



HOUSING  
NOVA  
SCOTIANS:  
A  
FRESH  
LOOK



Affordable  
Housing  
Association of Nova Scotia

# Housing Nova Scotians:

## A Fresh Look

*PRODUCED BY AFFORDABLE HOUSING ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA*

*MARCH 2011*



# HOUSING NOVA SCOTIANS: A FRESH LOOK

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## **PART ONE:**

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### ***SECTION 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

The data for this Report was gathered through stakeholder consultations conducted in 2009-10.

In all, eight communities across the province were consulted. AHANS would like to thank all of its members, partner organizations and the many dedicated individuals who participated in these important stakeholder consultations.

## ***AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

The findings of our current and earlier consultations, as well as the ready examples of other jurisdictions and the noteworthy achievements of our own housing departments in decades passed, tell us that Nova Scotia could be making better use of its limited resources, to greater effect, and for the greater benefit of all Nova Scotians.

To this end, the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia encourages the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia to: implement a comprehensive province-wide housing consultation; and in conjunction with that consultation to initiate a far reaching review of its housing policies and programmes, existing housing stock, and the house-building and property industries.

We strongly urge that such a consultation see the housing industry in the broadest of terms, embracing the public, private and not-for-profit sectors as a single body of mutually supportive and interacting entities.

To that end, we would encourage the Government to appoint a panel of 6 to 8 persons, broadly representative of Nova Scotia's housing sector (private, public and not-for-profit) to oversee the review and undertake the consultation.

The process would be informed by an understanding of the interactive and catalytic role housing must play in the social and economic development of the Province and would require a proactive role for the NS Housing Development Corporation.

To achieve its full potential, we suggest that the consultation be transparent and as widely inclusive as possible.

The panel should have a mandate to consult with counterparts and colleagues throughout the Atlantic Region and elsewhere in Canada.

The panel would be responsible for the review and the consultation and would have a limited time frame in which to conduct its research and prepare and submit a final report (e.g. 12 to 15 months).

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia would be pleased to participate in such a panel and assist in developing its configuration and mandate.

## **SECTION 2. INTRODUCTION: THE AHANS PERSPECTIVE**

This document is the product of AHANS's most recent research and policy endeavour. In October 2009, AHANS hired independent researcher and consultant, Charlene Croft to facilitate eight private stakeholder consultation meetings towards the development of an Affordable Housing Strategy for Nova Scotia. These meetings were focused around five questions generated from the information collected during the rural roundtable consultations of 2007.

During that series of consultations, AHANS gathered anecdotal evidence of the considerable hardships encountered by housing consumers in their real life struggles to find and retain affordable housing. The principal objective of the 2009-2010 consultation therefore was to hear from the stakeholders directly involved in the delivery of housing across the province, thereby to establish the specific elements of a more effective and broadly inclusive housing policy-making and delivery process.

*The status quo is no longer an option. Opportunity is slipping away even as the province's social, environmental, economic and governance problems are deepening. Repeatedly, those we've consulted spoke of their difficulties in accessing information and assistance, of the absence of responsible and accountable leadership, of the lack of hard information, and of bureaucratic opacity bordering on paranoia. Such conditions have done little to mobilize badly needed community-based social equity in a province where the public sector is hugely over-extended and the interests of the private sector are both limited and narrowly focused.*

Since the dismantling of the NS Department of Housing and Consumer Affairs in 1996, the province has been without a comprehensive housing policy and implementation strategy by which it might address the basic housing needs of all its citizens. The responsibility for housing was dispersed into the provincial bureaucracy with no clear leadership or mandate, leaving a leadership vacuum surrounding the delivery and maintenance of affordable housing in Nova Scotia. As year after year, provincial budgets shrank, ongoing housing program budgets stagnated. What activity there was, relied heavily on funds from federal government initiatives.

For the 2009-2010 consultation meetings, over 150 invitations were sent to stakeholders in the private sector (developers, landlords and property managers), government (federal, provincial, municipal), and non-profit organizations with direct and indirect interests in affordable housing. While the majority of responses came from the non-profit sector, there was also keen response from many of the municipal planning offices and from within the Community Health Boards across the province. Approximately 30% of the stakeholders contacted actually attended the consultation, with minimal attendance from the provincial government and the private sector.

Our research has revealed nothing particularly new or groundbreaking. What's more, the recommendations which arise from this most recent round of consultations have been offered in numerous previous reports by AHANS and other housing organizations for more than a decade. We submit this 2010 Report on behalf of all Nova Scotians, but in particular on behalf of those who contributed to its preparation. We are optimistic that this time our leaders will

appreciate the need for decisive action. We believe this report and the ones that have come before prove what's wrong. Remarkably, it is not for the most part about money. In fact, it seems to be about power. Or, if it's not about power, then it's about inertia.

The status quo is no longer an option. Opportunity is slipping away even as the province's social, environmental, economic and governance problems are deepening. Repeatedly, those we've consulted spoke of their difficulties in accessing information and assistance, of the absence of responsible and accountable leadership, of the lack of hard information, and of bureaucratic opacity bordering on paranoia. Such conditions have done little to mobilize badly needed community-based social equity in a province where the public sector is hugely over-extended and the interests of the private sector are both limited and narrowly focused.

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia is optimistic that the Federal Government may soon return to a more prominent role in Canadian housing. Meanwhile, AHANS strongly urges the Provincial Government to initiate a far reaching review of its housing policies and programmes, existing housing stock, and the house building and property industries. Such a process would see the housing industry in the broadest of terms, embracing the public, private and not-for-profit sectors as a single body of mutually-supportive and interacting entities. The process must anticipate a proactive role for the Housing Development Corporation, and understand the interactive and catalytic role housing must play in the social and economic development of the Province.

**Board of Directors**

**Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia**

**Halifax, Nova Scotia**

### **SECTION 3. LOOKING FOR ANSWERS. ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.**

At each of the sessions, AHANS introduced itself and the reasons for the consultation. The participants were asked to consider and discuss in turn, five questions. The discussions were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. After reviewing the assembled results, we agreed that there was considerable overlap and consensus among the groups and across all five questions. Thus, rather than reporting the answers of each of the groups to each of the questions in turn, we decided to distil the work of all of the groups into five inclusive discussions, one for each of the questions posed. Where opinion was divided we've reported all sides. Where a particularly challenging or poignant issue was raised, we've included direct quotes while protecting the privacy of the speaker.

#### **THE QUESTIONS:**

- 1) WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE STOCK, SHAPE, NEED AND DEMAND IN THE CURRENT HOUSING UNIVERSE?**
- 2) WHAT ARE KEY GAPS IN YOUR LOCAL HOUSING MARKET THAT FORM BARRIERS TO AFFORDABLE, SAFE AND APPROPRIATE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE OF ALL INCOMES?**

**INSTRUCTIONS: EACH GROUP WAS ASKED TO PROVIDE A SCAN OF EXISTING RESOURCES AND TO IDENTIFY GAPS AND BARRIERS.**

- 3) ACKNOWLEDGING THAT GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY HAVE NOT HAD THE CAPACITY TO LEAD AND MANAGE A SUSTAINABLE HOUSING SECTOR IN NS, HOW CAN WE:**
  - a. CREATE A STRONG SUSTAINABLE HOUSING SECTOR?*
  - b. BUILD COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GROUPS/SECTORS IN AN EFFORT TO BUILD CAPACITY?*

**INSTRUCTIONS: EACH GROUP WAS ASKED TO IDENTIFY IDEAS FOR CREATING A STRONG HOUSING SECTOR AND FOR BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS.**

- 4) REALIZING THAT WE HAVE FINITE RESOURCES:**
  - a. HOW CAN WE RESTRUCTURE EXISTING PROGRAMMES AND RESOURCES TO MAKE THEM AS EFFECTIVE AS POSSIBLE?*
  - b. CAN YOU THINK OF CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE WAYS TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?*

**INSTRUCTIONS: EACH GROUP WAS ASKED TO SUGGEST IDEAS FOR RESTRUCTURING PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AND ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION**

- 5) ACKNOWLEDGING THAT A SUCCESSFUL HOUSING STRATEGY STARTS WITH IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND DEMANDS, AND IS MAINTAINED THROUGH EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES; HOW DO WE:**
  - a. ESTABLISH NEED ACROSS THE PROVINCE?*
  - b. ESTABLISH AN EXISTING INVENTORY OF STOCK BY TYPE AND USER?*
  - c. SET TARGETS AND ESTABLISH TIMELINES FOR ACTION?*



*d. MONITOR PROGRESS OF THE STRATEGY'S IMPLEMENTATION?*

**INSTRUCTIONS: EACH GROUP WAS ASKED TO PROVIDE IDEAS ABOUT ESTABLISHING NEED, TAKING INVENTORY, SETTING GOALS, AND MONITORING PROGRESS.**

**6) HOW CAN STAKEHOLDERS IN THE HOUSING SECTOR EFFECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY?**

**INSTRUCTIONS: EACH GROUP WAS ASKED TO CONSIDER HOW THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY: GOVERNMENT, NON-PROFITS/COMMUNITY, PRIVATE SECTOR, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONSUMERS.**

**SECTION 4. THE CONSULTATIONS – INPUT AND ANALYSIS**  
**CONSULTING NOVA SCOTIANS FROM ONE END OF NOVA SCOTIA TO THE OTHER**

Locations were established. Key informants and stakeholders were identified and invited. Meetings were organized, planned for, and held over a period of five months, between mid-October 2009 and March 2010 in the following centres:

- Halifax
- Sydney
- Yarmouth
- Dartmouth
- Bridgewater
- Kentville/Wolfville
- Truro
- Antigonish

**THE DISCUSSIONS:**

At a most general level, the discussions address five interconnected issues, including: capacity, leadership, creative collaborations, monitoring needs, implementation and progress, and gaps and barriers

## **PART 1. CAPACITY, THE LACK THEREOF AND THE NEED FOR CAPACITY BUILDING**

'Capacity' and the lack of it are seen as a serious problem, one that applies broadly to all communities and runs from senior levels of government all the way down to individual community members whose lack of capacity renders them powerless.

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

#### ***1. General Awareness***

As a SECTOR, housing is misunderstood and badly under-valued both by government and the general public.

There is a lack of understanding of the profound importance of housing as a whole to the Province's social and economic well-being. There is little appreciation of the devastating social and economic impacts of inadequate, overly expensive and inappropriate housing. More troubling is the fact that while many respondents said they were aware they had a housing problem in their community, they did not know its extent, what resources were available, or how to access them. Under these circumstances, any discussion of the importance to sustainable communities of an adequate supply of decent and affordable housing seemed premature and badly out-of-touch with day-to-day reality. So what is 'sustainable development' anyway? 'Nobody seems to know but everybody throws the term around. More specifically, what does it mean with respect to housing?'

#### ***2. The Not-for-Profit Housing Sector***

While there are some bright spots, there can be little doubt that Nova Scotia's non-profit Housing developers, owner/members and managers are all operating under the considerable pressure of mounting demands and prolonged cut-backs. Various spokespersons characterized the sector as 'over-extended and lacking additional capacity', 'listless and lacking vitality', as 'lacking property management skills and knowledge as well as necessary technical skills and expertise'. In sum, it was observed that the sector suffers from the absence of skilled networks of organizational and technical support. The most commonly expressed view was that the existing supports were not very effective, skilful or accountable to those being assisted. This speaks volumes of the need for upgrading staff communication- and working-skills, attitudes and knowledge.

#### ***3. Governments: All Three Levels***

With respect to housing services, from the outside our government is seen as opaque and access to it, limited. 'Where 'greeters' are required, we face 'doorkeepers'. And when what we need is navigational assistance, what we get is 'not our problem' and 'we don't do that' or 'you don't fit, try somewhere else'. Whereas housing is a provincial responsibility, many of our respondents commented that from their side, our government seemed to lack capacity. They characterized the housing efforts of our Provincial government 'as fragmented, visionless, leaderless, and as long on inaction and short on strategy'. To make matters worse, the collective capacity of our governments is further compromised by serious lapses in coordination

between levels of government and within individual levels of government, between departmental 'silos'. 'Where there are resources and knowledge, they are not shared'. 'Things falling between silos simply perish with the result that there are no economies, no synergies'. Moreover, where all levels of government have suffered cut-backs, several municipal officials and politicians reminded us that not only had our municipalities been progressively stripped of their resources, they no longer had any idea of what's available, where to go to ask, or what to ask for.

#### **SUGGESTIONS:**

##### ***General Awareness:***

Working from the ground up, with the folks in need, to address the low level of public awareness about the social and economic importance to Nova Scotia of an adequate supply of decent, appropriate and affordable housing. Build capacity by building partnerships and alliances between government, community, and the private sector.

##### ***The Not-for-Profit Housing Sector:***

Our respondents suggested that ground might be gained were we to make links by networking across sectors. For example, Nova Scotia's Community Health Boards have knowledge about housing and health issues in their jurisdictions, and some have resources that might be deployed. Furthermore, our respondents also stressed the importance of capacity-building workshops, seminars, courses for credit and adult 'literacy' programmes around issues as diverse as community initiative, social enterprise, affordable housing-development, -management, -maintenance, -governance, and -sustainability.

##### ***Governments - All Three Levels:***

Notwithstanding Canada's lack of a national housing policy and programmes, there was consensus across all of the groups that the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia had to acknowledge the full scope of the housing sector and claim ownership of the province's housing problem. It was felt, that where housing is a provincial responsibility, the provincial government has no alternative but to take the lead. Indeed, without its vision and action-oriented leadership, the respondents could only see a serious situation getting worse. More specifically, it was suggested that with respect to the housing sector as a whole, 'the provincial government must develop a stable and wide-ranging housing policy and stabilize funding to enable long-range planning across the sector'. The province's housing policies 'must be made explicit, the programmes accessible, and the government's operations transparent'. To enable 'data-based decision-making', policy-making and programme design, a consolidated and accessible housing data base is badly needed.

Meanwhile, a re-focused and re-energized provincial initiative in housing should: seek to improve coordination between all levels of government - particularly between the province and its municipalities; create synergies by collaborating and sharing resources and knowledge;

counter departmental silo-building through networking, encouraging overlaps, and building-in redundancy.

Finally, many respondents supported the notion that a proactive provincial initiative in housing would wholeheartedly seek the full participation of the non-profit and social enterprise sectors, enlisting their participation and assisting them in their efforts to increase their capacity through education and training programmes, by making its resources, skills, knowledge and information available to them. It was suggested that in this respect, the provincial government might well consider establishing from within its existing ranks, a high-powered support team to improve access, mobilize support, and increase awareness about the need for decent and affordable housing and the availability and location of sources of support.

In conjunction with such an effort, existing or imported resources would have to focus on enhancing knowledge and skills, such as in program design, evaluation, performance measurement and community facilitation, and capacity building. In this regard, the three levels of government ought to sort out what each can do best, and then align their skills effectively and share their resources strategically.

## **PART 2. CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS**

History tells us that in the not-so-distant past, the Nova Scotia Housing Commission often initiated and supported collaborations in housing, both large and small, in partnership with other levels of government, and both in partnership with the private sector and the non-profit sector. In the HRM, the prominent examples of the communities of Lower Sackville and Forest Hills come immediately to mind. Whereas, in Sydney the enormous success of the builders' co-operatives is a most compelling example of how one exercise in collaboration enhanced the lives of hundreds of households. Collaborative activity is not beyond us. Far from it. Given the need, the opportunity, some encouragement and a bit of support, it is something at which we Nova Scotians excel.

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

In general, there was across the board acknowledgement that collaborations are good, essential, beneficial, and an excellent way to compensate for limited resources. Moreover, there was also widespread acknowledgement that in Nova Scotia creative collaborations are not happening to the extent they should. Respondents spoke about layers of bureaucracy, about the lack of cooperation between levels of government, and about the overwhelming amounts of time and energy it takes for community-based housing initiatives to assemble the resources and approvals for a project of even a modest size.

#### ***1. On the Critical State of Municipal/Provincial Relations:***

In fact, several respondent groups spoke of the essential need for collaboration between municipal and provincial governments, and unfortunately of the many, many barriers that must be overcome to achieve this. Another group spoke of its frustrating efforts to work with all three levels of government. While in still another group, a municipal employee spoke specifically of jurisdictional difficulties between his municipality and the province's housing department. In this regard, a number of municipal staffers and politicians spoke about the need of municipalities for greater powers and authority around land use planning, bylaws, and the policing of residential standards. At least one municipal employee stated that while due diligence demanded that his municipality enforce the building code and its by-laws, not only did they not have enough building inspectors with which to do so, they also faced barriers to training more people.

As if to underscore the difficult position in which our municipal units have been placed, one municipal spokes-person asserted that until the province's municipalities have stable and consistent funding, they won't take responsibility for housing.

Housing is a provincial responsibility, which is not to say that the federal government has no role to play for example, in the provision and distribution of resources. It can, and as recent history shows us, must continue to perform that role diligently. But what of our own province and its cities and towns? Our cities and towns are well positioned to work with local communities to resolve problems. In the past, when they had on-the-ground expertise in planning, design, and the capacity to enforce standards for building and safety, they

successfully undertook housing initiatives in support of economic development and renewal, neighbourhood improvement and public safety. In fact, support for municipalities by both senior levels of government has been insufficient and undependable. Without leadership, legislated mandates and financial support, our municipalities have had no alternative but to cut back their housing related efforts as they've struggled with the cost of a wide range of downloaded responsibilities.

#### **SOME SUGGESTIONS:**

##### ***Other Instances that Would Benefit from Inter-Governmental Collaboration:***

Proactive policing of the condition of the existing stock under the Residential Tenancies Act is essential. However, the need to maintain and improve its quality begs the question as to how to do so without making the housing less affordable to low income households. In a related way, new developments, condominium conversions, and seasonal pressures from renting students, all push up the cost of housing, making it less affordable to households of modest means. In both instances, creative collaborations between different levels of government and other actors could mitigate some of the negative impacts of the housing market.

Similarly, a case can be made for efforts to support the emergence of collaborations between community-based providers of affordable housing and planners and building inspectors. Such difficult and challenging matters call for considerable sensitivity and creativity. Indeed, as one respondent commented with respect to social assistance, 'the trick in making it work is to impact the quality of life and health in a positive way, while ensuring there is no stigma - by universalizing it'. What for example would it require in the way of collaboration to encourage the inclusion of housing for people with special needs in market oriented, affordable rental housing?

##### ***The Non-Profit, Community-Based Housing Sector:***

Without question, non-profit housing needs champions. Non-profits need pro-active supports and incentives such as tax exemptions, relief from development charges and building permit fees, inclusive zoning, and zoning to encourage housing mix, income mix, and tenure mix. While such strategies require the collaboration of municipal politicians and governments, they do offer low cost and high impact ways of promoting affordable housing in selective projects. Here a strong case can be made for collaborations between non-profit providers, municipal politicians, planners and building inspectors.

Further to that point, one respondent observed that not only do collaborative initiatives require facilitation, they themselves would benefit from being more creatively inclusive of churches, service organizations, governments, non-profits and welfare agencies, universities, benevolent organizations, foundations, and so on. To be even more specific, representatives from a few Community Health Boards indicated that while they are aware of the impacts of poor housing on health and well-being in their communities, they're not well placed to do much about it and would benefit greatly from collaboration with individuals and organizations active in the

housing sector. In another consultation, respondents spoke of 'burn-out' and the urgent need for new ideas, people and organizations.

Non-profit housing developers and providers need to find alternatives to the 'charity model' on which government funding programmes operate, and on which all but a very few non-profits are solely dependent. The 'social enterprise sector' offers approaches by which through creative collaboration, non-profits might make and re-deploy profits. Of course, there are other models. Both Winnipeg and Vancouver operate successful community service centres which provide one-stop shopping and require tri-level collaboration.

### ***The Provincial Government:***

Our respondents were well aware that when it comes to housing need, our provincial government lacks the wherewithal to go it alone. On the other hand, housing is a provincial responsibility. What's more, the government has resources including legislative authority, land, professional skills, and the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation which might be deployed more proactively in support of creative collaborations in housing. Indeed, while the government needs to come to grips with the housing sector as a whole, it is uniquely situated to leverage and mobilize the social equity which resides in our municipalities, local communities, formal institutions and communities of interest.

Finally, a Provincial Housing Policy with set priorities, clear responsibilities and mutually agreed goals would provide a firm foundation upon which to base future collaborations. With the commitment of the Province of Nova Scotia to be the 'lead' partner, all the ingredients for effective collaborative actions in housing would be in place. However, as one respondent pointed out, 'Without it, effective collaborations are unlikely'.



### **PART 3: LEADERSHIP - PROBLEMS THEREOF AND THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP FROM ALL SECTORS AND AT ALL LEVELS**

#### **OBSERVATIONS:**

All eight consultations characterized the province's housing sector as suffering from a significant lack of leadership as well as general confusion over who is responsible for what. For its part, the federal government has withdrawn from policy making in housing and adopted an ad hoc approach to selectively funding pressure points. Meanwhile in Nova Scotia, the service exchange took municipalities out of the social development field. At the same time, social housing became a residual concern of the NS Department of Community Services. No longer does any department of the provincial government have sole responsibility for the well-being of the province's housing sector as a whole.

As a consequence, things keep falling between stools, not only within departments, but between departments and between levels of government. The leadership vacuum means there is an absence of vision, and of policy informed by a vision. Moreover, the finger-pointing and buck-passing which are consequences of weak leadership and confusion over roles and responsibilities are frustrating, demoralizing and deeply damaging.

#### **SUGGESTIONS:**

Understandably, this topic precipitated lively discussion and generated a significant number of clearly defined proposals about leadership, relationships, and roles and responsibilities. Participants clearly identified the need for leadership from government, for more clearly defined roles, and for the need of all levels of government to work together in partnership with one another, as well as with the private sector and non-profit, community-based sector.

#### ***Federal Government:***

The respondents clearly favoured a strong, coherent and sustained federal presence in the field of affordable housing. Many saw the restored presence of the Federal Government in housing as a necessary precondition for a rejuvenated, leadership role for the provincial government in the housing sector as a whole.

#### ***Provincial Government:***

There was considerable support for the suggestion that the Provincial Government should re-establish a Ministry or Department of Housing with overall responsibility for the housing sector as a whole. At the very least, the provincial government should establish an intra-departmental task force to deal with housing. Only then would a government of the day have the capacity to exercise a leadership role in the field. Moreover, through its power to legislate, it would be able to develop, promote and defend housing policies and programmes which give priority to the delivery and maintenance of decent, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing for all Nova Scotians. The government would have both a mandate and the capacity to: clarify roles and responsibilities and lingering jurisdictional problems; work more closely with the province's municipal units and non-profit organizations to inspire them and build their capacity; leverage

provincially owned land and resources; and, create open partnerships with the non-profit and service delivery sectors.

Several respondents spoke of the important role the province might play in developing creative collaborations with the private sector. Others spoke of the potential for government to take the lead in building productive, tri-partite relationships with the private- and non-profit-sectors based on mutual understanding and respect.

One respondent suggested that the first thing a provincial housing department should do, is 'get all the right people in the same room at the same time to work on affordable housing together'. Still another went so far as to suggest that the cause of decent and affordable housing for all would be greatly advanced if only all three levels of government would 'stop putting barriers in place to block its development'. This is an important observation as it implies that our problems in housing may stem as much from what we are doing as from what we're not doing.

#### ***Municipal Government:***

Municipal governments should take the lead when it comes to building inspections to ensure safe housing. To this end, municipalities, with the encouragement of the provincial housing department, might also take the lead in organizing coalitions with landlords and property owners to bring rental properties up to code. Had they the resources and the inclination to do so, municipalities might also play a role in facilitating partnerships with the private sector, and between the private and non-profit sectors. A respondent at the Sydney consultation suggested that the word 'partnership' can be intimidating to the private sector and that where private sector skills and know-how are needed, great care be taken to fully explain what's intended. At the very least, municipalities can connect private sector parties with provincial and federal sources of programme support.

#### ***Not-For-Profit, Community-Based Sector:***

Supported by government, the not-for-profit, community-based sector has a role to play in developing decent and affordable housing. It also has an important role to play in educating the general public, the provincial government and the private sector on housing need in all parts of Nova Scotia. Through its research and policy-development activities and consultations such as this, the sector is well-placed both to inform governments and engage the business community and rental property owners in discussion about poverty and the parts they must play if it is to be abated. However, if the sector is to fulfill these roles the province will have to provide it with the human and financial resources it will need if it is to do so. As it stands, the sector is already badly over-extended.

#### ***The Private Sector:***

A number of respondents suggested that the private sector must be included in any discussions that take place about the future of housing in Nova Scotia. Many insisted that in order for the private sector to participate in to the development of mixed market and 'affordable' housing, it

would require financial incentives. Still others reasoned that care be taken to understand what the private sector needs in order for it to become involved in a meaningful way. They went on to argue that enthusiastic efforts must be made to show the private sector that its interests align with those of the development of decent and affordable housing.

***Editorial Comment:***

The private sector has never been reticent to inform governments, the community at large, and the not-for-profit, community-based sector in particular, about how it operates. Nor has it been shy about what it needs if it is to play a more significant role in the development of decent, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing for all Nova Scotians. In the first place, when pressed the private sector can do what it does very well, but always for a profit. In the second, the implication that the private sector is not involved is uninformed. Whether residential projects are for profit or not-for-profit, virtually every residential project built is designed, constructed and financed by individuals and entities who reside in the private sector. In other words, the considerable skills and knowledge of the province's private sector are already heavily involved in the development of decent and affordable housing in every part of the province. They are essential. No doubt it could do more. We all could be doing more. However, if we are to do so, good sense suggests that will only happen if and when the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia takes the lead.

To further sharpen the point, housing construction and renovation are significant contributors to the province's economy. There's more. With its links to other parts of the economy, housing also plays a key role in the economy as a whole. From wholesale to retail, from design to decorating to DIY renovations, housing grows communities, promotes job skill development, creates businesses and generates jobs. Thus, our provincial government could strengthen the economy across a broad range of sectors simply by coordinating the economic drivers of housing.

## **PART 4. MONITORING NEEDS, PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND MARKING PROGRESS**

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

#### ***A Vision for Housing, Policies and Programmes, Monitoring Progress:***

In response to other questions, consultant groups spoke strongly in favour of a renewed federal presence particularly with respect to affordable housing. Such a presence they reasoned, might encourage the Province of Nova Scotia to once again assert a strong leadership role with respect to its own housing sector. Were Nova Scotia to re-establish a full-fledged Department of Housing, one of its first steps would be to conduct an inventory of the province's housing stock as to its extent, age, condition, location, type and tenure, and so on. That inventory would establish the extent and nature of unmet housing need and of the province's annual production capacity. On the basis of such an inventory or base-line study, the Housing Department would project future needs, establish goals and targets, and thereby scope out a vision for the province's housing sector as a whole. A housing policy and programmes by which the vision might be implemented would then be established. At the same time, the base-line study might then be modified to serve as basis for monitoring annual progress toward the established goals. Following each Canada-wide census, a more extended provincial review and assessment might be undertaken. There is nothing new here. In fact, before it was disbanded and disbursed, the province's former Housing Commission functioned in just such a manner.

#### ***Base-Line Data and Data Sources:***

As far as we are aware, there is no single, official instrument for Nova Scotia by which its citizens might assess their progress toward meeting the need for decent, appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing for all. There is plenty of data and there many sources. However, our respondents consistently spoke of difficulties accessing data and analysis related to housing, programs, sharable resources, research, and meaningful provincial and federal program information, especially about the financial resources available and how to access them. It seems that what's needed is a strong, clear, simple template, access to a consistent set of sources, and a long-term commitment to monitor, record and report the information. The resulting data must be widely available and fully transparent so that we are all operating on the same assumptions and the same information.

#### ***Monitoring Progress - Open and Transparent:***

While one speaker suggested that a provincial housing data base be established by looking at a broad range of Nova Scotia communities as points of reference for analysis, others observed that CMHC maintains a national measure of housing need and affordability, the so-called CORE housing need measure. And that not only should the province not develop its own measures, it should adopt the national standard in order that we might measure our progress against standards that apply across Canada. Another speaker made the case that housing is only one piece of the puzzle, and is one of several inputs for quality of life. Measuring progress therefore is not just about counting units, it's about improving quality of life. In this regard, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has established a quality of life measure which includes a

housing component and which might also serve as a template for our own efforts. The concern here is that we establish baseline measures which are compatible with those in use in other parts of Canada, and that we apply them equitably across the province.

***Local Input:***

In fact, several speakers spoke passionately about the importance of local input into the monitoring process.

In this regard, the provincial Department of Housing would have to track progress against aggregated sources gathered from CMHC and Statistics Canada. At the same time, the province's municipal units and counties would all be required to make annual reports against the same set of criteria, thereby ensuring that the province's monitoring of its progress in housing was informed by a nuanced accounting of local needs, concerns and aspirations.

***In Sum:***

At present, the Province of Nova Scotia has neither a housing policy nor does it employ a widely available tool for monitoring our progress in housing. Information becomes available as from time to time, projects are announced. But press releases lack content and context. For example, how we are doing relative to other provinces remains a mystery. On the plus side, we learn about what we're doing. We just don't know how we are doing, either with respect to our own housing needs or relative to other jurisdictions across Canada. In sum, it was widely agreed that the Province must lead in the establishment of a monitoring system to track the extent and nature of housing need as well as the impacts of its housing policies and programmes across the province's housing sector as a whole.

A home-grown example is the very useful demographics web site of the Nova Scotia Dept. of Finance, "NS Community Counts". This site provides all of the province's communities with the most accurate demographic data available from Statistics Canada, packaged for Nova Scotians. More data linkages could be most beneficial to all sectors seeking to grow communities, commercial endeavours, and extend sustainability. In other words, it is being done and can be applied to the housing portfolio.

## PART 5. GAPS AND BARRIERS

### *What's Missing?*

- i) When the federal government devolved responsibility for housing back to the provinces, it left a yawning gap of vast proportions. Ever since, policy making and strategizing around issues in housing has suffered immeasurably.
- ii) In 2000, the Province of Nova Scotia closed its Department of Housing and Consumer Affairs and dispersed its responsibilities across several departments. At the present time, no Minister has sole responsibility for the province's housing sector as a whole.
- iii) The Province of Nova Scotia has neither a vision nor a strategy for the province's housing sector. Its housing policies and programmes, such as they are, are for the most part piece-meal and narrowly directed to social and public housing.
- iv) The Housing Services Division of the NS Department of Community Services has, since its inception, suffered progressive losses of capacity to the point where its effectiveness has been seriously eroded.
- v) The Province of Nova Scotia has no monitoring tool against which to measure the extent and nature of housing needs across the province. Neither has it the capacity to effectively monitor our housing progress against clearly stated and widely understood goals, standards and timelines.
- vi) The province's municipalities deal with housing matters every day but for good reasons, don't view housing as their responsibility. Their refusal to acknowledge that housing is at least in part their responsibility is a barrier to the timely and effective development of decent and affordable housing. After all, they are the organization which regulates building inspections, by-law enforcement, zoning and land-use and development policies.
- vii) Housing does not respect jurisdictional boundaries. Statements we heard across the province were summarized by a participant in Yarmouth who said, "There are jurisdictional problems in housing. It is a federal, provincial and municipal issue but with no coordinated strategy. Also, (within the province) there is no clear departmental jurisdiction. Is it the responsibility of community services or economic development?"

Other speakers on the same topic: "Housing services are disjointed, and front line workers in the departments of health and community services have no idea 'who's responsible for housing' their clients." There is "A lack of defined responsibility around the delivery of housing services. Housing exists in a no-man's land of bureaucracy within Nova Scotia."

### ***More Specifically:***

- i) There are capacity gaps within the non-profit and service delivery sectors. They suffer from being over-extended, from a lack of technical knowledge and skills, and from a lack of financial support. Many of the province's smaller municipalities lack the capacity to identify the extent and nature of housing need in their communities. Furthermore, many claimed they either didn't know where to go to get help, or having sought help were eventually disappointed when a badly-needed project fell through.
- ii) While support is available to individual clients, the supports available to the organizations trying to find or develop affordable housing are insufficient. 'Technical support groups' are required to assist community organizations interested in pursuing residential development and renovation projects.
- iii) Every group consulted reported housing needs unmet by their local supply. For example, those requiring supportive housing included the physically disabled, seniors, youth, and people with mental health issues and addictions, and the 'hard to house'. In addition, some reported that options for seniors who cannot stay in their homes but don't require long-term care, are very limited.
- iv) The population in rural Nova Scotia, though on the decline overall, has diverse affordable housing needs which vary from one community to the next. In some communities there is not enough housing, in others there are vacancies which however may be inappropriate. As a consequence, many rural Nova Scotians have no alternative but to move from their communities of choice to the city in search of appropriate and affordable housing.
- v) Not only do social assistance recipients face discrimination from landlords, the shelter allowance portion of provincial social assistance falls far short of private sector rents. As a consequence households on assistance are frequently forced into inadequate, inappropriate and over-crowded rental housing for which they pay far more than they should. To do so they must cut back on food and clothing.
- vi) Many of the province's 'working-poor' fall into the gap between social and public housing and what's available but not affordable in the private market. Poverty and low incomes are the root cause of households being forced into wretched and exploitive housing conditions. Services and supports can and should extend their reach by being applied with greater flexibility. At present they constitute barriers to accessibility for some whom they could be helping.
- vii) In Wolfville and Antigonish, the populations of renting students have pushed up rents to the point where they are roughly equal those of Halifax. Individual and family households of modest means are unable to compete. At the same time, they face long waiting lists and often times, years of waiting for places in social and public housing. Renting family households in Truro face high rents or sub-standard housing - leaky ceilings, moldy buildings, and landlords and property managers reluctant to take children and pets.

viii) In the Valley, there is an urgent, unmet need for rental housing to serve the affordable housing needs of migrant, seasonal farm workers. However, zoning restrictions and community resistance present formidable barriers to efforts to address this particular shortfall.

ix) Nova Scotia's housing stock is deteriorating. Building inspections are done automatically on new construction. As far as the existing stock is concerned, inspections are only done when they are triggered by a specific complaint. Our on-going failure to monitor and re-invest in our existing stock of housing is short sighted in the extreme. Indeed, its replacement cost would simply sink us.

x) Respondents from several communities also cited the high prices of land, construction, and development as major contributions to the widening affordability gap between rents and incomes.

xi) Access to efficient, effective and affordable public transportation has become a major problem in rural Nova Scotia where small populations are thinly spread and services and amenities are being consolidated and centralized. In Truro, while rents and property are less expensive outside the town, one must have a reliable form of personal transportation because the town has no public transit system of its own.

#### **MATTERS OF BROAD CONCERN:**

The Gaps and Barriers discussions were wide-ranging, impassioned and generated long lists of concerns and suggestions. While we've done some pruning, we feel we've captured the essence of those conversations. However, a few points raised in those encounters merited further attention: the need for leadership, cooperation, and teamwork to build 'networks of capacity'; the relationship between public and private interests; and the quality of thinking that at all levels is going into strategizing and planning around housing.

i) When we work in isolation from one another, we exaggerate the distance between ourselves. In the process, we expend precious energy, goodwill and social capital we can ill-afford to squander. We are therefore deeply troubled by the significant number of respondents who spoke of ill-fated efforts to initiate affordable housing projects, many of which failed for want of a receptive programme officer or out of the heavy burden of paperwork. In this way, we not only burn social equity as if it had no value, we also erect barriers and create gaps when we could be creating synergies and thereby getting the most out of our limited resources. We are speaking here of all of the actors, be they public, private or not-for-profit. We are speaking also of every level of government and within each level, of every person in every department.

AHANS has listened carefully to respondents from eight of Nova Scotia's communities. We asked mayors, counsellors, municipal planners, non-profit housing developers and managers, concerned citizens, and many more, why they think we're not meeting the province's housing needs. They've spoken clearly and from their own experiences about the lack of leadership, the lack of clarity about who's responsible for what, and of our inability to work together. If we fail



to heed their advice, we know that it will be to the detriment of future generations of Nova Scotians.

ii) We are all aware that Nova Scotia's population is declining in number and increasing in age, and that its public sector is heavily indebted and has limited resources with which to pursue the province's very modest development objectives. Similarly, we have been told the Province's private sector long-ago committed its limited resources and capacity. Finally, we've also been informed that the province's so-called 'social enterprise' sector is our last hope. This brief paragraph then is about expectations.

Our respondents have called upon the province to: exercise leadership with respect to the housing sector as a whole; make its knowledge, skills and resources available; clarify roles; encourage the formation of networks of capacity; and remove gaps that impede worthwhile initiatives. The private sector has been invited to join in, to do what it does best, at the top of its game, competitively and professionally. The not-for-profit community-based, social-enterprise sector has been called upon to rise above its state of chronic over-extension, and find ways of leveraging even more 'social equity' out of the province's already over-extended communities and institutions. Thus, the government will govern. The private sector will make its profit doing what it's called upon to do. And the social enterprise sector will do what it can to help. It's a tall order. One that without the leadership and sincere best efforts of the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia will simply fall short of the grand expectations we have for it.

iii) One respondent questioned the quality of the thinking that is going into the province's housing, suggesting that we're not putting enough imagination into strategizing and planning for it. Another suggested that a most creative contribution from government would be for it to simply stop putting barriers in place. Still another urged that our governments should take a risk and stop doing the same things that aren't working over and over again. And still another suggested that we should get everybody who matters in the same room at the same time and work it out.

Each of these respondents is challenging the narrow scope and shallow depth of current thinking about housing. We've become preoccupied with what the NS Department of Housing Services is or isn't doing. In fact it's just doing what it's supposed to do, taking care of our social and public housing, a small (+/-6%) but important piece of the province's total stock. For better or worse, it is what it is. But it's not enough. We don't think or talk about our housing 'situation'. It's the elephant in the room. Maybe if we don't think about it will go away. But it isn't going away. Our provincial housing 'situation' is fast becoming what's called a 'wicked' problem. 'Wicked' problems are not open to conventional approaches to problem solving. 'Wicked' problems require 'connected-up' thinking. 'Connected-up' thinking seeks to get its mind around the whole problem, around all of its aspects and the connections between them.

As a social, economic and cultural good, housing is of enormous consequence to all Nova Scotians. Housing is widely acknowledged as an input into better health, better education, and better employment. In short, it is one of the most critical determinants of quality of life. The

production, deployment, financing, maintenance and management of housing has huge implications for employment, transportation, land use, social, economic, and environmental planning and development. It is the affordability, accessibility, sustainability and well-being of the Province's housing stock as a whole that must be of principal concern to the Government of Nova Scotia.

## SECTION 5. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND SUMMARY

### PART 1. RESTORING THE PROFILE OF HOUSING IN NOVA SCOTIA:

At one time 'Housing' was a fully-staffed, stand-alone Ministry of the Provincial Government of Nova Scotia. At present, Housing Services is a branch of the NS Department of Community Services. From its location one might deduce that in Nova Scotia 'housing' is itself a community service, one amongst a host of such services. Furthermore, from its now diminished presence and relative isolation, one might also conclude that in Nova Scotia housing is of peripheral importance.

Access to decent and appropriate housing is a basic human right. Moreover, housing is far more than a social service. Housing is a major sector of the Province's social-economy. In 2008, residential construction alone accounted for approximately 2.36% of the province's Gross

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

Domestic Product. Housing secures jobs and generates revenues for the construction and related industries. At present, no one Minister speaks for the housing sector as a whole, which is after all, a large system of many interacting parts including the bits which fall under the brief of the Department of Community Services. Logically, housing in its most representative sense, that of the housing sector as a whole, is inappropriately placed in the Ministry of Community Services. Housing requires an independent agency, perhaps its own Ministry. The Minister or Director of such an Agency would benefit from the advice of a broadly representative Housing Secretariat. The Agency would embrace all segments of the housing sector and use its resources to leverage all the community capital available to it. The Agency would play the lead role in leveraging much-needed social equity through more effective intra-governmental collaboration and cooperation.

The key is the independence of housing as a fully functioning sector of the Province's social-economy. The form of its independence (Ministry with its own Minister, Crown Corporation, separate department, separate division within another department, etc.) must be open to dialogue. What shouldn't be open to dialogue is the independence of the Province's agency responsible for housing and its ability to be creative and responsive. Failing the above, housing would fall more appropriately under some Ministry other than Community Services, e.g. Economic and Rural Development.

## **PART 2. RECOGNIZING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPLICATIONS OF HOUSING:**

Access to decent and appropriate housing is a fundamental social/economic right and is recognized as such by the UN - but not as yet by Canada or any of its provinces or territories. This oversight must be addressed, if not by the Government of Canada, then by its individual provinces and territories, including Nova Scotia. Housing is widely acknowledged as an input into better health, better education, and better employment.

'Social service' is only one of the many roles housing plays in our lives. In fact, only a small fraction of the Province's housing stock comes under the brief of the Minister of Community

*Thus, as important as they are and as modest as is their extent, the effectiveness of the housing programmes administered by NS Housing Services can only be assessed in relation to the performance of the whole housing sector including all of its parts - public, private and not-for-profit.*

Services. More to the point, it is the affordability, accessibility, sustainability and well-being of the Province's housing stock as a whole that must be of principal concern to the Government of Nova Scotia. Thus, as important as they are and as modest as is their extent, the effectiveness of the housing programmes administered by NS Housing Services can only be assessed in relation to the performance of the whole housing sector including all of its parts - public, private and not-for-profit.

### **PART 3. BUILDING CAPACITY AND FOCUS AND LEVERAGING ALL THE RESOURCES:**

The private sector has neither the will nor the capacity to operate where it can't make a profit. By the same token, governments have neither the human nor the financial resources to meet all of the urgent needs unmet by the private sector. Nova Scotia's housing 'system' is simply not working to its full potential. Were it to do so, it simply could not afford to treat housing as a social service. Moreover, it could ill-afford not to leverage all of the resources available to it.

For its part, Nova Scotia Housing Services maintains a low profile, and frequently relies on its own limited forces. In doing so it continues to fail to leverage the sources of human, material and financial capital available to it in the Province's public and non-profit community-based

*In New Brunswick, Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador for example, proactive leadership has served as a catalyst in mobilizing broad support across the housing sector as a whole. Indeed, as models of co-operation and collaboration their example is both illuminating and informative.*

sectors. In dramatic contrast, the housing agencies of a number of provinces have been particularly adept at strategically deploying their limited resources to leverage significant additional resources from their respective communities. In New Brunswick, Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador for example, proactive leadership has served as a catalyst in mobilizing broad support across the housing sector as a whole. Indeed, as models of co-operation and collaboration their example is both illuminating and informative.

#### **PART 4. SETTING OUT A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT:**

##### ***Intra-Governmental Collaboration and Cooperation Urgently Required:***

In Canada three, sometimes four levels of government operate simultaneously. In Nova Scotia the three levels frequently contend with one another, when good sense and our limited resources would clearly demand active co-operation, collaboration and mutual respect. They're so distant that matters of urgent concern often fall between them for want of champions. The results of the consultation show that the situation is unacceptable and must be urgently addressed. Protocol requires that in housing the Province make the first move and thereafter lead.

It will take some doing as for many years now government leadership, through research and informed policy-making and programme development, has been largely absent from the

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housing scene in Nova Scotia. When it has been present, as in the recently released Poverty Reduction Strategy, the results have often been disappointing.

Do the housing industry's biggest private sector players - from real estate, banking, development, construction, to long term care providers - enjoy privileged access to government? Or does it just seem that way? After all, Housing Authorities which report directly to the Department of Community Services appear to be 'in' but seem to

have the status of necessary evils. As for the rest, the feedback of community-based, non-profit housing-developers, -owners and -managers is that they feel left out, under-funded and patronized by a Housing Services Department which for its own part, seems immune to criticism.

The respondents to our consultations have told us in no uncertain terms that without a profound change in the culture we share, the many parts of our housing 'system' will continue to work at cross-purposes. It can only get worse which will not only be a dreadful waste of energy, ideas, and limited resources, but a wasted opportunity of major proportions. At this point, it doesn't really matter who among us 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.

## **PART 5. FOSTERING DESIGN AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT:**

As a reflection of housing's major importance to the Province's social-economy and its nature as a broad-based system of interacting parts, an independent Housing Agency or Ministry needs the advice of an appointed Secretariat widely representative of the Province's housing sector. Existing examples might be the Youth Secretariat and the Senior Citizens 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 - where and how best to distribute the Province's housing resources. The Secretariat would also be a resource to the Sector and on the basis of 'best practices' would advocate for the Sector. It would be proactive in its advocacy and animate discussion and debate and would support such through its research and networking activities. 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.

## **PART 6. ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES - A PROVINCE-WIDE HOUSING CONSULTATION**

Experience and the ready example of others, tell us that we could be making far better use of our limited resources, to far greater effect and for the greater benefit of all Nova Scotians. In this regard, we are reminded of the stated intention of the Housing Services Branch to launch a Province-wide 'Affordable Housing Consultation'. Mindful of earlier consultations, AHANS proposes that this time the Government embrace this initiative, accelerate the process, broaden its mandate to include the Housing Sector as a whole, and to that end appoint a panel of 6 to 8 persons, broadly representative of Nova Scotia's housing sector. Whereas, transparency and widely inclusive consultation will ensure broad support and smooth implementation, the Panel should 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.

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (AHANS) is a registered non-profit society. In addition to its work in the fields of research, education and policy development and criticism, AHANS is directly involved in the development of decent and affordable ownership and non-profit rental housing. In addition, AHANS has commissioned two important studies which it would be pleased to share: ***The State of Affordable Housing in HRM***, and ***The State of Affordable Housing in Rural Nova Scotia***. The latter document arose from a Province-wide consultation involving seven round-tables and a day-long symposium. AHANS would be pleased to share its experience and stands ready to play a leading role in an Affordable Housing Consultation.



## PART TWO:

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### **APPENDIX ONE: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HOUSING?**

As we processed the results of our consultations some of us recalled a time in Nova Scotia when housing was a high priority with successive provincial governments. Whatever happened to housing? Where did it go? How did we get here? Conveniently, the NS Archives and Records Management website provides Government Administrative Histories Online. This is what we found on the progressive elimination of housing as an effective presence and responsibility of our provincial government.

1986 seems to have been a high point. After that, things get quite confusing with the functions of housing being subdivided and widely disbursed. In 2000, the NS Housing Development Corporation (NSHDC) assumed control of the NS Housing Development Fund and in that same year the Minister of Community Services and the Deputy Minister assumed responsibility for the NSHDC. It appears that the Minister of Community Services now enjoys all the powers with respect to housing as are set out in the Housing Act of 1989 as well as all of the powers extended both to the NS Housing Development Fund, the NS Housing Development Board, and the NS Housing Development Corporation. If this is indeed the case, then we may well ask why our Ministers of Community Services haven't been doing what they're responsible for and all they're empowered to do with respect to housing.

### **EXCERPT FROM THE NS ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT WEBSITE, GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORIES ONLINE:<sup>1</sup>**

In 1919, the Nova Scotia Housing Act was enacted to promote the building of private homes and the incorporation of housing companies (building societies), and a Director of Housing appointed.

In 1933, the Director of Housing was replaced by the Nova Scotia Housing Commission, with broad powers to encourage better housing and promote and finance house-building.

In 1966, the commission was revived, receiving a new and improved mandate to address the needs of low-income families, public, cooperative and rental housing, housing development and urban renewal.

In 1983, the commission was succeeded and replaced by the Department of Housing, delivering programs such as land servicing/lot sales, parent apartments, public non-profit housing (seniors, families and special care), senior citizens' assistance, provincial housing emergency repair, rent supplement, second mortgage, small loans assistance, "Access-A-Home" and private non-profit housing.

The Housing Development Board was established in 1983 to continue the housing development functions of the defunct Nova Scotia Housing Commission and approve loans for house building.

By 1986 the new board had proved inadequate. The then Minister of Housing was accordingly incorporated as the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation in order to promote housing development and administer the Housing Development Fund more effectively. The objects of the Corporation were to establish housing projects and construct housing accommodation of all types for sale or rent; plan, design, build, own, maintain, manage, and operate housing projects; construct, acquire, renovate and maintain housing of all types and sell, lease or otherwise dispose of it; promote and carry out the construction and provision of more adequate and improved housing for low-income families and individuals, students, elderly persons, families and individuals on social assistance, and people generally in needy circumstances; and improve the quality of housing and furnishings.

In 1992, the Department of Housing merged with the Department of Consumer Affairs to form the Department of Housing and Consumer Affairs. The new Department was responsible for collection agencies, consumer protection, reporting and services, direct vendors' licensing and regulation, housing, installment payment contracts, mortgage brokers' and lenders' registration, real estate brokers' licensing, residential tenancies, relief from fraudulent transactions.

In 1996, the Department of Housing and Consumer Affairs was dissolved and responsibility for housing transferred to Municipal Affairs, which was then re-named Housing and Municipal Affairs. The new Department was responsible for administering the *Housing Act*, the *Housing Development Corporation Act*, the *Assessment Act*, the *Municipal Act*, the *Municipal Affairs Act*, the *Regional Municipalities Act*, the *Towns Act* and all other acts relating to municipal affairs.

In 2000, the Departments of Housing and Municipal Affairs and Business and Consumer Services were amalgamated to form Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. The Department is responsible for access to government services and programs; consumer protection, including residential tenancies; licensed drivers and registered motor vehicles; consumer proposals; geographic information services; condominiums; vital statistics; real property registries, personal property registry, registrar of joint stock companies, Nova Scotia business registry, registry of motor vehicles and deputy registrar general; municipal and provincial-municipal relations; and the provincial tax commissioner.

In 2000, the NS Housing Development Corporation (NSHDC) assumed custody and control of the Housing Development Fund. The Minister and Deputy

Minister of Community Services, respectively, are Chair and President of the Corporation.

In 2008, assessment services were outsourced to the Property Valuation Services Corporation.

The Department of Public Welfare was created in 1944 to bring under the Minister of Public Health all matters relating to social welfare, including family and children's services, public charities, old age pensions, mothers' allowances, children's aid societies, juvenile court and reform schools. In 1946, a separate Minister of Public Welfare was appointed. In 1973, the Department was renamed Social Services, and in 1987 Community Services. The Department is responsible for income assistance and employment support, children and family services, child protection, and community supports for disadvantaged adults and disabled persons.

In 2000, the Department assumed responsibility for the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation.

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<sup>1</sup> A history of episodic restructuring hasn't been the only problem. Restructuring, together with down-loading and down-sizing have, in combination, made a devastating impact on the capacity of our provincial governments to address Nova Scotia's ever-evolving housing needs.

At a very rough estimate the non-clerical staff of the NS Housing Services Division of the Department of Community Services now stands at 30 persons, most of whom are located in Halifax. Compare this with Housing's 'peak' years from 1973 through 1976 when large numbers of co-op and public housing units were delivered. In 1975, when up to 800 co-op units were delivered, the Housing Division had a staff of approximately 110, some of whom were clerical staff. The non-clerical staff included all of the disciplines associated with the business of housing – planners, architects, architectural technicians, engineers, draftsmen, an appraiser, a legal department, researchers and statisticians. The Regional Offices had the usual array of trade tickets – carpenters, electricians, a mason, and possibly a plumber. Also in those years the Commission was staffing up its regional offices with college graduates of various stripes who worked alongside the “old hands”. While the organization experienced various leadership capabilities and the history shows that government struggled to find an appropriate organizational structure for housing, it wasn't until housing found a home in the Department of Community Services that it started to lose its professional capabilities.



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