



Strategies for responding **to Community Opposition for Affordable Housing Providers**

October 2021



Civida

Executive Summary



Social and affordable housing has a range of benefits for families and for communities.

However, when new affordable housing developments are announced, they often face community opposition which can reduce the supply of affordable housing. To better understand why communities are opposed to affordable housing and how providers can respond to opposition, Cividia conducted an applied research project, reviewing academic and gray literature.

Overall, the literature points to a wide range of reasons why communities can be opposed to affordable housing. Some of the reasons are specific to affordable housing, some are related to rental housing and the design of multi-unit buildings, and some are related to the planning and development process. Affordable housing is not the only development type to face opposition. Other developments, including purpose built rental developments, higher density developments, and other public facilities can also face community opposition. However, affordable housing often includes an intersection of factors which increases the likelihood of opposition.

From this review, there are a number of different strategies that housing providers can use to respond to community opposition and help develop community support, both broad, community wide strategies and project-specific strategies. We have summarized the research into four main strategies for housing providers:

1. Educate and inform early

- Many community concerns are rooted in myths and stigma about tenants in affordable housing, including concerns about crime, property values, and neighbourhood services.
- Providing education and information campaigns about affordable housing and specifically about the development can mitigate concerns and raise awareness of the need for affordable housing and the benefits to communities.

- Community members are more likely to support developments when provided with positive messaging about developments and with early and clear information about the development.

2. Engage early

- Communities are often concerned that their feedback and opinions will not be taken seriously. Some community concerns are valid and can help improve the development.
- Engaging early can allow providers and developers to establish and build trusting relationships with community members.
- Housing providers that intentionally engage early on in the process tend to have better outcomes than waiting for negative reactions before engaging.

3. Mobilize community leaders

- Community leaders can be an important source of public support and help respond to community opposition.
- Municipal councilors and mayors are often the first to receive community concerns and are well-placed to respond to opposition.

4. Avoid the term NIMBY

- The language that developers and providers use is important. Using combative and accusatory rhetoric without clear definitions can make community members feel combative.
- Research indicates that the term NIMBY has negative connotations, is often used as a pejorative and can increase opposition.
- Instead of labelling opposition, it is more effective for housing providers to identify why community members are opposed and develop specific strategies for the concerns being expressed.

While these strategies can also be used by housing providers in rural and small towns, there is less research and data on housing need and homelessness in these communities. Housing providers in rural and small towns can face barriers and community opposition to recognizing the need for affordable housing in the first place. The first strategy for in these communities is to raise awareness in their communities.

It takes significant capacity to not only be able to develop affordable housing but also

to implement these strategies to respond to community opposition. Many housing providers, both rural and urban, have limited capacity and resources and are already burdened with managing increasing demand, long waitlists, and aging housing. Managing community opposition should not solely fall on the shoulders of housing providers but should involve partnerships with government and civil society to change attitudes towards affordable housing, reduce community opposition, and increase the supply of affordable housing.

About Civida

Civida has a long history of promoting affordable housing options. We began as the Edmonton Housing Authority in 1970. In 1995, we became Capital Region Housing. Today, we are Civida — the largest provider of social and near-market housing in the Edmonton region. A lot has changed since 1970, but our mission remains the same: To provide safe and affordable housing.

We manage over 4,500 community (social) housing units on behalf of the Government of Alberta and own and manage over 600 near market units and 130 mixed income units. We also administer 3,000 rent subsidies to tenants in the private market on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

Our embedded Policy and Research Team completes applied research projects on issues and trends in the social and affordable housing sector.

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1.0

Introduction

Affordable housing has a wide range of benefits for individuals and families and for communities.

For families and individuals, affordable housing has been shown to improve the lives of residents through improved health, higher employment retention, more income for food and transportation, better success in school for children, and overall improvement of well-being for residents (Mueller & Tighe, 2007; Pomeroy & Marquis-Bissonnette, 2016; Scally & Koenig, 2012; Tach & Emory, 2017; Tighe, 2010). Community benefits include a more reliable workforce, increased social diversity, increased economic diversity, the prevention of homelessness, and revitalization of the area (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Mueller & Tighe, 2007; Scally & Koenig, 2012).

However, despite these known benefits of affordable housing and the negative aspects of housing inequality, the supply of social and affordable housing in Canada is lacking. Social and affordable housing makes up about 4% of Canada's housing stock, among some of the lowest proportions among countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020). In 2018, more than 283,800 households reported being on waiting lists for affordable housing nationally (Statistics Canada, 2019). According to administrative data from the Government of Alberta, more than 19,000 households were on waitlists for subsidized housing in Alberta (SHS Consulting, 2020). Since the early 1990s, very few social or affordable housing units have been built across Canada and those that have been built are primarily affordable (near market) housing (Suttor, 2016). Alberta has some of the lowest proportions of households living in subsidized housing¹ across all ten provinces, at 2.9% of households in 2016, compared to 4.2% nationally. In Calgary, approximately 2.9% of households live in subsidized housing; in Edmonton, approximately 3.8% of households live in subsidized housing (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

NIMBYism describes community opposition to affordable housing and other public infrastructure in a certain area, typically based on fear, including decreasing property values, increasing density and crime, and changing community character (Nesbitt, 2018; Obrinsky & Stein, 2007; Scally, 2013). While community concerns are not inherently problematic, they are often rooted in stigma and stereotypes about low-income households, which often intersect with racialized stereotypes (Tighe, 2012; Tighe & Goetz, 2019). Community opposition prevents communities from benefiting from diversity and leads to the exclusion of certain groups, thereby limiting their geographical and economic mobility and restricting their access to high-quality amenities and services (Whittemore & BenDor, 2019).

One challenge to increasing the supply of affordable housing is community opposition, often described as NIMBYism or Not in My Backyard opposition.

Research shows little negative impact to the broader community after affordable housing developments are built (Nguyen, 2005), yet community opposition to these projects persists due to perceptions of possible risks to the community that are often informed by racist and classist stereotypes (Tighe, 2010).

Because community opposition is a common response and barrier to affordable housing, there has been an increase in research on why communities are opposed and strategies for mitigating opposition. However, there is limited research in the Alberta context. This is an important gap as Alberta has a high need for affordable housing in both rural and urban communities and faces long waitlists and aging housing stock in need of repairs (SHS Consulting, 2020).

¹ Note: "subsidized housing" is the term used in the Federal Census. It includes rent geared to income, social housing, public housing, government-assisted housing, non-profit housing, rent supplements and housing allowances.

Research shows little negative impact to the broader community after affordable housing developments are built, yet community opposition to these projects persists due to perceptions of possible risks to the community that are often informed by racist and classist stereotypes.

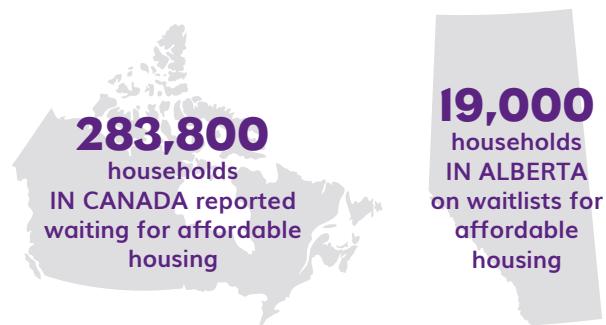
Further, Alberta experiences different housing pressures, including a large rural and small-town population where social supports, government funding, and affordable rental options are all lacking (Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014).

To better be able to respond to community opposition, develop evidence-based approaches, and contribute to further knowledge in the Alberta context, Civida conducted an applied research project on affordable housing and neighbourhoods.

To better be able to respond to community opposition, develop evidence-based approaches, and contribute to further knowledge in the Alberta context, Civida conducted an applied research project on affordable housing and neighbourhoods, focusing on three research questions.²

1. What does the existing research show as emerging strategies for responding to community opposition to affordable housing? Are there different considerations for rural and small-town communities?
2. What does the existing research show about the impacts of affordable housing on neighbourhoods, with a focus on property values?
3. What are the impacts of affordable housing developments in Alberta on neighbourhoods, with a focus on property values?

In this report, we address research question one, with a specific focus on differences for rural communities and small towns. It is a companion piece to the report "Exploring the impacts of affordable housing on neighbourhood property values: a literature review and five Alberta case studies", which addresses research questions two and three.



² Note: we had initially also planned to review the literature on affordable housing and crime and social disorder and provide an Alberta case study. However, there are known issues with crime data and data was not consistently available at a fine enough level to allow for this analysis. As such, we removed this question from the scope. A review and discussion of the literature is included in Appendix 2 of the complementary report.

This report starts with an overview of why communities are often opposed to affordable housing. The majority of the report focuses on reviewing strategies for responding to community opposition to affordable housing, including providing examples of strategies in action. We also focus on differences for rural communities and small towns, recognizing their distinct experiences. We conclude by summarizing the research and gray literature and provide additional resources for housing providers. Overall, community opposition is not isolated to affordable housing, but affordable housing often contains an intersection of factors that communities are opposed to, and which increase the likelihood of opposition. These include increasing density, purpose built rental housing, and concerns about the characteristics of tenants. Based on these concerns and drawing from the literature, we highlight four strategies that housing providers can use to respond to and mitigate community opposition. They are:

1. Educate and inform early
2. Engage early
3. Mobilize community leaders
4. Avoid the term NIMBY

**Overall, community opposition
is not isolated to affordable
housing, but affordable housing
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the likelihood of opposition.**

Further, rural and small-town communities also face community opposition as a barrier to increasing affordable housing supply. However, housing issues are largely seen as an urban issue, and there is much less research on rural and small-town housing need. The main distinct strategy for housing providers in these areas is to begin by raising awareness of the need for affordable housing in rural and small towns, which can lead into the other strategies highlighted in the literature and in practice.



2.9% of households in Alberta
live in subsidized housing

2.0

Why are Communities Opposed to Affordable Housing?



In considering how to respond to community opposition, it is important to first review the literature on why communities are opposed to affordable housing.

Community opposition is not restricted to affordable housing. A Not In My Backyard (NIMBYism) perspective describes community opposition to human or public service facilities being built within or in close proximity to the community (Dear, 1992; Whittemore & BenDor, 2019; Wilton, 2002). Many social services and physical infrastructures are considered to be beneficial and contribute to the public good, yet face resistance from neighbourhoods once a specific location is proposed for such services (Davidson & Howe, 2014). Community opposition applies to many different circumstances, including affordable housing developments, homeless shelters, landfills, renewable energy developments (such as wind turbines), waste facilities, and airports (Hubbard, 2009; Lyon-Callo, 2001; Petrova, 2016; Whittemore & BenDor, 2019; Wynne-Edwards et al., 2003).

The research in this report focuses on community opposition as related to the personal attitudes of nearby residents and how that impacts the development of affordable housing.

We use the term "community opposition" in this report rather than the term "NIMBYism", which has become politicized and can result in more opposition. Using the term community opposition also enables an analysis of what communities are opposed to, which better enables providers, developers, and municipalities to respond to community opposition (Burningham, 2000; Wolsink, 2006).

While community opposition can occur whenever there is a new and potentially different development for the area, it is most commonly associated with new multi-family affordable rental housing (Hubbard, 2009). The antagonism towards affordable housing can be compounded by the fact that affordable housing often increases density in neighbourhoods (Davison et al., 2013; Goss Gilroy Inc., 2019). Further, purpose-built rental developments, both affordable and private rental, often face opposition as "renter households are viewed as having less investment in their housing and in the community in general, representing a poorer, more transient population than neighbouring homeowners" (Scally, 2013, p.721). Homeownership is generally viewed as more stable and economically and socially beneficial to a community, while affordable rental properties are viewed as a threat to community safety, amenities, and property values, a burden on public services, and an attractant for low-income families, crime, and overcrowded and poorly maintained housing (Rollwagen, 2015; Scally, 2013; Scally & Tighe, 2015). Research also highlights that community opposition to affordable housing can come from a government-level through inequitable zoning regulations, denial of or inefficient movement of permits for new developments, or known lack of support (Nesbitt, 2018; Obrinsky & Stein, 2007; Scally, 2013).

The research in this report focuses on community opposition as related to the personal attitudes of nearby residents and how that impacts the development of affordable housing rather than institutional opposition (such as inequitable zoning). This is because, as Davison and colleagues (2013) highlight in their research on community opposition to affordable housing in Australia, opposition is usually localized and opposed by those living closer to the development. Polling in the United States reveals that most people believe there is a community obligation to provide housing to those who need it, however when proposals for infrastructure such as affordable housing

move from general (e.g., affordable housing is beneficial) to specific (e.g., affordable housing will be built in your neighbourhood), support declines (Mueller & Tighe, 2007; Tighe, 2010). This phenomenon is related to public opinion theory, which states that support from the public is typically stronger for abstract ideals than for concrete policies (Tighe, 2010). Canadian research from Kelowna, BC found similar results that residents were more opposed to prospective densification on their street but more willing to accept it in other places. The researchers also showed that framing densification with positive benefits increased the likelihood of accepting residential densification, illustrating how messaging can impact public opinion. However, the authors also note that framing and messaging alone is not enough to change community opposition on a wide scale (Doberstein et al., 2016).

In research from Australia on the impacts of affordable housing on neighbourhoods, Davison and colleagues (2013) highlight three main community concerns from the literature:

1. potential impacts on the neighbourhood,
2. potential impacts of the tenants due to perceived characteristics, and
3. potential impacts of the built form and the planning process.

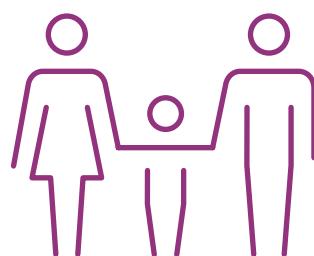
Each of these concerns are their own areas of research with their own debates and histories and exploring each one fully is out of the scope of this report. However, it is important to recognize the broad range of concerns that affordable housing developers are trying to address, both those specific to affordable housing and those more broadly related to the community engagement and planning process. We briefly discuss the research on these different community concerns.

2.1

Potential impacts on the neighbourhood

This concern is centered around individuals' sense of place in their neighbourhood, including crime and safety, the integration of the development with the surrounding neighbourhood, and the impact on property values. This also includes concerns about increases in traffic, changing community character, and a perceived threat to open space (Nesbitt, 2018; Obrinsky & Stein, 2007; Scally, 2013). Specifically, property values are often taken as a proxy for the quality of life in a neighbourhood, so declining property values is often perceived as a declining quality of life in that neighbourhood (Davison et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2005). However, research indicates no universal negative impact of affordable housing on property values, and property values are more impacted by broader

economic and social factors (Nguyen, 2005). Further, research highlights that there is no significant association between crime and affordable housing (Galster et al., 2002). These concerns about impacts on the neighbourhood are often related to concerns about impacts of tenants, which is discussed more below.³



³ For more research on property values, crime, and affordable housing, please see the factsheets on our website at civida.ca/AHFacts

2.2 Potential impacts of the tenants due to perceived characteristics

This concern is centered around stereotypes about the people who live in affordable housing. The stereotypical characteristics of people who are thought to live in affordable housing can impact the community response, as "resistance to proposed services increases as the 'social acceptability' of the clients of the services decreases" (Davidson & Howe, 2014, p.625). Research from the United States

indicates that these community concerns are often ethnoculturally based on stereotypes about race and income and perceived impacts on crime and social disorder (Tighe, 2012). Again, research shows no association between increased crime and social disorder and affordable housing (BC Housing, 2018; Galster et al., 2002).

2.3 Potential impacts of the built form and the planning process

This community concern is centered around the design, maintenance, and location of affordable housing, and often is interrelated with concerns and opposition to urban intensification and increasing density (Davison et al., 2013). In homeownership societies like Canada, US, and other western anglophone countries, the dominant housing design tends to be low-density owned single-detached dwellings, which have a variety of negative externalities including higher rates of greenhouse gas emissions and less efficient energy usage than higher density housing, increased car dependency and urban sprawl, and social exclusion (Lauster, 2016). While many cities have planning goals of increasing density, developers often face community opposition that increasing density is out of character for the neighbourhood (Doberstein et al., 2016; Searle & Filion, 2011). This is not isolated to affordable housing developments, but most affordable housing developments are multi-unit buildings so this is another common concern faced by affordable housing developments.

Further, due to stereotypes and stigma about affordable housing, there are often concerns that affordable housing is of poor

quality and will not be well maintained (Tighe, 2010). Overall, while there is an issue with deferred maintenance for affordable housing due to declines in funding (Suttor, 2016), affordable housing is often better maintained than comparable private market buildings. Affordable housing is also held to the same or higher design standards than private market buildings.

Overall, affordable housing is often better maintained than comparable private market buildings and is also held to the same or higher design standards than private market buildings.

It is also important to again note that this concern about design and community character is linked to concerns about tenant characteristics.

As Davison and colleagues write about community opposition to affordable housing in Australia, "Because character is inherently both social and spatial (Davison & Rowden 2012), community opposition to a development proposal on the grounds that it comprises the wrong types of buildings can become a cover for opposition to that proposal because it will house the wrong types of people." (2013, p.22-23).

There may also be community concerns about the planning process generally and residents may be concerned that their opinion will not be considered (Davison et al., 2013). This is a broader concern about community engagement and public planning processes

which is out of the scope of this report but still important to recognize. It is also important to consider who usually participates in community engagement and discussions about planning and zoning and how to make community engagement more equitable and inclusive.⁴

2.4 Community Opposition Methods & Impacts

Regardless of the root causes of community opposition and NIMBYism attitudes, they are a barrier for increasing the supply of affordable housing in Canada (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2019; Nesbitt, 2018).

There are several common ways that communities oppose affordable housing developments. These include writing letters to newspapers, taking out newspaper ads, conducting door-to-door information campaigns, handing out flyers, creating petitions, protesting, putting up yard signs, posting in web-based forums and message boards, creating social media campaigns, launching formal legal challenges, voicing opposition at public hearings, and contacting local officials (BC Housing, 2018; Hubbard, 2009; Scally & Tighe, 2015).

The most common time for community opposition is after a site has been selected or announced but before it has been officially approved through planning processes (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2019; Scally & Tighe, 2015). This is particularly likely to occur at public hearings. For example, BC has recently seen a number of high-profile public hearings for affordable housing with strong community opposition, including for an affordable housing

development that would include tenants with disabilities in Surrey (Bula, 2021b), a joint elementary school and social housing site in Coal Harbour (McElroy, 2021), and a supportive housing site in Kitsilano (Bula, 2021a).

Community opposition increases costs, reduces site availability, impedes designs, increases the time individuals and families wait for affordable housing, and overall undermines the construction of equitable housing (Scally & Tighe, 2015; Wong et al., 2020; Wynne-Edwards et al., 2003). Because most opposition occurs during the planning and engagement phase, these costs to engage and respond to opposition often occurs during periods of limited funding for housing providers, which directly impacts the viability of projects (MacPhail et al., 2021).

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⁴ For more on community engagement, see Crompton, 2017; Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 2020

For example, some CMHC funding is conditional on the land already being appropriately zoned, meaning the developer must have already borne these costs of engagement and rezoning. Further, community opposition during the planning phase can make tenants feel unwelcome in the community when the development opens, contributing to further social and economic exclusion. (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2019).

However, most research shows that community opposition greatly decreases once the development has been built, and there are generally few complaints once residents move in (BC Housing, 2018; Tighe, 2010). Often with older affordable housing in established neighbourhoods, residents are unable to distinguish the site from other market rate developments.

Example:

In Madison, Wisconsin, a transitional housing project called Occupy Madison was constructed as a small village of tiny homes, where residents must contribute volunteer hours or "sweat equity" to live at the village (primarily through yard work or construction and maintenance of units). The tiny home village was proposed on a previous brown field site where an out-of-use autobody shop sat. When the tiny home village was proposed, the neighbouring residents hired an attorney and drafted a petition, citing that their opposition was based on concerns about decreased property values, increased police presence, and the increased cost of municipal services. A majority (70%) of nearby homeowners and renters signed the petition opposing the development. As well, the local Madison Police Department also opposed the development out of concern for an increased workload in responding to calls to the village. Despite this, the city council unanimously approved the project and construction began.

The Occupy Madison team used various forms of media to garner public attention and support for the project by posting photos on Facebook and Buzzfeed and sharing updates and goals through multiple newspaper articles. Media coverage and public attention can help raise awareness, draw donations, and dispel negative stereotypes.

Within one year of opening Occupy Madison, the local police department reported no phone calls regarding the development, surrounding property values increased, and many of the neighbours retracted their opposition. The Occupy Madison tiny home village contributed to revitalization of the neighbourhood, as the lot previously held an out-of-use body shop. Community members stated that there had been no issues with the Occupy Madison residents, with many community members volunteering at the garden space of Occupy Madison, attending weekly potlucks with residents, and overall speaking very highly of the development.

Source: (Wong et al., 2020)

As this example shows, community opposition often diminishes once a development is complete and residents have become integrated into the community. It also highlights the importance of community engagement and development to not only manage a situation, but create a sense of agreement between neighbours, developers, and provider. This can be an important factor for developers to remember when faced with opposition and uncertainty from the community

and will be discussed more in this report. While community opposition is generally regarded as a negative and rooted in selfish, exclusionary values, opposition to specific projects can shed light on needed improvements to a community and can contribute to the approval process (Pendall, 1999). For example, if the main concern of residents is about congested social or public services (schools, waste removal, etc.), this can shed light on needed improvements to that neighbourhood's services. Some research

does show that some community opposition can lead to constructive conversations and creative solutions that benefit the entire community (Whittemore & BenDor, 2019). According to research by Scally and Tighe (2015) in the United States (U.S.), developers surveyed stated that public opposition to affordable housing had, in some cases, led to enhanced community engagement, aesthetic improvements to developments, positive media attention, and improvements in public opinion of affordable housing. However, it is important to remember that while community opposition may result in improved design, it can still be rooted in discriminatory opinions. Wynne-Edwards (2003) noted in their analysis of overcoming community opposition to homeless shelters in the U.S. that socially acceptable, and therefore publicly stated concerns about land use, traffic, physical appearance, and local services were masking concerns about undesirable neighbours, community history, and speculative concerns about crime and neighbourhood decline. The question remains how or what are the conditions to make community opposition a productive process, and how can providers tell when community opposition is based on real compared to discriminatory concerns.

The question remains how or what are the conditions to make community opposition a productive process, and how can providers tell when community opposition is based on real compared to discriminatory concerns.

It is also important to note that community opposition is often an expression of privilege. White, middle-upper class residents have more capacity to choose where they live and more economic and political power to oppose unwanted facilities (Wilton, 2002). Privilege is used to secure safer environments and shield neighbourhoods from unwanted social and physical burdens (Wolsink, 2006).

Consequently, environmental and social burden and risk is most often concentrated in communities with marginalized populations. This phenomenon can be described as geographical racism and leads to unwanted developments being built in areas populated by groups that lack political and economic resources to oppose such developments (Wolsink, 2006).

Further, certain groups are more impacted by community opposition and its effects on the supply of affordable housing. Due to historical and ongoing impacts from colonialism, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and other systems of oppression, certain groups experience more barriers in obtaining housing (Novac et al., 2002) and are overrepresented among households in social and affordable housing or in need of social and affordable housing (Claveau, 2020). Indigenous peoples are overrepresented among Canada's unhoused population and are more likely to be in core housing need compared to non-Indigenous people (Belanger et al., 2013, 2019; Claveau, 2020). Indigenous people and other racialized groups also experience heightened discrimination in obtaining housing, including stereotyping by and higher expectations from landlords, inefficient housing assistance (such as long waitlists and unaccommodating staff), and overall feelings of unwelcomeness in urban neighbourhoods (Belanger et al., 2019; Novac et al., 2002). Women and gender minorities are also over-represented among renters in social and affordable housing, as are immigrants, visible minorities, and households with disabilities and health needs (Claveau, 2020) who face barriers on housing and labour markets. These issues can be further exacerbated in rural communities where there limited supply of housing and a greater likelihood of Indigenous families living in unfit and overcrowded housing (Groening et al., 2019). Thus, the consequences of community opposition have disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples and other groups who have been made marginalized and who experience more social and economic barriers to accessing housing.

2.5 Summary

Overall, the reasons for community opposition are complex and usually never related to one single factor. According to Whittemore & BenDor (2019):

"Opposition can vary significantly according to the precise function of the proposed facility or the population it serves, the physical character and demographics of the proposed facility's surroundings, the facility's management or operating procedures, and even the region where the facility is proposed." (p.424)

While the specifics of community opposition are unique to each situation and are impacted by community history, demographics, and geographical location, affordable housing often features an intersection of reasons why communities are opposed and thus disproportionately faces community opposition. That is, it is not only that low-income individuals will occupy affordable housing, with the accompanying fears based on racist and classist stereotypes, but also the built form and style of the development, the increase in density and urban intensification, opposition to purpose-built rental, and various other factors compounded together that can make community opposition particularly common to affordable housing and difficult to overcome. However, despite this complexity of community opposition, research and practice have demonstrated strategies for responding to community opposition, the focus of the next section.

It is not only that low-income individuals will occupy affordable housing, with the accompanying fears based on racist and classist stereotypes, but also the built form and style of the development, the increase in density and urban intensification, opposition to purpose-built rental, and various other factors compounded together that can make community opposition particularly common to affordable housing and difficult to overcome.

3.0

Strategies for Responding to Community Opposition

Despite the compounding reasons that drive community opposition, research shows that those who oppose new developments can have flexible attitudes which can change over time (Davison et al., 2013; Goss Gilroy Inc., 2019; Wong et al., 2020).

The most effective way to work through community opposition is through various strategies that are contextually and locally specific. In a report for the BCNPHA, Nesbitt (2018) categorizes community opposition (NIMBYism) into four categories – economic, political, social, and spatial (p.6). Economic concerns relate to property values and investments; political concerns relate to trust in local government and ideologies about housing and fairness; social concerns to stigmas of crime, poverty, and racial stereotypes; and spatial concerns relate to community character, the built environment, and proximity of residents to new developments (Nesbitt, 2018). Nesbitt (2018) recommends creating robust strategies based on the concerns being expressed, which will be unique to each situation. Other research on responding

to community opposition has focused on project-specific compared to community wide strategies (Iglesias, 2002), or strategies for municipalities and policy makers (FCM, 2009).

In this section, we summarize the literature around four strategies, focusing on the role of the housing provider and developer. They are:

- Educate and inform early.
- Engage early.
- Mobilize community leaders.
- Avoid the term NIMBY.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive, meaning that housing providers can and likely should use all of them in different ways. These strategies also need to be adapted by housing providers to fit their specific situation.

The most effective way to work through community opposition is through various strategies that are contextually and locally specific.

3.1 Educate and Inform Early

Community opposition to affordable housing is often rooted in myths and stigma. Tighe (2012) argues that fears about the characteristics and behaviours of tenants of affordable housing is the main factor driving community opposition. Recognizing this, research shows that positive messaging that intentionally addresses myths and stigma can mitigate community concerns and improve support (Tighe, 2010).

Proactive and tailored marketing campaigns that demonstrate the need for affordable housing as well as campaigns which inform the community about the benefits of affordable housing developments are key strategies that providers can implement.

Example:

A University of British Columbia research project with the City of Kelowna tested the effect of 'message framing' on the likelihood of supporting increasing density in respondents' neighbourhoods. The researchers found that positively framing the messaging about the public benefits of increasing housing density resulted in an increase in the likelihood of supporting that type of project, compared to no framing (control group). Messaging about the private (individual) benefits and messaging about social comparisons (what experts said were the views of neighbours) had no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of accepting increasing density.⁵

While not specific to affordable housing, this research reinforces the role of communications and messaging in addressing opposition. Other research also highlights that using different terms like "home" instead of "housing" or "units" can help positively frame the development (Rockne, 2018).

At a broader level, proactive marketing campaigns that demonstrate the need for affordable housing as well as campaigns which inform the community about the benefits of affordable housing developments are key strategies that providers can implement (Tighe, 2010; Wynne-Edwards et al., 2003). This is also an important role that municipalities and those involved in the planning and approval process can take to counter negative stereotypes (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2019).

At the project level, research shows that community members are more likely to support a development project if they feel they have adequate and accurate information about it; the sharing of knowledge builds trust between the community and developer (Obrinsky & Stein, 2007). This include both at the beginning of the project but also regularly and throughout the project. Further, providing data and evidence about the impacts of previous developments can be used to respond to community concerns, such as data on property values or other expressed concerns.⁶

While data and statistics can be important ways to share evidence about affordable housing, these numbers have a human element and represent the needs and experiences of real people. Providers and developers can also work with current or future tenants to share their personal stories and humanize the evidence, but this should consider the burden on and safety of tenants to share their experiences, especially if there is significant community opposition.

Housing providers and developers should also consider how to inform and educate community members. Education is more effective when it is tailored to the community and includes robust and unique delivery methods such as fact sheets, Q&A sessions, websites, newsletter etc. (Wong et al., 2020). For example, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) developed a guide for municipalities to respond to community opposition which provides examples of different types of educational and informational materials to help reach diverse audiences, including illustrations, texts, maps, charts, and factsheets on the development itself (FCM, 2009). Similarly, BC Housing's toolkit on community acceptance lists a number of ways to provide information including project websites, factsheets, community meetings, and more (BC Housing, 2019). The diversity of materials helps keep community members focused on the development and can be applicable to different learning styles.

⁵ Doberstein, Hickey, and Li, "Nudging NIMBY."

⁶ This is the role of the second report on property values.

3.2 Engage Early

Another common concern from communities is that they do not believe their opinion will be considered in the planning process. Research completed for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) highlighted that proactive engagement with local residents helps build a trusting relationship (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2019).

Engagement is different than education, but these two strategies often go hand-in-hand. Community engagement is a term that is often used when developers or governments want to give information to the public. However, providers should think of it beyond information sharing. Engagement is more deliberate and an active decision to listen and communicate with community members. The Tamarack Institute, a Canadian organization which develops and supports strategies to engage citizens on major community issues, defines community engagement as "the process by which citizens are engaged to work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future" (Tamarack Institute, 2021).

Listening is also stressed in community engagement guides for municipalities, noting that when the municipal government along with the housing provider take the time to listen to communities, the "municipalities become a contributor to or a partner in enhancing the well-being of a community" (AUMA & AAMDC, 2015). Working with the local government can also help establish who is responsible for consistent, accurate, and timely engagement (AUMA & AAMDC, 2015; FCM, 2009) which helps to address community concerns that the engagement process will not consider their opinions.

Engagement is different than education or just information sharing. Engagement is much more deliberate and an active decision to listen, communicate, and collaborate with community members.

Example:

In 2013, Civida (formerly called Capital Region Housing), Edmonton's largest provider of social and affordable housing, began making plans to redevelop the Londonderry site in North Edmonton. This site formerly contained 80 aging townhouses.

In 2014, the City of Edmonton (the City) and Capital Region Housing partnered on the redevelopment. As a partner, the City facilitated community engagement, connected the developer with the community league, and provided staff resources. In this case, the City and Civida piloted a new engagement process where they started community engagement before the formal rezoning and public hearing process to generate community support early in the process. Civida approached the community engagement with an open slate for design with no specific decisions other than a target for a number of units.

When the project eventually went forward for rezoning, the project was approved with no community opposition, tripling the density from 80 units to 240 units.

The Londonderry mixed income development broke ground in 2018 and is scheduled to open in Winter 2022. Sources: (Anderson-Baron & Kjenner, 2021; Crowther, 2017a)

Developers should be prepared to include community members early on in the planning and decision-making process (Wynne-Edwards et al., 2003). The more involved community members are, the more likely they are to approve of a project, and the more satisfied they are with the outcome (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2019). Community members can provide insight into community history, input on the design, and needed improvements to the area. This joint decision-making process involves consulting with community members, as opposed to simply informing them of changes to their neighbourhood (Obrinsky & Stein, 2007).

It is also important to be clear and set boundaries about how community feedback and input will be used. The International Association for Public Participation outlines a spectrum of levels of engagement with different responsibilities and outcomes for each level of engagement. These range from "Inform", which is one-way information sharing, to "Empower", where communities are active decision-makers in the final outcome.

Developers should be prepared to include community members early on in the planning and decision-making process (Wynne-Edwards et al., 2003). The more involved community members are, the more likely they are to approve of a project, and the more satisfied they are with the outcome (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2019).

As this example shows, intentional and clear community engagement with partnership and support from the municipality helped to create community support and minimize opposition to the Londonderry development. Research also shows that early involvement can help build trust and credibility with the community, while delayed community involvement can lead to animosity, distrust, and stronger community opposition (Tighe, 2010).



Community leaders can be an important source of public support and help respond to community opposition.

3.3 Mobilize Community Leaders

Developments are more likely to be successful if they are supported and embraced by the community. Developers can focus on both minimizing opposition and mobilizing public support in order to benefit the neighbourhood during and post construction (Obrinsky & Stein, 2007).

Mobilizing community leaders is a key way to build public support for affordable housing. This can include identifying potential supporters of affordable housing, including from the project (e.g.: contractors, construction workers, etc.), individuals or groups who would indirectly benefit (e.g.: business owners, employers, friends and family of potential residents), and groups that may have a special interest in supporting affordable housing (e.g.: churches, charities, homelessness advocates) (Obrinsky & Stein, 2007).

Engaging with community leaders also serves to spread information about housing need, breaks down stereotypes, and mobilizes support for affordable housing (Belanger et al., 2019).

This should also include municipal leaders and councillors who are often some of the first to hear community opposition before and at public hearings and so are well placed to be able to respond to opposition and build support. For example, then Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson launched an initiative called #yegYIMBY day in 2016 to help mobilize support for affordable housing (Stolte, 2016).

In this example from North Glenora, the community league became supporters of the project and helped mobilize support from the rest of the community.

Example:

North Glenora is a wealthy, mature neighbourhood in Central Edmonton. In 2015, the local Westmount Presbyterian Church announced a plan to redevelop the aging church building into a mixed-use site with affordable housing townhomes. The church, the developer/provider (Right at Home Housing Society), and the community league came together early to establish working relationships and respond to community concerns. Both the church and the community league were community leaders who helped develop community support so that the building was eventually approved without any community opposition.

In a blog post from Together Wise Consulting, Andrew Gregory, an Edmonton resident who served on the community league shared their experience of the process for how the community got to "YIMBY" (Gregory, 2018). When the proposal was originally announced, the community was concerned about impacts on crime and property values. According to Gregory (2018), the church and developer quickly engaged with the community and committed to listening to and incorporating feedback from residents into the planning and building of the housing development.

Gregory noted that the community felt that there was a trusting and open relationship with the developer, and that their input was valued and respected (Gregory, 2018). According to Gregory (2018), the developer was successful in gaining the community's support through using the strategies outlined in the literature, including: (1) creating a dialogue with residents from the beginning through formal and informal community meetings, (2) addressing the concerns of residents by accepting questions and providing written, detailed feedback, which included
(Continued on page 24)

information on property values, crime, and the need for affordable housing, and (3) accepting and valuing community input, and implementing suggestions (for instance, the drive aisle to the development was redesigned to address safety concerns).

This relationship building with the community league created public support for the development which has also helped to keep the aging school open by bringing in more families (Crowther, 2017b; Neufeld, 2018; Stolte, 2018). Construction began on the North Glenora affordable housing development in June of 2016 and the developed opened in 2018. At the time, it was the largest net-zero multi-unit development in Canada.

3.4 Avoid the term NIMBY

There is also research that suggests that using the term NIMBY can increase community opposition. The term NIMBY seems to have first appeared sometime in the 1970s (Kinder, 2019). The term has negative connotations is frequently used as a pejorative to suggest selfish, ignorant, and irrational behaviour on the part of opponents (Burningham, 2000; Nesbitt, 2018; Petrova, 2016; Wolsink, 2006). It has become a phrase which people do not want to be associated with and is likely to put people on the defensive. In an magazine article about the term, Perry (2017) argues that the "term exists solely as political rhetoric to be wielded against those you see as less-open minded than yourself" (Perry, 2017). While some community opposition is based in prejudicial stereotypes, this is not the case for all concerns, and using the term NIMBYism does not easily allow for a discussion of these potentially valid concerns.

In addition to negative connotations and increasing opposition, the term also creates a false dichotomy, something which can be an impediment when trying to build relationships with community members. The term establishes a divide between rational, civically minded developers, and irrational residents "putting personal interests ahead of societal benefits" (Petrova, 2016, p. 1280; see also Whittemore & BenDor, 2019). Using the term NIMBY fails to examine what exactly opponents of new developments do not want in their backyards and does not allow for nuance or discussions of what and why communities are opposed

to, which limits how providers and supporters of affordable housing can respond. A more effective response is built on understanding the motives of why community opponents are saying "no".

What kind of language should developers and providers be using instead? Perry (2017) suggests using rhetoric that is "sharper and clearer" and to be more specific in arguments with opposition. The focus should be less about the label of those who are opposed to new developments and more about the concerns and information that is in circulation about the development so that the developer can develop local and concern specific strategies.

Overall, the important take away is to identify why communities are concerned and develop specific strategies to address those concerns rather than labelling community opposition as NIMBYism.

The focus should be less about the label of those who are opposed to new developments and more about the concerns and information that is in circulation about the development so that the developer can develop local and concern specific strategies.

Example:

Recognizing these issues with the term NIMBYism, some researchers suggest alternative methods to engage with communities and identify concerns. For example, the VESPA method (Visual, Environmental, Socioeconomic, Procedural) guides developers and planners to define and group residents' assorted concerns into these four categories to better understand their motives and address concerns (Petrova, 2016). Through this process, developers and planners can identify which concerns are the most common and address them specifically to change opposition to acceptance or support (Petrova, 2016). Another method is ENUF (Engage, Never use NIMBY, Understand, Facilitate), which includes (1) engaging and involving community members in decision making (2) avoiding using the term NIMBY as it creates defensiveness and offers an insufficient explanation of residents' concerns, (3) working to understand residents' concerns and perceptions, and (4) facilitating communication to empower communities (Petrova, 2016).

3.5 Summary

From the research, literature, and example scenarios, we described five key strategies for responding to community opposition to affordable housing.

1. Educate and inform early.
2. Engage early.
3. Mobilize community support.
4. Avoid the term NIMBY.

Overall, the research and literature reviewed highlights the importance of local context and site-specific strategies. While there are some common concerns and some common overarching strategies, every community and development have unique histories and practices that will need to be considered when developing strategies for responding to community opposition and developing community support.

As the examples have also shown, communities can be moved from opposition to support but it takes effort and intentionality on the part of the developer, the municipality, and the community. This also highlights that

responding to community opposition is not just a developer or housing provider issue, especially when providers often lack capacity and resources. There are additional strategies that municipalities and policy makers can use that are out of the scope of this report but are important strategies nonetheless for creating a supportive and efficient planning and land use framework to increase the supply of affordable housing.⁷

In the next section, we turn to a focused discussion of rural areas and small towns.

Every community and development have unique histories and practices that will need to be considered when developing strategies for responding to community opposition and developing community support.

⁷ See (FCM, 2009; Goss Gilroy Inc., 2019; Nesbitt, 2018)

4.0

Focus on Rural and Small-Town Communities

While community opposition impacts both urban and rural communities, rural areas face some distinct pressures and concerns about affordable housing and community opposition.

While both Canada and Alberta are urbanizing, there still is a large proportion of people who live outside of cities. There is no clear definition on what is considered rural or small town, and definitions vary by province or data source (Subedi et al., 2020). We draw from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM, n.d.) and distinguish between urban areas as areas categorized by Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016) as part of a census metropolitan area (CMA), and rural areas and small towns as areas that are not categorized as part of a CMA. CMAs are areas with a population of at least 100,000 and a core population at least 50,000 or more. In 2016, there were three CMAs in Alberta – Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Using this definition, rural areas and small towns still include a very diverse group of communities, from remote communities with no population centre to small and medium population centres. In Alberta in 2016, approximately 70% of the Alberta population lived in the larger metro regions of Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge (Statistics Canada, 2017a).

Overall, rural areas and small towns are older and growing more slowly than urban areas in Canada and face distinct pressures, including housing need (FCM, n.d.). Most rural and small town communities do not have a robust system of social assistance to address issues such as homelessness or housing need (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015; Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014). Rural areas have varying degrees of government funding for various social services as government funding often follows population-based patterns, with more money given to shelters and housing services in urban centres (Groening et al., 2019; Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015). This is exacerbated in rural

communities by the “lack of fiscal and human resources to apply for the scarce funding available to rural communities” (Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014). It is common for rural communities to not have an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or affordable housing stock, and limited access to other services such as food banks and public transportation (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015).



Households in rural areas struggle with **higher utility costs** and housing that is older and in **higher need of repairs**

Housing needs in rural communities differ from urban areas in relation to the availability of social infrastructure, housing markets, migration, availability of rental units, and increased pressure on housing supply when rural areas are close to boom-and-bust economies, such as oil and gas or seasonal tourist destinations (Bruce, 2003; Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2016). Rural areas and small towns primarily consist of single-detached owned housing, with little to no multi-unit housing, and many rural communities face barriers

Rural communities face issues with housing need, but there is significantly less research or data on the extent of housing need, in part because there tends to be less visible homelessness in rural areas.

This is exacerbated by the existing lack of services in rural areas, so that households in need of assistance must often move to urban areas.

to increase the supply of low-cost, multi-unit housing (Bruce, 2003; Nesbitt, 2018). Northern Alberta is especially impacted by the macro-economic shifts related to the oil and gas industry, as rural areas are more sensitive to economic swings (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015). Households in rural areas also struggle with higher utility costs, and rural housing tends to be older and in higher need of repairs (Bruce, 2003). Further, hidden forms of homelessness (such as couch surfing, living in vehicles, or in precarious housing) are more common than visible homelessness in rural areas (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2020). Those more likely to sleep rough in rural areas (a form of visible homelessness) include migrant workers and families (Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014). There are also reports suggesting that those who are experiencing homelessness in rural communities are often

women fleeing situations of domestic abuse (Pijl & Belanger, 2020). A lack of affordable housing in rural communities is a barrier for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women fleeing from domestic violence, and leaves women vulnerable to continued violence, economic adversity, and involvement with child welfare services (Groening et al., 2019).

Overall, rural communities face issues with housing need, but there is significantly less research or data on the extent of housing need, in part because there tends to be less visible homelessness and more hidden homelessness in rural areas (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2020; Bruce, 2003). This is exacerbated by the existing lack of services in rural areas, so that households in need of assistance must often move to urban areas (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2016).

4.1

Community Opposition in Rural and Small Towns

Community opposition in rural communities share many similarities with urban communities, such as concerns for increased traffic, property values, and changes to community character (Guidotti & Abercrombie, 2008). However, there are also distinct reasons for opposition in rural communities, as rural communities are unique in their populations, housing stock, funding, and awareness of the need for affordable housing (Nesbitt, 2018; Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014). Some research suggests that because housing need and homelessness tend to be more hidden in rural areas and small towns, there can be less support for affordable housing among the community. The housing crisis is often seen as an "urban issue" (FCM, n.d.). As Waegemakers Schiff and Turner write, "The existence of homelessness counters the mythology of idyllic small-town living, thus it takes more to bring it to the surface as a priority issue." (2014, p.18). When homelessness

and housing need is hidden, it is more difficult to obtain accurate counts of those in need of housing, obtain funding, or find solutions for those households (Groening et al., 2019). Notwithstanding that there are community members and leaders who recognize the need for affordable housing in rural areas and want to take action (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2020), the main distinct form of community opposition to affordable housing development appears to be acknowledging that housing need and homelessness exist in rural areas and small towns.

The main distinct form of community opposition to affordable housing development in rural areas and small towns appears to be acknowledging that housing need and homelessness exist.

Example:

Okotoks is a town in Southern Alberta with a population of approximately 30,000. In February 2019, the town council approved the conceptual design for a mixed income tiny home development that would include 42 affordable housing units and be partially located on municipally-owned land (Babych, 2019). The project had acquired conditional funding from CMHC for the project (Naragh, 2019).

However, the project faced increasing community opposition after the initial approval. A community group organized a petition to the town council to rescind the project approval which received over 3200 signatures, more than 10% of the town's population. In a news article, one of the community organizers said "Our group is not against tiny homes. This is not a nimby 'we don't want tiny homes,'" (Condon, 2019).

In August 2019, the town council voted to not fund the project. In a news article, the town mayor Bill Robertson said, "this has really brought to the forefront ... community awareness of affordable housing and, you know, how to attain that" (CBC News, 2019). The project did not move forward.

This example demonstrates that community opposition in rural areas and small towns takes similar forms as community opposition in other areas, including petitions. It also demonstrates the politicization of the term "NIMBY", which was recognized by the group opposing the development. It also demonstrates, as the mayor notes, the need to raise awareness of the need for affordable housing in rural areas and small towns.

Part of how opposition can appear is in land use planning in both urban and rural communities, but more commonly in rural areas and small towns where there can be no land appropriately zoned for multi unit housing, affordable housing or emergency shelters (Bruce, 2003; Nesbitt, 2018). As public hearings are one of the main points in the development process where community opposition occurs, this can increase the likelihood of community opposition to affordable housing developments in rural areas and small towns.

Example:

Wetaskiwin is a small city in rural Alberta with a population of approximately 13,000. In November 2020, the city's Emergency Advisory Committee declared a state of local emergency to "provide Wetaskiwin and area's vulnerable humans with immediate access to shelter and integrated supports." (City of Wetaskiwin, 2020). This State of Local Emergency was initiated to be able to use civic buildings to support those experiencing homelessness as the city did not have a permanent emergency shelter. In a statement, the Mayor of Wetaskiwin, Tyler Gandam said:

"With winter quickly approaching, Council felt that the quickest way we could address the need for shelter was to declare a state of local emergency while we continue to find a permanent solution," said Wetaskiwin Mayor Tyler Gandam. "Council and Administration are committed to protecting our vulnerable population as well as those experiencing homelessness." (City of Wetaskiwin, 2020).

The integrated response hub opened in the Civic Building in downtown Wetaskiwin in January 2021, operated by Open Door. An emergency shelter had operated in the building in the past two years but had previously been closed due to complaints and safety concerns (Ramsay, 2020). (Continued on page 30)

However, in an article from CBC, the location in downtown Wetaskiwin was noted as sub-optimal for the community and for the integrated response hub. The group running the emergency shelter had found a permanent space earlier in the year but experienced community opposition on the grounds that the property was not adequately zoned for the use. The article notes that "Open Door and the city government soon discovered there is no property in Wetaskiwin zoned to allow a homeless shelter. The city had to declare a state of local emergency to allow the shelter to open on schedule in the Civic Building." (Jeffrey, 2021)

In May 2021, Wetaskiwin City Council voted to terminate the lease agreement with Open Doors at the Civic Building after receiving numerous complaints from community members. The Mayor (who opposed terminating the lease agreement) motioned for administration to bring back costs for setting up a new location for the Hub. (McEwan, 2021)

In a response, the Executive Director for the Hub noted that:

"While the plan to relocate was moving forward in the background as clients were being treated, those plans have also been jeopardized with the City's decision, said Hutton, as some of the investors have backed out and others are concerned with no zoning and the City's Land Use Bylaw (LUB) to allow for a shelter anywhere in the City, there is concern Council will not approve amendments to the LUB that could allow for a shelter if presented to council."(Max, 2021)

As of July 2021, The Hub had not found a new space but has transitioned to an outreach model of support (Dansereau, 2021).

As this example highlights, the lack of appropriately zoned property for emergency shelters was a key barrier identified by both the city and by the agency and which enabled

increased community opposition when the development was proposed, ultimately resulting in the closure of the shelter.

4.2 Strategy – Raise awareness of the need for affordable housing

Because there is such limited research on affordable housing and housing needs in rural areas, the main strategy for responding to community opposition in rural and small towns is to first collect data on housing need and raise awareness for the need for affordable housing. Nesbitt (2018) recommends beginning the affordable housing development process in rural communities by raising awareness for the need for affordable housing. Raising awareness of housing needs can inform decisions to allocate funding for these projects, reduce the stigma about people who need affordable housing, and combat stereotypes about affordable housing.

However, in order to raise awareness of housing need in rural communities, we must also collect better data on rural homelessness and housing need. The lack of data on rural homelessness and housing need impedes a clear understanding of the complexity and specificity of this issue, and thus hinders efforts to implement programs and developments aimed at creating affordable housing (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2016). It is difficult to obtain data on the number of individuals or households experiencing homelessness or housing issues in rural communities, as traditional approaches for collecting this data in urban areas (such as counts from shelters

Example

In 2017 and updated in 2019, The Alberta Rural Development Network created a Step-by-Step Guide to Establishing Rural Homelessness. This is a tool that helps rural communities gather data on homelessness (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2019).

In 2018, the Alberta Rural Development Network and a partnership of rural and small-town communities undertook a coordinated project on estimating rural homelessness and housing need across the province called the 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project. Using the methodology in the guide, they identified approximately 3,000 unstably housed individuals across the 20 communities, at approximately 1% of the population. This is still estimated to be an under-representation of housing need in rural communities (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2020). As a result of this project, Cenovus Energy committed \$50 million to support housing in six Indigenous communities (CMHC, 2021).

This project received a CMHC Gold Roof Award for Knowledge to Action and can be replicated in other rural communities and small towns to help raise awareness of housing needs in these communities (CMHC, 2021).

and service providers or waitlist data for affordable housing) do not translate to rural environments where these services are lacking in the first place (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2019; Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015).

Raising awareness of the need for affordable housing in rural and small towns can also support advocacy and partnerships with all levels of government, which is especially important for rural areas that have less capacity. Addressing housing needs requires a level of coordination and service planning that many rural areas are not equipped for and need further government support in order to achieve (Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014). This is especially true for rural areas with high economic growth, as more social infrastructure will be necessary for "the inevitable increase in housing instability and homelessness they will experience as a result of migration and limited affordable rental stock" (Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014, p.36). Affordable housing and homelessness are often seen as urban issues in part because there are fewer services in rural areas, and so people experiencing

housing need often relocate to urban areas to gain access to social services and assistance (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015). However, individuals who relocate to urban centres are often isolated from their social networks and informal supports (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2019). As Waegemakers Schiff and Turner write, "If governments are committed to maintaining a rural population, more resources will need to be made available to house people in their home communities" (2014, p. 28).

Raising awareness of the need for affordable housing in rural and small towns can also support advocacy and partnerships with all levels of government, which is especially important for rural areas that have less capacity.

Example

Morinville is a town of approximately 10,000 people located about 35 km north of Edmonton. In 2008, the Town of Morinville completed an assessment of the housing needs of the community, indicating the need for more affordable housing. In 2009, the Town Council approved the Community Housing Plan which outlined housing targets for the community, including developing affordable housing (Town of Morinville, 2009).

In February 2019, the province (then being led by the NDP government) announced funding for the Morinville affordable housing development. The then Minister of Seniors and Housing, Minister Sigurdson said in a statement: “[...] We have heard from Albertans that projects like the Morinville Affordable Housing project are especially needed in smaller and rural communities. [...]” (Government of Alberta, 2019)

In February 2021, Morinville's first affordable housing complex opened in the town, featuring 40 units in a mix of 1 to 3 bedroom layouts and using a net zero design (Morinville Online, 2021). In an article on the development, “Mayor Barry Turner said this development would make Morinville a more inclusive community where people would no longer have to leave town simply to find a home they could afford.” (Ma, 2021)

The project was funded through a partnership between the Town of Morinville, the provincial government, and the federal government through CMHC, and is operated by Homeland Housing (Government of Alberta, 2021).

This example demonstrates the initial starting point for this successful development was completing the housing needs assessment in 2008 and the subsequent community housing plan in 2009, which was used as the basis and justification for the project to both funders and the community.

5.0

Conclusion

This report has highlighted a number of reasons why communities often oppose affordable housing, including concerns about decreasing property values, increasing crime, and increasing density.

Research demonstrates no intrinsically negative impacts of affordable housing and instead demonstrates many more positive impacts, both individually and at a community level. While there are a number of common strategies to respond to community opposition, including information campaigns, proactive community engagement, and mobilizing community support, it is the local context and the local concerns that need to be addressed.

Most community opposition appears to be rooted in fear, especially fear of the unknown and fear based on myths and stigma. This too demonstrates the importance of inclusive and diverse communities. Developing affordable housing that is geographically and equitably distributed supports racial, social, and economic community integration by avoiding concentrated neighbourhood poverty and inequality (Suttor, 2015). Locating affordable housing developments in vibrant and economically stable communities supports access to services and resources for low-income communities (Scally & Koenig, 2012). The City of Edmonton also recognizes the importance of geographically and socially? integrated affordable housing, and through the Affordable Housing Investment Plan has committed to a roval process. The engagement process itself is expensive and can cause project delays, and often occurs during periods of limited funding (e.g., some CMHC funding is conditional on the land already being appropriately zoned, meaning the developer must have already borne these costs of engagement and rezoning). The ability to oppose developments in the first place is also a question of equity,

as those with more privilege are more able to oppose developments, both those with more risks like landfills, and those with perceived risks, like affordable housing. Low-income communities thus often face more of the risks of developments such as landfills, while being prevented from accessing higher income communities with more green space and amenities.

It takes significant capacity to not only be able to develop affordable housing but also to implement these strategies to respond to community opposition. Many housing providers, both rural and urban, have limited capacity and resources and are already burdened with managing increasing demand, long waitlists, and aging housing. Managing community opposition should not solely fall on the shoulders of housing providers but should involve partnerships with government and civil society to change attitudes towards affordable housing, reduce community opposition, and increase the supply of affordable housing.

While there are a number of common strategies to respond to community opposition, including information campaigns, proactive community engagement, and mobilizing community support, it is the local context and the local concerns that need to be addressed.

5.1 Resources for Housing Providers

In addition to the detailed bibliography, we've listed some specific resources for housing providers to help address community opposition and implement these strategies.

5.1.1 Community Engagement

- City of Edmonton's Engagement Toolkit: edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/neighbourhoods/neighbourhood-engagement-strategy-toolkit
- Beyond inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement: sfu.ca/dialogue/resources/public-participation-and-government-decision-making/beyond-inclusion.html

5.1.2 Responding to Community Opposition

- AUMA's Strategies to overcome NIMBYism: auma.ca/advocacy-services/programs-initiatives/housing-hub/how-municipalities-can-act/strategies-overcome-nimbyism
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities – Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide for Responding to NIMBY report: https://data.fcm.ca/documents/tools/ACT/Housing_In_My_Backyard_A_Municipal_Guide_For_Responding_To_NIMBY_EN.pdf

5.1.3 Housing Data

- Statistics Canada Housing Statistics Portal: statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects-start/housing
- Canadian Rental Housing Index: rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#intro
- CMHC Housing Market Information Portal: cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en#Profile/1/1/Canada

5.1.4 Rural Specific Resources

- Rural Municipalities of Alberta: ruralalberta.com/
- Rural Development Network: ruraldevelopment.ca/
- Statistics Canada Rural Canada Statistics Portal: statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects-start/society_and_community/rural_canada

6.0

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