

A Decent, Appropriate and Affordable Home for Every Nova Scotian:

Housing is a critical determinant of one's quality of life. Good or bad, where and how we are housed affects every one of us, every day of our lives. It affects our states of physical and mental health and well-being, our abilities to learn and retain knowledge, our ability to obtain secure and rewarding employment, and later in life to manage a comfortable retirement. In short, as a social, economic and cultural good, housing impacts the lives of all Nova Scotians in countless ways. Arguably then, concerted action on the production, deployment, financing, maintenance and management of housing would go a long way to addressing the government's three stated goals to bring us "back to balance", "grow the economy", and "create better health outcomes".

About 94% of our housing stock is privately owned, the major part of it by individual home owners, the balance by rental property owners. Just 6% of our housing stock is the direct responsibility of our provincial government. To put it another way, its role as an instrument of directed social policy and planning is but one of many roles housing plays in our lives. More to the point, it is the affordability, accessibility, sustainability and condition of the province's housing stock as a whole that must be of principal concern to all Nova Scotians. For, whether one is homeless or on the verge of homelessness, whether one is living in owned or rented housing which is in poor condition, inappropriate, overcrowded, unaffordable, or unsustainable, one has precious few alternatives. For as it stands, some of our social and public housing is inappropriately located and some has outlived its usefulness, while experience tells us the 6% only grows a few units at a time. In other words, there will never be enough social and public housing to meet the demand. Thus, when it comes to 'balancing' our overall housing 'health', we will have to look beyond government-funded housing programmes to the whole housing sector including all of its parts - public, private and not-for-profit.

Our housing 'system' is not working to its full potential. The private sector does what it does very well but is limited in how much it can do. At the same time, three levels of government operating at cross purposes and under extreme financial duress are limited in what they can achieve. As a result, the gap between our housing needs and our capacity to deliver decent and appropriate housing that is both affordable and sustainable is widening. If our housing 'system' was working effectively, it would be deploying the wherewithal of our governments to leverage the resources of the private and non-profit sectors. It would be making the most of all of the resources available to it. It would be using those limited resources to leverage significant additional resources from each and every one of its communities and constituencies. And it would be deploying its powers and authorities more strategically, more imaginatively and creatively to mobilize and guide broad support across the housing sector as a whole.

The NS Housing and Homelessness Network:

The NS Housing and Homelessness Network has deep roots in Nova Scotia's long history of advocacy and action on issues relating to the production, distribution, ownership and administration of housing. In November 2012, a like-minded group of community-based service providers, municipal, provincial and federal government departments and agencies, property owners and housing developers gathered in convention, committed to working collaboratively on issues related to housing and homelessness.

Our goal is to carry this historical work to another level, and by doing so to ensure that by the year 2022, there is enough decent, appropriate and financially and environmentally sustainable housing in the Province such that every Nova Scotian is living in a home in which he or she is comfortable and financially secure.

Guiding Principles:

- The Housing and Homelessness Network is a province-wide organization which is concerned for the well-being of all Nova Scotians, be they young or old, urban or rural. Thus, the Network's interest in housing extends to the whole universe of housing in NS, be it rented or privately owned, in the private, non-profit or public sector.
- The NS Housing and Homelessness Network supports a Housing First approach to the delivery of human service policies and programmes
- As housing touches us in many ways, the NS Housing and Homelessness Network always takes a multi-sectoral approach to the issues with which it deals
- NS Housing and Homelessness Network is committed to the principle that it should 'Do no harm'. Decent and appropriate housing costs what it costs. But badly built, poorly located and cheaply finished housing bears huge hidden costs.
- The NS Housing and Homelessness Network will make a difference. It will have impacts. And it will monitor and measure the outcomes
- In its activities, the NS Housing and Homelessness Network is guided by the principle of the 'Double Bottom Line' whereby one not only provides a good or service for a fee, but does so in ways which generate a greater social benefit at one and the same time.
- The NS Housing and Homelessness Network promotes approaches to the development of decent, appropriate and sustainable residential neighbourhoods and communities which are community-based and supported, and which are broadly inclusive and mix incomes, tenure forms and uses
- The NS Housing and Homelessness Network believes that while government(s) are not the answer to every problem, inevitably one or another or all 3 will have a hand in the solution.

The active participation of our governments will be essential to the success of our initiative. Therefore, the Network will actively seek the collaboration with all 3 levels of government.

Strategies:

The NS Housing and Homelessness Network will develop and publicize a made-in -Nova-Scotia housing strategy. That Strategy will embrace the housing universe as a whole and be multi-sectoral in its reach. The strategy will be a 'living' document. It will set targets and monitor outcomes and will be updated annually. Whether it be privately owned or in the public, non-profit, or private rental-sectors, the NS Housing and Homelessness Strategy will have as its 3 major objectives, to:

1. upgrade and protect the existing stock of affordable housing against conversion, demolition or undue inflationary pressure;
2. better utilize the existing stock of affordable housing; and,
3. make significant annual additions to affordable housing stock.

Tactics:

To these ends, the NS Housing and Homelessness Network will:

- be proactive in seeking partners and building a broad-based, province-wide partnership;
- be a leader, convener, researcher, advocate, demonstrator, guardian, and teacher;
- it will lobby Government and respond to its announcements, policies and programmes, and promote useful new to Nova Scotia concepts/policies e.g. land trusts, housing trusts, a registry and support to rooming house owners, etc.;
- serve as a catalyst by bringing together all of the stakeholders (e.g. NP's with IPONS);
- undertake and publicize successful 'demonstration' projects (get some 'easy' wins) and focused initiatives (e.g. with rental property owners, with rooming house owners, with church groups looking to downsize, with service organizations, etc.);
- establish metrics by which to measure and differentiate housing needs, then set targets and monitor outcomes;
- build a pool of experts (planning, design, construction, finance, policy, social animation, etc.) and be a resource across the Province;
- educate public official and politicians in all levels of government as well as property owners and housing developers to the creative alternatives and resources (precedents, best practices, models, expertise, financial, institutional, government programmes, etc.) available to them;
- build capacity across all sectors through education and outreach;

- promote financial literacy and social enterprise approach to the development of decent and affordable housing. Double bottom line - "Doing well by doing good";
- develop affordable housing and promote strategies which sustain its continuing affordability;
- develop and promote strategies for the development of affordable housing which exploit its cross-cutting implications for education, health care, the justice system, transportation, the environment, employment, etc.; and,
- start with what's at hand. Inventory the sources of capital which are immediately available (existing buildings, land, sweat equity, ideas, equity in an existing stock, etc.). Then going forward, leverage what's available.

Governance:

The NS Housing and Homelessness Network is building a multi-sectoral organization in which members (groups/individuals) are empowered to actively pursue their particular interests in housing and homelessness. We are therefore proposing an organizational structure that functions as a horizontal network of powerful, semi-autonomous caucuses or working groups - each focused on a particular theme, for example:

- Rural and Small Town Caucuses;
- Caucus on Housing Policy, Programmes and Government Relations;
- Caucus for the Upgrading and Protection of the Existing Stock of Owned/Rented Affordable Housing;
- Caucus on Homelessness; and,
- Caucus on the Development of New Affordable Housing

Caucuses would be convened from time to time as the need arises. Each would be led by a small group of committed individuals with strong leadership qualities. Each caucus would establish its own agenda within the frame of the Network's philosophy and mindful of the positions assumed and actions taken by the other caucuses. Each caucus would be responsible for its internal and external communications.

At 2012 Network Conference, each caucus will select a Chair and Co-Chair, one of whom will agree to sit on the Network's Steering Committee for the next year, the renewed Steering Committee will be responsible for organizing the 2013 Convention, overseeing and supporting the work of the caucuses and establishing a website and online newsletter, etc.

Attached please find a copy of the Steering Committee's Report back to the membership of the 2011 Conference. Early in the summer of 2012, a draft was developed and circulated to the members of the Steering Committee for their review. The attached is the revised version. **Please pay particular attention to page 4 where under the sub-heading 'Governance', a section is devoted to the pivotal role of five named caucuses in the work of the Network. At Registration check-in on Thursday, please identify the caucus in which you want to participate for the balance of the Conference.**