

Newsbriefs

NOVA SCOTIA EDITION SPRING 2008 – Volume 7, No. 1

Crossroads Housing Co-operative was able to replace many of their windows with more energy-efficient ones, thanks to a municipal grant



Grant helps Crossroads get new windows

Members of **Crossroads Housing Co-operative** in Lower Sackville are enjoying new windows this winter, thanks to a grant from the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Donna Berringer, the office co-ordinator, saw an article in Halifax's *Chronicle Herald* last year about the HRM Community Grants Program for community groups who own and operate affordable housing. She explains, "The grant could be used for energy efficiency upgrades to existing buildings, building code upgrades or major repairs." The program provides one-time grants to help the non-profit sector improve the standard and operating efficiency of their properties. It applies only to subsidized units.

Crossroads is a 50-unit co-operative made up of 10 buildings. As 20 of their units receive rent supplement, Donna immediately saw the possibilities. When the co-op was built in 1987, the building code was different from today's standards and the units are ready for upgrades.



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CHF Canada annual general meeting
You could go to Toronto in June



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“Crossroads has always had a capital replacement plan,” Donna says, “and over the last six years we have replaced 32 decks and roofs on seven blocks of homes.” Another section of their plan called for complete window replacement and improved insulation in the basements. Donna contacted the HRM customer service centre, picked up the application package and started gathering information.

She did the initial research on her own. “I didn’t want to build up everyone’s hopes, only to find out that we wouldn’t qualify.” Once she had the package almost together, she took it to the Board. It was decided that, if they obtained the grant, the money would go towards window replacement. The Board decided to add the money they would receive from their municipal tax rebate.

Last May, Crossroads received word that their application had been approved. They received \$25,000 (the maximum that could be awarded.) The work was completed in September, with 41 new windows and three new doors installed in their 20 rent supplement units. Crossroads has further plans for window replacement in the remaining units, with \$15,000 being allocated from their replacement reserve in 2008 and \$20,000 in each of 2009 and 2010. As Donna points out, “the grant of \$25,000 certainly went a long way in helping with this project.”

Crossroads would like to acknowledge the help and support they received from the staff of the Grant program.

Peta-Jane (PJ) Temple, Co-ordinator of the HRM Grants Program says the program will be operating again in 2008 – 09. You can find out more by calling 490-5469 or by searching for Community Grants Program on the HRM website at www.halifax.ca. The deadline for submissions is March 31.

Ms. Templeton cautions that funding for the affordable housing portion of the program is \$50,000, which can be awarded as program grants up to \$5,000 and/or capital grants up to \$25,000. Priority is given to public safety upgrades, followed by building code compliance.

Does your co-op have a story?

If your co-op is celebrating an anniversary, starting or finishing a project, or if your co-op has an interesting story to tell, we’d like to hear it. We’d love to see your co-op featured here. To find out how to tell us your story and send us photographs, please contact Debbie Hamilton, Member Services Co-ordinator at 1-866-213-2667 or dhamilton@chfcanada.coop.



Co-op Cost Cutters

Co-op Cost Cutters is a group purchasing program that offers Nova Scotia member housing co-ops the ability to pool their buying power to save money. Member co-ops save money on maintenance supplies, electrical, plumbing and cleaning supplies, appliance parts, flooring, carpets, tile, paint and wall coverings, office supplies and furnishings, the purchase or leasing of appliances, and credit reports and checks.

There are some great deals with Co-op Cost Cutters. Co-op Cost Cutters aims to provide the best value, quality and customer support. In many cases, these same deals are also available to co-op staff. To find out more about the program visit coopcostcutters.com or contact Debbie Hamilton, Member Services Co-ordinator, at 1-866-213-2667.

Keeping your co-op full

Why are vacancies so serious for your co-op? Here's why. Once you've lost housing charge revenue because of empty units, you can never get that revenue back. To earn the income you need to run your co-op properly – and to have a healthy, positive co-op community – you need to keep vacancies down to an absolute minimum. The goal you are aiming for is no vacancies at all.

The results we want:

The co-op keeps turnover down by giving good service to its members

You won't have vacancies if households aren't moving out. Nothing keeps unit turnover down like satisfied members.

The co-op restores units to market-ready condition on move-out

If you want to fill units quickly, get them ready for market right away.

The co-op advertises vacancies

If you have a vacancy coming up and no applicant to fill it with, you'll need to advertise.

The co-op has a quick and simple application process

You should be able to approve new members as quickly as the private landlord down the street can approve new tenants.

Units are filled right away

Sometimes, when markets are soft, you might need to offer incentives to get new members, just as landlords do to fill their units when tenants have lots to choose from. You might offer free power or phone hookup, or even a housing charge holiday in the 12th month.

The co-op orients new members promptly

Give new members information about living in the co-op right after they've moved in. If you want productive members who take an active role in the co-op, then show the new members how to do that. Give them some options to choose from, but remember – the most important thing to ask of new members is to come to members' meetings to learn about and vote on the issues.

Tools

To get the results you want, you'll need the right people and the right tools.

Your most important resource in filling units is the person prospective members deal with over the phone and in person when they come to see the unit. That person can be a member, but more and more co-ops are realizing that their manager might be the best person – or, in a busy co-op, someone whose job focuses on the members and marketing. Notice we've said nothing about the membership committee? That's because, in a competitive market, using a well-meaning but slow-to-act membership committee to fill units may not be the best way to get the job done. You don't need a whole committee to fill one vacancy – your applicants are applying for

housing, not a job. Remember, they'll be paying you, not the other way round.

Applying for membership in a housing co-op shouldn't be an ordeal. You don't need big interviews. Instead, when you meet the applicant to show the unit, talk about your co-op and explain the responsibilities – and benefits – of membership. If your applicant is still interested, then you've got a new member – as long as the credit and landlord checks don't turn up any problems. Formal board approval of a new member can come later. Background checks should be completed right away.

By all means keep a waiting list if you can. That may mean advertising even when you don't have a vacancy. If you do keep a waiting list make sure you keep it up to date. Some co-ops hold successful open houses for those who might be interested in co-op housing. It's a chance to share information and get new names for your waiting list. If you don't have a generous waiting list to turn to, the best tool in the toolkit is an advertising strategy.

Here are some ideas:

- local newspapers
- local schools
- community centres and notice boards
- colleges and universities (students pay housing charges too)

And put a notice of vacancy outside your co-op – it can be very effective and costs nothing once you've bought the sign.

This article was excerpted from Getting Management Right, available in the Resources section of CHF Canada's website: www.chfcanada.coop.

Bursaries make going to the AGM possible

Make sure to register a delegate for CHF Canada's Annual General Meeting in Toronto, June 12-14. The education program offers over 40 workshops to support co-ops in good governance, sound management and principled leadership. Whether you are new to your co-op or have experienced co-op living for a while, you will find topics that will give you tools and ideas to take back home.



Nova Scotia co-ops are eligible for bursaries to help send a delegate to this meeting. A travel pool and discounts for small co-ops make it easy for co-ops to attend.

Jeanene Harnett, past president of **Capeland Co-op** in Halifax, said, "Being a co-op of six units we are very limited in our ability to afford such a trip. With this aid I was able to attend the AGM in Winnipeg this past May. Many times we find ourselves involved with keeping our heads above ground and do not seek the help available to educate our members and board. There is education available through an

AGM that would assist boards in their decision-making and organization of their policies and bylaws."

For more information or to register, see the registration package mailed to your co-op at the end of February or visit the AGM information centre at www.chfcanada.coop.



Publication information

Newsbriefs is published by the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. Material may be copied. Please credit CHF Canada.

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Mark your calendar

Nova Scotia spring education event

Saturday April 12, 2008

**Citadel Halifax Hotel,
1960 Brunswick Street, Halifax**

Sound management, good governance and principled leadership are all parts of a healthy co-op. This full day of workshops will focus on how to build skills and use them in your co-op. All co-op members are welcome to come, learn, and connect with other co-op members from across the province. If you live more than 100 km from the Halifax area, there is also a travel rebate available. CHF Canada holds education events twice each year in Nova Scotia.

For registration information, visit www.chfcanada.coop or contact: Karen Brodeur - kbrodeur@chfcanada.coop
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