

2010 Fredericton Affordable Housing Day Report

I work in Fredericton, can I live here too?

The City of Fredericton hosted its fourth annual *Fredericton Affordable Housing Day* forum on November 23 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Master of Ceremonies and Chair of the City's Affordable Housing Committee, Councillor Mike O'Brien, welcomed special guests and more than 125 participants. Councillor O'Brien acknowledged the strong partnership that exists between the City and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the Province of New Brunswick, the NB Non Profit Housing Association and the Community Action Group on Homelessness to advance the affordable housing file in the Fredericton region and thanked all for their ongoing efforts.

The half-day forum featured several activities including: a reality check exercise examining housing insecurity in Fredericton and its impact on all of us; a keynote address on a successful affordable homeownership model; and a panel discussion and community dialogue session on the topic of 'smart development in the context of affordability'.

Special guests were Fredericton Mayor Brad Woodside; Jim Hughes, Deputy Minister of Social Development; and CMHC Corporate Representative for New Brunswick, Francine DiMambro.

- Mayor Woodside commented on the stigma associated with subsidized housing and the extent of public opposition to proposed affordable housing developments over the years. However, he indicated much progress has been made with a growing support from Council for more affordable housing development throughout the City.
- Mr. Hughes highlighted affordable housing as a key component of the poverty reduction strategy and home ownership as an important piece of the housing continuum.
- Ms. DiMambro thanked the organizing team for its work on the forum and also for creating affordable housing solutions in the Atlantic region and specifically here in Fredericton. She encouraged future collaborative efforts as ways to ensure our neighbours, our communities and all Canadians have access to quality and affordable housing.

Affordable Housing Day Program

(A copy of the 2010 Affordable Housing Day Program is available at the following link: <http://www.fredericton.ca/en/communityculture/resources/Pamphlet-AHDay.pdf>)

- ***Precarious Housing Reality Check*** – Stacey Ingraham and Meaghan Burpee

Stacey Ingraham and Meaghan Burpee, two social work students from Saint Thomas University, presented the audience with a reality check exercise looking at the depth of housing insecurity in Fredericton. Using the 'iceberg' analogy approach they applied information from the 2006 Census Agglomeration to create a picture of homelessness and housing insecurity in the Fredericton area. (Like an iceberg, 'the biggest part of the housing problem is usually hidden from view'.)

Based on their analysis, the **Fredericton Housing Iceberg** looks like this:

At the top of the Iceberg.....Visible Homeless Population – 430 persons

Below the Iceberg..... Hidden Homeless Population – 1285 persons
Overcrowding – 1095 households
In need of major repair- 2485 households
Unaffordable Housing – 6105 households

The overall picture shows a high proportion of Fredericton Households is under stress even though the area has had a strong economy and robust housing development for several years. Additionally, a large segment of the market place remains underserved.

In their wrap up, the presenters reminded the audience that housing stress and insecurity can happen to almost anyone and to consider how the following questions applied to each of them: What would happen to your housing situation if:

- *Your pay cheque was a week late?*
 - *Your household income cut in half?*
 - *Your transportation costs doubled?*
 - *You suddenly had to divert 20% of household income to pay for prescription drugs?*
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- **Keynote Address (Options for Homes Model) - Michel Labbé**

(A copy of Mr. Labbe's power point presentation is available at the following link:
<http://www.fredericton.ca/en/communityculture/resources/TheOptionsModelPackage2.pdf>)

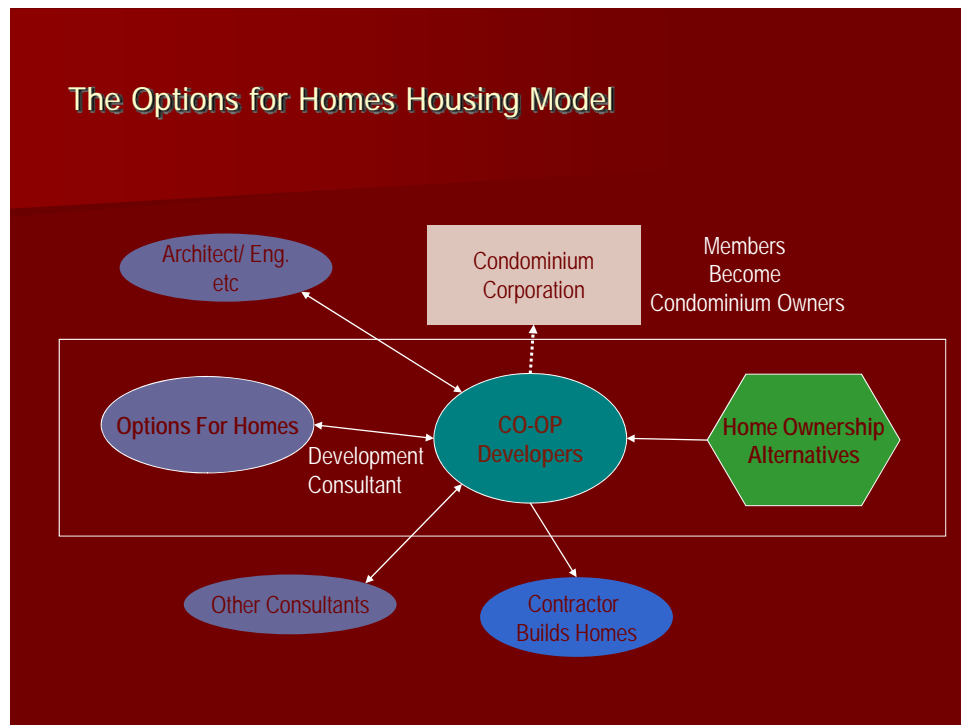
Michel Labbé is President and CEO of *Options for Homes*, a non-profit housing corporation based in Toronto. He is an Urban and Regional Planning graduate from the University of Waterloo and has been involved in the production of affordable housing for 25 years. Since 1992, Mr. Labbé has been instrumental in developing a model that provides mixed income housing to thousands of households without any permanent government subsidy but welcomes government support if available to make the model better. Lands donations are part of the puzzle.

Options For Homes is a leading organization in the Social Enterprise movement, and its housing model has been used to create home ownership opportunities for hundreds of families in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta and most recently in Nova Scotia. Mr. Labbé described his housing model as a program that rearranges The Box and puts 'community wealth' to work. Its achievements to date are:

- 14 delivery agencies
- 4,000 homes
- \$30,000,000 in liquid capital
- \$100,000,000 in community wealth

The Options Model creates a condominium corporation where condo owners are supported with start up financing and alternatives mortgages through *Home Ownership Alternatives*. Typically, 15% of the condominium owners are the Working Poor and 10% are below the Poverty Line.

The following diagram illustrates the *Options for Homes* Housing Model:



The model permits clients access to homeownership with a small down payment which is at least three to five per cent of the purchase cost. For people living below the poverty line, Options for Homes will provide help with their down payment through a loan which serves as a second mortgage and which the buyer doesn't have to repay until the unit is sold or rented.

Mr. Labbé explained how his model provides social benefits for the whole community and encouraged governments to focus more on helping low-income families living in subsidized housing realize the possibility of homeownership. He illustrated a couple of his newer developments, Mapleview Village in Barrie and Brighton Park in Waterloo, as examples of what can be achieved using the *Options for Homes* model. Mapleview Village is planned to be an environmentally sustained community that will include extensive green space, well-insulated efficiently heated homes, solar heating, and will offer car sharing to its residents to complement car ownership.

For more information on these developments and the *Options for Homes* Housing Model please visit the Options website at optionsforhomes.ca

- **Panel Discussion and Community Dialogue on the topic of ‘Smart Development in the context of Affordability’**

Moderator – John Leroux is a native of New Brunswick and has worked as an architect for more than a decade. He has been employed at several Governor-General's Award-winning firms in Toronto, as well as firms in Atlanta and his hometown - Fredericton. He has published two books on New Brunswick architecture, *A Fredericton Alphabet* (2001) and *Building Capital: A Guide to Fredericton's Historic Landmarks* (2004).

Panel Members

- **Michel Labbé** is a Toronto-based leading Canadian social entrepreneur with 25 years experience in the production of affordable housing.
- **Mayor Brad Woodside** was instrumental in establishing the City of Fredericton Committee on Affordable Housing, a network of municipal, provincial and federal representatives, community groups, off-reserve aboriginal representatives and housing developers dedicated to improving access to affordable housing.
- **Frank Flanagan** is the Director of Development Services for the City of Fredericton who has been involved with several affordable housing reports and studies for the Province, municipalities as well as private developers.
- **Kurt Peacock** is an urban researcher in Saint John, and a member of the newly-formed New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network. His 2005 Report, *Poverty and Plenty*, is still referenced by policy makers in Saint John, as they seek to reduce the income gap between the inner city and the region's affluent neighbourhoods.
- **Jean Rioux** has worked in the field of housing for the past 25 years. In his current position as Director of the Community and Individual Development Branch, he is responsible for programs in the Early Childhood, Income Support, as well as Housing and Homelessness sectors.
- **Neil Brown** is a local developer and has worked for 20 years in his family company, A&R Rentals which operates more than 200 apartment units. Their newest apartment development at 198 York Street includes several affordable housing units.

The focus of the panel discussion was a conversation on ‘**smart development in the context of affordability**’ and began with each panelist delivering a short presentation on his vision covering the following:

- Affordable Home Ownership
- My role in community growth
- Smart urban development
- Economic growth and housing trends
- Inclusionary zoning, sprawl, density
- Sustainability and planning

The following is a brief synopsis of these presentations:

Mr. Labbé used his housing model of affordable home ownership as an example of cost effective and environmentally sustainable development. He urged planners and developers to put people first and to stop building cities around the automobile. In his words, ‘cars should be supplemental in the planning process and the current focus on the car as the centre of development should change’. He also offered a car-sharing model to illustrate transportation options that can be applied to the planning process for new developments.

Mayor Woodside acknowledged the social challenges facing the City in light of the fast pace of development which has occurred over recent years. He noted the value of having stable and safe housing for people and emphasized the need to be a more inclusive community to address immigration and demographic changes.

Frank Flanagan focused his remarks on the need to pursue development which incorporates 'smart growth' and 'sustainability'. He described the current urban sprawl situation outside the city limits as the opposite of smart growth and how higher density development is the 'key' to good urban planning.

Kurt Peacock urged cities in New Brunswick to take a new approach to working together and end the fighting over the scarcity of resources. He supported Mr. Flanagan's call for higher density development, and supported the *Options for Homes* model.

Jean Rioux described recent provincial initiatives to address homelessness such as "*Hope is a Home*" and "*Home for Everyone*". New Brunswick now has a homelessness framework in the poverty reduction strategy and the key goals are to create a stable support to the homeless population and a network committee. Two affordable housing development priority items are creating more inclusive (mixed income) communities and developing a green building policy and practices in partnership with the Department of Environment. He added that the investment in Affordable Housing to extend to renovation and housing agreements will be extended.

Neil Brown related his own personal experience with affordable housing development and stressed the importance of government funding to increase the incentive to private developers. He cited the benefits of affordable housing development to the larger community and how integrated housing fits with the Canadian Social Identity. He also commented on how affordable housing misconceptions and stereotypes challenge a developer.

Following the presentations, John Leroux, invited questions from the audience: Here is some of that dialogue:

Question: What is holding affordable housing back in Fredericton?

Response:

- **Frank Flanagan** – Although we've made good strides in affordable housing development, the public does not easily accept diversity. There is a continuing need to educate the public and development community on the benefits of affordable housing.
- **Kurt Peacock** - Government needs to utilize information available to them. For example the proposed Tannery project in Saint John was not needed as that particular neighbourhood was already overly saturated with low income housing. There is a need for more public education and awareness to overcome the NIMBY phenomenon and social housing stigma.

Question: What happened to the Limerick Road Project?

Response:

- **Frank Flanagan** - The design for the project was completed, however there was neighbourhood opposition to the project and developers were hesitant. Even though government funding for the project has expired, the project may still be viable.
- **Neil Brown** suggested that we drop the term 'affordable housing' because 'it promotes stigma and makes things more complicated than they need to be'.

Question: We need more programs available. How do you suggest we move to these new options? Where do we start?

Response:

- **Mike Labbé** - We need to find land in areas that are affordable.
- **Frank Flanagan** - We need to ask the right questions such as “Where is there land?” The City should also look at innovative development that is affordable and designate areas of the City for affordable development.

Question: What is car sharing?

Response:

- **Mike Labbé**:- It is the concept of communally owned cars where members pay fees and use a computer card which accesses the car and keeps a record of the time it was used. The availability of such a program helps people eliminate the need for a second car.
- **Kurt Peacock** - “If you build communities for cars you get more cars. If you build communities for people you get more people.”

Question: There are problems with rezoning. Are there plans for affordable housing zoning changes?

Response:

- **Frank Flanagan** - There will be an amendment to the Zoning By Law to pre designate areas for higher density as an enticement for developers.

Question: There are no buses on Sunday. There are limited bus schedules. What can we do?

Response:

- **Frank Flanagan** - We need density in order to increase ridership levels.

A related comment from an audience member: The current economic stimulus funding targeted traffic infrastructure. If we continue to build bigger and faster roads, where is the incentive for people to use public transit? Reality is that until the government puts in disincentives for driving to work then there will not be there demand for public transit.

Evaluating the Forum

An online evaluation was sent to all the registered participants. The following is a compilation of responses taken from the completed evaluations.

1. **How did you find Reality Check Exercise:**

More than 50% of the majority of respondents found the Reality Check very useful; 44% found it useful and 5% not useful.

Comments:

- This was a good education piece for people in attendance - especially those not familiar with the broader effects of poverty.
- The social work students did a great job presenting this material.
- I am not at all surprised with the facts as presented by the STU students... and am well aware of the shortage of affordable housing in NB.
- This presentation would be very helpful for groups making a case to get funding for affordable housing.

- When put into perspective, problems like this take on a very real meaning.
2. **How did you find the presentation of the Keynote speaker, Michel Labbé from Options for Homes?**
78% of the respondents found the presentation very useful; and the remainder found it useful.

Comments:

- Very interesting, we should explore all possibilities to find good solutions for housing.
- Hopefully Mr. **Labbé's** presentation will encourage our community to begin looking at this model.
- Although the speaker was wonderful, what really concerns me is turning this into action. I get the impression that Fredericton helps host this event yet doesn't actually try and get anything serious happening on the ground.
- I really think his presentation was excellent. It provides hope for many and potentially could be a means of reducing the barriers involved in home ownership. His concept was realistic and practical.
- I'm still wondering about the details of financing both for the home buyers and the development.
- It was great to see someone so passionate about this issue.
- I love the concept and agree that certain things can be implemented in New Brunswick.
- He was excellent, clearly a very smart man. I thought his business model was inspired, as it's true we need to find sustainable solutions for low income housing. I think his model is ideal for those working low income individuals. I took two good ideas away from the presentation. I thought it was an innovative way, although the particular financing method seemed quite complicated, and I feel that I know just enough 'to be dangerous'.

3. **How did you find the community dialogue & panel discussion?**
61% found it very useful; 36% found it useful and 3% found it not useful

Comments:

- The Saint John person (Kurt Peacock) had an interesting take on their experience.
- I was very interested in what each panel member had to contribute, all valuable information, particularly liked what Mr. Brown of A & R Rentals had to say as I am familiar with the nice building that he constructed on the corner of York/George Streets.
- The speakers were good and offered great knowledge in their respective fields.
- I learned a lot from Mr. Peacock, and was moved by Mr. Woodside's passion.
- Good discussion, everyone was very engaged.
- It is good to know our City is working to assist rather than hinder new affordable growth.

4. **How did you find the printed materials and displays?**

53% of the respondents found them very useful; 44% useful; and 3% not useful

Comments:

- The universal design is critical. That was not apparent in many of the designs.
- I really liked the Affordable Housing Day brochure describing "a frequent scenario", unfortunately this is very true for many including those who hold down jobs.

- There were some that were only in French, but I am sure that was just an error. I can read French but not all of the people at my table could.
- I am not a fan of slides but it was ok.
- I liked being able to see what the city has done as of late. Bit by bit, the culture of having a place to call home in F'ton is changing.
- I did like the financial household summary in the brochure, it had many people at my table talking about it. Good for those who don't have experience/knowledge about low income existence.
- Sorry, I had no idea there were printed materials.
- What displays? Also, the printed pamphlet about the event hardly contained any information about the event or the speaker. Why was a whole page devoted to sponsors?

5. What was the most important piece of information you learned from this session?

- Information from Michel Labbé -interesting opportunity for financing and that all affordable housing doesn't have to look like affordable housing.
- It was good to see all aspects of our community wanting to work together for housing solutions.
- Working people deserve our help
- I was impressed with the new model presented by Mr. Labbé and realized that reasonably priced housing can also be made available to those with a lower level income.
- Still no bus service to Two Nations Crossing.
- That it is possible to create affordable housing with very different people living happily together.
- How committed this town is to affordable housing.
- One in six (families) are living pay cheque to pay cheque.
- That there is hope for future development, and I am happy that there appears to be a great interest in affordable housing in our city.
- That affordable (cost effective) housing for low income households can be provided without government assistance, recognizing though that the desperately poor still will probably need some government help.
- That there are a lot more homeless people than I envisioned.
- The great need to help those who are not able to have a home, every person and family deserves this right.
- The importance of being green, which Fredericton is doing a great job at. Thanks to Brad Woodside and the City of Fredericton.
- That the City of F'ton is onboard in creating communities that host all economic backgrounds. What a positive first step!
- Alternate methods of financing affordable housing.
- Michel Labbe's presentation....I love the idea of socially responsible business, not a concept that is very common in a capitalist society. I think the 'making a reasonable profit' aspect is wonderful, I hope other developers will think so too.
- There are options outside government assistance to provide affordable housing and the people benefiting can say they helped themselves.
- The fact that affordable housing doesn't necessarily need to rely entirely on public funding.

- It was good to learn about what other parts of the country are doing to offer housing options that are affordable to those who thought they would never be able to own a home.
- Property overlooked by others may be opportunities

6. How could Fredericton's 2010 Affordable Housing Day have been improved?

- More networking time
- Focus next on how to actually make change happen.
- Finding a way to move information into action. Getting some commitments from the various stakeholders in the room.
- How many seniors groups were represented?
- Snacks with the coffee break.
- The venue was excellent (with exception of parking challenges due to Legislature opening)... it would have been nice to hear from more builders as I know they were in the room.
- I think some slides showing more clearly how the financing works would have been helpful
- There is always room for improvement in all that we do. Perhaps implementing Habitat For Humanity and having a family present.
- Folder of hand-out information ready for each participant to take away.
- It was Great!
- An online version detailing each step on how to create this type of financing.
- The temperature of the space was very cold.
- Larger accommodations due to great turnout

7. How did you find CMHC's affordable housing information that you received at Fredericton's 2010 Affordable Housing Day?

31% very useful; 39 somewhat useful; 0 % not at all useful; 20 % don't know.

Comments:

- Excellent planning and informative; I would very much like to be a partner going forward and I represent a large group of single, divorced/widowed soon to be retirees.
- Have already seen their items.
- The housing stats I already had an idea about, and I'm a service worker, not a developer, so while Michel was really interesting, I can't use his model. But I thought what he brought to the table regarding NIMBY illustrated possible solutions.

8. Please indicate which of the following products and tools available through CMHC's Affordable Housing Centre you are familiar with? (Check all that apply)

53%- mortgage loans
 50% - website/online
 47% - market analyses
 36% - seed funding/programs
 6% - other

9. **Which best describes your organization?**

- 33% - government
- 31% - non profit
- 17% - private sector
- 8% - municipality
- 3% - faith-based

Comments:

- Thanks, I shared my thoughts with the Mayors of the Cities of NB Association
- I am a concerned single female facing retirement on a small pension
- I have been a realtor in Fredericton for 25 years so this is of great interest to me.

10. **Stay up-to-date with what's happening in the field of Affordable Housing! Receive a monthly e-notice that highlights information on tools, web forums, financial assistance, and success stories. Please add me to your E-Notification list: (If yes, provide Name, Email, Organization, Postal Code)**

44% of respondents said yes and 56 % said no