Lessons from "Our home Today and Tomorrow"

A Housing Needs Assessment

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Abstract

Canadian cities today face numerous challenges, many of which are unique from city to city. Housing is one of the many planning-related areas which is affected by changes in a city over the course of time. Understanding the need for specific types of housing in a city will help determine what types of development are most appropriate. A Housing Needs Assessment is a planning tool which assists the process of identifying the specific housing needs of a city. This multi-step process is a way for planners to understand which policies, strategies, and frameworks are the most useful. Although many planning tools exist, a Housing Needs Assessment, when implemented effectively and professionally, is a planning tool that can determine where a city's housing needs are. In the fall of 2017, the City of Kelowna British Columbia completed their Housing Needs Assessment which honed in on the need for a variety of different housing types and demonstrated how effective and innovative a needs assessment can be.

Background and Context

Image 1: Where are the other housing options?
Retrieved from http://bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2018/homesbc/2018_Homes_For_BC.pdf

Image 2: Rent or Buy
http://rentcourtmanager.diyrealty.co/blog/rental-housing-innovation-solves-affordable-housing-letter-to-hud-ben-carson-sba-trump

Introduction

Cites across Canada struggle with the challenge of providing the correct types of housing for their citizens. Planning literature identifies that a housing needs assessment can effectively support planners to understand the specific type of housing a city needs to pursue. Planners can use a needs assessment to help guide policies and recommendations to encourage positive housing change in a city. Many housing needs assessments exist although not all try new or innovative approaches. Many of these have an end goal of home ownership; in some instances, this goal is not attainable for all residents. In addition to the existing literature on housing needs assessments, a discussion about Kelowna's housing needs assessment will determine why this is an example of best practice for the broader planning community.

Background

Need Analysis

As growth occurs, cities change and transform. In many instances, these changes affect a city's ability to provide the necessary housing for the current demographic. Planning issues are becoming more complex, planning tools like housing needs assessments must be utilized in order for professional planners to make the most informed recommendations possible. Some examples of major housing issues that can contribute to the need for a housing needs assessment may include but are not limited to:

• Has the community developed an adequate strategy to house its citizens for a 20-year planning period?
• Is the community's current housing stock in good condition or in need of rehabilitation?
• Is crowding a problem?
• What citizens will need financial assistance or social services to obtain affordable, safe, decent housing?
• What citizens have special housing requirements?
• Will other data and analysis be useful for affordable housing activities?

(Planning Analysis: Housing Needs Assessment, http://pages.uoregon.edu/rgp/PPPM613/class9.htm)

As explained in the Planner's Notebook written by Raymond J. Struyk (1987), a housing needs assessment "aims at focusing attention on the types of policy changes needed to fully address a country's housing needs over an extended period of time" (p. 232). Information that is gathered for a need and demand analysis will often contain a data compilation of:

- population, age, and gender;
- household size, growth, and type;
- the economic growth or decline of the area in cluding employers, industries, labour markets, unemployment rates;
- household average and median incomes;
- number of renters and vacancy rates;
- availability and affordability of rental housing based on income and rents, including non-market waiting lists;
- ownership tenure, new housing starts, cost of

(CMHC)
https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/afhoce/afhoce/
tore/hodefashch/upload/housing_needs_EN.pdf)

When the housing and demographic landscape has been identified, it will become clear what part of the population is struggling. In many Canadian cities the current housing market does not reflect the housing needs of it's citizens.

When specific percentages of the population emerge that require attention, it is useful to provide additional information to support these demographics. An example of this is "a large percentage of lone-parent females in the community… it would be useful to include as much data on lone-parent women as possible" (CMHC website). This specific demographic will likely benefit from the researcher searching for ways to assist their housing needs. As seen in Image 3, the collection of specific data and further analysis will help contribute to developing policies and strategies which will result in action.

Image 3: Housing Needs Assessment Model.
Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/rgp/PPPM613/class9.html

Surveys and Statistics

Housing needs assessments often include survey information. This survey information provides the planner with a snapshot of the current housing situation in the city. The information may include but is not limited to:

- Profile of respondents (age, gender, marital status, household income, employment status)
- Current housing arrangements (own, rent, house, apartment, cost)
- Future housing preferences (plans to move, preferred location, price, unit size and type, features, amenities, and need for assistance)

(CMHC)

Once a housing need has been identified, it must be determined whether it is feasible to develop this type of housing. An example of a housing need might be affordable rental housing, as many cities struggle to provide this for their citizens. Cities with an end goal of home ownership may choose to ignore the demand for rental housing as it does not fit with a city's vision or plan to develop for-sale homes. Before a strategy is developed "it is important that you find out as much as you can about whether people will want to live there and that you will have a viable housing project" (CMHC). The more information that is gathered in a housing needs assessment, the more informed professional planners can be in their recommendations.

Analyzing and observing data

Observing both statistical information published in the Canadian Census, survey results, and the identified patterns and trends will assist in developing the most appropriate housing strategy. This concluding analysis will determine both the strategies and outcomes that come from the completion of a housing needs assessment.

Facts from the Case

About "Our Homes Today and Tomorrow: A Housing Needs Assessment"

<u>How did this Housing Needs Assessment come to be?</u>

In the fall of 2017, the City of Kelowna completed a Housing Needs Assessment called 'Our Homes Today and Tomorrow'. This needs assessment was completed for a number of different reasons. Kelowna Planner, Michelle Kam, explained that the provincial government of British Columbia committed 5 million dollars over 3 years to assist in funding housing needs assessments for local governments across the province. Kam also shared that Kelowna was due to have a housing needs assessment completed as they normally update the information every 5 years. In addition to this, the City of Kelowna is "facing unprecedented housing challenges" (OHTT, 2017, p.6). Some people are benefiting from this situation, others are feeling the compression of the tight housing market. Strategies and recommendation derived from this needs assessment had the potential to impact housing affordability in Kelowna.

<u>Outcomes of the Housing Needs Assessment</u>

The 'Our Homes Today and Tomorrow Housing Needs Assessment' was a starting point that contributed to a number of strategies including the Healthy Housing Strategy Proposed Actions. Specifically, item 5.2 is a direct outcome of the housing needs assessment and has provided numerous recommendation to council during early spring of 2018. Some of the themes of these strategies address housing diversity and homelessness.

Image 3: Diversity of housing in Kelowna
Retrieved from https://www.societyofhope.org/housing-info/seniors-housing/item/apple-valley-building-ii

<u>The Layout of the Housing Needs Assessment</u>

The document 'Our Homes Today and Tomorrow' is written in six sections. The first section outlines the study's approach and identifies the purpose of the study, as well as the different housing strategies that Kelowna has in place. These strategies include Journey Home Strategy and the Healthy Housing Strategy.

The second section of the assessment provides some context to Kelowna's housing today, and where it may be in 2040. This quick snapshot section is a way to briefly compare the current situation to what is expected.

Sections three through six gives a more thorough study of Kelowna's housing during the time of the study. This third section is key as it connects the current housing situation to the unique Wheelhouse approach designed specifically for Kelowna's Housing Needs Assessment. Each category in the Wheelhouse is measured to understand how Kelowna can promote housing development and positive change in specific categories. The document provides an example of best practice in how it identifies demographics that may have specific housing challenges. An example of this is acknowledging the challenges that are present for lone parent families, and Indigenous homelessness.

Healthy Housing Vision

The housing needs of all Kelowna residents are met through attainable, accessible and diverse housing options.

The categories of the Wheelhouse include Market Housing which include ownership housing and rental housing. Although this is not the end goal for Kelowna, the city is still looking for growth in these areas. The second part of the approach is categorized as the Safety Net, this speaks to the services in Kelowna that provide temporary, short-term accommodation. This may also include emergency shelters; during recent years wild fires and flooding have been a major issue as numerous people have lost their homes, or been forced to evacuate. The final segment of the Wheelhouse is Housing with Supports, this includes subsidized rental housing and long-term supportive housing.

Image 5: Wheelhouse
Retrieved from Our homes today and tomorrow, 2017

"Examining what we can predict about housing in Kelowna's future is critical for a needs assessment" (Our Homes Today and Tomorrow, 2017, p. 52). Kelowna examined a five-year housing supply examining the current number of active development applications. The data revealed that Kelowna is undergoing immense growth, in May 2017, 2,500 units were under construction. Studying the type of development the city is undertaking is an example of best practice for a housing needs assessment as the city is able to know what type of housing is currently being added to the city and what types of housing development should be undertaken in the future.

Kelowna bridges these findings to the needs outlined in the wheelhouse. As seen in Image 6 the existing housing supply shows a significant amount of home ownership options for residents. It is clear that rental housing is an area of significant need for growth as Ownership Housing is not appropriate for numerous Kelowna residents.
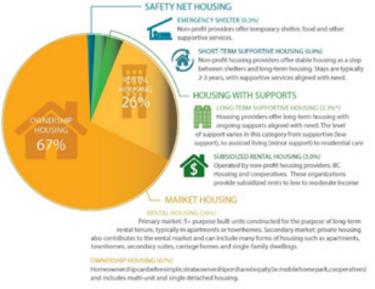

Image 6: Existing Housing Supply by Wheelhouse
Retrieved from Our Cities Today and Tomorrow: A Housing Needs Assessment

Lessons from "Our Homes Today and Tomorrow: A Housing Needs Assessment"

The housing needs assessment that the city of Kelowna used is an example of best practice. It took a unique, and successful approach to identify the most appropriate end goal for housing. "Unlike most needs assessments, our approach is not predicated upon the notion that home ownership is the end goal of the housing system" (Our Homes Today and Tomorrow, 2017, p.17). Kelowna understood that pursuing multiple different housing types would best support the citizens of Kelowna rather than striving for alternative goals. Home ownership will continue to be out of reach for many people of Kelowna. It is important to prioritize support for rental housing so that all residents of Kelowna have affordable and secure housing. A lesson for planners is to identify the most appropriate end goal for housing, this may not be the same for each city. Planners must compile housing data to determine the housing gaps in a similar way to the method quantitative data

As explained previously, Kelowna's housing needs assessment included a visual diagram of what they call the Wheelhouse. This diagram is the City of Kelowna's organizational approach to express the diversity of housing needs in the community. This Wheelhouse is in line with the end goal of having a diversity of housing options for residents of Kelowna. This diagram is an example of best practice as it is able to break down the different housing types which are desirable in Kelowna and compare them to what it already has. The Wheelhouse supports that "people may move across categories of the wheelhouse throughout their lives" (Our homes today and tomorrow, 2017, p.7). It is key that Planners understand this fluidity.

Another example of best practice is that Kelowna chose to use numerous census periods dating back to 1986 to gather information on long-term housing trends. By doing this, they had a greater understanding of how the housing affordability challenge had come to be, and where changes have occurred. "It is important to make use of the best available information in order to respond to each of the questions" (Guide and Data Template for Preparing a Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, 2013, p.2).

Kelowna used both quantitative and qualitative data for their study. This data built a picture of Kelowna's current and future housing supply. Collecting both types of data is an example of best practice; it helps a planner determine how to effectively make recommendations based on multiple types of information. "For the most part, a need and demand study will focus on the use of quantitative (statistical, economic or demographic) data, but you may find that qualitative data is useful and necessary, especially if your target population is small or is a very specific group" (Guide and Data Template for Preparing a Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, 2013, p.2).

Conclusion

A Housing Needs Assessments is a tool which can help Planners understand the current housing situation of the city. When done effectively, a planner can learn about housing trends and then predict housing needs for the future. 'Our Homes Today and Tomorrow: A Housing Needs Assessment' is a strong example of best practice which other planners can look to for guidance. 'Our Homes Today and Tomorrow' use both quantitative and qualitative data, demonstrating that a mix of data collection methods can be beneficial in providing Planners with a comprehensive view of the issues on which to base their recommendations. Successful planning, means strategically applying the best planning tools available; the City of Kelowna has done this through its methods of gathering research and the innovative approach of creating the wheelhouse. Through the use of the Wheelhouse, the City of Kelowna was able to categorize the different housing needs, and effectively measure where change should occur. The process of a Housing Needs Assessment has the potential to capture an accurate picture of the current housing needs of a city providing the most informed information to planners.

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