



ALBERTA  
REAL ESTATE  
FOUNDATION

# Enabling Housing Choice Project

Preliminary Research

Report #5:

**Housing & Capacity**

April 2022



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice Project encompasses all of what we call Alberta, and is the traditional and ancestral territory of many peoples, presently subject to Treaties 6, 7, and 8 including the Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation and the Métis People of Alberta. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on and that which we refer to in this research.

RDN is committed to supporting the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, and believes in the need for meaningful engagement and consent with Indigenous peoples in the community. Colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. As this project specifically touches on development and planning concepts which are built on a colonial system of governance and land use management, we also recognize that we have more work to unpack the systems in which we are upholding and working within.

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**Zachary Weeks**, Accessibility and Disability Consultant

**Tamara White**, Principal, Elevate Community Planning

**Lenze Kuiper**, Chief Administrative Officer, Oldman River Regional Services Commission

**Lisa Drury**, Senior Planner, City of Beaumont

**Emily Sangster**, Long Range Planner, City of Beaumont

**Jason Syvixay**, City of Edmonton, Principal Planner, Zoning Bylaw Renewal Strategist

**Global Village Centre** in Brooks, AB

**Jacquie Fenske**, Experience Alberta

**Eva John-Gladue**, Operations Manager

**Natalie Gibson**, Principal & Economic Development Expert, Innovisions & Associates

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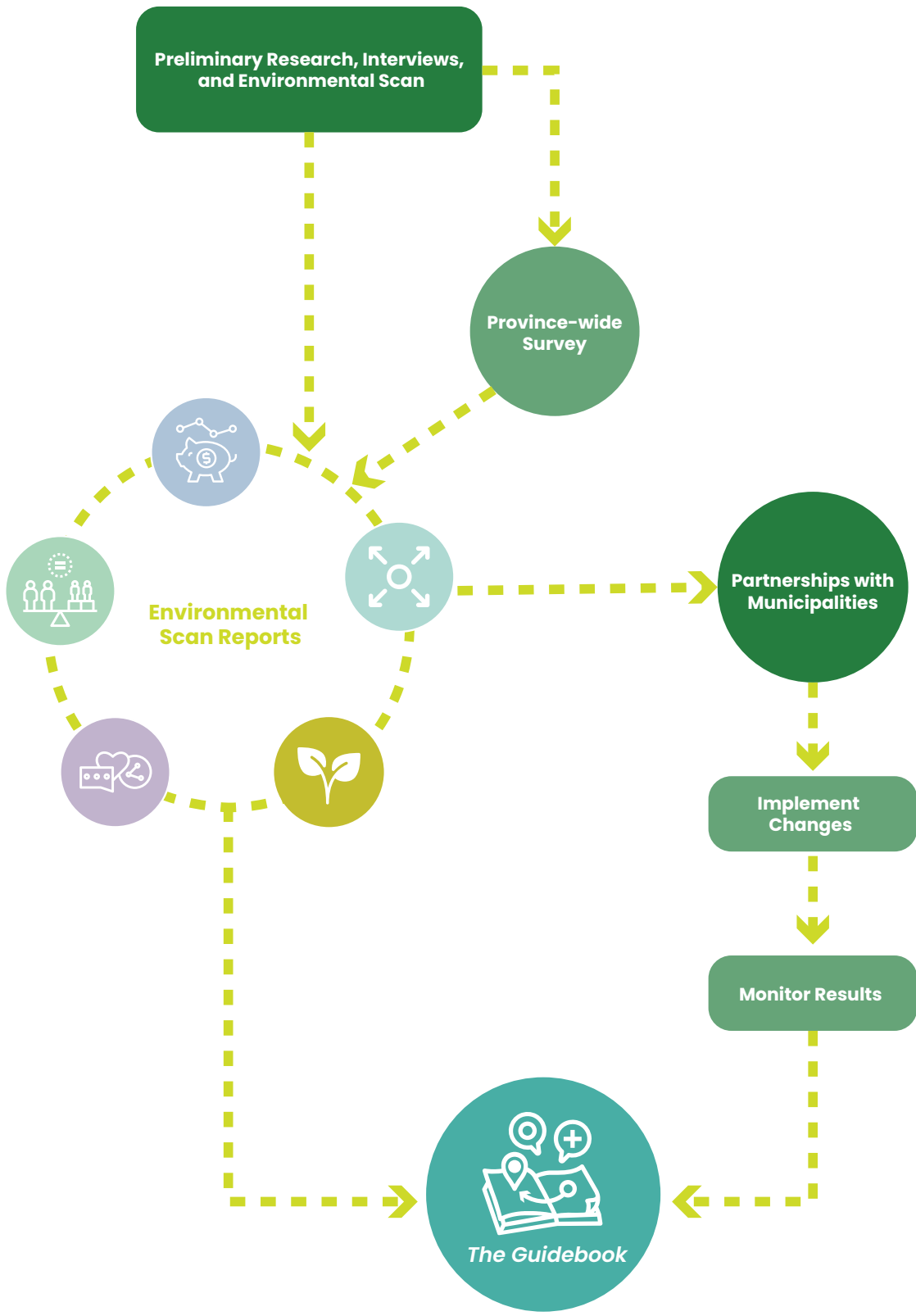
# PROJECT CONTEXT

The Enabling Housing Choice Project aims to provide insight on how Albertan municipalities can support growth in their communities and help provide more housing options and choices to their residents through local policy changes and capacity building strategies. In the first stage of our project, we conducted a literature review, subject matter expert interviews, and case studies. We have broken our findings into five main themes in order to make the relevant information more easily accessible.

This report on Housing and Capacity, along with our other four themed reports, can be used by municipalities and communities to help better understand the complexities of housing choice and to help guide the development of equitable policies and strategies. It is important to note that all these themes intersect with each other. A holistic approach to enabling housing choice that considers all of these themes is required to make meaningful change that positively impacts various groups and their unique needs within a community. These preliminary findings will inform the next phases of our project, including the creation of our Guidebook for Enabling Housing Choice.

In this report we discuss:

- » The varying ways communities can build capacity through attracting and retaining a skilled workforce;
- » The dynamics of economic development and housing and building capacity through shared knowledge;
- » The value of utilizing existing staff capacity more efficiently and effectively; and,
- » The role partnerships and relationship building play in creating change.



# OVERVIEW

The ability of a community to enact changes and achieve its goals is linked to the amount of capacity a community has. A lack of capacity refers to the deficiency of knowledge or awareness, the scarcity of funding and technical expertise, or just the shortcoming of community understanding and support (Wakely, 2016).

**“CAPACITY [IS] THE ABILITY OF AN INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, ORGANISATION OR SYSTEM TO DELIVER INTENDED OUTCOMES, WHILE CAPACITY BUILDING REFERS TO IMPROVING THE ABILITY OF THE ENTITY TO PERFORM” (BROWN ET AL., 2011, P. III).**

Some communities may struggle to create plans, policies, and strategic frameworks that enable them to make effective change because of a lack of capacity. This can be an obstacle in any community but is especially prevalent in smaller communities where there are often more constraints in funding and expertise. Capacity can also be limited by the inefficient use of municipal resources and staff. Capacity is not just about increasing funding or human capital but using the resources municipalities already have to their fullest potential.

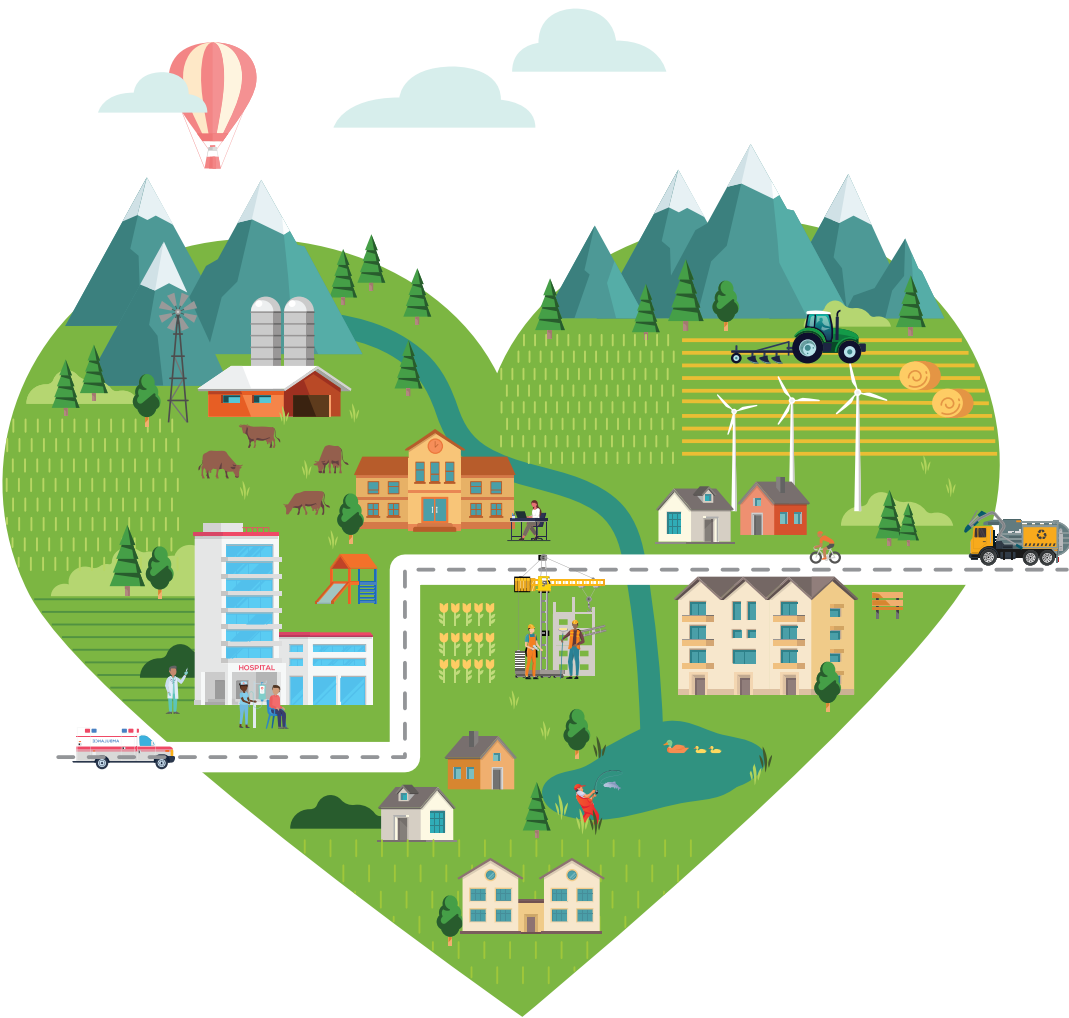
Attracting a diversity of people with different skills, knowledge, and perspectives to a community can help solve some capacity limitations. Capacity limitations can also be caused by the inefficient use of community resources. Communities must innovatively capitalize on what they can offer to provide better strategies to overcome capacity challenges including enticing new businesses and attracting people through vibrant Main Streets.



Town of Cochrane's Bustling Main Street (Experience The Cowboy Trails, 2022)

While there are many other forms of capacity, focusing on how to grow a community's population and skilled workforce is an important way to enhance a community's ability to enact positive changes. Being able to equip people with the knowledge and resources they need to succeed in their roles is also essential. This is known as Human Resource Development (HRD). HRD is the "process of equipping people with the understanding and skills, and the access to information and knowledge to perform effectively." (Wakely, 2016)

Growing the workforce often requires increased housing supply, and it is important to consider how this housing should be supplied to ensure the efficient use of resources and funding.



# ATTRACTING AND MAINTAINING A SKILLED WORKFORCE

## DOWNTOWN AND MAIN STREETS REVITALIZATION

Vibrant community hubs like Main Streets and downtown areas can help to attract skilled workers, which in turn increases knowledge capacity (Charney et al., 2015). Downtowns need to be able to attract and retain people and businesses (Charney et al., 2015). Downtown areas come in many different sizes, and even in small communities, they can act as a hub for services that help the local and regional population. A successfully functioning downtown has a concentration of many different activities such as workspaces, residential housing, cultural facilities, and recreational establishments (Charney et al., 2015).

**“ DOWNTOWNS ARE MORE THAN RETAIL, COMMERCIAL, SERVICE, AND WORK CENTERS. THEY ARE THE SYMBOLIC CENTERS OF CITIES AND ARE UNIFYING FORCES FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES” (BURAYIDI, 2018, P. 4).**

From 2016 to 2021, Alberta’s rural population has declined by 2.7% in comparison to Alberta’s urban (large cities and towns) population growth which has increased by 6.4% (Statistics Canada, 2022). Many people are moving out of rural areas because of the lack of resources and change in the economy that calls for more service-oriented economic growth which is happening in cities (Henderson, 2022).

Urban centres are also increasing in population because immigrants are more likely to settle in urban areas rather than rural communities. Because of this decline, many professionals such as healthcare practitioners are moving out of rural communities (Weisner, 2021). This is detrimental to rural areas’ shrinking and aging population, which can “create further difficulties for communities in attracting business, which then drives more people out of smaller centres” (Henderson, 2022). Creating a more vibrant hub with a diversity of housing can aid in keeping people attracted to the character of the community.





## **SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Social capital can refer to “the participation of civil society in formal planning and decision making” (Polk, 2011, p. 189). Municipalities are facing challenges in building capacity, and this could be helped by utilizing social capacity within their community. There is a growing role of neighbourhood and community groups that contribute significantly to the overall decision making and problem-solving processes that municipalities must deliver (Wakely, 2016). Taking advantage of social capital means using the connections that communities have with one another to solve problems and spread awareness of creative solutions.

Smaller communities may have difficulties in retaining and attracting residents which in turn contributes to their lack of capacity. However, if a community utilizes their social capital, they can bring a community together to solve these problems (Wakely, 2016). With volunteers to help with capacity concerns, the municipality raised awareness of issues in the community and was able to bring community members together and solve various problems. When residents are positively engaged, knowledge and resources are increased through social capital expanding a municipality’s capacity and helps overcome obstacles and build community relations.

## **ENTICING BUSINESS AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES**

Demand and growth can largely be attributed to employment opportunities (Burayidi, 2018). However, enticing businesses and attracting people is a difficult predicament since economic and population growth influence each other. To have a successful business, there must be people to participate in encouraging the economy through the businesses. For a place to be attractive to reside in, there must be businesses for people to enjoy and to create job opportunities.

In Sangudo, AB, for example, after a major effort was undertaken to create employment opportunities and invest locally, the town experienced economic growth which in turn increased housing demand. Sangudo has roughly 300 residents and maintaining or increasing their population is a challenge. Residents Dan and Coral Ohler believed they needed to do something to help stimulate their local economy, thus they created the Sangudo Opportunity Development Co-op (SODC), an investment co-op. This gave a way for community members to “pool their money to invest in local projects” (Mathews, 2020). The SODC helped build two businesses and a home which enabled the town to save their local meat processor.

The SODC helped stimulate business in Sangudo, raising over \$250,000 to reinvest in the community. Because of the SODC and community efforts, Sangudo is experiencing economic growth, but they are “not just building businesses,” they are “building community” (Thompson, 2019). Although Sangudo is a small town, they found a creative way to entice businesses and create job opportunities which in turn attracts skilled workers.

# BUILDING CAPACITY: SHARED KNOWLEDGE

Another aspect of capacity building is organizational development and utilizing shared knowledge.



**“ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE PROCESS BY WHICH THINGS GET DONE COLLECTIVELY WITHIN AN ORGANISATION. IT IS TO DO WITH MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES; RULES AND REGULATIONS; HIERARCHIES AND JOB DESCRIPTIONS – HOW THINGS GET DONE” (WAKELY, 2016).**

When communities do not have the capacity within their organization to enact changes, they may often outsource their need for technical expertise and knowledge. Through partnerships with other communities and regional planning, communities can expand and share their knowledge through relationship building and collaboration.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Communities can build relationships with other entities, such as other municipalities, private sector enterprises, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to strengthen their capacity. Through the task of creating better planning processes, municipalities can create relationships with these different groups to “confront and command new urban agendas” (Wakely, 2016) and build the capacity they need to enact change. Having consultants and external advisory boards can help communities review plans to help them through best practices specific to their municipality. However, not all municipalities can afford to outsource work to consultants. Instead, sharing knowledge between different interested parties can help communities gain more technical expertise to achieve their goals efficiently and effectively. For example, in the case study we elaborate on later in this report, the Tribal Chiefs Employment & Training Services Association (TCETSA) implemented their Tiny Homes Project working with the government and First Nations community to pool their knowledge and resources to fund the project.

When there is better coordination and more transparency between communities and funding agencies, municipalities may feel more confident when creating a funding proposal (Nesbitt, 2018). Conversations about affordable housing are often centered around large urban centres, but the need for it in smaller communities is also prevalent, if not often acknowledged. However, how to go about addressing affordable housing can be more cumbersome for smaller municipalities who may not have delved into tackling this issue before, which could be a deterrent to applying for funding or even just finding out where to start.

## REGIONAL PLANNING

Municipal government partnerships can also alleviate the pressure that individual municipalities experience and increase their capacity. Regional planning can build capacity through sharing knowledge and collaboration. For instance, within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB), planners strategize for the region as a whole. The RMWB accounts for 10.5% of Alberta's land mass and is the second-largest municipality in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2021). Instead of planning for their urban and rural areas separately, they work collaboratively with their urban and rural areas so that their residents can benefit from what the entire region has to offer. When planning for a region, the hubs and central areas must also serve regional expectations since a lot of people from the rural areas also take advantage of what the urban areas provide. If municipalities can utilize regional planning and work together instead of accepting the pressures they face individually, they can increase their capacity and enact thorough and comprehensive changes in their region.



A rendering of a converted office building into sunny open plan living spaces (Paynter, 2021)



## CASE STUDIES

In this section, we highlight two case studies to help demonstrate how capacity building can be done in different ways. This section explores how the City of Beaumont increased their capacity by implementing a new Land Use Bylaw to enhance its efficiencies and how the Tribal Chiefs Employment & Training Association (TCETA) leveraged collaboration and relationship building to increase capacity.

### **CITY OF BEAUMONT: BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH EFFICIENCIES**

Sometimes communities do have the financial resources to outsource their capacity or access planning firms to help consult on best practices. However, even with adequate financial capacity, resources may be stretched thin due to inefficient practices. This can happen when a Land Use Bylaw becomes outdated and starts presenting restrictive land use policies that can inhibit innovation and development. One of the pillars to building capacity is institutional development. This is all about capacity building by enhancing efficiency through legal and regulatory changes (Wakely, 2016).

In 2019, a new Land Use Bylaw was adopted in Beaumont, which incorporated significant form-based codes rather than use-based elements. A form-based code is a zoning regulation where development is controlled by the physical form rather than the land use, so as long as the development is coherent with the surrounding environment, land uses do not have to be as segregated. Their new Land Use Bylaw also reduced the number of land use zones, to enable more flexibility and efficiency within their land use framework. Because of the form-based code and reduction in land use zones, Beaumont is now able to encourage more diverse land uses, while still supporting a cohesive character throughout the city.

Since the new bylaw was adopted in 2019, Beaumont has seen significantly fewer Direct Control (DC) applications for land designations specific to a certain parcel of land with unique characteristics, traits, and regulations. Instead, more applications for new developments without the need for rezoning are being received by the planning department, which has reduced the administrative and financial costs of development, streamlining the application process and burdens on the planning department. Beaumont's planners are now able to spend more time on strategic work and long term policies, allowing them to work at a higher level or on more complex applications while no longer being burdened with a cumbersome and outdated Bylaw to navigate.

With the introduction of more flexibility, residents and developers can create more diverse developments. There are more options for what people can do with their spaces. An

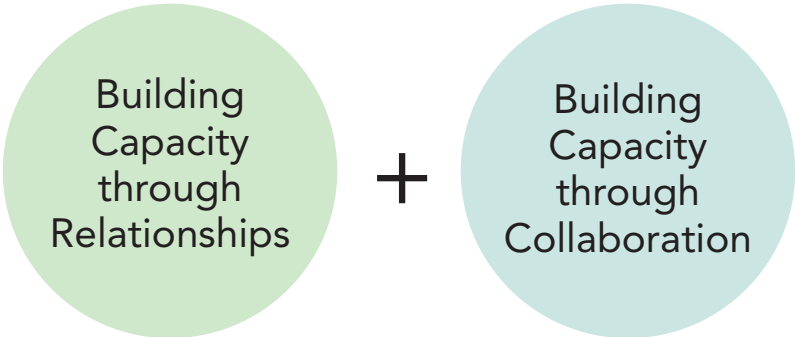
example could be a daycare operating in a former single-detached home, where the actual building design isn't different, but the use has changed to provide more services to adjacent residents. With Beaumont's new Land Use Bylaw, the municipality was able to increase its capacity by enhancing efficiency, without having to increase staff or funding.

**TCETSA: BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH COLLABORATION**

The Tribal Chiefs Employment & Training Services Association (TCETSA) supports Indigenous communities through the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program, which helps Indigenous people improve their skills and find employment (TCETSA, n.d.). TCETSA works with six First Nations in northeast Alberta and they have offices in urban sites such as St. Paul and Bonnyville. The association saw that there was a need for external contractors to come into the communities they work with to do trades work. Many times they would bring in their own employees so TCETSA tried looking for ways to build capacity in the local First Nations while also working to promote increased collaboration between external contractors and local residents.

In 2016, TCETSA launched the Tiny Homes Project which sought to provide local trainees experience with construction safety, trades training, and hands-on experience, while also working to address homelessness. The project proposal was put through Alberta Indigenous Relations, TCETSA's own ISET agreement, as well as the First Nation communities. TCETSA was able to work with the government and the First Nations community as equal partners which built financial, resource, and knowledge capacity to successfully implement these tiny homes.

The Tiny Homes Project used a different model of building houses by using the community's own people and hiring trainees to work alongside journeymen to gain experience in the workforce. Additionally, through this project, TCETSA approached related industries and the apprenticeship program about opportunities for individuals to be earning hours towards the trade. TCETSA's partners were from carpentry, electrical, and plumbing companies, and they worked with them to ensure the trainees' hours spent on building tiny homes could go towards their journeymen hours. This model was eventually approved and embedded into the training program. The Tiny Homes Project was a holistic way to strategize against homelessness and the housing crisis while also providing opportunities for Indigenous people to gain experience and learn valuable skills.



## NEXT STEPS

Looking at ways to increase economic growth can attract a skilled workforce which increases a community's knowledge base and in turn builds capacity. Municipalities need to consider investing in creating vibrant downtowns and Main Streets. This helps to attract and retain skilled workers, which ties in to attracting new businesses. Revitalization is more than merely fixing the physical attributes of a place; it is the way that a municipality can creatively stimulate economic growth within their community.

Building capacity does not always mean increasing a community's population or fiscal means. It could mean using the resources a community already has and enhancing them. Some municipalities may not be informed about the impact housing diversity can have, so increasing their awareness and expertise would bring them one step closer to creating a more inclusive and dynamic community. By building technical expertise, communities can gain knowledge in areas they are lacking, but also learn about ways to adapt to the changing needs of capacity building. Housing development and planning is a fluid field, so being able to know "flexible and responsive management styles" (Wakely, 2016) is important in building capacity. Municipalities should consider partnering with other municipalities, private enterprises, or non-governmental organizations and build the relationships they need to better serve their communities.

Taking a look at a community's institutional development and organization can have a big impact on capacity building. Municipalities should look within their structures, such as their Land Use Bylaw, to continually adapt to the needs of their community. By updating a Land Use Bylaw to reflect the evolving nature of planning, a municipality can free up valuable time to focus on strategic and impactful initiatives. Finding more efficient ways to make use of time and resources can build capacity within a community without increasing the population or fiscal means.





## GET INVOLVED

Our Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) Enabling Housing Choice Project team is working to support communities across Alberta to create innovative and transformative local policies that promote housing diversity, access and choice. If you are interested in learning more about the project, current partnership opportunities, and research, please get in touch by contacting us here at [housingchoice@ruraldevelopment.ca](mailto:housingchoice@ruraldevelopment.ca) or by visiting our [webpage](#).



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Email: [housingchoice@ruraldevelopment.ca](mailto:housingchoice@ruraldevelopment.ca)

Website: <https://www.housingredefined.ca/enabling-housing-choice-project>