

**STRATHCONA COUNTY AFFORDABLE HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT**

Report Purpose

To update County Council on the activities and achievements of the Strathcona County Affordable Housing Implementation Committee from July 2008 to date.

Recommendation

THAT Council receive the Strathcona County Affordable Housing Implementation Committee Final Report as information.

Council History

May 20, 2008 - Council established the Strathcona County Affordable Housing Implementation Committee.

March 9, 2010 - Council received the Affordable Housing Implementation Committee's Annual Activity Report as information.

Background/Justification

Strategic Plan:

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| <i>Governance</i> | | | <i>Community Well Being</i> | | √ |
| <i>Community Sustainability</i> | | √ | <i>Economic Viability</i> | | √ |
| <i>Service Delivery</i> | | <i>Stakeholder Communication</i> | | √ | <i>Resource Management</i> |

Policy: n/a

Legislative/Legal: Committees of Council are established and governed by the Strathcona County Boards and Committees Bylaw. Section 6.2 of the bylaw requires committees to provide an annual report to Council.

Economic: To assist in the development of affordable housing, the Province has allocated grant funding which has totaled **\$12,387,159**.

Social: The Affordable Housing Implementation Committee supports the Social Sustainability Framework as the focus of the committee is to support social inclusion, community connectedness, social responsibility, and health and well being, by removing barriers to housing for a variety of vulnerable people, allowing people to remain in their community, and by providing safe, adequate housing, providing a range of housing options for those who have different needs than the majority. The need for affordable housing is identified in the framework as a key priority.

Environmental: The creation of affordable housing in the community will assist in preventing younger generations from leaving the community, thereby keeping a family unit together in the same community which lessens the transportation burden on the family unit and produces fewer GHG emissions.

Stakeholder: This committee represents a community perspective regarding the implementation of affordable housing in the County.

Interdepartmental: Family and Community Services and Planning and Development Services

Summary

Under the Municipal Sustainability Housing Program and Capital Enhancement Program, the Province has provided grant funding to assist Strathcona County to increase the supply of affordable housing and transitional housing units. To access this funding, a housing needs assessment was conducted which identified gaps and provided information which allowed Strathcona County to make recommendations for an Affordable Housing Plan. The creation of the Affordable Housing Implementation Committee was one of the first steps in initiating the plan.

Since July 2008, the Committee has met with administration to discuss affordable housing proposals that have been submitted to the County and to discuss affordable housing projects that the Committee may pursue in the future. The Committee is scheduled to dissolve on December 31, 2011.

Enclosures

- I. Strathcona County Affordable Housing Implementation Committee Terms of Reference (CPIA #11540)

- II. Strathcona County Affordable Housing Implementation Committee Final Report (CPIA #16341)

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Affordable Housing Implementation Committee: Sharon Bunnin*

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AFFORDABLE HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

I. COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEE

- A. Members at Large: Five (5)

II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In keeping with Strathcona County's Strategic Plan and more specifically the Capstone policies dealing with Governance and Community Well Being, an Affordable Housing Implementation Committee shall oversee implementation actions of the Affordable Housing Plan and provide recommendations to Council.

III. DUTIES

- A. Explore a framework and action to encourage more incentives that includes affordable rental and special needs housing.
- B. Work with the developer and homebuilder to encourage construction of more modest and diverse forms of market housing.
- C. Make recommendations to Council on strategic property and dwelling unit purchases.
- D. Provide an annual report that evaluates the outcomes and effectiveness of affordable housing initiatives for each of the three years of provincial program funding.

IV. MEETINGS

The Committee shall hold meetings four (4) times per year or as determined by the Affordable Housing Implementation Committee.

V. LIAISON

The manager of Corporate Planning and Intergovernmental Affairs will attend meetings with other department representation as deemed necessary.

VI. DISSOLUTION

The committee will dissolve by December 31, 2011.

Strathcona

County

Affordable Housing Implementation Committee 2011 Final Report

Committee Background

Following the announcement from the Government of Alberta that Strathcona County would be provided grant funding under the Municipal Sustainability Housing Program and Capital Enhancement Program, Strathcona County completed a Housing Needs Assessment in January 2008. The report includes four major housing gaps in Strathcona County, including:

- Affordable Market Rental Housing;
- Entry Level Ownership Housing;
- Subsidized Rental Housing; and
- Special Needs Housing.

Also cited in the Assessment, are the population groups facing the biggest housing affordability challenges, including:

- People living on Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH);
- Lone parents under the age of 35;
- Singles under the age of 25;
- Single seniors on fixed income with low assets; and
- Women leaving abusive homes.

As a result of the Housing Needs Assessment's recommendations, Strathcona County Council created the Affordable Housing Implementation Committee (AHIC) in July 2008 to assist in the allocation of the funding for the creation of new and transitional affordable housing units. Under the committee's terms of reference, the Committee is to advise Council regarding:

- A. a framework and action to encourage more incentives that includes affordable rental and special needs housing
- B. working with developers and homebuilders to encourage construction of more modest and diverse forms of market housing
- C. Recommendations on strategic property and dwelling unit purchases.

Public membership on the Committee has included:

- Deborah Howes, an arbitrator/mediator with a background in condominiums
- Doug King, who has experience in local development
- Ayanna Inniss, a member of the Northern Alberta Cooperative Housing Association
- Sharon Bunnin, chair of Strathcona County's Seniors Advisory Committee.
- Colleen McMorran – served for 2 years (past member)
- Shelley Busko – served for 1 year (past member)

Four current public members meet quarterly with department representatives from Planning & Development Services, Family & Community Services, and Corporate Planning & Intergovernmental Affairs.

Summary of Work

To date, the Committee has assisted in the allocation of funding totalling over 12 million dollars towards housing projects and programs which will result in the creation of over 200 affordable housing units. As well, the Committee has worked to create awareness throughout the community about the need for, and importance of, affordable housing.

Specific Activities

The committee has assisted in the review and monitoring of grant allocations to four not-for-profit organizations including:

Habitat for Humanity - Edmonton (HFH-E): Total allocation of \$1.7 M for the creation of 6 townhouse units and 4 duplex units for low to modest income families.

Pioneer Housing Foundation (PHF) – Seniors Housing: \$4.25 M allocation to construct 60 self contained units which will provide affordable market rental accommodation for seniors.

Pioneer Housing Foundation (PHF) – Community Housing: Following PHF's mandate change to include community housing, an additional \$5.0 M was allocated for the creation of a 69 unit community housing complex, to be constructed by the end of 2012. The target demographics for these units will be older non-seniors on AISH and single parent families.

Strathcona Schizophrenia Foundation (SSF): \$158,000 allocation to purchase two condo units for housing those who suffer from mental illness.

Robin Hood Association (RHA): \$800,000 to develop 38 housing units for adults with developmental disabilities.

The Committee has also supported the allocation of a pool of grant dollars to two programs available to Strathcona County residents:

Secondary Suites Grant Program: \$575,000 has been allocated to this program which offers a maximum of \$15,000 to residents who want to create a new suite in their home, and \$10,000 for those who want to upgrade an existing suite. Grant recipients will be required to enter into an agreement with the County to ensure that the suite remains at a maximum of 85% of market rent for at least 5 years, to an occupant who makes 80% or less of the median income. To date, four suites have been created through this program.

The HOME Program: \$250,000 has been allocated to this partnership which will provide training to potential home owners, who will then be eligible to receive up to \$5,000 of down-payment assistance to purchase their first home. To date, five sessions have been held, with approximately 200 attendees. To date, \$125,000 has been granted to 25 first time home owners in Strathcona County.

In addition to advising Council on affordable housing allocations, the Committee also worked on promoting affordable housing programs, and raising awareness regarding the benefits of creating affordable housing in the County; stressing the importance of *“housing in our community, for our community”*. This message was communicated in brochures, regular newspaper advertising, increased web presence, and at two events in 2011:

Seniors Active Living Conference, April 16
Great Canadian Trade Fair, April 8, 9 & 10

Challenges / Recommendations

1. Awareness and marketing to change attitudes towards affordable housing

The Committee recommends continued Council endorsement of the creation of affordable housing awareness and marketing campaigns that relay the benefits and positive outcomes that diversity of housing will bring to the community. The challenge in promoting affordable housing is the NIMBY (not in my back yard) perspective, often based on mis-information. A significant way to succeed in this marketing initiative is to leverage the upcoming marketing campaign through the Capital Region Board. This will not only ensure a big “bang for the County buck” but will also help citizens understand that the affordable housing issue is truly regional. The Committee has advised administration to focus remaining administrative funding from the Affordable Housing Municipal Sustainability Initiative towards having Strathcona County capitalize on the synergy that will be created in the Capital Region and focus attention on County specific programs and housing projects.

2. Secondary suites and future zoning

The Secondary Suites Grant Program has not had the expected uptake to date. The Committee recommends that secondary suites become listed as a primary use in appropriate neighbourhoods to encourage the creation of suites in the County. Currently, at best, secondary suites are listed as a discretionary use in many neighbourhoods, and in many newer neighbourhoods are not listed as a use at all. Appropriate planning and zoning amendments are required to reflect parking and other realities in established or new neighbourhoods. As well, look to a more visible and aggressive marketing campaign of the grant program and target setting for uptake and monitoring of progress towards achieving those goals. This discussion about where secondary suites will be allowed will invariably lead to a more holistic dialogue about density in the community and what that will look like in the future. The AHIC feels this discussion needs to happen sooner rather than later. As well, the need to increase the maximum grant funding for renovations/new suite from \$10,000/\$15,000 to \$15,000/\$25,000 may be required to assist applicants in better covering high costs associated with the creation of their suite (i.e. the cost of separate heating and ventilation for the suite that is independent from the house).

3. Availability of stock or land for affordable housing

The Committee became aware early on that the County is severely limited in availability of land owned by the County or others that could be developed, purchased or swapped to enable an affordable housing project to proceed. Council should consider how to address the availability of land for such projects and whether to create its own land bank for this purpose. As well, requirements for affordable housing to be included in new or re-developments may assist in ensuring that affordable housing becomes a necessity in future planning.

4. Long term commitment to addressing affordability

Council should consider what happens next. The AHIC has fulfilled its current mandate but the issue of affordable housing will continue into the foreseeable future. Recognizing that community

affordability is a crucial component to the overall prosperity of that community, work remains to be done to ensure there are affordable options for every demographic that will participate in creating that prosperity (both socially and economically). The AHIC feels this may take the form of another committee (perhaps ad-hoc) whose mandate is to work with a variety of different entities in the affordable housing portfolio in the region to address the longer term issues surrounding affordability. It would be critical to ensure that the membership in the committee came from all areas with an influence including, but not limited to, the private market place, different orders of government and relevant learning institutions. As well, the Province has recently allocated funding through a Request for Proposal process. When Strathcona County is in a position to request funding through the RFP, the role of a public committee to review and provide support for the project may be beneficial in the endeavour to secure grant funding.

5. Continue support for affordable housing organizations

The County should consider continuing to support Habitat for Humanity (HfH) building projects until HfH reaches a threshold number of units in the community to become self-funding. We understand HfH uses the income for existing units in the community towards future units in the same community. We also understand when the threshold number of existing units is met HfH may be able to build at least one additional unit in the community each year.

6. Strathcona County commitment

The Committee encourages Strathcona County to give thought into what level of commitment they are willing to put forward in the effort to address future affordability. To date, the fiscal contributions toward projects and programs have largely been from other orders of government. The AHIC feels that although the responsibility for housing should remain the responsibility of the Province, where it makes sense to benefit Strathcona County, on the whole, affordable housing subsidization should be considered as an opportunity that needs to be explored. To continue to rely solely on Provincial funds places the community at considerable risk in not being able to respond to the demands for a diverse housing base needed during Alberta boom-bust cycles. Continued yearly financial support for programs such as The HOME Program which has proven successful will ensure that affordable housing remains a priority for the County.