

INFORMATION NOTE

Title: Affordable Housing Update

Date Prepared: 09/17/2019

Report To: Affordable Housing Working Group (AHWG)

Issue: Affordable Housing Update

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

Here is an update on some of the main areas of work:

CITY OF ST. JOHN'S HOUSING NEEDS STUDY UPDATE: The final housing needs assessment report was introduced through an information note at the July 10th Committee of the Whole meeting and published on the City of St. John's. A presentation will be held on Housing Need in St. John's and new research and practices to respond to housing trends. Our Housing Need consultant David Harrison is an urban planner, housing advocate and economic development consultant based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. David will present on the data as well as his findings and analysis associated with his oversight of the City of St. John's Housing Needs Assessment Report. Following David's presentation, René Babin, Outreach specialist, Canada mortgage and Housing Corporation will speak. René will introduce best practices in housing for communities. He will discuss how we can set up mechanisms to encourage aging in place and will share recent CMHC research and resources. This presentation will help attendees think about housing in a different way and to consider different housing models that meet the needs identified in the Housing Needs Assessment. This event is taking place on Oct 4th and is hosted by the City of St. John's in partnership with CMHC. We hope the AHWG members can be present for this event and contribute to sharing it within their networks

LAND INVENTORY (of City owned land): Work has been underway to identify further parcels of City owned land for potential projects. A new list is being circulated to relevant internal departments for comment in order to add additional parcels to our inventory list.

Plans for one parcel of land will be discussed at the AHWG meeting.

ADVOCACY LETTER:

An advocacy letter has been prepared for Federal Election candidates urging them to make affordable housing a campaign priority. Specifically, to include within their campaign the need to increase access to capital for new social and nonprofit housing developments, provide ongoing funding for repairs and increase federal investments to social supports and supportive housing solutions. The advocacy letter is currently with senior City executive for review. We expect to be able to update the AHWG on this at our September 24th meeting.

CENTRAL HOUSING WAITLIST: We continue to have conversations with CRA re. 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 (governing the municipal affairs of St. John's) outlines authority to acquire land, enter into housing agreements, provide housing, adopt Building Codes etc. but does not reference setting rents, collecting rent or verifying income. We have agreements signed with CMHC/NLHC that require us to verify income and dictate how we must calculate rent however these are agreements and do not provide the authority required. NLHC were granted permission under the Housing Corporation Act and the Intergovernmental Affairs Act. CSJ does not qualify under either of these. We are actively trying to address this in the review of the St. John's Act that is currently underway.

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SOCIAL MARKETING STRATEGY: A subcommittee was established with marketing expert representation from Stella's, Choices for Youth, End Homelessness St. John's and the City of St. John's. The most recent meeting was held on August 16th. The subcommittee reviewed and discussed the proposed communications and social marketing plan. Work is underway to develop fact sheets that will debunk some of the fears associated with affordable housing projects and the meeting emphasized the need to use the community engagement tools outlined in the NIMBY toolkit to tackle perceived fears of lowered property values, increased crime, increased traffic etc. A long-term social marketing campaign was proposed to the group with the goal of supporting mixed income and integrated neighbourhoods. Next step is to finalize design and copy during the month of September. This will be vetted through the community partners. There will also be an opportunity for our committee members to bring back information to their organizations for input.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY RETROFIT PROJECT: An energy audit was conducted on a vacant unit targeted for the energy retrofit project. Energy upgrades are now beginning to be implemented.

NON-MARKET HOUSING TOOL: All data for this project has now been mapped against intensification areas and transit routes. Mapping tool was vetted through the interdepartmental affordable housing working group and minor modifications are being made. Screen shot of the internal tool will be shared with the AHWG at our meeting.

NIMBY TOOLKIT: Partnering with Poverty Reduction, Department Children, Seniors and Social Development the NIMBY toolkit is being updated. Discussion on draft case studies that were circulated to the AHWG will take place as part of the broader AHWG agenda.

SUCCESSFUL TENANCIES: Some initial work has been done to connect with key service providers to deliver safe and healthy housing presentations again focusing on educating on the effective identification and reporting of property standard violations. The first presentation is taking place September 20th with Correction Services Canada. We are working to set up additional presentations with relevant stakeholders.

EVOLUTION OF NON-MARKET HOUSING PROJECT: Work on this project has paused. We will require assistance to identify a research avenue to develop this project further.

Conclusion/Next Steps: This update is to inform of progress as well as obtain further direction and guidance from the Affordable Housing Working Group.

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