the Bike St John's Master Plan. The detailed design of this shared-use-path is on-going and will be completed soon.



The shared-use path will extend from King's Bridge Road to Columbus Drive. It is mostly in place as a granular walking trail today, linking several neighbourhoods through an important east-west greenway that largely parallels Empire Avenue. Its goal is to provide an attractive and continuous 4.8 km active transportation route in St. John's, connecting popular destinations and amenities along the way. The shared-use path will be designed for people of all ages and abilities. Public engagement was held for residents and stakeholders to share their input and feedback on the project. In March 2021, the "What We Heard" document summarizing feedback from the Kelly's Brook Shared-Use Path public engagement process was released. More information can be found on the [Engage! St. John's page](#).



## **Informing Action**

Raise awareness and educate the impact housing needs has on our community's health, sustainable growth and economic security.

- Increase the understanding of affordable housing, housing need, and associated best Practices

### Indigenous Cultural Diversity Training

The City of St. John's, End Homelessness St. John's, and First Light partnered to offer free Indigenous Cultural Diversity Training for frontline housing workers from non-profit agencies and for landlords and property managers in St. John's.

The 8-hour virtual training for frontline housing workers was a comprehensive session, focused on discussion and participation. The training covered Indigenous groups in our province, history, culture, and housing and homelessness issues for Indigenous Peoples. This training included many opportunities for experiential learning, questions, and understanding how to apply the information learned during the day.

The two-hour landlord session was a brief introduction to the diversity of Indigenous groups in Newfoundland & Labrador and touched on topics such as cultural humility, Residential Schools, Indigenous homelessness & accessing housing services.

### Demystifying Funding Opportunities for Affordable Housing

On November 23, 2021, the City of St. John's and partners offered a webinar titled "Demystifying Funding Opportunities for Affordable Housing". This webinar was an opportunity to hear from multiple funding partners at one time to learn about what funding is available and how the streams can work together to achieve an affordable housing project.

Presenters included:

- Krista Gladney, Affordable Housing and Development Facilitator, City of St. John's

- Hope Jamieson, Program Manager & Regional Energy Coach, Community Housing Transformation Centre
- Jessica Golden, Program Outreach Officer – Green Municipal Fund, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Marina Sloutsky, Outreach and Project Development Specialist, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

### National Housing Day Virtual Forum

On November 25, the City of St. John's, End Homelessness St. John's, and partners offered a National Housing Day forum with the theme "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Housing".

The agenda was as follows:

- Opening Remarks
  - Councillor Ophelia Ravencroft, City of St. John's Housing Lead
  - Doug Pawson, Executive Director, End Homelessness St. John's
- Empower's Experience of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Housing
  - Taylor Cassel, Housing Support Worker, Empower
  - Joby Fleming, Advocacy Program Manager, Empower
- The New Accessibility Act / Universal Design, A Winning Solution for Everyone
  - Craig Reid, President Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL, Past President of the Universal Design Network NL
- Breakout rooms for discussions about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Housing
- Provincial Initiatives
  - Minister John Abbott
- Closing remarks

### Community Art Project

From Monday, November 22 to 26, an art project titled '*What does your home mean to you?*' was on display at City Hall. Each City of St. John's Community Centre submitted a piece that showed participants' perspective on what home means to them. The art pieces were used to construct a small home that was displayed in the Great Hall.



- Increase understanding and advocacy of Universal Design Standards

At this year's National Housing Day event, Craig Reid, President of the President Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL and Past President of the Universal Design Network NL presented on Universal Design.

We also promoted an event offered by the Universal Design Network NL on our Affordable Housing newsletter and New Lease newsletter and shared with other relevant contacts. The event was titled "Universal Design: Past, Present, and Future!" and included the following guest speakers:

- Rob Menchenton, Architect, Fougere Menchenton Architects
  - Dion Regular, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury NL
  - Abby Wilansky, Project Designer, Kimmel Studio Architects
  - Jamie Shipley, Senior Advisor, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Discourage Not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) attitudes

Development of a social marketing strategy that addresses and alleviates concerns related to affordable housing developments is ongoing. A social marketing campaign has been created to tackle the fears associated with affordable housing through increased information (awareness campaigns, success stories, etc.) and focusing on the benefits of affordable housing. This campaign "What does 'affordable housing' mean to you?" was launched in November 2020. It uses short videos with inanimate objects that are common to every home and the script is aimed at producing self-reflection for the viewer to chip away at the perceptions of affordable housing. The campaign aims to debunk some of the myths associated with affordable housing and to encourage individuals to reflect on their own perceptions and beliefs. NIMBY – or 'not in my backyard' - is the resistance to housing projects based on stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes and policies that have the effect of creating barriers for people.

The videos are available on the City's YouTube channel and the campaign will continue to run on social media channels.