



Affordable Housing: A Chamber's Perspective

The Chamber has been following the discussions and stories around the need for affordable housing in Nova Scotia. We have also monitored the ideas and tools that have developed and utilized in response. While affordable housing does not fall within our mandate, employees do. We, therefore, decided to hold a roundtable of stakeholder members to allow for facilitated discussion and idea generation that the Halifax Chamber can use in our government submissions, op-ed pieces, and social media.

We thought we would share some of the key points that emerged during our discussions and what attendees thought the Chamber could do to advocate for both affordable housing while supporting the businesses that create housing supply

Stakeholder Conversation Topics

Who is Responsible for Affordable Housing Anyway?

- This was the biggest question from all stakeholders in the room. The Municipality is vocal that they are working very diligently to ensure affordable housing for Nova Scotians, but often defer to the Province as affordable housing is currently within their powers. The Chamber has often and will continue to advocate for greater autonomy and powers for the municipality. At the same time, it was stressed that getting the right group of people in a room to collaborate toward meaningful solutions could make a huge difference. It is not an insurmountable problem with the right commitment and resources.

Developer Approval Times

- Is the lack of affordable housing, or at least housing that is affordable, due to slow approval times? Many developers would say yes. It can take months, if not years, for a new development projects to be approved, thus reducing the availability of housing. Some suggested that more apartments and condos on the market would drive down prices due to a higher vacancy rate.

Living Wage

- Is the cost of housing the problem or are employers not paying a fair wage? Is Housing a basic human right, if so, individuals on income assistance often cannot make the math work. It is not one groups issue, it is everyone's issue. There was much debate about this topic with no real conclusion. We are open to your thoughts.

Recapitalization

- There was also a discussion of both using funds to preserve and improve current affordable housing and utilizing old or vacant buildings as new affordable housing. This could involve significant red-tape but would by-pass the need for faster approval times.

Rent Control

Is rent control a Band-Aid solution for a supply side issue? Demand will continue to increase, supply will continue to drop under a rent control framework. Is an affordable supply strategy a better approach to affordable housing?

Recommendations for the Chamber

- Advocate to redirect housing responsibilities out of the civil service to a Crown Corporation.
- Advocate for a target number of affordable units and a certain level of affordability.
- Ensure representation on affordable housing panels and community participation in idea generation.
- Review and promote best practices in other jurisdictions.
- Advocate for fair property taxes for both residential and commercial properties.
- Meet with the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission
- Review results of rent control in other jurisdictions and present results to government

The group of stakeholders we gathered was diverse in industry. Their conversation was open, respectful, and garnered action items for the Chamber that can lead to positive outcomes for all involved. We were thrilled to host them and will work to ensure their ideas and recommendations are utilized in appropriate channels and Chamber documents.

We would love to hear your thoughts and ideas, so take a few moments to comment below or send along your ideas, as we always readily accept recommendations from our members. We often convene members to chat about specific and timely topics. If there is a topic you like to speak on or with a group of Chamber members, please send it through to kathleen@halifaxchamber.com.