

The
**CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING
FEDERATION**
of Canada



Guide to the Province's five consultation questions for co-op housing participants

Get involved in the Long-Term Affordable Housing
Strategy consultations

June 2009



INTRODUCTION

At each of the regional consultation sessions to be held across Ontario there will be discussion of five set questions that the Province has framed to guide the process. This document gives you some tips about how to ensure issues relevant to you and your co-op are discussed at the consultation in your region.

LINKING CO-OP ISSUES TO THE FIVE QUESTIONS

Please refer to CHF Canada Ontario Region's Background Paper *A place for co-op housing in Ontario's Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy*. This paper talks about a number of issues that co-ops and members have raised over the last number of years that are of concern to them. Many of these issues can and should be raised during these consultations.

Below we have attempted to list some of the issues that are detailed in our background paper that may best relate to the five questions being asked. In a number of cases we have listed a topic that may be referred to under more than one of the five questions.

As you will see in some cases there is not always a direct connection to the question posed and the issue raised. That said, it is important to realize that the questions themselves are somewhat narrowly focused and unfortunately may somewhat limit the range of issues that participants at the regional meetings would like to engage in.

Participants should not feel bound by this narrow wording of the questions. Rather, use the set questions as only a very rough guide to the issues you wish to speak on. The overall purpose of the consultations on the Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy should be to hear from participants on key housing issues and suggestions as opposed to constricting the discussion into narrow confines of specific queries set by the Provincial Government.

REAL STORIES HAVE REAL POWER !

Overall, as we mentioned in our background paper, participants should keep in mind that speakers are most effective when drawing on your own experiences and discussing issues that are important to you and your co-op. Personal stories of what affordable housing and co-operative living have meant to you and your family can be quite compelling and have a positive impact on the process and outcomes of the consultation.

Please use the CHF Canada material as a guide, not a substitute for your input.

RAISE LOCAL ISSUES

It is also quite important that in each community where consultation sessions are held that local concerns come to the fore. The housing problems and issues are in all likelihood much different and varied in Sault Ste. Marie than in Toronto. What is happening with vacancies, rent supplements, energy costs, waiting lists, levels of poverty and so on in your community? These are all areas that you may want to give local voice to.

At the end of the day the real housing needs of people and communities are the best foundation for a comprehensive and long-term strategy. Let us all take advantage of this historic opportunity to shape the vision of affordable housing in this province for years to come !

1

FIVE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

What specific roles should each of the housing partners play in the delivery of affordable housing?

This opening question is a good starting point to stress the responsibility that the Provincial and Federal governments have historically had in funding new affordable housing programs. Commentary on the current lack of affordable housing may also be linked here to the role of senior levels of government. This is also a good place to talk about the key connections between poverty and lack of housing that people can afford.

As well, this may be an appropriate place to mention that participants appreciate the Province's launch of the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, and raise the issue of Queen's Park needing to provide leadership in the housing field.

In summary some of the sections from the background paper that may be relevant include:

- Affordable housing must be seen as a cornerstone in reducing poverty
- Affordable housing makes economic sense
- Commit to funding a stable, multi-year development program
- Housing need continues to grow
- The private market won't fill the affordable rental gap
- Build non-profit and co-operative housing
- Preserve the non-profit use of co-op housing and other housing providers
- Queen's Park must lead on housing issues

2

WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED TO OUR HOUSING PROGRAMS TO BETTER USE RESOURCES AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING? CHANGES COULD INCLUDE MODIFICATIONS TO THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM OR THE SIMPLIFICATION OF HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PROGRAMS

The question on changes needed to housing programs is a good place to raise a number of issues in our background material such as affordability problems, the need for rent supplement programs, and difficulties with the Affordable Housing Program.

Sections you may want to refer to in the co-op sector document include:

- Affordability problems continue to grow
- No new rent-geared-to-income (RGI) funding is available
- Help RGI residents cope with skyrocketing utility costs
- Ensure that the Affordable Housing Strategy is truly “people-centred”
- Give more power, control and support to communities and residents
- Housing co-ops have been by and large shut out of Affordable Housing Program
- Fix the Affordable Housing Program (AHP) so that it supports the development of community housing
- Ensure that co-op housing is a key part of the mix

3

WHAT CHANGES ARE REQUIRED TO THE SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM ACT TO REDUCE THE REGULATORY BURDEN AND IMPROVE THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL HOUSING?

Clearly the changes to the *Social Housing Reform Act* (SHRA) is an area where co-op representatives will in all likelihood have a lot to contribute to the discussion. People should feel quite free to speak from personal experience on how they see the SHRA as impacting negatively upon the co-op and members.

See section in our paper on Key SHRA areas that co-ops are looking for improvements on including:

- Re-commitment to a community-based model
- Limit on subsidy repayment
- Special Priority Policy (SPP) review
- Assistance for market-paying households suffering loss of income
- Lack of flexibility in centralized waiting lists
- Little co-op discretion in occupancy standards for RGI households
- Need for a dispute resolution system with service managers
- An end to open-ended receivership provisions
- Right for providers to retain operating surpluses

4

WHAT CREATIVE NEW IDEAS COULD IMPROVE THE CURRENT HOUSING SYSTEM? THIS COULD INCLUDE NEW PLANNING TOOLS, INNOVATIVE FINANCIAL OPTIONS AND NEW GREEN TECHNOLOGIES.

This question on creative new ideas is a good opportunity to raise community-based control of housing. While not necessarily a new idea, the community-based housing model that governments turned to over thirty years ago, as an alternative to large-scale government-run housing, is something that has worked very well.

This question also gives you an opportunity to talk about what creative or innovative initiatives that you are doing in your own co-op or housing community that are proving successful. Particularly any green technologies or energy conservation measures should be discussed here.

Do not feel reticent in providing any of your ideas and solutions. We should remember that we want to make this Provincial consultation our consultation.

There are some sections in our paper that address this including those that look at planning tools and financial options. Some of the sections in the background document that you may want to refer to include the following:

- Make a renewed commitment to the community-based housing model
- Use legislative and other tools at the Province's disposal to create more affordable housing
- Help rebuild the development capacity of the community sector
- Give more power, control and support to communities and residents
- Make regulatory changes and provide other support to allow co-ops to borrow against their equity for capital repairs

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WHAT SHOULD BE USED AS THE HOUSING INDICATOR FOR ONTARIO'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY? IN THIS CONTEXT, WHAT DO TERMS LIKE AFFORDABLE, ADEQUATE AND SUITABLE HOUSING MEAN TO YOU?

This is a fine area to refer to some of the data that we currently have and report on in our materials such as number of rental units built, percentage of rental units constructed versus ownership, people in core need, percentage of income spent by households on housing, size of waiting lists, number of rent supplements/housing allowances, etc.

Again, this is also a question that you may well want to bring a local perspective to what is going on in your community. What would you like to see as a real and substantial measure of progress in the housing arena and how would that help in reducing poverty? Feel free to air your views.

Some of the sections you may want to refer to in the background paper include:

- Housing need continues to grow
- Private market won't fill the affordable rental gap
- Affordability problems continue to grow
- Fund a multi-year rent supplement program for new and existing rental housing

SUMMARY

Thank you for participating in the Provincial consultation session in your area. Given that co-operative housing in Ontario is a well-documented success story we have a lot to contribute to Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

We know that over the years co-op housing representatives have prided themselves on offering governments suggestions that work as opposed to simply reciting the problems that exist. We are pleased to continue with that practice and work with the Province as Ontario shapes its vision of affordable housing for many years to come.