

Bridges and Foundations: CURA

Bringing Communities Together to create Quality Aboriginal Housing

Urban Aboriginal Housing: Challenges and Opportunities Report

The following document details the common themes taken from the morning's small group discussions. I analyzed the data from the note-takers, facilitators and flip chart papers and this is the result. The notes from each group's discussion are available upon request to individual group members. Several groups are now interacting and exchanging information thanks to the mini-conference. Bridges are being built. Another workshop to further this day's work will be scheduled soon.

On September 18, 2003, 56 people attended the mini-conference "Urban Aboriginal Housing: Challenges and Opportunities." 11 were from the housing industry (builders, planners, real estate), 6 from the financial sector, 27 from community based organizations and 12 from various government sectors. Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals discussed urban Aboriginal housing in Saskatoon and to many it was reiterating old issues. Many of the challenges or opportunities are well known but the ideas exchanged were including new stakeholders. An underlying sense of urgency existed in many of the group discussions. People are tired of "just talking about ideas" and want to see action. Bridges and Foundations: CURA hopes to facilitate an action plan guided by the identified themes from the morning's group discussions.

Themes for "What Should We Be Doing?"

Housing and Market: Groups recognized the need for alternate housing options for the different segments of the population (students, lone parent led families, and seniors for example). Service support network needs differ depending on the group's general net income. Demographics work will reveal where the greatest need is and this knowledge can help determine a support network's design. Housing design must consider each segment's specific needs. Fifty percent of the groups identified student housing as an urgent need.

Industry and Employment: Opportunities for employment in the trades or professions abound for people in the construction field. The revision of the apprenticeship training system will allow people to specialize and enter the work force in a shorter timeframe.

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Support Network: Everyone identified the need for an information network that would list programs and service providers related to housing, both rental and home ownership, and disseminate this information to the public. Two groups noted that service providers could also benefit from this network by learning about other services that could help their clientele.

Development: The groups discussed the need to encourage infill development, with environmental assessments, and redevelopment. The "ready to move" housing option and reuse of existing houses were two possible methods to address Saskatoon's housing shortage.

Themes for "What are the Barriers (reality check)?"

Understanding: There is a lack of understanding about the issue and stakeholders' roles and how agendas or mandates can detrimentally affect the work on housing. Builders, community based organizations, civic departments and Aboriginal organizations acknowledged the need to reach an understanding on issues, regulations and policies so a concerted effort to address housing can be possible.

Program creation: Participants called for the creation of a program where all involved work together. People will utilize existing programs and promote opportunities and programs regarding housing. It was suggested that the housing information network could incorporate a function that would ensure communication and understanding between stakeholders.

City of Saskatoon: The City of Saskatoon's role and successful work to date was recognized. Groups discussed possible options to increase its role in housing developments. Could bylaws be changed and if so, how or in what ways? Perhaps tax cuts or reduced utilities could benefit housing initiatives. Could land be made available to builders at a reduced rate? These possibilities need to be discussed and explored with the specific departments.

Government: People explored the possibility of the government changing its delivery system for social services. Clarification is needed on how social services housing

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payments can be used towards home ownership. Groups recognized the inherent difficulty in changing bureaucratic systems.

Support: There is a need to provide ongoing support to care for and maintain homes. People are unable to repair and/or maintain their property either due to prohibitive costs or just not knowing how to repair things. The housing information network agency could provide information on how to repair or maintain your home or seek out possible subsidy programs for home repair.

Themes for "How Can We Do This Together?"

Collaboration: Collaboration between stakeholders and listening to those who need the housing is of utmost importance. Groups realized that we must work on one problem, and even one facet of a problem, at a time because blanket solutions quickly applied have not solved anything. People need to share information and their capacities and take this newly acquired knowledge back to their own organizations.

Trust and Cooperation: In order to do this, we must build trust and cooperation between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. It must be determined if Aboriginal organizations want to work with the non-Aboriginal organizations involved in housing and if so, establish how they want to interact. People suggested creating an open and inclusive urban housing program where everyone would work towards the common goals for housing.

Education: The housing information network could also provide an education department where people could learn about housing options, the benefits to home ownership, and homeowner responsibilities. This could also be incorporated into the regular education system.

Land banks: People suggested creating land banks or emulating the Fort McMurray housing initiative in Saskatoon. Land banks could lease the land to people providing them homes while they were in school and provide them the opportunity to build credit.

Conclusion: Housing does not exist in a vacuum. It affects all societal aspects. A sense of community must be built while the housing needs are addressed. Some feel that

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Aboriginal housing needs are best served by creating communities entirely for that population while others argue against it stating that people should be able to choose where they live. As stated earlier, there is no one correct answer and as stakeholders, we need to create several options and work with the people to choose the best plans of action.

Urban Aboriginal Housing Strategy

Bridges and Foundations: CURA hopes to facilitate the action plan or strategy using the mini-conference's findings and working with its stakeholders and Planning Circle members. Stakeholders will receive suggested action plans and, at a second meeting, discuss and decide on a course of action. Bridges and Foundations: CURA's research will provide data on Saskatoon's current urban Aboriginal housing situation. Planning Circle members, community stakeholders and those in need will, using the mini-conference's findings, create a community vision.