



NIAGARA REGIONAL HOUSING

FACES AND PLACES OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

2008 - 2012
STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) developed this plan, in consultation with community partners, to guide our work in the years ahead

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Niagara is a diverse and unique region – a composite of the distinct characteristics of 12 municipalities. Combined, Niagara is home to 427,420 people or 183,334 households. For many of these households finding affordable housing is a challenge.

Housing costs can be the single largest expenditure in a household budget, leaving little room for other necessities.

Affordable housing enables individuals to apply their limited resources to the other necessities of life. The *People Needing Housing: A Collaborative Housing Strategy for the Niagara Community*, commissioned by Niagara Regional Housing in 2004, identified that "... some 45.2% of all tenants (approximately 19,000 households) were paying more than 30% of their income for housing, with 21.2% (approximately 9,000 households) paying over 50%."

Such households are considered to be "at risk", as disproportionate costs for housing dangerously reduce

their ability to afford other necessities of life.

Wait times for affordable housing become longer as the waiting list continues to grow

The waiting list for affordable housing continues to grow. In the past five years, there has been a 5% increase with applicants waiting 1-8 years for accommodation depending on the location.

As people age, their needs increase and become more costly.

Seniors are the fastest growing population in Niagara with 17% of the population greater than 65 years of age, compared to the provincial average of 12.9%. The provision of appropriate services for seniors is a key issue facing many affordable housing providers as more and more seniors are aging in place and wish to remain in their homes.

New development helps but it is not enough

NRH has been successful in receiving funding from the federal and provincial government of over \$16 million for the development of 343 new affordable housing units. But it is not enough.

Some of the older affordable housing units were built at a time when energy conservation measures and accessibility standards did not have the same profile as today. Evolving social priorities require the investigation of new technologies to reach current standards.

There are currently over 7500 units of affordable housing in Niagara. Capital investment in this asset makes good business sense.

The existing affordable housing stock is in good condition. However, it is an aging stock with current and future capital needs.

In 2005, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing confirmed that annual contributions to capital reserves were under-funded by 15% for provincial units and 223% for federal units. Some housing providers in Niagara region have already depleted their reserves and over half will have depleted their funds by 2015.

Sustainable funding solutions need to be found

Federal funding for affordable housing will continue to decline over the next 25 years. This reduction will ultimately result in increased costs to the local property tax payer. Continuing in this manner is not sustainable and new approaches need to be found.

Innovative solutions are needed to ensure that affordable housing is available to all residents

Planning policies, sustainable funding models, protection of existing stock, and strong partnerships are needed to ensure that affordable

housing continues to be an integral part of healthy communities.

Through its 2008 -2012 Strategic Plan Niagara Regional Housing will continue to bring stakeholders together and plan the future for affordable housing in Niagara.

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

This section summarizes the four strategic directions that were identified during our consultation process in 2007. The directions provide us with a long-term guide to address Niagara's need for affordable, safe, secure and suitable homes. Within each strategic direction we have identified our key objectives and work priorities. Our companion document, the Niagara Regional Housing Business Plan provides further detail on each strategic direction and is used to monitor progress.

- 1.** Innovative affordable housing solutions
- 2.** Environmentally responsive sustainable communities
- 3.** Strong partnerships with stakeholders
- 4.** Adaptable service-delivery network

Innovative affordable housing solutions

Trends and Challenges

The shortage of affordable housing in Niagara is not a recent discovery. In fact, the *People Needing Housing* affordable housing strategy, developed in 2004 identified the need for an additional 488 units per year for the next ten years to address the needs of those with incomes below \$30,000. Not only has that annual target not been met but the need for housing, as reflected in the waiting list, continues to grow.

Key Objective

To seek out innovative solutions to address the growing need for affordable housing in Niagara

Work Priorities

- 1.1 Investigate affordable housing solutions in other jurisdictions and develop potential solutions for Niagara
- 1.2 Incorporate experience gained from development programs into design of new program
- 1.3 Investigate alternative funding and investment mechanisms
- 1.4 Streamline the application process for affordable housing
- 1.5 Investigate potential to increase affordable housing for newcomers
- 1.6 Investigate options for housing and support services for at risk youth; the next step after “crisis” (youth 16-24)

Environmentally responsive and sustainable communities

Trends and Challenges

There is increased recognition that healthy sustainable communities are only possible when individuals take responsibility to identify the issues and address them. By providing the organizational and policy supports, NRH can encourage and facilitate positive change. Putting in place: energy conservation solutions that recognise the implications of global warming; accessibility standards that take an aging population into consideration and capital reserves that are adequately funded are just a few of the measures that need to be investigated and initiated.

Key Objective

Continue to improve the safety, efficiency and environmental sensibility of new and existing buildings while maintaining affordability and cost-effectiveness

Work Priorities

- 2.1 Investigate new technologies related to energy conservation
- 2.2 Develop and implement an energy conservation program for owned units and housing providers that will reduce energy consumption
- 2.3 Investigate potential sources of funding for energy initiatives
- 2.4 Finalize the asset management program for owned units and share with housing providers

Strong partnerships with stakeholders

Trends and Challenges

From the development of new housing units to the day-to-day enjoyment of those units, the success of affordable housing is increasingly dependent on a complexity of partnerships with community agencies, other levels of government, and stakeholders.

Key Objective

To develop and foster partnerships that are instrumental in the development of affordable housing and providing its residents with the supports that are necessary to live full and productive lives

Work Priorities

- 3.1** Develop a client-centered case management approach to resolving tenant issues
- 3.2** Strengthen the transition from independent living to supportive care to long term care
- 3.3** Set up community focus groups to identify and resolve issues
- 3.4** Work with municipalities, Niagara Region and interested parties to promote the development of affordable housing

Adaptable service - delivery network

Trends and Challenges

The affordable housing service delivery network includes staff who work for housing providers, NRH staff, as well as, a number of volunteers who sit on the respective boards. As is common in most sectors in the post-baby boom generation, many of the housing sector are reaching retirement age at the same time as the volunteer sector is experiencing a level of burn-out.

Key Objectives

To put the appropriate supports in place that will assist NRH employees and the housing provider network in its work

Work Priorities

- 4.1 Develop Customer Service Standards
- 4.2 Provide one-stop resource/service information
- 4.3 Create documents that are customer friendly
- 4.4 Undertake assessment of business practices through scheduled surveys and make changes as needed
- 4.5 Implement an integrated Information Technology (IT) system that meets the needs of NRH
- 4.6 Undertake training/education sessions as needed
- 4.7 Improve public perception of affordable housing
- 4.8 Address any Human Resources gaps or adjustments
- 4.9 Enhance and promote a healthy work environment