



The
Edmonton
Inner City
Housing
Society

Insites

Affordable Housing – The Key to Healthy Communities

Message from the Executive Coordinator: Cameron McDonald

New and future housing projects: The Financial Challenge

Lack of government funding for affordable housing since the mid-1990's has seriously challenged our ability to add to the affordable housing stock in the inner city.

Two main questions immediately arise: Where do we find the capital to build? How can we guarantee to our stakeholders (including our residents, partners, and supporters), that we can responsibly manage and maintain our buildings over the long term? Our tenants are persons who have very low incomes.

We cannot generate large amounts of rental revenue in order to offset expenses. New and future housing projects are quite likely to run at a deficit, which puts a lot of stress on our organization.

It is important to point out that affordable housing means different things to different people. A person making \$25,000/year may find that a one-bedroom apartment at \$500/month is affordable, but a two bedroom at \$700/month is not affordable. Hence, this person may reasonably choose to give up some space in order to afford his



Houses to be razed for new family units. Run-down, unsafe, and very energy inefficient, houses like these rent for \$700/month plus utilities. A cold snap in winter pushes the monthly costs to over \$1000/month.

or her housing. This person would say that there should be more affordable two-bedroom apartments for persons who make a modest living. With our residents, however, the average monthly income for a single person is under \$700/month (\$8000/year). For this individual, a one-bedroom apartment is absolutely unaffordable in the current rental market. The most recent statistics from CMHC state that the average prices for one and two-bedroom apartments in Edmonton are \$575 and \$709 respectively. A single parent with two children, who is on assistance, receives a maximum shelter allowance of \$503/month. This parent cannot even afford a one-bedroom apartment. Should several families be expected to pile into a one-bedroom apartment? One does not need a degree in mathematics to see the affordability problem that many inner city residents face in the current housing market. (Not to mention the condition of some of these places.)

Part of our mandate is to ensure that the rents we charge are affordable. This means charging rents which are **well under market rates** (e.g., we charge \$330/month for a one bedroom apartment for a single person, and \$503 for a two bedroom townhouse for a family – assuming the units have no operating subsidy, and the tenants have low income).

Meeting the challenge: Vinterra Properties & EICHS

Recently, Arnie Gable, the owner of Vinterra Properties Inc. approached our organization and offered to build some housing on a not-for-profit basis. He said: "I am truly concerned about the homelessness issue and my company can offer services which at this time may be more useful to you than a cash donation."

He then proceeded to state that he would design and manage the construction of the project at no charge. Furthermore, he would not mark up the cost of materials and labour. In the end the overall cost of the project became very reasonable. Just as importantly, he is holding the price well into the foreseeable future, and any cost overruns he will cover. If his company comes in under his quoted price, he will donate back the surplus to Inner City Housing, in order to provide seed money for future projects. A conservative estimate suggests his company's contribution will save us well



Proposed family housing unit.

over \$100,000 in terms of the overall cost of the project.

With this kind of partnership in place, our organization searched the community and found an appropriate parcel of land. We purchased four lots in Norwood, close to Norwood School, the Norwood Community Centre, and the Sprucewood Public Library. This land will be used to develop eight new

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There's No Place like Home

by Betty Farrell, President

This old, familiar song title was used forcefully in the recent postcard campaign sponsored by the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness and Our Voice newspaper. This action, a message to the Honourable Stan Woloshyn, minister responsible for housing, called for an immediate response to the desperate need for affordable rental accommodation in Alberta – urban and rural.



been living in the river valley while the weather has been clement, along with numerous singles.

In November 2001, the recommendations of the Low Income Review were released by the Minister Mr. Clint Dunford. Several recommendations were very noteworthy, – especially the

one calling for an increase in the Low Income programs such as Supports for Independence (welfare), Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and others. Yet, as of November 19, 2002 no raises have been forthcoming. The shelter rates allowed recipients in no way match the going market rates.

Alberta also needs a higher minimum wage. Just think – a person working a 40 hour week at \$5.90 an hour makes \$236.00 weekly, \$1044 monthly. No wonder food banks have longer and longer line-ups each month.

The Affordable Housing Partnership Program, initiated by the Federal Government, and signed by the Alberta Government in June 2002, will make 67 million dollars available toward low cost housing over the next five years. However, there is a big catch – those dollars must be matched by an equal contribution from this province

For most of us, home is a comfortable reality, a safe, clean warm place for ourselves and our family. Yet, right here in Edmonton, more and more citizens face the bitter fact that there is no affordable long term place for them to call home.

On October 23, 2002, the fifth homeless count in this city revealed that the condition of being homeless has increased by 65% from the last count conducted in September 2000. This October 2002 count found 1,915 homeless people in our city including 118 families with 26% of the children under the age of 15. [See back page for summary.] And we must remember that, for every person counted, there are a host of others in our city living in extremely run down, even dangerous accommodation, paying unfair rentals for miserable housing. Many are spending over 50% of their income to have a roof over their heads.

It is also true that more than one family has

We Must Take Action:

Write or phone the Honourable Stan Woloshyn, Minister for Seniors and responsible for low income housing, regarding the affordable rental crisis.

Call the Alberta Minister of Human Resources and Employment, Honourable Clint Dunford, urging positive action on raising the rates for those Alberta depending on the Low Income Programs.

It is very important to contact Premier Klein and your own MLA regarding these urgent issues.

You will be sincerely thanked by all of those Albertans who are desperately waiting for an affordable, decent rental space to call home.

and other participants. As of November 25, 2002 the Alberta Government has yet to announce the amount it will contribute. The monies currently available must be spent by the end of March or it is gone. Doesn't the Alberta Government realize this or does it care little for the neediest citizens of this province, who are the working poor or those needing assistance from the various provincial programs?

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An on-going challenge (continued from page one)

With rent charges like the ones just mentioned, balancing affordability with increasing operating expenses is a serious managerial challenge.

What about construction? Even if an organization is fortunate enough to receive grants to build a project, by the time construction is 'ready to go', it is quite likely that prices have escalated and a new search begins to cover cost overruns.

The Federal Government recently announced the Affordable Housing Partnership Program. Through this program one can access up to \$50,000/unit. This program is a step in the right direction, but current conditions indicate

that family housing requires more than \$50,000/unit to build, given the price of land and inflating construction costs. Moreover, the program does not address the problem of long term viability in terms of operations, especially when the money is used to build housing for persons with very low income (i.e., our residents). In the long run it is the on-going operations which cost the most, not simply the capital costs.

This is the challenge: We must persevere in this difficult environment and adhere to our mandate and current mission priorities: to continue to find ways to build new housing, keep the housing affordable, and secure sufficient resources so we can properly maintain the buildings over the long term.

Tenant Profile

"Most of the fellas I drank with are dead"



"I'm one of the lucky ones." So says Frank Joy, 48, as he relates his story of 30 years of hard drinking and the road to recovery he's been on for the last three years. "I started drinking in grade 9, and drank every chance I got. Most of the fellas I drank with are dead."

Today Frank lives in a modest room in an EICHS rooming house and helps out with yard work year round.

"Basically, before I got in here I was living in a dive. Cockroaches, mice, a real dirty place, no screens on the window – all the usual nice stuff. We didn't even get our own mail, it was all delivered to the landlord."

Frank relapsed about two years ago and almost died. He credits the staff at

the George Spady Centre (an alcohol treatment centre) and his landlord at EICHS for helping him get back on his feet. Although he was on a binge and ended up in hospital, his room was kept for him, in the hope that he would get his sobriety back.

And he did. "It's almost 20 months. I get lots of support and so far it's working." Last month Frank gave a life skills presentation to Our House, another alcohol treatment centre where he had spent 3 months, and continues to visit for support. He spoke to others in recovery about his experiences, about how scared he was to re-establish communication with his family, about learning to be at ease with people and working on his self-esteem.

Although Frank found it scary to rebuild relationships with his family, he says, "My family never gave up on me, I was the one who wasn't there. They would be out on the streets looking for me when I was drinking. Now, we've got the trust back. They know they can count on me. They showed me through the years that they were there for me, now I have a chance to give some of that back." On Frank's dresser is a photo of him holding his grandniece. He truly is one of the lucky ones.

Tenant Profile

"Where I was living before, we had cockroaches and mice"

As a student and single parent, Tina needed housing that she could afford with a combination of student finance assistance and part-time work. She moved into EICHS family housing in McCauley in 1994. While studying, she volunteered with the Boys and Girls Club down the street and then was hired part-time to work with the hot lunch program at McCauley School. She now works as a teaching assistant with Ben Calf Robe Aboriginal Head Start.

"For me, a home is a sanctuary," she says. "Through all the years I've been a tenant, the project managers have been great. They understand how my income can go up and down depending on how many hours work I get. The rent geared to income program makes it possible for me to live here. Where I was living before we had cockroaches and mice. Even the place my Mom lives in now, she has to turn on the stove to heat up the rooms, because sometimes the landlord doesn't get the furnace repaired or doesn't pay the bill. Here, I don't have to worry about these things."

In 2000, Tina moved to one of the family units in Boyle Street. "I have to admit, I was a little worried about the area, having young kids. But its been great. I have good neighbours, there are lots of supports in the neighbourhood like Bissell Centre, and next year



Tina, Preston and Brandon at home.

my kids will transfer to the new school (Mother Theresa) that is opening just a few blocks away. The teachers are friendly, and the social workers in the schools go the extra mile. I like living in a neighbourhood where people at the corner store know my name."



Meeting the challenge (continued from page one)

units of family housing. Our ability to purchase this land was made possible through generous donations from the Allen Family (through the Edmonton Community Foundation) the Minerva Foundation, and recent donations from our other supporters (individuals and church groups).

Through the efforts of the **Community Action Project** (a community group dedicated to neighbourhood revitalization) local residents were consulted about our proposed development,

and the feedback we received was very positive.

Hopefully in the next month or two, we will find sufficient capital to build this project. With the family shelter network full and unable to place families in need due to the current housing shortage, eight new units of family housing will help take some of the pressure off the affordable housing crisis. However, eight units is a far cry from the 5000 units currently needed in Edmonton.

The EICHS Community



Marc Munan, an eleven year resident of Project 4, 9535 - 108 Avenue recently exhibited about 30 pieces of his art work at Studio 321 located on Rice Howard Way. His show included clay and wood works, water colour paintings, folk art and intricate cityscapes done with cardboard, felt markers and felt fabric. The exhibit was a joint venture between father and son as Marc's father, Louis, also had 15 of his sculptures on display. When not working on his own art, Marc has volunteered with a children's program at the Edmonton Art Gallery. He has graciously lent two water colour paintings to our office to brighten the walls and hopes to have another exhibit in February, 2003.



Preston at work

November 22, 2002: Homelessness Awareness Day



A Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton

Conducted October 23, 2002 by the Edmonton Homelessness Count Committee

Summary

The fifth count of the homeless found 1915 homeless persons in the City of Edmonton. Of these, 1213 were absolute homeless (having no housing alternatives) and 702 were sheltered homeless (living in emergency accommodations.)

The Edmonton Homelessness Count Committee organized the count, applying the methodology used in the previous counts (March/ November 1999 and March/ September 2000), to ensure a consistent "snapshot" of the homeless population.

There were 118 families counted, encompassing 267 children under the age of 15 and 141 caregivers.

A majority of the homeless were single – 1507 of the 1915 total. Among them, 61% were absolute homeless compared with 39% who were sheltered homeless.

Definitions:

Absolute homeless – no permanent place to reside, or stay with friends or find emergency shelter space.

Sheltered homeless- people registered to stay in approved emergency shelters. These are people who expect to be "on the street" at the end of their stay in emergency accommodations.



**You are invited to the
EICHS Christmas Dinner
9353 - 101A Avenue
December 21, 1-3 p.m.**



Thank you to all of our donors, volunteers, board members, staff and new partners who make decent housing a reality. We thank you for your support and generosity.