

Taking the Pulse ...Professional Practice: Case-in-Point

Communicative Planning Practice: Planning for Housing Affordability Through the Canada-Manitoba Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI)

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A UMCP and MHRC Collaboration



Collaboration

Inclusion

Spreading Ownership

The Future

This case study begins with a description of the future. We see the purpose of our case-in-point as but one of several case studies on affordable housing which, collectively, will influence future housing policy. We offer this vision of the future as something to aspire to.

Through many years of strong collaborative planning, housing policy in Canada has come to be referred to as an anchor in a strong, collective welfare state. As a hallmark to this status, Canada is both acknowledged and envied worldwide for its commitment to making affordable housing a non-negotiable basic human right. This belief that high standards of shelter are necessary to the healthy functioning of cities and regions is the backbone of the post-modern Canadian experience. While many countries continue to yield to the entrenchment of market based solutions as the main provider of housing, Canada has long quit the insatiable race to homeownership. Instead a balanced and imaginative approach to housing takes its place to offer choice and affordability to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and complex population. The emergence of this story begins in the present...

The Present

The current housing situation in Canada is not in its best form. Housing programs have either diminished or disappeared in the past few decades. Housing policy during this period may be characterized as a time of debate between levels of government as to who is or should be responsible for the provision of housing supports. In a metaphorical sense, the impact

of this era has left a situation where housing policy in Canada is acknowledged as an “orphaned child” (Carter & Polevychok, 2004) and as the wobbly pillar of the welfare state (Malpas, 2004). The practical implication of this era records 200,000 Canadians homeless and a total of 1.7 million in core housing need (Housing and Homelessness, 2003). Social housing has been hit the hardest in this period, which up to the early 1980s saw funding for about 20,000 new units per year. Then during the period of 1984 to 1993 an estimated \$1.8 billion was cut from national housing programs. This decline in funding ended with the cancellation of all federal government funding for the provision of new housing in 1993 (CPC, 2004). Due to these policy changes, Canada’s housing system became, by 1996, the most private-sector-market-oriented of any western nation, including the U.S. Through this, choice in housing

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has become limited to those whose incomes are sufficient enough to make it in this market (Hulchanski, 2004). This has led to a discrimination in the treatment of ownership and rental sectors where more than 20% of renters live in housing that either needs major repair or is overcrowded as compared to 10% of homeowners (Hulchanski, 2004).

AHI Background

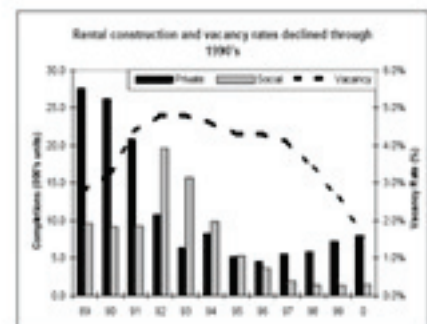
The Affordable Housing Initiative began in 2002 as a jointly funded program between the provincial and federal governments. The City of Winnipeg has also come on board by donating monies to specific projects for land assembly from its Housing Rehabilitation Investment Reserve. Since its inception, the program has seen two phases of funding. Phase I began in 2002, where each level of government contributed equal shares for a total of \$50.78 million. The program entered into Phase II in 2005, which was marked by an additional \$23.08 million under the same equal cost share. AHI target groups include low-to-moderate income renters, urban families and northern residents. The focus in this second phase is to provide more resources and meets stricter targets to accommodate those with the deepest housing needs. The “low income household targeting” facet of the program moves into this realm. The initiative also promotes a balanced approach to housing by attenuating to different tenure types, mainly homeownership and rental with the hopes that future cooperative and nonprofit housing prospects will compliment these initiatives. The AHI’s focus on increasing the supply of affordable rent is particularly important in light of the decline in new rental construction since the 1980s (Pomeroy, 2001).

Introduction

This Case-in-Point looks at the role of planning and affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI). This initiative is a cost sharing agreement between the federal government and the province of Manitoba to increase the supply of new affordable housing in the province. This program is highlighted because it provides a mixed tenure approach to increasing the supply of affordable housing. This focus moves to align the provision of *housing* closer with *housing needs* by emphasizing a range of programs to address different publics and discourage social exclusion. Ensuring decent housing is important to planning, because “it impacts on individuals’ disposable income, their ability to access employment, their health and their inclusion in society” (Hulchanski, 2004, 3).

Objective

This project is examined to gain an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of inclusive planning in the field of housing. By acknowledging the intersection of planning theory and practice, this study is intended to encourage reflection and inform direction of affordable housing programs in the future. The experience of AHI provides important lessons in the mounting of grounded theory. These lessons are articulated and passed on to other planning practitioners.



Source: Pomeroy, 2001

While this case study focuses on the AHI in Manitoba, it should also be noted that the scale of the program is nationwide. In fact, the federal government has signed similar agreements with all provinces and territories of Canada (Rewniak, 2006).

AHI Projects

The outcome of the AHI program will be the creation of approximately 2 500 affordable housing units in Manitoba (Province, 2005, 23). These projects are provided through a number of groups such as Kiwanis, Kinkora Developments, WHRC, the Spence Neighbourhood Association, the North End Housing Project and Housing Opportunity Partnership to name a few.

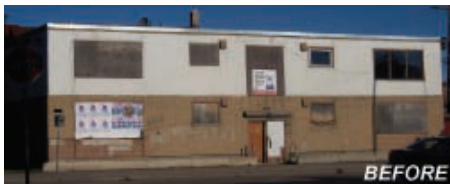


Housing Opportunity Partnership

for refugees and new immigrants. The result is “Welcome Place Transitional Housing Project which provides 28 transitional housing spaces (WHHI, 2004).



Welcome Place Transitional Housing Project



WINNIPEG HOUSING REHABILITATION CORPORATION



Providing Quality Affordable Housing



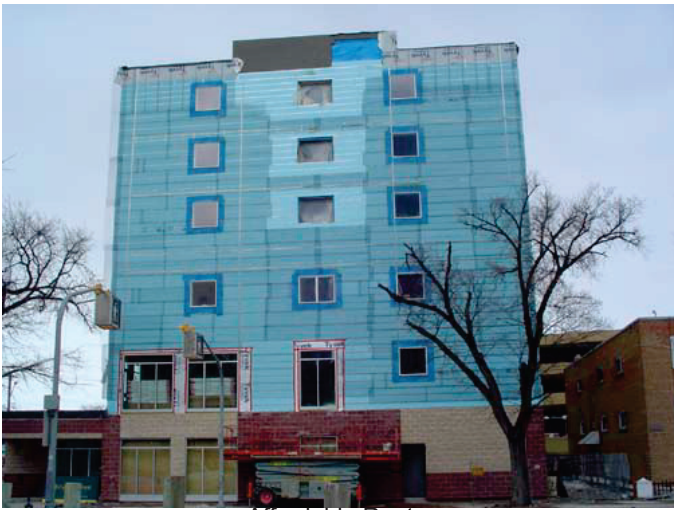
WHRC
Affordable
Rental

In 2005, HOP renovated 14 homes with the assistance of AHI funds in the neighbourhoods of Daniel McIntyre, and St. Matthews. The North End Housing Project also constructed an energy efficient home in Centennial (CanEquity, 2005). Also in 2005, money was allocated for a mixed use studio/residential development on Main St, “The Edge-Artists Village”. This renovation of a heritage building will result in the creation of 8 one bedroom affordable rental units and will open in August 2006 (Service Canada, 2005).

In 2003, AHI money allocated to the Spence Neighbourhood Association and the North End Housing Project resulted in the provision of 14 houses in the Spence, William Whyte, and North Point Douglas neighbourhoods (Service Canada, 2003). In 2004, seven local organizations received \$2.6 million for affordable transition housing

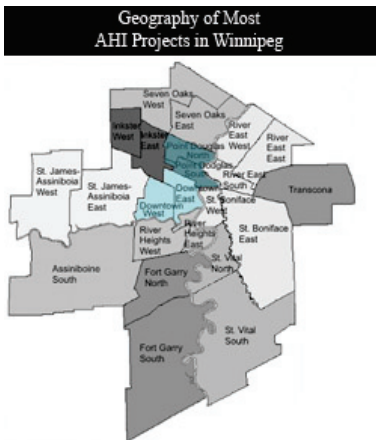


The Edge-Artists Village



Affordable Rent

In 2006 and 2007, the North End Housing Project will acquire 38 properties, plus an 11 unit apartment building, and a fire rescue house (Sorge, 2006).



The diverse range of projects provided through AHI funding is worth noting. These range from making homeownership options more accessible to those with lower incomes to providing subsidized rental accommodation in the form of rent-geared-to-income. Both these opportunities seek to minimize social exclusion by increasing access to homeownership and by decreasing the stigma often associated with low income rental. This is achieved on the basis of apartment buildings where some of the rents are market base and others are market base with additional subsidy. Kikaniw in West Broadway is a living AHI example, where

half the rents are base rents and the other half are base plus supplement (Kirby, 2006). This enables apartment buildings to contain a mix of incomes. Another development in which an income mix is proposed is Flora Place. The type of mix under consideration is even a greater range of rents.

The mixed tenure focus of the AHI program has directed efforts toward those with the greatest housing needs. One example is the diminished role of homeownership in the program. It is estimated that only about 25% of the money available is going toward homeownership initiatives while the rest is going to rental and other (Kirby, 2006). To facilitate more new rental supply, the MHRC has issued Expressions of Interest to solicit new projects in 2003 and 2005. In February 2005, The Community Economic Development Committee of Cabinet agreed on moving 15 of the subsequent submissions forward for approval (Province of Manitoba, 2005).

Efforts are also being placed on looking to alternative forms of tenure and condominiums. The notion of affordable condominiums would increase housing choices. Construction has also begun on co-housing (Kirby, 2006). "The Edge" provides opportunity for mixed uses. Target groups of the AHI funding include: Aboriginals, persons with disabilities, seniors and new Canadians (Kirby, 2006).

It has also been suggested that through the AHI, the role of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) could be increased in the delivery of long term social housing programs. This may be done by increasing the ownership and management of low income housing by CBOs through the help of the expertise of the MHRC to increase capacity in this area (CCPA, 2006, 27).

It is also noted that affordable housing projects are not limited to Winnipeg. For example, the AHI has funded the construction of a 27 unit seniors project in Dauphin with some assisted living (Province of Manitoba, New, 2005)). The town of Woodlands also benefits from an affordable seniors apartment of 12 units. AHI dollars have also been spent in

other urban centres as well, such as Brandon.

Collaboration

Perhaps the most compelling component of the AHI program is its collaborative basis. The fact that housing policy debates between senior levels of government have been marked by arguments over responsibility in recent years, the federal-provincial collaboration that defines the AHI is encouraging. The fact that the city of Winnipeg has joined the collaboration is equally encouraging. This collaboration is not limited to government, however, as it involves a range of housing projects and therefore, the potential for collaboration among many publics. This arrangement is important to transforming the nature of governance in the provision of housing services. This challenges "...the notion of governance as merely the formal institutions of government, and of government as primarily the provider of economic and welfare services..." (Healey, 1997, 199). In recognizing the role of communicative action in shaping local specific environments, formal governments have a role to play in "...providing a hard infrastructure... and a soft infrastructure of relation building through which sufficient consensus building and mutual learning can develop" (Healey, 1997, 200). Providing money for affordable housing without dictating how that money will be allocated in local environments enables room for locally specific and collaborative endeavors. Caroline Sorge, general manager of the North End Housing Project praises the flexibility of the AHI, claiming that the program allows a diversity of needs to be met, not just those that meet criteria that is already determined. As a result the philosophy of the program is articulated as "three level government cooperation that is socially aware" (Sorge, 2006).

Theory Meets Practice

The 'communicative' turn in planning provides opportunity for transformation. While the environments that we live in often seem beyond the bounds of our control, we must understand that while we are shaped by structural forces, we also shape them. "So we have power and, if sufficiently aware of the structuring constraints bearing in on us, can work to make changes by changing the rules, changing the flow of resources, and, most significantly, by changing the way we think about things" (Healey, 1997, 49). From a planning perspective, affordable housing provision is one of those areas that will benefit from "...reflexivity on our assumptions and modes of thinking" (Healey, 1997, 49). This section highlights three important concepts of communicative action, *collaboration*, *spreading ownership and multiple publics*. The AHI appears to have the potential to foster these concepts which are necessary to transform the way we think about and deliver affordable housing.

Facets of Communicative Action:

- All forms of knowledge are socially constructed;
- Construction and communication of knowledge take many forms;
- Preferences are learned behavior;
- Societal interests are diverse, creating the potential for oppressive relations;
- Ownership needs to be spread to and draw on diverse ranges of knowledge and reasoning;
- Focus needs to be placed upon consensus building and away from competition;
- Planning is embedded in its social environment through day to day activities and is therefore, positioned to challenge processes that marginalize (Healey, 1997).

Spreading Ownership

When community is given the opportunity to participate and take ownership over their environment a different atmosphere is formed. Spillover effects from community participation in housing programs go beyond and engage community members in several ways. One example is that many residents affected by AHI have become involved in resident committees (Kirby, 2006). Another emerges from a story where an aboriginal training program contributed in the building of some of the AHI funded housing units. A funny observation was made between the construction of these housing units and the construction of housing provided for community in a top down manner. When housing was government provided, it seemed almost a beacon for vandalism and tagging. On the other hand, the units that the aboriginal training program were involved in constructing appeared untouchable; the doors could be left wide open and they would most certainly be safe (Kirby, 2006). Such stories are encouraging because they signal community development. Being that some of the workers were ex gang members also shows how different and productive opportunities can be created where benefits are spread over the whole community.

“making sense together while living differently”

Spreading ownership in the provision of affordable housing provides avenues to meet a range of interests and needs. This encourages and supports the challenge of “...making sense together while living differently” (Healey, 1997, 50). This opens up new opportunities for inclusive planning with multiple publics.

Inclusion/Multiple Publics

Responsiveness to multiple publics is important to any aspect of planning where guided by the goal of a “politics of inclusion” (Sandercock, 1997, 198). This goal seeks to be aware of systemic inequalities and correct them by paying attention to imbalances of information and to lack of representation (Sandercock, 1998). This entails mechanisms for recognizing and representing distinct voices in society. “Such group representation implies institutional mechanisms and public resources supporting the self-organization

of groups so that they achieve collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in *the context of wider society*” (Sandercock, 1997, 198). Planning theory along the lines of inclusion has opportunity to meet practice through the AHI in its support of diverse housing initiatives.

Planning Lessons

Through its experience, the AHI has valuable lessons to share which are important to the future success of affordable housing provision.

One of the largest lessons we can learn from this program is about scale. While the AHI has committed over \$70 million since 2002, this figure simply

isn't enough. In order for appropriate impact to occur, an amount ten to twentyfold would not be unreasonable (Kirby, 2006). Tom Yauk, the president of Housing Opportunity Partnership asserts a similar claim: “AHI may provide an

“AHI may provide an appropriate context for the improvement and development of housing, but it lacks the scale to meet what has become an overwhelming social housing need” (Yauk, 2006).

“If there was 10 to 20 times the funding, then something could really be done” (Kirby, 2006).

appropriate context for the improvement and development of housing, but it lacks the scale to meet what has become an overwhelming social housing need” (Yauk, 2006).

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has also raised criticism that the AHI is too

focused upon homeownership and that “...while this intervention has helped address the housing needs of some moderate-income households in the south, it has not produced housing for the thousands of households living below the poverty line (CCPA, 2006, 25).

These comments about scale draw into question

whether governments are truly committed to facing the reality of funding required to respond to the depth of housing needs that are currently evident. There is danger in these programs to create an appearance of adequate housing that provides an opportunity to avoid facing the magnitude of the local housing challenges that face us.

The second important lesson that the AHI provides is the importance of local capacity building. “Building housing is important, but not as important as leaving a legacy which can be continued” (Kirby, 2006). History has shown that the effect of programs that are time limited is that they do not last. The Core Area Initiative is cited as an example (Kirby, 2006). Collaboration, inclusion and ownership don’t grow around program deadlines. In the absence of well developed local capacity, the provision of AHI funded homes was slow in the early going as the available housing groups couldn’t react quickly enough. One outcome of this situation was an unintended focus on homeownership. Though the initial intent was to provide a range of strategy, homeownership dominated because these were the groups that were available to uptake the funding (Kirby, 2006).

While the program seems to contain a mixed tenure approach, it is difficult to assess because the AHI funded housing initiatives do not appear in a central document or file. The main method to find details about properties has been through government news releases. In order for the program to retain an adequate mix, program evaluations could benefit from documentation of projects and their focus. The Association of Manitoba Municipalities has suggested the creation of such an inventory (AMM, 2005). While Manitoba does currently provide detailed reporting on the AHI to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on an annual basis, this information is used for internal purposes only (Rewniak, 2006).

Qualitative studies of the initiative would also be important in directing future initiatives both responsive to needs and capacity. A focus upon

qualitative indicators such as the number of housing units delivered (outputs) were a main factor in compromising the early direction of the AHI program (outcomes) (Kirby, 2006), where a vision of mixed approaches suffocated under the home ownership option.

Conclusion

Years of neglecting the affordable housing needs of Manitoba have placed considerable strain on areas of housing policy. The AHI appears to contain many ingredients necessary to increasing the provision of affordable housing through collaboration, inclusion and the spreading of ownership. As a result, the program has great potential and has even been receptive to criticisms about its benefactors. This is evidenced by a second evolutionary phase in the program that places more emphasis upon meeting deeper housing needs. Despite all this, claims that suggest a lack of sufficient scale may be difficult to avoid and difficult for the program to overcome if not addressed.

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