

Original AHDN project proposal. This document is shared because it outlines the context and goals of the project.

Affordable Housing Development Navigator Project

SUMMARY

The harbourside urban community of Dartmouth North includes approximately 7,000 households and 13,000 people living within Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), the largest municipality in Atlantic Canada.

With average household and family incomes barely more than half the HRM average, Core Housing Need in the area approached 40% in the 2016 Census, and has almost certainly increased since.

A regional shortage of rental housing and recent municipal zoning changes have caused additional pressure in recent years, driving uncontrolled increases in rent and vacancy rates to historic lows.

The project will support at least three non-profit agencies in Dartmouth North to advance their plans and proposals for the development of new affordable housing units, and generate new information resources, tools, and lessons for the benefit of the Community Housing Sector in the region and the province. This will be achieved by providing additional targeted local capacity through the creation of two contract positions: an Affordable Housing Development Navigator and an Information, Evaluation, and Communication Lead.

The lions share of the budget is the salaries of two new employees who will delivery on the project objectives. The remaining amounts will fund “Personnel – External Professional/consultant” and direct costs.

The Farrell Benevolent Society, Welcome Housing, and Lake City Works – these are local agencies aspiring to create additional affordable housing units that are willing partners to not only pursue their individual goals of new development and increased organizational capacity, but also to work with the Navigator and the IEC Lead to develop processes and tools that can be shared and replicated to support similar success in other communities.

Between the Bridges (BtB) and their Network – The Public Good Society of Dartmouth has been a partner of this organization since they participated in the BtB’s Social Innovation Lab. This is where the idea of this project was born.

The network of nearly 100 people which includes:

- a) community sector organizations;
- b) representatives from all three levels of government;
- c) members of the public and private sectors;
- d) residents from the community.

IMPACT SUMMARY

This project will create transformational impact in a number of ways. For Dartmouth North, new units of accessible and affordable housing, provided by local organizations that are well-known and respected will have a long-term impact on the fabric of the community, as well as concretely affecting people's lives. The community will also experience a transformational impact in its community sector housing providers as they build and sustain increased capacity.

For the sector, the primary goal is to create and demonstrate an effective process to accelerate growth and development of community housing in an area with high needs and existing organizations, but little to no additional capacity to get new projects off the ground (a scenario in many communities across Nova Scotia). The information tools created by the IEC Lead will also create value for the community housing sector across the province and contribute to the transformational change efforts of organizations that are seeking to work together in a formal association.

The organization will work with at least 3 organizations:

- o 8 buildings
- o 90 units
- o 90 tenants

Sharing the results of the project and its impact with other communities is one of the organization's primary goals. That is why a separate Information, Evaluation, and Communication Lead (IEC Lead) is needed to bring a particular skill set and focus to those elements of the overall plan. Allowing the Navigator to focus on working with the local organizations on housing developments.

Sharing would take a variety of forms, in person and in writing. The IEC Lead would have access to their own networks for support and audience, as well as the extended cross-sectoral and cross-provincial networks that are already connected to the work.

The organization is also aware of the emerging potential for a province-wide community housing association in Nova Scotia and would be happy to see any of this work contribute to such an organization.

DESCRIPTION

The project will support at least three non-profit agencies in Dartmouth North to advance their plans and proposals for the development of new affordable housing units, and generate new information resources, tools, and lessons for the benefit of the Community Housing Sector in the region and the province. This will be achieved by providing additional targeted local capacity through the creation of two contract positions: an Affordable Housing Development Navigator and an Information, Evaluation, and Communication Lead.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The harbourside urban community of Dartmouth North includes approximately 7,000 households and 13,000 people living within HRM, the largest municipality in Atlantic Canada.

With average household and family incomes barely more than half the HRM average, Core Housing Need in the area approached 40% in the 2016 Census, and has almost certainly increased since.

A regional shortage of rental housing and recent municipal zoning changes have applied additional pressure in recent years, driving uncontrolled increases in rent and vacancy rates to historic lows.

Fortunately, Dartmouth North is supported by an impressive network of non-profit and public sector organizations working together on a variety of complex issues including food security, education, health, and housing.

In 2014, the Public Good Society of Dartmouth, recognizing significant challenges around housing, partnered with Welcome Housing (formerly Metro Non-Profit Housing Association) to open the Dartmouth Housing Helps office in Dartmouth North, providing direct support to at-risk and difficult to house individuals.

Staff develop relationships with landlords, assist clients to find suitable housing, and promote housing retention and improved health and social functioning among individuals who experience housing instability. The program has grown and become a vital asset to the community while also providing on-the-ground perspective on the local housing situation to the Public Good Society.

Concurrent with recent historic investments from the federal government, we are witnessing an alignment of priorities in the rest of the public sector that hasn't been seen in a long time. At the municipal level, HRM has been actively working with partners to develop solutions and in 2018 adopted an Affordable Housing Work Plan with attention to increasing supply, reducing core need, and strengthening the sector. Provincially, Housing Nova Scotia has released a 2019-22 Action Plan with a focus "to preserve and transform existing social and public housing and to stabilize our community housing sector."

Not only are governments aligned in purpose, they are beginning to work more collectively with the community sector, private sector, and residents. In 2019, Between the Bridges (BtB) hosted a five-day Social Innovation Lab on Affordable Housing in Dartmouth North. Multi-sector stakeholders with a wide-range of collective experience and perspectives were invited to work together. Seven participants came from the Community Sector, two from the Private Sector, eight were residents, and four came from Government (two municipal, one provincial, and one federal). The group was facilitated through a process that identified three prototype solutions to carry forward, which self-selecting participants would focus their time and energy on. The

leading concept from that Social Innovation Lab was the development of a role in the community like the one proposed in this project.

As uncovered in the Social Innovation Lab, there are a number of reputable agencies within the community who are interested in creating new, sustainable, affordable housing units in Dartmouth North. However, like almost all community sector organizations, additional capacity to pursue new opportunities is hard to come by, especially under the strain of recent years. Entities may have the willingness and ability to manage new units should they get created, but not the up-front resources and capacity to get started.

Further challenges arise when attempting to navigate the myriad of applications and permits required for any project, as well as finding and funding the specialized professional services that must be retained throughout the process. While it is recognized that resources are available from agencies such as CMHC to help with Community Housing funding applications, even the processes to acquire such support can be too complicated for a small organization to tackle.

Regional and provincial partners confirmed the same situation exists in many other communities, indicating a desire to find a successful method to “jump start” new affordable housing projects. The potential value of up-to-date information tools to support community agencies navigating “the system” was also recognised.

The Affordable Housing Development Navigator project seeks to grow and strengthen the Community Housing Sector in Dartmouth North, provide the region and province with a potential model to replicate in other communities struggling with housing, and develop and disseminate useful information tools for the sector within the region and the province.

To achieve these goals the Public Goods Society of Dartmouth will hire an Affordable Housing Development Navigator (“the Navigator”) for an 20-month term to work hand-in-hand with at least three non-profit agencies in Dartmouth North, providing the additional “time, talent, and treasure” that is needed to advance plans and proposals for the development of new affordable housing units. A \$25,000 fund will be created and available to the Navigator for technical and professional expenses as needed, to address particular proposal submission requirements.

The Navigator will also work with client agencies to leverage funding from existing programs and assess the sustainability of their plans, delivering information on best practices within the Community Housing Sector in order to maximize their potential for long-term success.

The Public Good Society has already had conversations with four agencies in the community that want to create additional housing units, need additional support to begin to accomplish that goal, and are interested in working with us to find a solution.

Additionally, PGSD will hire a dedicated Information, Evaluation, and Communication Lead (“IEC Lead”) to work with the Navigator, providing ongoing support and embedded program evaluation. They will also produce and support the dissemination of new information resources

and tools for the benefit of the Community Housing Sector in the region and the province, such as: up-to-date contact lists and directories; a Nova Scotia-specific, plain language guide to available resources; white papers that target a specific aspect or challenge within the current process(es); infographics; and tip sheets for housing agencies and other stakeholders.

With our existing network both in and outside the community, our positive working relationship with Housing Nova Scotia, and our participation in the Between the Bridges Network, (which is, itself, part of a broader, province-wide collective) the Public Good Society is excited and well-positioned to share our learnings and our material widely. We are also aware of the emerging potential for a province-wide community housing association in Nova Scotia and would be happy to see any of this work contribute to such an organization.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC GOOD SOCIETY OF DARTMOUTH

In late 2004, community members representing residents, business, health, community services, voluntary sector, and government formed The Public Good Society of Dartmouth.

The originating group recognized that working together and pooling their resources and knowledge would better address complex social issues facing the Dartmouth area. Steering committee members' hard work and willingness to take a non-traditional approach, were instrumental in moving the concept and goodwill forward into action.

In 2006, The Public Good Society was registered and undertook a Core Service User Survey to hear first-hand about the well-being of those surveyed and where gaps in services might be. The survey results and recommendations were widely shared.

Based on that information, the Board of Directors developed their first program, Connections That Work, which has been serving the community since 2007. Since then, activity on a number of community issues has occupied the Public Good Society, with programs, partnerships, and initiatives relating to housing, transportation, food security, and social inclusion.

MISSION STATEMENT

“To work with partner agencies serving Dartmouth and to share our resources and knowledge to better understand and address complex social issues facing our community members.”

CONTACT

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