

Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership

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Preservation of non-profit housing in Halifax: policy tools and challenges

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Community Partner/s	United Way of Halifax, HRM Planning and Infrastructure <i>Other potential partners (will be approached once the proposal is approved): Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia, Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, Harbour City Homes, Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, Housing Trust of Nova Scotia</i>

1. Rationale

Affordable housing in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has recently come under threat from increased development of central area properties and redevelopment of existing low-income neighbourhoods. Preserving affordable housing, particularly in historically low-income areas like the North End, is a critical component in managing supply. It has become more difficult for developers and municipalities to build new affordable units without substantial assistance from the provincial and federal governments, making preservation of the existing stock critical. Non-profit housing organizations, which own and manage the properties and often serve key demographic groups such as seniors, new immigrants, and people at risk of homelessness, are facing increased barriers to their operation. This trend has been observed in other countries, such as the United Kingdom and The Netherlands (Gurran et al. 2007), where policy directions have favoured privatization of public housing assets and non-profit housing associations have also been forced to sell hundreds of units.

Non-profit housing associations provide supportive housing, social housing, and affordable rental units. They are supported in these efforts through municipal and provincial tools and programs, such as rent supplements for tenants with low incomes and targeted funding for specific groups (e.g. seniors). However, shifting economic conditions and political priorities have contributed to an uncertain funding environment for non-profit housing associations. For municipalities, preserving existing affordable units can be problematic for several reasons. First, the higher a property's land value, the more revenue the municipality can collect. Since property taxes are by far the main source of income for municipal governments, local councils often opt for redevelopment, which can contribute to more households and a higher-value building on a given site.

Second, many of the low-income communities in Canadian cities, including Halifax, are located in central parts of the city that have recently experienced a renaissance (e.g. Roth and Grant 2015); higher-income individuals are choosing to live there, creating increased competition for housing and contributing to gentrification in some areas. Planning policies, such as those aimed to increase density in inner city neighbourhoods, may contribute to this crisis in affordability. The trend to develop smaller units in ever-taller buildings runs contrary to the tendency among many non-profits to provide larger units to house families with children. Non-profit housing authorities can no longer afford their central city properties, but relocating to cheaper land is not always an option that meets the needs of their tenants. While low-income households could conceivably move further out into the more affordable suburban communities, this would require the purchase of a car; central neighbourhoods are accessible by foot, bicycle, and transit.

Finally, the rights of renters, including tenants living in co-operatives or non-profit housing, are often considered secondary to owners' rights; it is often assumed that tenants are short-term residents, and that they do not contribute much to their neighbourhoods.

2. Potential Policy Relevance

Local policy seems to support the role of different types of housing, including non-profit housing, in meeting the needs of the local population. The Regional Municipal Planning Strategy recognizes the role of the municipality in supporting housing diversity and affordability for all socio-economic groups and for aging in place. Its key policy directions include effective land use regulation and supporting provincial and non-profit sector housing initiatives (Housing and Homelessness Partnership 2015). Housing Nova Scotia has in the past partnered with private sector landlords to preserve affordable rental units. In 2015, tenants facing eviction due to the proposed sale of non-profit association Harbour City Homes' nine buildings on Brunswick and Artz Streets were able to obtain rent supplements from the Province of Nova Scotia to use when they found a rental unit elsewhere (Devet 2015). However, many of the residents had lived in the units for over 30 years and were dismayed about the dispersal of their long-term friends and neighbours in the community (Devet 2015, Fraser 2015). The Provincial Housing Strategy, *A Housing Strategy for Nova Scotia* (2013), identified "building partnerships with communities, residents, businesses, non-profit organizations and local governments" and "ensuring a range of affordable housing options for owners and renters alike" as two of its five key areas.

Despite clear policy directives, support for non-profit housing appears to be minimal, with most non-profit housing associations dependent upon unstable funding sources such as grants and short-term initiatives. The individual redevelopment of non-profit housing sites and the sale of non-profit housing association buildings do not seem to trigger the use of protective tools, programs, or policies from the municipality (e.g. Fraser 2015) or province. This suggests that protective tools, programs, or policies to prevent redevelopment and displacement of existing residents are not strong enough, or that there are barriers to their implementation. This project aims to uncover the critical issues that non-profit housing associations face in acquiring, operating, and retaining their buildings, and the tools, programs, and policies that support this affordable housing option in Halifax Regional Municipality and the Province of Nova Scotia. The study also aims to uncover the barriers HRM and Housing Nova Scotia face in applying these policy tools, and ways in which these barriers have been overcome in key cases.

3. Research Questions

1. What is the role of non-profit housing associations in providing affordable housing in Halifax?
2. How has the supply of units provided by non-profit housing associations changed since 2006?
3. What tools, programs, and policies (e.g. municipal, provincial) exist to support the establishment, operation, and preservation of this type of housing?
4. What barriers (e.g. institutional, social, financial) exist to application of these tools, programs, and policies, and in what ways have these barriers been overcome? Are there tools, programs, and policies from other municipalities/provinces that could be applied in Halifax?

4. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions

The project focuses on the local policies that attempt to disrupt the international trend in urban disparities, e.g. providing housing support for the low-income population and the lower end of the rental housing market. Uncovering ways in which the partners have overcome barriers to application of these tools contributes to the NCRP objective to identify specific local interventions that have the capacity to mitigate the effects of exclusion. The project builds on existing research networks in Halifax Regional Municipality.

5. Research Design & Methods

We will use a mixed-methods approach to the work. We will recruit and train a graduate research assistant to help collect, analyze, and disseminate the research results. This work will include:

- A literature review of scholarly literature, newspaper articles, municipal documents, and non-profit housing association reports related to non-profit housing in HRM

- An analysis of HRM and Housing Nova Scotia policies, programs, and tools that affect the supply of non-profit housing, and tools that have been used in Canada, the United States, and Europe to support and preserve non-profit housing
- An analysis of the supply of non-profit housing in HRM, using data from the municipality
- Interviews with non-profit housing associations, municipal officials, provincial officials, and other stakeholders to identify the problems providers are facing, how existing tools are used, and barriers to their use (approximately 15-25 interviews)
- Preparation of reports and scholarly papers

6. Role of Community Partner

Our community partners are active participants in our research process, attending meetings and providing regular advice and feedback. The community partners will help design the interview guide and will advise on interpreting the findings and making policy recommendations.

7. Role of Students / Research Assistants and Contributions to Training

We will employ a graduate research assistant to work full-time on the project in the summer of 2017, and part-time during the fall and winter terms (2017-2018). We will recruit a student in the two-year Master of Planning program at Dalhousie. These students require a 15-week full-time work placement as part of their cooperative graduate program, and summer research assistantships qualify as appropriate work term placements. The student will help design the interview guide, develop the Research Ethics package, locate key literature on non-profit housing, and conduct an analysis of the supply of non-profit housing in HRM from 2006-2016. They will also assist in conducting the interviews. The student will be able to use the resulting data for their independent masters research project in fall 2017. In Winter 2018, the student will continue analyzing the interview data, co-author the report and journal articles, and prepare for the research dissemination workshop.

The student will be trained in basic quantitative methods, research ethics protocols and design, interview techniques and coding of interviews, policy and report writing, and qualitative data analysis software (HyperResearch).

8. Schedule

- Collect and review literature (scholarly articles, newspaper articles, municipal documents, and non-profit housing association reports) related to non-profit housing in HRM (summer 2017)
- Analyze HRM and Housing Nova Scotia policies, programs, and tools that affect the supply of non-profit housing, and tools that have been elsewhere (summer 2017)
- Analyze the supply of non-profit housing in HRM, using data from the municipality (fall 2017)
- Assist in conducting interviews with non-profit housing associations, municipal officials, provincial officials, and other stakeholders to identify the problems providers are facing, how existing tools are used, and barriers to their use (approximately 15-25 interviews) (summer 2017)
- Prepare a **report on preliminary findings** by October 2017
- The RA will prepare a **master's research project report** by December 31 2017
- Prepare final report by May 15 2017
- Prepare one or more **scholarly papers** (winter 2018)

9. Outcomes / Deliverables

- a) Community stakeholders meeting (March 2017)
- b) Research protocol (including interview guide, ethics application) (April 2017)

- c) Preliminary findings report summary report (October 2017)
- d) Report on the housing supplied through non-profit housing associations, changes in the supply over time, tools available to encourage and protect non-profit housing, and barriers to their use (December 2017)
- e) MPlan student: research report on non-profit housing (December 2017)
- f) MPlan student: draft scholarly paper on low-rent apartment areas (March 2018). This paper will be reviewed/revised by the team (submission in May 2018).
- g) Scholarly paper on understandings of neighbourhood (submission May 2018)
- h) Research dissemination workshop (June 2018)

10. Budget Explanation

Amount requested: \$20,400

The principal cost involves student labour:

- Summer 2017 student (MPlan, summer work term, 37.5 hours per week, 15 weeks at \$18) = \$10,125
- Fall 2017 student (MPlan, 10 hours a week, 14 weeks at \$18] = \$ 2,520
- Winter 2018 student (MPlan, 10 hours a week, 14 weeks at \$18] = \$ 2,520

Transcription of interviews: 50 interview hours at \$60/hour of interview * 11% EI and CPP] = \$3,330

One copy of HyperResearch qualitative software = \$ 305

Costs for office supplies, printing, map printing, etc. = \$ 600

Student travel (to present at the Canadian Association of Planning Students or Canadian Institute of Planners conference) = \$1,000

Total costs = \$20,400

Other resources:

Pending: We will apply for a Nova Scotia subsidy available for the summer cooperative work term student. It would be worth for \$3,500, if successful.

The research team already has the equipment needed for interviews and statistical software needed for the study. We have access to computer resources to do the work. The department will provide work space for the students.

References

- Devet, R. 2015. Halifax social housing tenants rally to save their homes. Halifax Media Co-op, December 1, 2015.
- Fraser, L. 2015. Halifax tenant questions plan to sell affordable housing properties. The Chronicle Herald, August 9, 2015.
- Gurran, N., Milligan, V., Baker, D. and Bugg, L.B. (2007). International practice in planning for affordable housing: Lessons for Australia. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. AHURI Positioning Paper no 99.
- Housing and Homelessness Partnership. (2015). *Housing Needs Assessment*. Halifax: Halifax Regional Municipality.
- Roth, N. and Grant, J.L. (2015). The story of a commercial street: Growth, decline, and gentrification on Gottingen Street, Halifax. *Urban History Review* 43(2), 38-53.

□ Funding approved: \$20,400 date 18 July 2017

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SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
Personnel costs				
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Undergraduate*				
Masters *	\$15,165		Province of NS \$3,500 pending	\$15,165
Doctorate *				
Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Postdoctoral				
Other				
Travel and subsistence costs				
Applicant/Team member(s)				
Canadian travel				
Foreign travel				
Students				
Canadian travel	\$1,000			\$1,000
Foreign travel				
Other expenses				
Non-disposable equipment (specify)				
Professional / technical services (specify: includes partner staff time contributed to or paid for by project, translation, editing, etc.)				
Transcription	\$3,330			\$3,330
Other expenses (specify: includes honoraria, data purchase, field costs, printing, supplies, etc.)				
1 Copy HyperResearch	\$305			\$305
Office supplies	\$600			\$600
Total				\$20,400