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Enabling Housing Choice Project

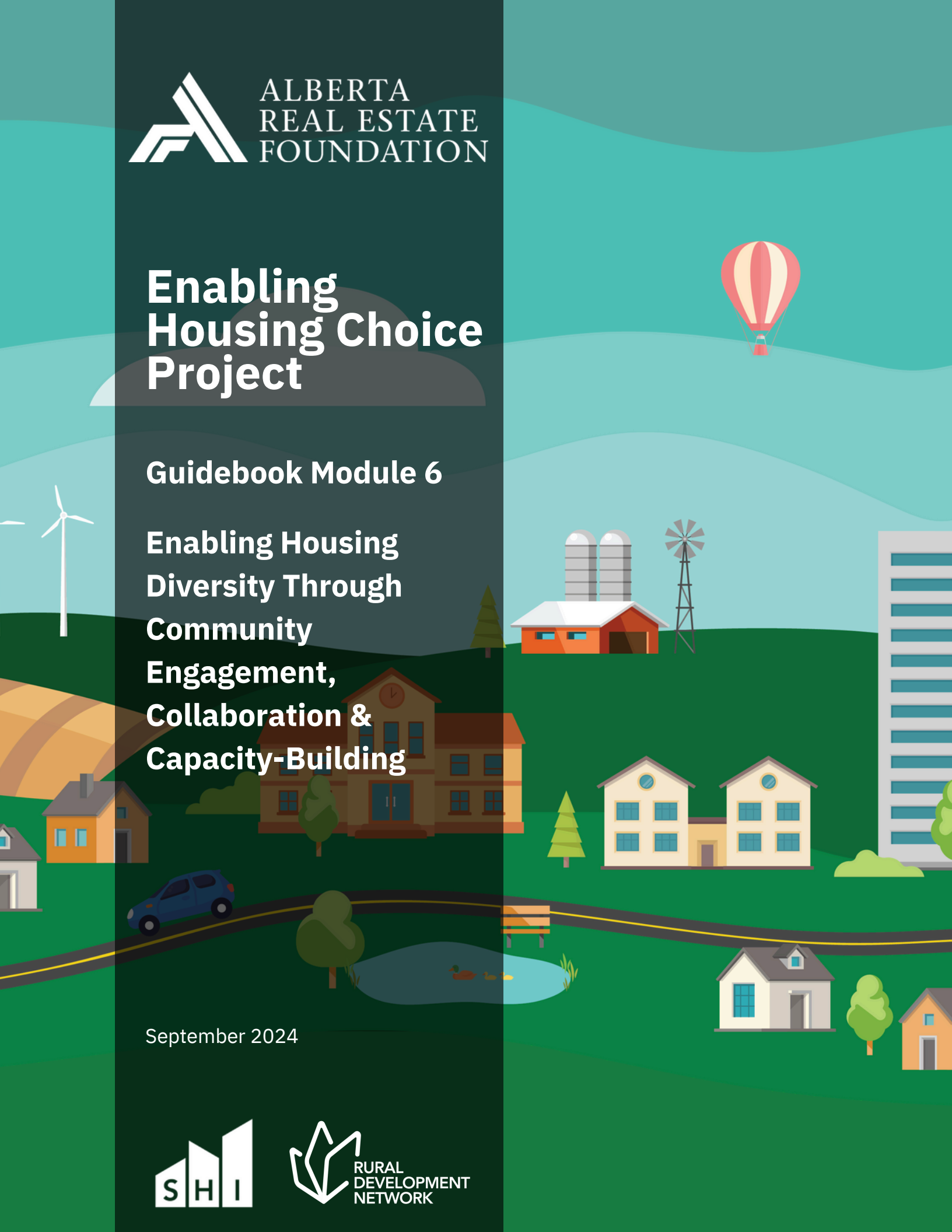
Guidebook Module 6

Enabling Housing Diversity Through Community Engagement, Collaboration & Capacity-Building

September 2024



RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
NETWORK



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to acknowledge our connection with the ancestral peoples who have been on this land for millennia.

RDN's physical office is located on lands traditionally known as amiskwachiwaskahikan (A Miss Gwa Che Wuss Sky Gun) - aka Beaver Hills House, or Edmonton, the historical land of Treaty 6 Territory, which is also within the Metis Nation District 9.

We acknowledge and confirm our commitment and responsibility to foster better relationships with Indigenous peoples, and to improve our own understanding of the unique and diverse cultures of local First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we gather on.

RDN is committed to connecting our programming to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as benchmarks for our reconciliation journey.

It is our sincere hope that the information provided in this guide will help communities address their own unique and diverse housing needs, and provide greater housing security and inclusion for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both in the community and the surrounding area.





PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to thank the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF) for their funding and support in this research project.

We also want to acknowledge the 6 Alberta communities that participated in this research: (alphabetically) City of Airdrie, Town of Bow Island, Town of Claresholm, Town of Mayerthorpe, Town of Pincher Creek and Town of Trochu. These communities embraced the EHC team's mandate and research process, enabling them to collect practical and compelling information about current housing issues, barriers and opportunities in their community.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the housing stakeholders who participated in the various community engagement exercises that were conducted for this project. We appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to sharing your insights, identifying challenges, highlighting opportunities, and suggesting ways to improve housing diversity in your community. Your contributions have played a vital role in shaping the understanding of the current housing landscape and guiding the research towards meaningful solutions. Your generosity and willingness to collaborate have been instrumental in our goal to facilitate a more inclusive and diverse housing environment, both in your community and across Alberta.

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MODULE 6: ENABLING HOUSING THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

MODULE 6 OF 8

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement, collaboration and capacity-building are all essential for enabling the development of housing that is created for and supported by rural communities.

By involving residents, stakeholders, and advocacy groups in the planning and decision-making processes, municipalities can ensure that housing policies and developments reflect the diverse needs, preferences, and aspirations of the community.

Similarly, industry collaboration and building strong relationships play a crucial role in enabling diverse housing development within a community. Clear communication channels and transparent dialogue are essential for aligning interests, sharing information, and identifying common goals and priorities. Furthermore, industry collaboration provides opportunities for knowledge exchange, innovation, and capacity building, enabling stakeholders to explore creative solutions, leverage best practices, and overcome barriers to diverse housing development.

Lastly, capacity-building strategies can help equip communities with the necessary resources and knowledge to address their diverse housing needs. Understanding how to leverage capacity is critical for overcoming housing-related challenges and can help mobilize a community's resources to take immediate housing action.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to provide rural municipalities with the tools and resources to facilitate community engagement, collaboration and capacity-building efforts that help garner further support and resources for diverse housing development that meet a community's housing needs.

1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is essential for fostering housing diversity as it ensures that development plans reflect the needs and preferences of local residents. By involving the community in the planning process, municipalities can gather valuable insights and build support for diverse housing options that reflect the needs of the community.

Engaged communities are also more likely to embrace diverse housing projects, leading to smoother implementation and long-term success. Additionally, community engagement promotes transparency and trust, empowering residents to have a voice in shaping their neighbourhoods.

AMPLIFYING VOICES: Allows residents to voice their concerns, preferences, and aspirations regarding housing options, ensuring that proposed developments align with community values and priorities.

FOSTERING TRUST: Engagement creates transparency and trust in the decision-making process, promoting buy-in and cooperation from residents who feel heard and valued.

REDUCING NIMBYISM: Engagement can help reduce NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) sentiments regarding diverse housing developments by addressing misconceptions and dispelling fears about proposed housing projects

SHARING KNOWLEDGE: Engagement can provide an opportunity to share information with the public about the benefits of diverse housing options, such as increasing affordability, promoting inclusivity, and supporting economic growth

MAKING INFORMED DECISIONS: Municipalities can gain insights into the diverse housing needs of their residents, leading to more inclusive and responsive housing policies and initiatives that reflect the needs of the community.

1.2 CONDUCTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement with the general public is crucial for garnering support and understanding a community's diverse housing needs for various reasons. Prior to conducting community engagement, it is important to first identify which approach will best garner the most relevant public input from your community.

These approaches could include but are not limited to:

TOWN HALL MEETINGS/PUBLIC FORUMS: Town hall meetings and public forums can serve to provide the community with in-person opportunities that allow a diverse array of stakeholders to participate in local housing conversations.

Participants can voice their concerns, preferences, and priorities related to housing, while also learning about potential solutions and policy proposals from experts and decision-makers.

SURVEYS/ONLINE FEEDBACK PLATFORMS: Surveys and online engagement platforms are useful tool for gathering input from a wider audience, allowing residents to participate at their convenience and provide anonymous feedback if desired.

WORKSHOPS/FOCUS GROUPS: Workshops and focus groups can help facilitate more in-depth discussions and collaborative problem-solving, bringing together diverse community perspectives to explore potential housing solutions.

INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGNS: Informational campaigns via community events (i.e. local trade shows, conferences) can raise awareness about the importance of diverse housing and encourage public participation in the planning process.

Consider creating informational materials (i.e. brochures, pamphlets or social media campaigns) that can be disseminated to the broader community. Information could include upcoming housing projects.



A COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: CONDUCTING SURVEYS IN BOW ISLAND, PINCHER CREEK & TROCHU

Through project partnerships with the Town of Bow Island, the Town of Pincher Creek and the Town of Trochu, the EHC team gathered insights and perspectives from residents regarding diverse housing development.

Recognizing the importance of understanding community needs and preferences, the team prepared community surveys tailored to each municipality's unique context and demographics.

Using both paper surveys and Google Forms as an online survey platform, the EHC team strived to ensure that the survey was accessible to a broad demographic range in each community. The format for the survey consisted of eleven questions about each community's current housing situation, diversity, barriers or challenges, and other similar themes. It also included a section to collect demographic information.

Utilizing the results of the community surveys, the EHC team was able to better understand the diverse housing needs of each community, and engage in further discussions with residents and local housing stakeholders about addressing their needs.



1.3 IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When conducting community engagement on diverse housing needs and issues, municipalities must consider several important factors to ensure that all residents have a voice in the decision-making process.

INCLUSIVITY: Ensure that community engagement efforts are inclusive and accessible to all residents, including those from diverse backgrounds, languages, and socioeconomic statuses.

TRANSPARENCY: Be transparent about the purpose, goals, and outcomes of community engagement efforts by providing clear information about the decision-making process and how public input will be used.

TIMING: Consider timing community engagement efforts to maximize participation, avoiding holidays, major events, or other competing priorities that may limit attendance.

ACCESSIBILITY: Choose venues and formats for engagement that are accessible to all residents, including those with disabilities, and provide options for remote participation or alternative formats for providing feedback.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING: Share information, materials and resources to residents about diverse housing options, the benefits of inclusive housing policies, and the role of community engagement in shaping housing decisions.

CASE STUDY: CONDUCTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE TOWN OF BOW ISLAND

Background: In late 2022, the EHC team conducted on a community engagement initiative with the Town of Bow Island, to gather input, ideas, and feedback for the development of the Westview Lands parcel in the community. This initiative culminated in an open house event, where residents were invited to share their thoughts and provide feedback about three concept designs that the EHC team prepared to demonstrate how diverse housing could be developed on the parcel.

Through discussions and visual aids, community members were asked to talk about their preferences for housing types, amenities, green spaces, and infrastructure on the site. The contributions from participants at the open house played a pivotal role in shaping development plans for the Westview Lands parcel.

Research: In preparation for the open house event at Bow Island, the EHC team created posters of the detailed concept designs for the parcel, to illustrate the housing options for the site, including low-rise apartment buildings, townhouses, and a limited number of single detached dwellings. Community members were invited to view the design options and then discuss their insights, preferences and perspectives about the designs with the EHC team.

In addition to the site design, the EHC team prepared an illustration of the various diverse housing types that were being proposed on the site, so that participants could visualize what it might look like. People at the open house were requested to place stickers on the poster to indicate which types of housing they would most like to see in their community.

Conclusion: Through the open house engagement initiative, the EHC team gained a deeper understanding of the community's housing needs and priorities, ensuring that the subsequent development plans for the Westview Lands parcel were thoughtfully informed by the collective input of Bow Island residents.

In 2024, the Town of Bow Island published their final design concept for the Westview Lands parcel. The final concept included a diverse array of housing types that will provide Bow Island residents with more affordable and suitable housing options that cater to their needs.

Relevant Resources:

- [Sustainable Housing Initiative: Bow Island Land Use Study \(2023\)](#)
- [Sustainable Housing Initiative: Bow Island What We Heard Report \(2022\)](#)
- [Town of Bow Island: Build Now In Bow Island \(2024\)](#)



2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

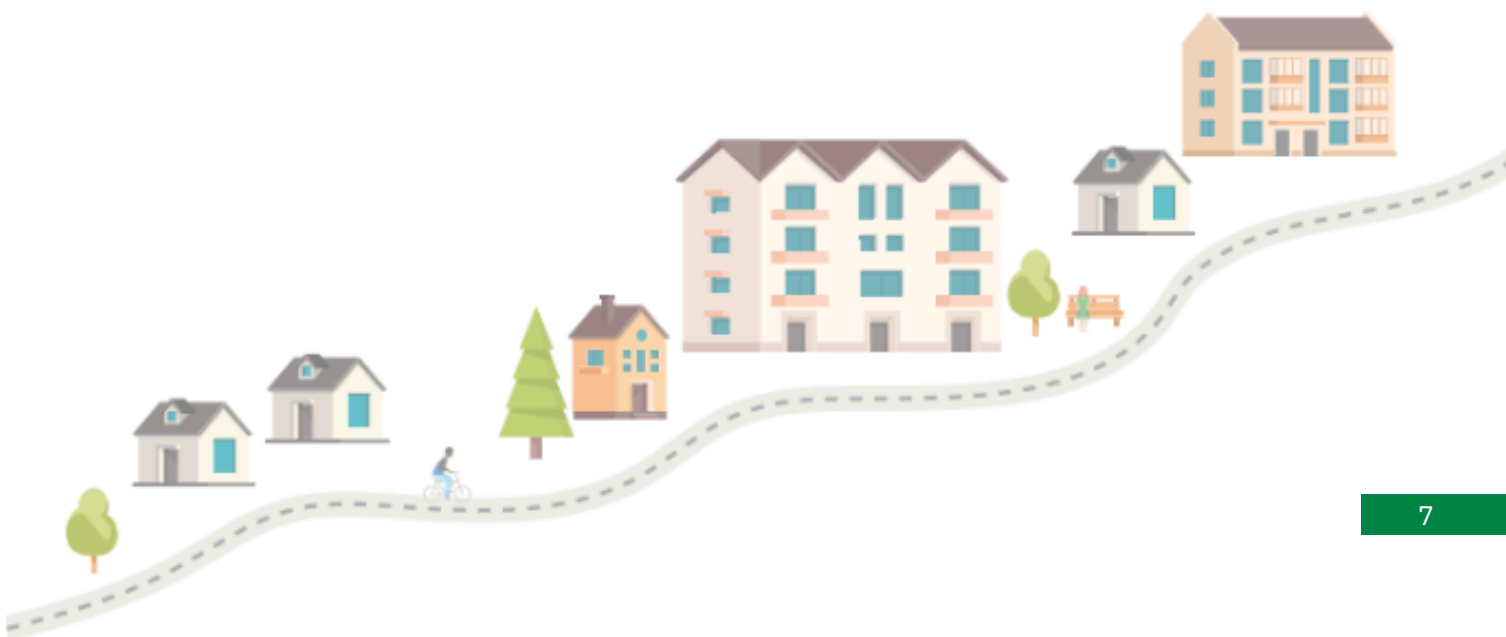
Collaboration between municipalities and local housing industry stakeholders is critical to effectively meeting the diverse housing needs of a community. By working hand-in-hand with developers, builders, real estate agents, and other housing professionals, municipalities can leverage their expertise, resources, and insights to develop innovative solutions that address the unique housing challenges and opportunities within their community.

Local housing industry stakeholders similarly possess expert knowledge of market trends, consumer preferences, regulatory requirements, and best practices, which can inform the development and implementation of housing policies, programs, and initiatives.

The recommendations for each of the EHC partner communities included that they consider the following key approaches to collaborating with local housing industry stakeholders:

COMMUNICATION IS KEY: Establishing clear and constant communication between the municipality and local housing industry stakeholders is critical for the creation of successful diverse housing initiatives.

EXPLORE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES: Exploring partnership opportunities with local housing industry developers and builders can help the municipality harness industry expertise for housing initiatives



2.2 COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Communication is key for fostering relationships between the municipality and housing industry stakeholders – developers, builders, real estate agents, and other housing professionals. A clear understanding of each groups' needs, challenges, and perspectives will lead to more effective collaboration, and give the municipality the ability to develop innovative solutions, policies and initiatives that will assist housing stakeholders to meet the community's housing needs.

Ongoing communication can be achieved through a variety of means, including the following:

MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS: Organize regular meetings and workshops with housing industry stakeholders to facilitate communication, information-sharing and understanding. These sessions can provide an opportunity to voice concerns, share insights, and collaborate on potential solutions.

TASK FORCES &/OR ADVISORY COMMITTEES: Establish a task force or advisory committee, comprised of representatives from the housing industry to provide a structured forum for collaboration and problem-solving. The group(s) should meet regularly to discuss emerging issues, review proposed policy changes, and provide input on strategic housing initiatives. For example: a community housing committee with representatives from the development community, housing advocacy organizations, and local government could explore strategies to increase housing stock and promote development opportunities.

OTHER CHANNELS: Gather input from housing industry stakeholders through a variety of other channels – online surveys, focus group discussions, comment forms – to collect insights into the needs, preferences, and priorities of housing stakeholders that cannot be gathered through one of the above methods. For example: conduct an annual survey to assess the effectiveness of existing housing policies and programs and gather suggestions for improvement.

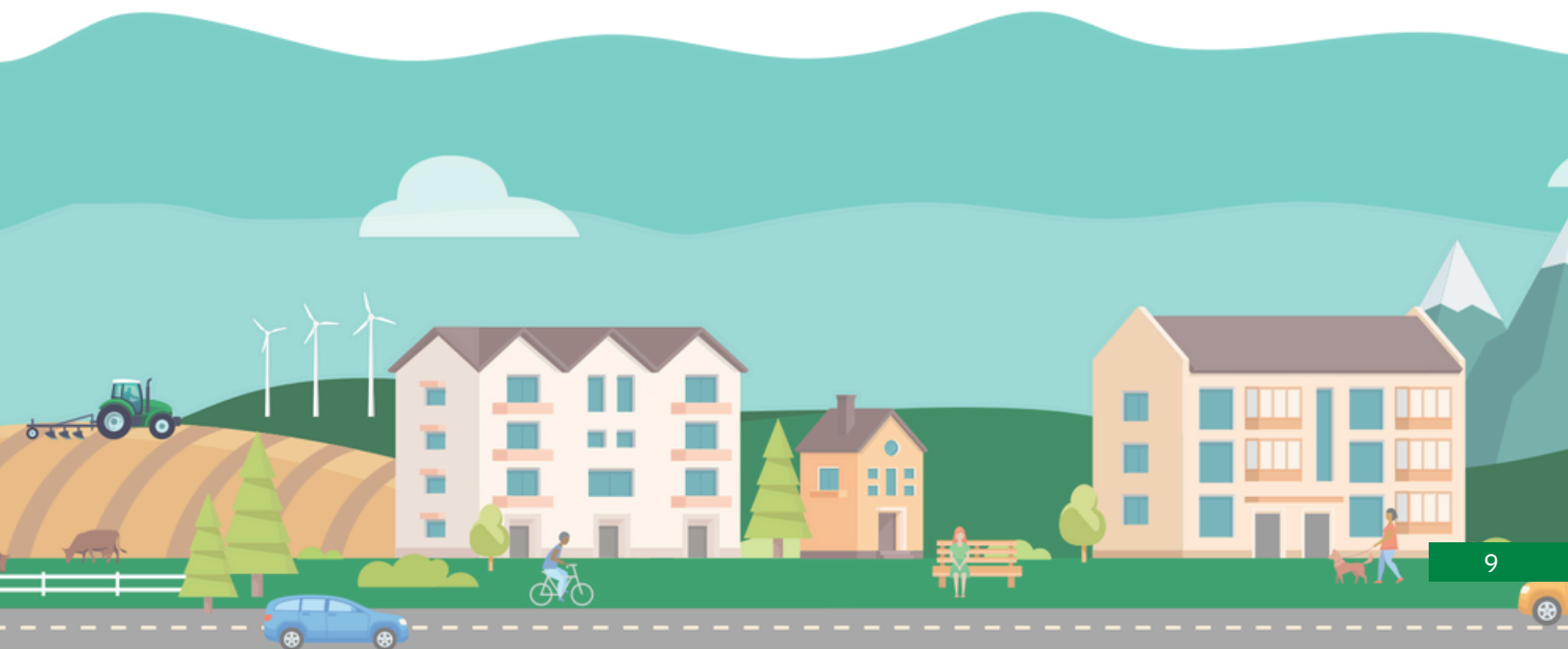
A COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS WITH LOCAL LANDOWNERS IN CLARESHOLM

Through the ***Enabling Housing Choice Project's*** partnership with the Town of Claresholm, the EHC team played a role in facilitating focus group discussions between the Town of Claresholm and local landowners who were keen on developing their land for housing in the community.

Throughout these discussions, landowners consistently emphasized the significance of clear, transparent communication with the Town, highlighting the need for timely updates and accessible information. The dialogue revealed a shared desire for a collaborative approach to land development, where stakeholders could work together to navigate the intricate processes involved in housing development.

One key theme that emerged from the focus groups was the importance of understanding the sometimes complex processes involved in land development.

The local landowners expressed a desire to better comprehend various aspects of the development process, including available grant and funding opportunities, local housing needs, regulatory processes, and timelines. They emphasized the need for accessible resources and support to navigate these complexities effectively.



2.3 EXPLORE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

For municipalities, exploring partnership opportunities with local housing industry stakeholders is essential for enabling diverse housing development. By partnering with local developers, home builders, and housing providers, municipalities can tap into their expertise, resources, and networks to develop tailored housing solutions that address specific needs and challenges within the community.

While the nature of partnerships between municipalities and local housing industry stakeholders can vary, here are a few examples of what partnership opportunities can look like:

PILOT PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES: Collaborating on pilot projects allows municipalities and housing industry stakeholders to test innovative housing solutions on a small scale before fully implementing them. By jointly developing pilot projects, both parties can assess their feasibility, effectiveness, and community acceptance, and then fine-tune the project from real-world feedback.

JOINT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: Partnering with housing industry stakeholders may allow municipalities to access joint funding opportunities for housing development initiatives. This may involve pooling financial resources from both public and private sectors, leveraging grants, loans, tax incentives, and other funding mechanisms to support diverse housing projects that benefit the community.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: Forming public-private partnerships allows municipalities and housing industry stakeholders to collaborate on housing development projects through shared responsibilities, risks, and rewards. PPPs can take various forms, including joint ventures, development agreements, or long-term leases, and enable both parties to leverage their respective strengths and resources to deliver successful housing outcomes.

3.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPACITY-BUILDING

Having the staff capacity is critical for the municipality to effectively respond to the community's housing needs, both immediately and for long-term sustainable housing-related initiatives. Internally, municipalities can invest (and have) in staff training and resources to help them effectively analyze, plan, and implement housing policies and initiatives. In general, municipal staff have an excellent understanding of the local housing market, regulatory frameworks, and best practices in housing development. Finally, municipal administration understands that municipal departments must collaborate effectively in order to address its community's complex housing challenges.

Regardless of all of the above, the prevailing issue for all the partner communities has been staff capacity. In smaller rural communities in particular, the CAO wears many 'hats', and is responsible for almost all the different areas of municipal administration.

This section explores potential avenues for a municipality to build capacity so it can better respond to the community's diverse housing needs.

LEVERAGING EXTERNAL RESOURCES:

Explore the potential to leverage local housing industry stakeholders' expertise, knowledge, resources, and innovations to develop effective housing strategies that will respond to the community's housing needs.

BUILDING INTERNAL CAPACITY:

Explore the potential to develop internal staff expertise and resources to more effectively respond to the community's housing needs.

3.2 BUILDING INTERNAL CAPACITY

Municipalities play a crucial role in addressing housing needs within the community. They work hard to utilize internal capacity to effectively plan, implement, and manage housing-related initiatives, including coordinating and developing infrastructure, resources, and expertise within municipal departments to tackle local housing challenges comprehensively and proactively.

By investing in additional and continual staff training, municipalities will be better able to analyze, understand, and respond to local housing needs and initiatives. In addition, by continually looking to improve collaboration among municipal departments and agencies, the municipality will be better able to respond to and update land use and zoning regulations, housing policies, and community engagement efforts that meet the needs of the community.

However, and as indicated earlier, discussions with the partner communities revealed that staff capacity to implement the changes that were suggested for the municipality in the final reports was very limited. These issues are discussed further at the end of this module.

3.2.1 STAFF & DEPARTMENTAL CAPACITY:

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT: Additional training and professional development opportunities for municipal staff involved in housing-related roles – planners, policy-writers, housing administrators, and development officers – can enhance their skills to work in areas such as housing policy analysis, affordable housing finance, community engagement, and regulatory compliance.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION: Fostering additional and ongoing collaboration among the municipal departments (Planning and Development, Public Works, Engineering) and external agencies (FCSS, social services, housing authority) that are involved in housing-related activities, can help facilitate information sharing, streamline decision-making processes, and help implement integrated solutions to housing challenges.

TECHNOLOGY & TOOLS: Updating and modernizing municipal tools and software platforms that enhance efficiency, data management, and communication within municipal departments will help streamline workflows and decision-making processes. Any technology update must include training staff on any new mapping systems, project management software, data analytics tools, and communication platforms.

3.2.2. BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES: Implementing strategic planning processes that integrate housing considerations into broader municipal planning frameworks – municipal development plans, housing strategies, and land use bylaws – to enable more diverse housing options, promote mixed-use neighborhoods, and address affordability challenges. As outlined in other modules, it is crucial that housing stakeholders are engaged in the planning process to ensure the updates align with community housing priorities and values.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION: Fostering additional and ongoing collaboration and coordination among different levels of government, housing agencies, and organizations that are involved in housing-related activities will help leverage resources, expertise, and funding opportunities for diverse housing initiatives. Look to create partnerships with and among municipal, regional, provincial, and federal agencies, as well as non-profit organizations, community groups, and private sector stakeholders.

TECHNOLOGY & TOOLS: As above, updating and modernizing municipal tools and software platforms will help streamline workflows and decision-making processes.



3.3 LEVERAGING EXTERNAL CAPACITY

For municipalities, exploring **partnership opportunities** with local housing industry stakeholders is essential for enabling diverse housing development. By collaborating with the local industry stakeholders described earlier in this module, municipalities can tap into supplemental and often complementary expertise, resources, and networks to develop housing solutions that address the specific needs and challenges of the community.

While the nature of partnerships between municipalities and local housing industry stakeholders will vary, below are a few examples of what partnership opportunities can look like:

PILOT PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES: Collaborating on pilot projects allows municipalities and housing industry stakeholders to test innovative housing solutions on a small scale before fully implementing them. By jointly developing and implementing pilot projects, both parties can assess feasibility, effectiveness, and community acceptance, and then fine-tune their implementation strategy based on local feedback.

JOINT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: Partnering with housing industry stakeholders can enable better access to joint funding opportunities for housing development initiatives. This may involve pooling financial resources from both sectors (public and private) in order to better leverage grants, loans, tax incentives, and other funding mechanisms to support diverse housing projects that benefit the community.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: Forming public-private partnerships allows municipalities and housing industry stakeholders to collaborate on housing development projects through shared responsibilities, risks, and rewards. PPPs can take various forms, including joint ventures, development agreements, and/or long-term leases; both parties are better able to leverage their respective strengths and resources to deliver successful housing outcomes.

Moving Forward

Is your municipality or organization eager to enhance its capacity to meet your community's diverse housing needs? At the Rural Development Network, our Sustainable Housing Initiative specializes in empowering communities to strengthen their internal and external capacity to respond effectively to housing challenges.

Whether you're grappling with affordability issues, accessibility, or the need for more diverse housing options, our team is excited and able to start the conversation to explore the tailored solutions that will align with your community's unique needs and aspirations.

At RDN, we believe in the power of collaboration and innovation to drive meaningful change. Our Sustainable Housing Initiative is designed to assist your community in enabling housing diversity and choice through comprehensive assessments, strategic planning, and actionable recommendations.

Our SHI team can help with your **staff capacity issues**, by providing expertise and assistance in preparing policy, updating bylaws, and identifying funding opportunities, to help ensure that your community can achieve its housing goals. Let us help you build a stronger, more inclusive community where everyone has a place to call home. Contact us today to learn how we can partner with you to create lasting, positive impacts in your community.





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