



Nova Scotia Community Housing Sector: Policy Development

The reports on affordable housing recently released by the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Nova Scotia have highlighted the valuable role the community housing sector (CHS) has in finding solutions to Nova Scotia’s affordable housing crisis. However, little is offered on how this contribution is accomplished, and how this acknowledgement translates into policies that support the CHS in meaningful ways. While various governments and agencies may wish to provide more assistance to CHS organizations, questions remain: what barriers to government support exist for smaller organizations because of assumptions and criteria around organizational scale and maturity, and what other policy barriers, zoning bylaws, and issues thwart creative thinking and innovative solutions?

“Land zoning needs to be more housing friendly. It does not allow for density and zoning is done without consulting the community.”

For the CHS, barriers to funding often have roots embedded in policy frameworks and inter-governmental systems. To address this, respondents from the CHS call for greater communication and systems-change at municipal and provincial levels, including reviews of numerous areas of legislation that could be amended to improve opportunities for local-level solutions:

- Review the Municipalities Act to empower municipalities to have greater freedom to participate in creative solutions.
- Review policies related to taxation and land ownership to address the growing problem of marketization, speculation, short-term rentals, and non-resident ownership that is distorting property values throughout the province.
- Improve transparency and community involvement in zoning and development processes.
- Consider mechanisms such as land trusts and other strategies to make underutilized lands and vacant properties available to non-profit and co-op housing initiatives.
- Examine zoning bylaws that define housing density, building requirements, and other regulations that restrict exploration of different options such as “tiny homes.”

Many of the changes sought are beyond the direct control of the CHS, but its advocacy efforts, informed by collaborative research and by direct contact with the most affected communities, can help highlight and influence policy change at the local level.