

Housing Nova Scotians: A Fresh Look

Strategic Assessment and Summary

As a social, economic and cultural good, housing is a major sector of the social economy and of enormous consequence to all Nova Scotians. The production, deployment, financing, maintenance and management of housing have major implications for employment, transportation, land use, environmental, social, and economic and environmental planning and development.

- In Canada, three, sometimes four levels of government operate simultaneously. In Nova Scotia, the three levels frequently contend with one another, when good sense would clearly demand active co-operation, collaboration and mutual respect.
- Without a profound change, the many parts of our housing 'system' will continue to work at cross-purposes. It can only get worse which will be a waste of energy, ideas, and limited resources, as well as a wasted opportunity of major proportions. It doesn't matter who is responsible for this unhappy state of affairs. What matters is that when it comes to housing, leadership in the field is a constitutional responsibility born by Canadian provinces.
- Experience and the example of others, tell us Nova Scotia could be making far better use of its limited resources for the greater benefit of all Nova Scotians. The private sector has neither the will nor the capacity to operate where it can't make a profit. Governments have neither the human nor the financial resources to meet all of the urgent needs unmet by the private sector.
- Were Nova Scotia's housing 'system' working to its full potential, it could not afford to treat housing as a social service or fail to leverage all of the resources available to it. In contrast, the housing agencies of other provinces (e.g. New Brunswick, Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador) have been adept at leveraging their limited resources to gain additional resources from their respective communities and housing sectors. As models of co-operation and collaboration, their example is both illuminating and informative.

At one time 'Housing' was a fully-staffed, stand-alone Ministry of the Provincial Government of Nova Scotia. At present, no one Minister speaks for the housing sector as a whole, which is after all a large and complex system of many interacting parts including the bits under the Department of Community Services.

- Housing requires an independent agency or Ministry.
- The Agency would embrace all segments of the housing sector and use its resources to leverage all the community capital available to it.
- It would lead in leveraging much-needed social equity through more effective intra-governmental collaboration and cooperation.
- Its Minister or Director would benefit from the advice of a broadly representative Housing Secretariat.

- The Secretariat would: monitor housing need and supply; monitor the existing stock and report regularly on its condition; report to the Minister of Housing, both to advocate for the Sector and advise the Minister annually on the priority of housing needs and supply. The Secretariat would also be a resource to and advocate for the Sector. It would be proactive in its advocacy, animate discussion and debate, and support them through its research and networking. The Secretariat would animate the development of a Provincial Housing Strategy and Action Plan with targets and performance indicators. The Secretariat would have a staff and the financial wherewithal, provided by the Minister, necessary to support it.

AHANS therefore requests the Government to launch a Province-wide 'Affordable Housing Consultation' with a mandate to include the Housing Sector as a whole. The Consultation would be undertaken by a Government appointed panel of six to eight persons, broadly representative of Nova Scotia's housing sector. The Consultation would be thoroughly transparent and widely inclusive to ensure broad support and smooth implementation. The Panel would consult widely across the Province and where appropriate with counterparts and colleagues throughout the Atlantic Region and elsewhere in Canada. The Panel should be given a time frame of no more than 12 months in which to research and prepare a final report. AHANS would be pleased to participate in such a panel and would be more than pleased to assist in developing its configuration and mandate.

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