

RURAL HOUSING SYMPOSIUM  
May 24 and 25, 2007

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This symposium was the result of seven Round Tables that AHANS has held around the province since September of 2006. The areas involved in the Round Table process were:

Truro,  
Sydney,  
Antigonish,  
Bridgewater,  
Yarmouth,  
Preston, and  
Kentville.

The symposium involved a range of people (over 30 attended during the course of the 2 day event) – some who had previously attended a Round Table in their area, and others who were either unable to attend or hadn't heard of the process until the symposium was announced.

There were several representatives from all levels of government, but most attendees were representing groups and associations that are dealing with housing or larger poverty issues with a variety of stakeholders or marginalized groups in their areas.

As an introduction, the overwhelming themes garnered from the provincial Round Tables were presented.

\* (Presentation given by Kasia Tota - see attached full report)

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Response Points From Symposium  
Members:

- ❖ Environmental issues should be added to Preston's list of specifics.
- ❖ New housing models that have been proven elsewhere (outside the province) could answer some of the issues raised.
- ❖ There is concern about the amount of time that Nova Scotia is taking to come up with a plan for the housing trust fund that has been transferred by the federal government.
- ❖ Acknowledgement of the problems inherent when working with a community-based board when there is no government involvement – no buy-in.
- ❖ Acknowledgement that these issues are shared around the country, that the country is rich, that these problems should not exist.
- ❖ Acknowledgement that this may be the first time ever that a group has come together from around the province to look at solutions we can share.

After this presentation, sessions were held to answer the following questions:

What is working well in your community?

Based on this...

What is your vision of how it could be?

Based on the patterns from these 2 conversations...

What policy recommendations would you like to make that would take us towards this vision?

The following represents an encapsulation of discussions and conclusions from the members of the Rural Housing Symposium.

#### OUR VISIONS –

##### Consensus building:

- Partner with established community leadership through church groups and organizations.
- Strong co-op movement based on farmers' co-op as a model (which supports the community by creating awareness); develop this synergy by bringing players together (carpenters, designers, planners)
- Continue to develop government boards so that their priorities are aligned with the community's vision - give more power to community boards in government.
- All levels of government should come together to listen to people's concerns and needs.
- Work on projects that entire community participates in/benefits from.

##### Financial options:

- Get all building material suppliers to get involved in building affordable housing.
- Fund raising: use hospital fund-raising model (car, small craft, etc. lottery)
- Community economic development: well-paying jobs = affordable housing
- Leverage money from small fund nuggets.
- A community money pot that receives funds from government to match community donations (All the community strengths lead towards fund-raising, and the process will strengthen the community further.)

##### Planned approach:

- Sustainability needs must be recognized within the model.
- Build mixed neighbourhoods to prevent stigma. (Stop segregating)
- Have units available in every neighbourhood that is affordable - appropriate housing should be available anywhere.
- Create assisted sustainable units for seniors
- Create consumer driven housing starts: co-ops/group homes/seniors/family/etc.

##### Capacity Building:

- Mobilization: a public process to bring out the issues of affordable housing, with planned reviews built in. It is essential that the community see that this is a crisis. Then they will act.
- Use community skills to develop housing (perhaps through community colleges) - provide jobs; people may not be licensed but have skills; use the experience to gain the license
- Bring diverse interests together – keep focused.

- Create non-profit organizations that are not totally dependent on government.
- Formation of a “grass roots” government for political accountability – to mobilize portfolios involved in housing by having a summit on affordable housing (Be inclusive/innovative...include education and criminal justice depts. Why? Youth are being incarcerated due to tragedies related to sub-standard housing. )

Community visions:

- Support model that includes effective parenting, with assistance.
- Educate children to be self-sufficient.
- Community transportation modeled on Kings Transit.
- Capacity building within the community, so that the process can be continually successful.

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OUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Housing as a provincial department on it’s own merit could develop affordable housing with input from local community development agencies. Government should actively participate in community housing development activities, allowing guidelines to be flexible for local priorities.
2. With both government and community input, Community Housing Co-operatives would become the local structure, representing the needs of each

community. They would be responsible for:

- ❖ an inventory of needs
- ❖ facilitation of land banking
- ❖ preparation of the process the delivery
- ❖ provision of continuity for sustainable operations

Through this process of networking and building partnerships, the community is capacity building, becoming aware of their own strengths and abilities. The government is also more available to the public, able to share their knowledge, and aid in the process. The outcome will be something we can do together.

Where a community is able to raise resources (financial + in-kind donations + sweat equity) the government matches the equity while maintaining community control over spending. Establish a system of accountability that ensures all activities related to the development and maintenance of social housing (including rural housing associations) is used to:

- ❖ develop community capacity
- ❖ develop skills and employment
- ❖ foster a sense of pride and ownership in the community

STEPS TOWARDS THESE GOALS

**Needs assessment**

Inventory of housing needs within each community

**Develop awareness programs** within communities that include:

- ❖ facts, figures, needs
- ❖ what can the community provide? (including sweat equity)
- ❖ what can we do together?

**Prepare programs of delivery:**

- ❖ find land - Look at land banks and current municipal housing.
- ❖ deeds/clear title to property must be easier to obtain.
- ❖ design and concept - Provide services with a continuity of sustainable operations.

- ❖ develop financial partnerships
- ❖ grants that respond to escalating costs for seniors living on fixed incomes

“Nothing succeeds like success.” instill a sense of pride and ownership among people who live in affordable housing

- ❖ hold meetings from start to finish of projects
- ❖ foster involvement and a sense of community

•Government should match money generated by community and keep control of resources in the community.

•High density building in rural areas would bring services.