

Presentation to Edmonton City Council Executive Committee, 2012 June 27:

Agenda item “Consultation with High-stressed communities”

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness has paid close attention over the past couple of years to the City of Edmonton's work in relation to non-market housing in its uneven distribution across the city. We are pleased to have an opportunity to again share the views of our diverse membership as the latest report related to this topic is being considered.

It is vital for City Council to provide leadership that demonstrates an understanding of both the human right of all to decent housing and of the role of government in ensuring non-market housing is used effectively to achieve this end in the context of safe successful communities.

The Edmonton Coalition On Housing and Homelessness promotes awareness, advocates, and takes action on housing issues to enhance community life. ECOHH welcomes the commitment of the City to improve housing security and to ensure all Edmontonians live in healthy, safe communities.

ECOHH is concerned the recommendations currently before City Council will not provide the best route to achieve these goals. ECOHH brings a long credible record with these issues, with member organizations that are providers of non-market housing and related support services.

As a coalition, ECOHH has been studying these issues for over 25 years and taking an active role in seeking to have them properly understood.

ECOHH is concerned that the major source of new input for the City in the current report comes from a limited exercise with focus groups involving less than 50 community residents in several neighbourhoods, selected in a process not explained, and that the recommendations related to moratoriums on non-market housing in some neighbourhoods as part of this report are not likely to achieve the desired results.

City Council must incorporate non-market housing into a strong overall housing plan, and not take actions that will distract from such a commitment to instead respond to some people who have good intentions but incorrect understanding of the value and benefit of non-market housing. ECOHH is sympathetic and understands the concerns of some residents in the

identified neighbourhoods with higher levels of non-market housing, but believes the solution they advocate will not be successful in achieving the end they are seeking.

The assumption that non-market housing is a cause of distress in neighbourhoods is without foundation. ECOHH believes that in fact, as part of an overall integrated set of actions, good non-market housing is **a solution**.

In the context of a reality that 10% of Edmontonians are in core housing need, non-market housing is an inherent public good for the City. Non-market housing helps reduce poverty. It reduces the reliance on shelter mats as accommodation for people who have nowhere else to go, or the potential of some living on vacant land or parklands. Without a significant investment to expand the amount of appropriate non-market housing available, people with limited economic resources will have no choice but to use less healthy or safe options.

Poverty is the core problem that causes people to describe a neighbourhood as “distressed”. The for-profit housing market cannot respond to the affordable housing needs of many low-income individuals and families. Non-market housing can increase the amount of money available for low-income households, since they pay no more than 30% of their income for such housing. Living in non-market housing may also increase their ease of access to a range of other services and programs that support their move towards greater economic independence over time.

ECOHH agrees that there are many good reasons to see non-market housing well distributed in the city and does not challenge the report's recommendations in that regard. ECOHH is also in agreement with the report's recognition that emergency shelter accommodation concentrated in a few communities is not to be mistaken for non-market housing. Our concern is with the unsupported assertion that a moratorium on non-market housing in a few neighbourhoods will be helpful in reducing the concerns that have caused some residents of neighbourhoods to feel they are in distress. It would be more effective to focus on comprehensive plans that addressed the direct sources of distress, and to continue to encourage non-market housing in other areas of Edmonton. Supporting enhancements to the concerned neighbourhoods that would benefit residents living in both non-market and market housing will be more valuable than the recommended moratorium on non-market housing.

Building non-market housing units reduces reliance on emergency shelters and mats which in recent years have increasingly been relied on as a substitute for real housing while there has not been an adequate supply of affordable units.

Properly developed, built, and managed, non-market housing renews the housing stock of high threshold neighbourhoods by replacing aging and deteriorating market housing or vacant lands with newly constructed housing that meets current building code standards and fits well with a neighbourhood's style.

ECOHH believes that mixed housing in ALL neighbourhoods city-wide is the right way to go. Instead of a moratorium for years on non-market housing in high threshold neighbourhoods, pro-active policies should be pursued that would ensure non-market housing is built in all City neighbourhoods and can meet the needs of those with low-incomes through such supportive measures as good public transportation.

ECOHH encourages the use of surplus school sites for innovative mixed income projects to share availability of affordable housing throughout the city. To promote acceptance from community members, non-market housing developments must be designed and sized to fit into neighbourhoods so they complement or integrate well with existing market housing. As part of larger developments or re-developments, non-market units should be included so that Edmontonians can choose what neighbourhood they want to live in based on neighbourhood characteristics like community spirit, schools, amenities, and heritage – not just housing affordability.

This will create an Edmonton where we truly have “neighbourhoods of choice” - and it's something well worth our efforts to foster.

The City's commitment to decent housing for all people is the way to end homelessness and improve the quality of life for many with limited economic capacity, but currently the inadequacy of provincial and federal funding to achieve this is a problem. ECOHH encourages the City to keep working hard to persuade these other orders of government to improve the funding available for measures the City knows will support this goal.

Thank you for this opportunity. We invite the City to be in touch with us anytime to discuss this or other matters.

