



Enabling Safe and Inclusive Communities Through Housing

A CHRA Congress Session Summary



BC Housing

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their generous support of this initiative

April 2014

Introduction

This paper builds on a workshop held at the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's (CHRA) 2014 Annual Congress. It highlights three projects where housing is the catalyst for urban inner city neighborhood regeneration. The workshop *'Enabling Safe and Inclusive Communities Through Housing'* held on May 1st, 2014, addressed the preservation of Vancouver's Downtown East Side for low-income residents, plans for a new Edmonton community built on the site of a decommissioned airport, and the renewal of a downtown Winnipeg neighborhood. In each case, housing served as the foundation for neighborhood preservation, redevelopment and renewal, respectively.

Inner city neighborhoods that offer housing options for diverse household types and income levels can increase social and economic opportunities for those living in the area while strengthening urban growth. Increasing the number of households in urban neighborhoods also reduces pressures on transportation networks and related environmental impacts. The health benefits of walkable urban neighborhoods are also well documented. Yet many inner city neighborhoods across Canada are experiencing pressures due to a variety of economic, social and environmental factors, and strategies are needed to ensure neighborhoods remain safe and inclusive places for individuals and families to live.

In some cases, preserving neighborhoods for existing residents is a challenge if the cost of housing and retail space rises too quickly. In others, the opposite challenge is true, whereby declining inner city infrastructure and services require added investment and support in order to be stabilized. Finally, the redevelopment of unused inner city lands presents an opportunity that can equally bring about new, accessible urban neighborhoods.

Expanding on the presentations delivered at CHRA's 2014 Congress workshop *'Enabling Safe and Inclusive Communities Through Housing'*, this paper provides further background on three innovative projects taking place in Vancouver, BC, Edmonton, AB and Winnipeg, MB. The case studies are:

I. Protecting Low-Income Housing in Vancouver's Downtown East Side

Shayne Ramsay, CEO of BC Housing, spoke about the organization's Single Room Occupancy Renewal Initiative in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. The presentation focused on the rehabilitation of the downtown core, approaches to mitigating the displacement of residents during urban renewal and the conservation of existing historic structures.

II. The Way Ahead: Edmonton's Innovative Blatchford Redevelopment

Mark Hall, Executive Director of the Blatchford Redevelopment with the City of Edmonton, spoke on the innovative sustainability focused redevelopment of Edmonton's former City Centre Airport. Discussion centred on the integration of the new Blatchford community within adjacent, existing city neighborhoods, environmental sustainability, urban housing, transportation and infrastructure needs.

III. Responsible Community Revitalization with Winnipeg's Housing Opportunity Partnership

Lori Thorsteinson, President and Peter Squire, Past President of Housing Opportunity Partnership shared their organization's innovative approach to inner city neighborhood renewal through homeownership.

The projects highlighted here present new approaches to fostering healthy and inclusive inner city neighborhoods in which housing affordability is a vital component. They address many important issues linking neighborhood vitality to housing affordability and accessibility. They also highlight locally based opportunities to bring back the amenities that will allow inner city neighborhoods to flourish, such as affordable housing, walkability and increased efficiency of transportation, along with public spaces, schools, recreation, retail and social services, providing new and renewed opportunities for inner city neighborhood growth.

CASE STUDIES

I. Protecting Low-Income Housing in Vancouver's Downtown East Side

A Culturally Rich Social History:

Once Vancouver's main commercial district and transportation hub, The Downtown East Side (DTES) encompasses some of the city's oldest neighborhoods. The area holds a unique character and rich history, and is strongly connected to its founding Aboriginal communities – including the Musqueam, Tsleil-Wauthuth and Squamish First Nations – and also maintains roots that stem from early Japanese-Canadian and Chinese-Canadian settlement. The neighborhoods of Gastown, Powell Street, Chinatown, Oppenheimer and Strathcona, with their distinctive low- to medium-rise buildings and smaller scale architecture, link to the diverse communities that have settled in the area over time. Many elements of Canadian history are rooted in the Downtown East Side, such as the Chinese Head Tax, the forced displacement and internment of the Japanese-Canadian community during the Second World War, as well as the displacement of First Nations under residential school policy.

Located on land many Aboriginal communities consider unceded Coast Salish territory, the area's economy was anchored at the turn of the century by Woodward's, Vancouver's primary retail location, and a destination for shoppers city-wide, with numerous hotels built to accommodate commercial travelers and tourists to the area. However, the character of the neighborhood changed dramatically with the discontinuation of the city's streetcar service in 1958, and the shutting down of the North Shore Ferry Service the following year. The closing of these transportation networks meant the dissipation of the thousands of people who had flowed through the neighborhood on a daily basis, crippling many local businesses. By the 1970s many of the Single Room Occupancy hotels built for destination shoppers had become the homes of single middle-aged men with modest fixed incomes.

Neighborhood Decline:

The neighborhood began to significantly deteriorate in the 1980s, resulting in part from the deinstitutionalization of patients from a number of mental health facilities in British Columbia (BC). The lack of support services for these newly released individuals led many to Vancouver's Downtown East Side to find residence in the areas affordable Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels. During the early 1990s, Woodward's department store went out of business, gutting the neighborhood of its primary retail anchor. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s injection drug use spread across the DTES, resulting in almost 90 percent of users in the area being infected with Hepatitis C. Finally, restrictions imposed on eligibility for social assistance in 1995, an unchanged housing allowance between 1995 and 2007 and the physical deterioration of many of the area's SRO buildings created increasing and compounding challenges in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood has been cited by Statistics Canada as one of the country's poorest urban areas, and poverty does present a significant challenge to the community's health, social well-being and resilience as a whole. Over the past decade local and regional governments, academics, researchers and social agencies have suggested many solutions to the area's problems, with the Downtown East Side becoming a breeding ground for social experimentation. Solutions have ranged from the enforcement of drug use, to legalizing drug use, reducing harm, to promoting abstinence, from the enforcement of the sex trade, to legalizing the sex trade and raising welfare rates; in other words, a mix of opposing and targeted programming. The DTES is also home to North America's first supervised injection site (INSITE).

These problems cannot however be taken out of context, as the area includes industrial land, a vibrant business community, schools, churches, high-priced condos and co-op housing. As a mixed-income neighborhood, the DTES is also home to numerous non-profit organizations, social service agencies and shelters offering critical support to the community. It was estimated in 2011 that 18,477 people live in the DTES, with 38 percent living within a family structure, an estimated 24 percent are single parents, 15 percent are under the age of 19, while the area is home to 2,300 businesses employing more than 20,000 people.

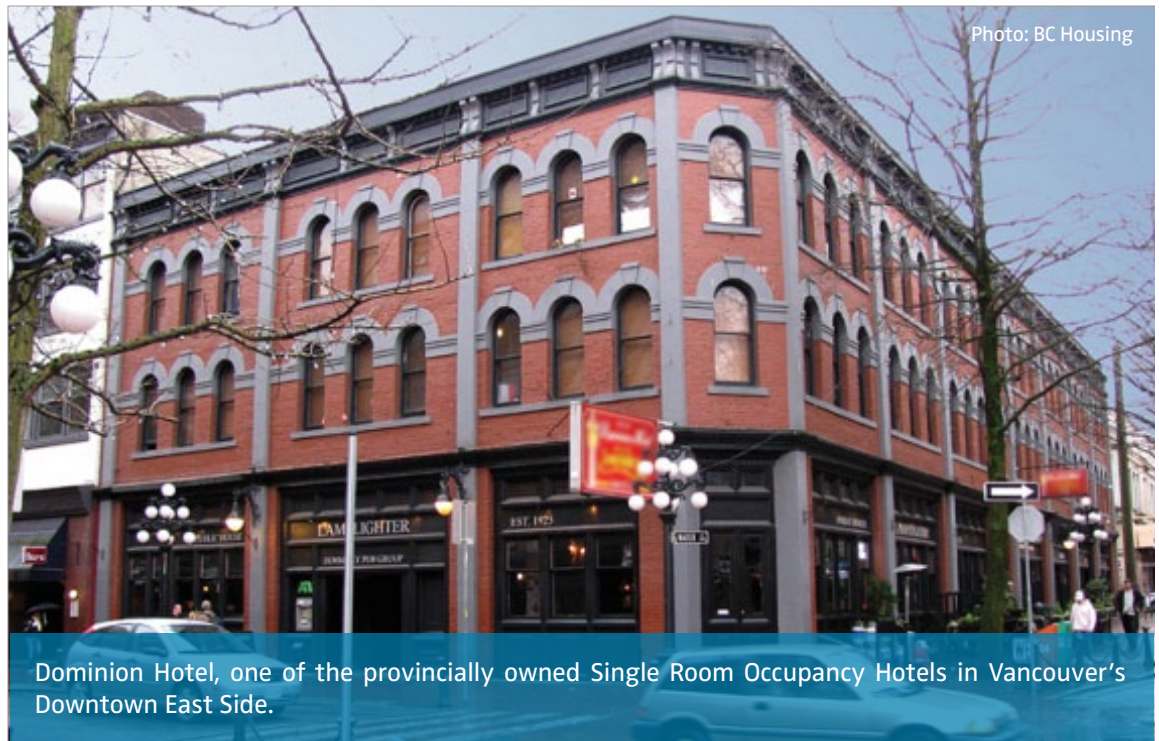
However, more than half of the residents in the DTES are low-income, dependent on social assistance, pensions or charitable and social services. Over the last ten years the population of Vancouver's DTES has grown by 10 percent, while 52 percent of residents in the area are over the age of 45, compared to 39 percent in the rest of the city. These trends are coupled with an unemployment rate of 27 percent and a median household income of \$13,691, the lowest in the city of Vancouver. As well, approximately 10 percent of Vancouver's Aboriginal population lives in the area, and Strathcona and Chinatown house a high immigrant population, while the rest of the DTES is primarily non-immigrant. Underpinning these socio-demographic trends is the urgent need for more affordable, stable and safe housing for the low-income residents of the Downtown East Side.

BC Housing's Single Room Occupancy Renewal Initiative:

Single Room Occupancy hotels are an important community asset in the DTES, as they can be the entry point into stable housing for many people who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness. Many of the residents living in SROs face complex challenges including mental health issues, alcohol and drug addictions and physical disabilities. SROs offer residents the opportunity to be stably housed while accessing programs and services in support of individual needs. Studies have shown that approximately 79 percent of SRO residents have health concerns, 47 percent have multiple health concerns, and 33 percent suffer from mental illness. Studies also reveal that residents are:

- 79 percent male;
- An average age of 46 years;
- 68 percent Caucasian, 21 percent Aboriginal or Metis;
- Have an average total monthly income of \$1,109;
- Represent 30 percent of all police calls in Metro Vancouver in 2008; and
- It is estimated to cost the Province approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 additionally per person annually if a resident leaves a SRO and returns to the street.

BC Housing has been working with Vancouver's Downtown East Side community to understand the housing issues within the DTES neighborhoods, and to develop solutions that address the barriers facing the most vulnerable group of people in the area. The core issue is understood as a severe shortage of safe, affordable and habitable housing in the DTES, and the redevelopment pressures on the SRO housing stock, which is in marginal condition. To prevent the loss of this stock, and address the lack of affordable housing, in 2007, BC Housing purchased 24 Single Room Occupancy hotels – more than 1,400 units – in the DTES and surrounding areas to preserve and protect these units for the purpose of social housing. Although initial upgrades were undertaken to address immediate health and safety concerns, it was not enough to improve basic living standards, and ultimately, without further repairs, the provincially owned SROs would continue to deteriorate and would ultimately become uninhabitable.



To address the serious potential of SRO residents sliding back into homelessness, in October 2011, BC Housing announced the SRO Renewal Initiative (SRI Project or the Project) to renew and restore 13 of the 24 SROs. The SRI Project invests in housing for approximately 900 at-risk SRO residents. Once completed, the Project will provide residents with clean, affordable and safe long-term housing with access to integrated social programs and services.

The project has also secured 1,100 BC Housing owned SROs in terms of rent (\$375/month) and tenure, an important legacy of the project, as the number of private rooms renting in the area at or below the shelter allowance component of Income Assistance has fallen from 67 percent in 2007 to 26 percent in 2013. With fewer vacancies and a greater demand for affordable housing in the DTES, more private SRO owners are choosing to increase rents, as the very low shelter rates make it hard for private owners to maintain and renew the housing stock and to recover on investments when tenants are low-income.

In December 2012, BC Housing entered into a fixed-price Project Agreement with Habitat Housing Initiative, a private sector partner, to build, finance and maintain the SRI Project over a term of 18 years, including the estimated construction period of three years. A first in Canada, the SRI Project is an innovative social housing model that will be delivered as a public-private partnership (P3). The total capital cost of the Project is \$143.3 million and is funded by the Province of British Columbia (\$114.2 million) and the Government of Canada (\$29.1 million) through the P3 fund.

Habitat Housing Initiative's proposal outlined creative solutions for temporary tenant relocation and construction challenges including securing and upgrading up to 175 privately owned rental units in the DTES to be used as temporary residential accommodation. During the construction period, buildings will be renovated and put back in service as soon as they become available, allowing residents to regain use of their renovated homes while remaining in the community throughout the construction process. An important outcome of the Project will be the restored private sector units. In time, they will also be added to the inventory of privately owned SRO hotel rooms available in the Downtown East Side.

Integrating Housing and Community:

The SRI Project will improve the health and living environment of individuals in the community while providing autonomy and dignity to residents. Stabilizing living conditions for this vulnerable population also allows for enhanced opportunities for residents to look for work and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The Project itself will provide 60 person years of skills development and job training to local residents, as well as 20 person years of employment opportunities for First Nations individuals. BC Housing's existing agreements with non-profit operating partners that provide tenant services and programs will remain unchanged, while new programming and service spaces will be added.

The SROs are also historic buildings that form part of the heritage of Vancouver's Downtown East Side neighborhood, and BC Housing's SRI Project will ensure the heritage status of many of these buildings. BC Housing undertook an evaluation of the buildings and identified that 9 of the 13 SROs held either City of Vancouver or federal heritage designation status. Renovations will include the retention and renewal of building façades, staircases, windows and light wells. This work will ensure the heritage status of the buildings, extend their useful service life, and improve and enhance the local community streetscape. Renovations to each of the 13 SROs will also result in significant energy efficiencies achieved through the replacement of and renewal of building systems such as boilers and building envelope, windows and insulation and upgraded heat and ventilations systems, helping BC Housing achieve its mandate to be carbon neutral by reducing greenhouse gas emissions for each of the 13 buildings.

Woodward's:

The Woodward's building has now also been redeveloped and includes 536 market-housing units, 125 single below-market housing units to be operated by Portland Hotel Society Community Services and 75 family below-market housing units to be operated by the Affordable Housing Society. This mixed-use development has brought an array of services back into the area including London Drugs, the National Film Board of Canada, civic offices, a daycare, public atrium and the Simon Fraser University School for Contemporary Arts. A catalyst for the revitalization of the Downtown East Side, the Woodward's redevelopment, opened in 2010, has brought renewed interest to the area around Victory Square, and it is anticipated that the area will continue to see investment into the future due to the historic preservation and renewal of this important commercial anchor in the Downtown East Side.

Looking Forward:

Looking forward, the newly adopted Downtown East Side Local Area Plan (2014) includes a housing strategy that seeks to protect community assets, support vulnerable residents, stabilize the affordable rental housing stock and create opportunities for community-based development. The message made clear within the DTES Local Area Plan is that housing is not enough on its own. Job opportunities, affordable services, food security and mental health outreach are key to maintaining a vibrant community in which housing is accessible and achievable for all.

The BC Housing Single Room Occupancy Renewal Initiative is one important piece of this renewal plan. By reinvesting in a vibrant area of the city of Vancouver, one with a long social and cultural history, the SRI Project brings new opportunities for growth, renewal and stability to the Downtown East Side. In expanding the scope of access to employment, social services, and safe affordable housing, the Project not only addresses the needs of current SRO residents, without displacing tenants, but anticipates future needs by enhancing the heritage and vibrancy of the area for generations to come.

II. The Way Ahead: Edmonton's Innovative Blatchford Redevelopment

History Meets Future Innovation:

The potential to design and develop a neighborhood around sustainable principles from the ground up is a rare and exciting opportunity. An international design competition for the redevelopment of Edmonton's former City Centre Airport has done just that, inviting architects and planners from across the globe to share their vision for the transformation of the airport land. In use until November 2013, Edmonton's City Centre Airport was the first licensed airstrip in Canada. It played a major role in aviation during the Second World War as part of an international airplane relay network, and enabled northern exploration in Canada. In 1995, passenger air service was consolidated to the Edmonton International Airport, and in 2008, Edmonton City Council opened discussion on the redevelopment of the City Centre Airport into a new urban residential and commercial community. Named after former city of Edmonton Mayor Kenneth Blatchford, who was instrumental in the creation of the City Centre Airport, the vision of the new Blatchford Redevelopment is of a vibrant ecological and transit-oriented community incorporating public space, family housing and a walkable neighborhood environment. A master plan has now been developed to redevelop the site into an environmentally sustainable, mixed-use community for 30,000 residents.

Edmonton's City Centre Airport lands will be home to 30,000 Edmontonians living, working and learning in a sustainable community that uses 100% renewable energy, is carbon neutral, significantly reduces its ecological footprint, and empowers residents to pursue a range of sustainable lifestyle choices.

The redevelopment is intended to weave together the unique urban, environmental and heritage aspects of the area while generating greater unity across the city of Edmonton. In developing the 217 hectares (536 acres) of centrally located land, Blatchford's design will incorporate a large central park and open public spaces, development of urban agricultural landscaping including community garden plots, and a large stormwater lake complex and boardwalk. The Master Plan for Blatchford was completed in early 2012, detailed design work has taken place, and shovels are expected to be in the ground in 2015. Blatchford is also a major pillar within The Way Ahead: City of Edmonton Strategic Plan, outlining a vision for Edmonton in 2040 aligning the city's economic growth and urban development priorities around six citizen-focused goals including:

- The transformation of Edmonton's urban form through increased density;
- Shifting Edmonton's transportation modes to promote alternatives such as walking and cycling, paired with readily accessible public transit;
- Reducing the ecological footprint of the community and its residents by being sustainable and resilient;
- Improving livability through increased access to recreation and active lifestyle options;
- Diversifying Edmonton's economy by promoting a vibrant livable city, and by providing a dynamic environment that encourages innovation;
- Balancing revenues and costs so that the city can provide the affordable services and infrastructure that citizens need.

The Blatchford Redevelopment will be at the heart of this vision of citywide transformation. Located just north of the downtown core of Edmonton, the redevelopment of the former airport site will inform forward thinking on sustainable inner city community design. While areas of Edmonton today, such as Old Strathcona, still offer walkable, livable neighborhoods reminiscent of mature cities, Edmonton has seen its downtown core depleted during the 1960's and 1970's due to development patterns that moved infrastructure and housing outward to the suburbs, creating car dependent communities of single-family tract housing. By re-connecting centrally located urban neighborhoods surrounding the former airport land, the Blatchford Redevelopment seeks to bring a newfound cohesion to the city of Edmonton.

Housing and the Broader Urban Context:

Regional, economic and demographic changes taking place within the city have also influenced the impetus for the Blatchford Redevelopment plan. Edmonton's location effectively positions the city as the research and supply hub at the heart of Alberta's energy sector. This affords positive net benefits for the city in terms of population and employment growth within a strong local economy. However these trends also pose challenges such as the increased need for services and infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population, coupled with the potential impact of rapid growth on the city's built infrastructure and urban environment.

The Edmonton Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) saw its population grow to 1,159,869 in 2011 and recorded the second fastest pace of growth of any metropolitan area in Canada over the period from 2006 to 2011. And with 57 percent of the current population between the ages of 25 and 64, affordable family housing is a growing issue in the city. The city's vacancy rate is one of the lowest in the country, declining to 1.4 per cent in October 2013, down from 1.7 percent in the same period of 2012. In addition, the average rent of a 2-bedroom apartment rose by 6.4 percent in 2014 alone. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, the proportion of Albertan's spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent is 23.7 per cent, and monthly shelter costs are roughly \$200 more across the province than the Canadian average.

Affordable family housing is therefore a guiding principle of Blatchford's design, to be oriented toward a town centre to maximize walkability, sustainability and efficiency of use of surrounding neighborhood amenities. While a range of housing densities will be used throughout Blatchford, including higher density builds around Light Rail Transit (LRT) and activity nodes, no single-family homes will be included in Blatchford's design. Rather, the community is focused on the development of multi-family housing in a range of medium density types including townhouses, stacked townhouses, condos and 4 to 6 storey apartments. Housing design will contribute to a vibrant street life and will offer mixed-use space including office, retail and commercial where appropriate. At least 20 percent of Blatchford's housing units (approximately 2,000 to 2,500 units) will be affordable housing, both ownership and rental. The Blatchford Redevelopment Plan situates housing around the following principles:

- Promotion of mixed-use development, including medium density street-oriented, walk-up buildings to minimize the building footprint and maximize open space;
- Allowance for higher density development at LRT stations and activity nodes to create the critical mass necessary to sustain public spaces, cultural and business uses and the viability of a pedestrian oriented street life;
- Mixing of affordable housing and market-rate housing throughout the community; and
- A diversity of housing for singles, couples, families and a broad range of amenities from daycares to schools to restaurants, all locally situated.

The housing needs of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) students will also be considered through the inclusion of student housing and the expansion of the NAIT campus within the Blatchford Redevelopment area. NAIT is the largest apprenticeship trainer in Canada serving 30,000 students across 16 learning sites in Edmonton, and is Canada's largest post-secondary institution without off-campus student housing. Given that NAIT serves a large student population from outside the Edmonton metro area, student housing is considered a priority. NAIT's campus development expansion team is working closely with the Blatchford design team to examine collaborative opportunities for district energy and shared use of recreational, arts, technology and other public facilities. This expansion will provide NAIT with the capacity for enrollment growth in existing programs, will accommodate new programs as well as applied research opportunities and will consolidate Edmonton's capital region facilities.

Sustainable Design and Transportation Needs:

The final plan will include an impressive array of sustainable features. Urban agriculture, low impact drainage development approaches, and the requirement for high performance building envelopes, a fibre optic network and a district energy system are all included in the plan approved by City Council. Further sustainability features including solar photovoltaic panels for homes, a recreational lake and accessible and age-friendly urban design are also being considered.

Blatchford's vision includes being carbon neutral in using 100 percent renewable energy, significantly reducing the community's ecological footprint. Environmental sustainability will be achieved by using a variety of technologies to minimizing waste, heat, power and water consumption. Climate responsive landscapes designed to optimize solar impact and minimize wind impact, along with more densely populated residential neighborhoods and an extended network of pedestrian and bike paths situated around a town centre will further enhance the impact of an inclusive and sustainable design.

The term 'sustainability' encompasses many ideas, notions and uses, and is defined in the UN Report "Our Common Future" as, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Three elements must co-exist for sustainable development to be successful and they include the social, economic and ecological dimensions.

In addition to environmental sustainability, the challenge is to address social and economic factors that will encourage residents to adopt a sustainable lifestyle including walking, cycling and reduced automobile dependence. This means providing choices across a broad range of living and working environments such as housing in proximity to employment opportunities, access to education, health care, recreation and entertainment, and a comprehensive community design, including the extension of the city's Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, connecting Blatchford with the rest of Edmonton's LRT System. Blatchford will also seek to minimize automobile traffic through the narrowing of roads and a reduction in parking space requirements.

To facilitate the long-term transportation and commuter needs within this new urban neighborhood, the Blatchford Redevelopment plan will both utilize and extend existing city infrastructure. The lands immediately surrounding the former airport are developed with a

range of commercial, residential, industrial, public, community, educational and cultural land uses. Five established neighborhoods are located within close proximity to the development and include major employment and innovation hubs such as the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, the Norwood Extended Care Hospital and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. The Blatchford Redevelopment plan thereby creates a new centralized destination that will knit formerly disparate communities and land uses together, linking infrastructure, design and transportation efficiencies.

It is not just sustainability or innovative design however that sets the Blatchford Redevelopment apart. It is also the integration of new and existing infrastructure that capitalizes on the principle of sustainable urban renewal, simultaneously reinvesting in current neighborhoods through the repurposing and reuse of inner city public lands.



Blatchford Redevelopment will be a sustainable mixed-use community in the heart of Edmonton including affordable rental and homeownership housing.

Looking Forward:

Today, the city of Edmonton is setting a new precedent for sustainable community development. In transforming Edmonton's former City Centre Airport in the heart of the city into an inclusive, family oriented, sustainable community, Blatchford will demonstrate in a real and measurable way how cities in the future can continue to reduce their ecological footprint. Aligning its priorities with city objectives, the Blatchford Redevelopment will be instrumental in shaping future development practices and in changing the way the city of Edmonton grows.

Just as suburban expansion provided a pattern for urban growth, Blatchford represents a new opportunity to establish a world-leading model for repurposing former industrial lands into family-oriented neighborhoods that draw households back into the urban core of the city. Built along the principles of providing for an intimate city experience in which residents can walk, shop, live, work and play all within the city centre – amenities lost with the efficiencies of suburbia – Blatchford has set lifestyle, affordability, and sustainability as priorities for current and future generations.

III. Responsible Community Revitalization with Winnipeg's Housing Opportunity Partnership

Stabilizing Local Neighborhoods Through Homeownership:

Housing Opportunity Partnership (HOP) is a Winnipeg-based not-for-profit inner-city revitalization initiative. Focused on an inner-city neighborhood in the West End of the city, HOP's primary purpose is the reclamation of derelict homes in need of repair. The organization strategically targets the acquisition of homes on streets that already have a homeownership base while focusing exclusively on increasing homeownership opportunities in the area.

Many local families can still trace their heritage back to the West End of Winnipeg, a culturally diverse neighborhood with working class roots that fell into decline in the years following the Second World War, as many families moved to Winnipeg's suburbs. Just west of downtown, the area saw crime rates rise in the 1970s, followed by extensive revitalization efforts in the 1980s, and continued decline in the condition of housing in the mid-1990s.

Exacerbating the decline of the area, the 21st century saw the tendency towards single-family residential development in the suburbs and the decentralization of recreation and retailing outside of Winnipeg's city centre. Subsequently, homes in the West End of Winnipeg saw a significant decrease in market value, shifting the property tax burden onto other areas of the city. The result was the disinvestment in the inner city core of Winnipeg, as well as a reduction in the supply of affordable housing. It was against this background that Housing Opportunity Partnership was created.

Housing Opportunity Partnership's groundbreaking work began in 1995 as a result of learning about the success of the Columbus Housing Partnership in the United States (now Homeport), a not-for-profit organization committed to preserving, stabilizing and improving neighborhoods through new and renovated affordable rental and for-purchase homes. The Winnipeg Real Estate Board (WREB - now WinnipegREALTORS®) felt the city could do something similar, given the local need for neighborhood revitalization, and began forming a broad housing stakeholder task force with the goal of developing housing partnerships in Winnipeg.

In 2000, the City of Winnipeg initiated efforts to revitalize the downtown core of the city, and classified 14 neighborhoods as 'major improvement areas'. These were "older areas that have experienced significant decline to the point where housing and neighborhood infrastructure require complete renewal."

"House by house, block by block, this partnership is rebuilding Winnipeg's inner-city neighborhoods."

– Glen Murray, former Mayor of Winnipeg (1998-2004)

In light of declining and aging neighborhoods, the goal of HOP has been to promote self-sufficiency by renovating the existing housing stock to provide and strengthen homeownership opportunities for low-to-moderate income buyers in the community. The program is further based on the belief that homeownership is a stabilizing force bringing growth and vitality to a neighborhood by establishing long-term security, cohesion and development in the area. Housing also represents a personal and financial investment that will appreciate over time, meaning that the more homeowners there are in a community, the greater the potential for neighborhood revitalization through a shared interest in the ongoing redevelopment of the neighborhood.

To achieve its neighborhood revitalization goals, HOP strategically purchases and renovates homes on streets that already have a homeownership base in order to increase the long-term viability of redevelopment in the area. HOP's efforts are currently focused on the western edge of the Spence neighborhood in the West End of Winnipeg, and include the neighborhoods of St. Matthew and Daniel McIntyre, with a focus on the streets between Arlington and Balmoral, bordered to the north by Notre Dame and to the south by Portage Avenue. The area is currently home to over 35,000 residents, 1,000 local businesses and has seen an increase in young families, university students and first-time homebuyers move into the community in recent years.

Private-Public Partnerships and the Tools of Financing:

Initial funds were secured in 1997 through two main sources. The Manitoba Securities Commission provided \$600,000 over four years, while \$500,000 over three years was established under the Winnipeg Development Agreement Home Equity Program, administered by the federal government.

The funding provided by the Manitoba Securities Commission was secured through the interest earned on real estate deposits held in trust by real estate brokers from across the province. A portion of these funds were previously committed by legislation to real estate education programs, with the remainder going into provincial general revenues. Due to the efforts of the Winnipeg Real Estate Board at the time, the legislation was amended in 1996 to allow the earnings to also be used for the funding of not-for-profit initiatives that promote affordable homeownership and neighborhood revitalization.

The funding provided by the Winnipeg Development Agreement Home Equity Program, signed in 1995 by all three orders of government, pooled \$75 million to be used for community and economic development in the city. In addition, the WREB contributed \$25,000 in initial start-up funding to HOP, as well as helping to provide MLS® market information to non-profit housing developers.

A final source of funding comes from the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative for market gap funding – the difference between the acquisition price and rehabilitation price of the homes HOP purchases – which includes \$1.5 million from the cost-shared Canada-Manitoba Affordable Housing Initiative.

With these key sources of funding in place, Housing Opportunity Partnership has established a revolving fund used to purchase and renovate existing houses in the inner city area. After the homes are renovated, HOP sells them at fair market value with the intent of, at minimum, recovering costs. Any resale proceeds are then returned to the fund, and used again in the same way.

The program has a number of characteristics that have contributed to its success. From the outset, private funding was an important catalyst in securing future funding from the municipal, provincial and federal governments. With funding support coming from all three orders of government, representing approximately 35 percent of HOP's total budget, public financing continues to be a critical component used to fill the market gap and rehabilitation price of the homes HOP purchases, including the operating cost and selling price of the home.

Recognizing the need to find alternative sources of funding, the WinnipegREALTORS® continue to support the program in kind through its staff and facilities, and are a tremendous resource and reason for the success of the HOP initiative.

Qualifying for a HOP Home:

Winnipeg has one of the best housing affordability indexes in the country, with over 30 percent of renters able to afford a home. Yet many renters who have sufficient income to qualify for a mortgage still lack the upfront savings required for a down payment or closing costs. Housing Opportunity Partnership supports the transition from renting to homeownership by providing direction and financial support to potential buyers towards owning a home.

Families, single parents and new immigrants are HOP's target base. To qualify for a HOP home, family income cannot exceed \$64,606 a year and applicants must be first time homebuyers. Homes must remain owner occupied, and buyers are first required to qualify for a mortgage. A 5 percent down payment plus \$1,500 towards closing costs are also available for qualifying households, while a forgivable second mortgage is placed against the property should owners sell within the first ten years of owning the home.

Defining Success:

Since its inception, HOP has come a long way towards strengthening the homeownership base of Winnipeg's inner city. Initially HOP bought homes for as little as \$10,000 to \$20,000, reflecting the dilapidated state of housing in the area, and focused on partial renovations costing \$10,000 to \$15,000 a home. HOP has since been buying homes as well as lots – some of which have homes on them that need to be demolished – at an increased value of up to \$60,000. With the purchase of these lots, the organization is now focused on the building of infill homes at a cost of up to \$160,000 per home. Real estate prices in the area have risen due in large part to the success of HOP's inner city revitalization efforts, with sales prices ranging from \$149,900 to 199,900 for a single family home.

To date over \$12 million has been invested in the West End of Winnipeg by HOP, with 87 homes sold and 3 infill properties under development by the organization. Since 2013, the average residential sales price of a detached home in the area has gone up from \$29,027 to \$157,932 – a 544 percent increase. As well, the sales increase in the area has gone from 23 percent to 59 percent, while HOP homes remained on the market for just 28 days in 2013, compared to 137 days in 1998. In addition, from 2006 to 2010 crime has decreased in the area by 27 percent, and business starts are up by 25 percent. These are key indicators of neighborhood renewal.

“As we buy up and repair boarded houses, we see more private investors doing it as well... That's the success; when private investment comes in.”

– Frank Zappia, HOP Realtor & Owner, Zappia Group Realty

In addition, the organization focuses on what is achievable based on the time and resources it can currently leverage, meaning the organization's capacity for turnover and reinvestment in the local housing stock does fluctuate. Housing Opportunity Partnership is also considering other areas of the city in which to expand their work, and have been working closely with the city through Winnipeg Housing to designate neighborhoods in which the condition of homes, sales and social indicators could benefit from investment. HOP is also targeting even more infill projects through the development of R-2000 energy efficient homes that include high levels of insulation, clean air and water conservation features.

Key program elements have contributed to the success of the Housing Opportunity Partnership and can be characterized as follows:

- **Participation of the Winnipeg Real Estate Board / WinnipegREALTORS®**
The involvement of local REALTORS® has been instrumental due to their localized expertise in the real estate market, in helping to define and target areas for neighborhood revitalization, and in streamlining the initiatives of the organization without requiring the need for additional staff and overhead.
- **Involvement of Bankers & REALTORS®**
HOP continues to have strong banker and REALTOR® representation on its Board of Directors, contracting a dedicated real estate expert to advise and lead on the initiatives of the program.
- **Maintaining Low Administrative Costs**
To keep administrative costs at a minimum, HOP does not maintain an office space. In addition HOP contracts a real estate expert and part-time administrator, meaning the majority of funding in support of and generated by the program is re-invested back into the purchase and renovation of affordable homes in inner city Winnipeg.
- **Re-Investment into the Revolving Fund**
Investing the money generated from the purchase, renovation or construction and re-sale of all homes back into a revolving fund is a fundamental aspect of the continuity of the program due to the limited upfront funds received by HOP.
- **Involvement with Local Community Organizations**
Coordination and cooperation of initiatives in local neighborhoods with the community associations of Spence, the St. Matthews and Daniel McIntyre neighborhoods has been instrumental to the success of HOP.



Urban infill home developed by Housing Opportunity Partnership (HOP) in Winnipeg's West End.

Looking Forward:

Housing Opportunity Partnership has helped to secure a long-term resident base in the inner city by reinvesting in Winnipeg's West End neighborhoods through the renovation of existing homes or construction of new infill homes. HOP's efforts have further stimulated commercial business while reducing crime and providing a net improvement in the housing stock and tax base for the city of Winnipeg. The organization has established itself as a pioneer and role model for neighborhood revitalization in providing affordable homes through market gap financing for low-income households.

The success of the organization has evolved by increasing opportunities for affordable homeownership in the West End of the city, thereby stabilizing long-term investment in the area. A replicable model utilizing private-public partnerships and a revolving fund to maintain sustainability of the project, Housing Opportunity Partnership remains flexible in expanding to further neighborhoods in Winnipeg.

Conclusion

Neighborhood preservation, redevelopment and renewal encompass a complex and integrated set of social, political, economic and cultural issues where housing features prominently. Through innovation, broad-based partnerships and community buy-in, the three projects featured here are leading the way in fostering inclusive and safe urban neighborhoods through housing.

Whether by rehabilitating and preserving affordable housing for low-income residents, planning for the future through inclusive design, or stabilizing neighborhoods by creating opportunities for homeownership, these case studies identify key issues and trends in neighborhood preservation, redevelopment and renewal. With an emphasis on affordable housing, long-term project planning and inclusiveness, these case studies have demonstrated that coordinated efforts on the part of governments, local businesses and social service groups can result in neighborhoods that are dynamic, sustainable and accessible to many population groups now and for years to come.



*The **Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA)** is the national voice for the full range of affordable housing and homelessness issues and solutions across Canada. We have over 275 members who collectively house and shelter hundreds of thousands of Canadians, and provide housing support to many more. CHRA provides a home for the housing sector and for all who believe that every Canadian should have a decent, adequate and affordable place to call home.*

75 Albert Street, Suite 902
Ottawa, ON, K1P 5E7

📞 (613) 594-3007
📠 (613) 594-9596

www.chra-achru.ca
info@chra-achru.ca