



MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday January 28, 2021 - 1:00 pm online

PRESENT:

James Grunau, Doug Peat, Barry Growe (Journey Home Community)

Derek Chu, Ryan Reid, Mohammed Zaout (Kinbrace)

Richard Belcham, Tammy Johnson, (inasmuch)

Jenny Lam (Options)

Ann Barnard Ball (New Hope Community Services)

Joni Rose (Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MUNI))

Alexandra Dawley, Jackie Sarvini (MOSAIC)

Dustin Lupick (HSABC)

Julia Wu (bc211)

Dallas Posvand – (Victoria Immigrant & Refugee Centre Society) <https://www.obwh.org>

Jenny Moss (MAP)

Regrets: Marzieh Nezakat (MOSAIC)

Chair: Doug Peat

- Doug welcomed everyone and looked forward to a better 2021.

Our new member, Dallas Posvand, introduced himself and **Oak Bay Welcome Houses**

Dallas is employed at VIRCS in Victoria – he now co-manages with his fiancée the Oak Bay Welcome Houses Program based on template of Kinbrace – ED (of VIRCS) David Lau has fixed up houses with help from donations and volunteers.

District passed permissions for houses to open to refugees, including claimants and they will open soon to mixed populations along with helping community who will be volunteering and sponsoring room rental. This is a 9 month-term including wraparound services of a full suite of VIRCS programs.

To contact Dallas email: obwh@vircs.bc.ca

Julia will get info about Oak Bay Welcome Houses for bc211

- November 26, 2020 HWG Meeting Minutes - approved
- Agenda outlined and approved.

Updates

- **Update on the InfoLink Article with BCNPHA – Richard**

Published in the Fall InfoLink: <https://bcnpha.ca/resources/infolink/> - Pg. 37

Doug – this is an important contribution to fostering positive relations with BCNPHA.

- **Update on Roundtable with BCNPHA and MAP – Taskforce**

Jenny M: Jackson (BCNPHA had offered MAP HWG 4 possible dates for the webinar: 16th or 17th of March, or the 23rd or 25th.

Since Peer Daniel had asked for data and research there was a query if the raw data from the BC CHARMS project would be available in time?

Alexandra: yes, raw data should be available given ministerial approval for use. (input from Joni Rose)

Doug: reminded us that the idea was to have a 2-way conversation with BCNPHA.

Comment: be careful not to conflict with Spring Break.

Doug: better to move those dates. Though it was added that we need to be clear about the format.

- **Comments on initial feedback re: Housing Challenges via CHARMS Project research**

Alexandra Dawley / MOSAIC (for Marzieh)

News:

- BC Charms logo designed. Will circulate with the Minutes
- collected key province-wide data to make sure we are bridging key clients – 78 stakeholders contributed + 50 with lived refugee claimant experience from across the province.
- Will be shared as a **report** in multiple languages with MAP and wider. Has helped the team better understand the barriers to successful housing for claimants as well as some successes. And can be a useful tool for many.
- Tech consultant has provided us a Systems Requirements document – to design the best system for our needs
- We are now working with 2 technical consultants to translate those needs into technical specifications.
- these consultants are also a bridge with selected vendor and support through testing
- meetings with 3 potential vendors: Apricot, HIFUS - and 1 to meet soon.

- identified a Privacy & Security Consultant who will ensure that the system complies with provincial and federal guidelines.
- thanks to all the feedback from many of the HWG members among others.

Comments/Questions:

Joni Rose – Provincial in scope – **Alexandra:** YES: and also in terms of age/disability and other variables

Question: when will the final report be available?

Alexandra: needs ministerial approval, graphic design and final approval

Tammy: might be worth waiting for the final report for BCNPHA roundtable?

Question – in scope of work are you looking at compatibility with other software?

Richard - Software integration – we are considering how the system will integrate with other technologies, whether API's can be involved; but we need to keep the scope focused – need to tread very carefully.

Limited technology – being aware of system integration possibilities, but due to funding limitations and other issues it may not come at the beginning.

Joni Rose: her concern also is security and integrity of data as well as budget.

Question: – asked for confirmation that this will be THE housing referral system for refugee claimants?

Richard: yes; but it is not meant to be a case management system – it stays focused on housing referral

Roundtable Updates on any items specifically related to housing.

Tammy (inasmuch) – shared that they had researched their few clients placed in BC Housing – got a positive report. Much better than experience with market housing. Market housing is a very different experience in terms of discrimination.

James (JHC) – one house empty beginning February – open for referrals.

Reception Center – received funding for concept design process – consultant Loyal Mackerof will contact various MAP members to get ideas.

Applied to BC Housing for funding with a developer on the sunshine coast – for 5 double units (10 units). Maybe come to fruition in a couple of years.

Also moving ahead with other developers who are putting complexes together and considering allocating a few units for refugee claimants.

Mohammed (Kinbrace) has a family unit for 2-4 people available. Accepting referrals.

Alexandra (MOSAIC) – had 8 irregular arrivals recently. Still needing help for 4 of them – anyone have space for someone in a wheelchair? And a space for a single mom with 2 children – Alexandra will check the vacancies mentioned above.

Neither Kinbrace nor JHC could assist with wheelchair accessible units.

We need units with wheelchair access.

Jackie (MOSAIC) – collected a lot of extensive and detailed data aggregated over the months so now has extensive data to be made available in many languages.

Dustin (HSABC) - Extreme weather shelters have not been able to open, or have less capacity, because of COVID. Shelters are at their capacity. Struggle to find appropriate housing.

Julia (bc211) – not a lot of calls from new individuals – but calls from those settled and housed but need to connect with settlement agencies for the first times re: benefits etc.

Business

1. 4.8 million funding for refugee claimant housing Notice to Vendors– Discussion.

Joni – Notice to vendors is up on BC Bid – seen as a way of consultation before the RFP – it will form a FAQ document for a formal procurement so that everyone can see questions / feedback / answers
Please discuss and plan - don't make assumptions – please ask for clarifications - Give feedback please.

(Joni withdrew for the conversation)

The meeting was asked to discuss:

- *What opportunities do you see?*
- *Why only for renovations?*
- *Could we do some collective advocating with BC Housing and Ministry on increasing scope for things they would fund?*

Comment: it's a missed opportunity to add to housing stock with capital funding with new builds.

Question: is the Province possibly in contact with other organizations that have properties that need funding for renovations – that we don't know about?

Seems an incongruous idea when we had already communicated the need for capital funding.

Response: It's not ISS – they have communicated they are not interested in another large project.

Maybe its another group – shelter societies?

But whatever group is chosen they must have sensitivity to the needs of refugee claimants – hope the Province will be sensitive to this.

Question to Ann (New Hope) since they have had a number of recent renovation experiences – do you see this as an opportunity?

Response: not really – it doesn't go far (\$1.5m) – especially with asbestos abatement which is very expensive.

Richard – it could be seen as worse – it's only for owned property – or for rented property with a committed 5- year lease. Unless we can find a partner who would take on the risk; it's not something inasmuch could take on.

However, there are so many benefits to capital funding – it would help us provide housing to 6 – 10 single refugee claimant males and an income stream too. It is very unsupportive to the smaller organizations.

Doug – just one opportunity possibly – with a municipality – a city-owned land that they were going to lease out and then tear down. There was a lot of money for renovations - they are very unlikely to give up a possible rent-providing property (revenue source) – but if we could jointly apply with a municipality it could provide housing at a very low cost.

Richard – but municipalities (e.g. Abbotsford) are not going to allow a 5-year lease – perhaps a 5-year Comfort Letter but no lease. So, the risk will then be all on the society.

Doug - Should we do an advocacy with BC Housing to increase the scope? This would need to go out from MAP HWG with MAP Executive approval.

Comment: Joni mentioned she welcomes questions & feedback to create a FAQ

There was general agreement around the table - people who write RFP's may appreciate this feedback.

James – it would be a mistake not to share our collective voice – we have provided research, reports and a collective voice. We should encourage the Province as they go through the factors we have provided so housing for claimants is done appropriately.

Question – is anyone applying if not they are not here? Agencies working with refugee claimants are all here, so could this be a new agency looking to work with claimants?

Repeated: – if not us, who?

Derek – there are other agencies who work with people including RC's – some are venturing into housing but are not members of MAP.

We would all welcome more refugee claimant housing. So the tone of our question needs to be collaborative.

Question: Does this project not have to be refugee claimant-serving agencies only?

- not sure what the % of those served has to be claimants in this procurement.

Suggestion: – the letter should make a case for RC-serving agencies who know the needs of claimants– to avoid money going to other groups who might specialize in detention or homelessness or other focus not specifically claimants.

The Chair suggested writing a Letter – from MAP HWG Executive:

Agreed that Derek/Doug will put this together with editing help from Ryan/Barry/Richard

To be completed ready to send by end of next week (Feb 5).

2. Canadian Council for Refugees housing network and how best to engage.

- Report from CCR's First Housing Network Meeting – Doug

Very exciting to see that CCR has created a network for discussing refugee housing needs.

In 2019 we pushed for a resolution at CCR about refugee housing – an issue that had not been touched

since 2005. And in Fall 2020 an even stronger resolution was agreed to that led partly to setting up the new CCR Housing Network.

The meeting heard that **market housing** was problematic throughout the country for refugees in terms of demands for credit checks, massive down deposits and co-signers as well as outright discrimination. Then considered **non-profit housing** – rules vary across the country. Noted that in Nova Scotia refugee claimants are not eligible to apply for non-profit housing; and waiting lists in Ontario are huge. Really looking better in BC not least because of the work of MAP HWG in collaboration.

Referrals – vary also – limited financial resources places some in housing that re-traumatizes claimants as it is so overcrowded and disgusting.

Good idea: Landlord awards – to promote good landlords by informing them of the needs of claimants and getting away from these type of credit checks, co-sign regulations and references.

Would this be a useful tool to explore with David at Landlord BC (Umbrella organization for landlords in the province) – could we explore this to encourage best practices?

Some ideas for consideration in the future.

CCR Housing Network is at beginning stages of developing its purpose/identity/TOR.

Comments from others who attended:

- Asking for 3-9 months advance rent – this is illegal.
- Affording rent for housing for bigger families is universally a problem.
- Many with lived experience at the table.
- Good way to shared best practices – learn from other provinces and share our projects.
- Strong advocacy to govt from a big, varied, capable group.

3. Discuss How to Prepare for an Influx of Refugee Claimants – Doug (continuing the discussion started at the November HWG meeting)

We need to prepare for a situation of no housing spaces and an influx of claimants as the borders open:

- *What can we learn from the housing response for Tamil Boat People who arrived in 2010?*
- *Is there anything we can suggest to the Provincial government, in conjunction with shelter operations as a task force, to prepare for an influx*

Barry was invited to bring insights from his experience working in Emergency Planning at Canadian Red Cross and later with MAP during the Tamil arrivals in 2010.

There is no excuse for not planning, even if the needs are not clear and, in the end, not everything planned can be used - we should be considering a plan for a substantial influx.

Barry worked with MAP in 2010 on this – there were just 500 Tamils- mostly single men. Not a huge influx

but it was extremely difficult to find housing, much of which was not suitable. Took weeks and weeks to get close to better housing solutions.

We should not assume that the US will help with this – Obama/Biden administration was not good at taking in claimants – although Biden will be under scrutiny and the caravan arriving at the border will make it hard for the US – it may end up with Canada offering to help with these and others who have been waiting at the border over the last months.

So, we should be asking ourselves: What could be done if we have a surge of 5 – 10,000 people at the border? What could we plan to provide some solutions?

Comments:

- James – perhaps the co-chairs could send some questions to the group for discussion.
- Richard – invite an expert to address us who engage in emergency planning.
- Joni Rose – the province is discussing the issue – and with other ministries - but we don't know what to expect – Joni will take the issue back to ministry and will report at next meeting as to what they are planning.
Noted it is very complex especially because of the pandemic - we would need to plan for an influx during and after the pandemic.
- Barry added that it is normal for much emergency planning to be irrelevant when the need materializes; but it is so important to be at least partially prepared.
- Jenny – suggested that we could invite the new Disaster Coordinator at Red Cross LMR to join us.
- Alexandra suggested we request input from UNHCR
Reality of situation in central America
James mentioned that bringing BCNPHA in would be a good alliance

Request from Mohammed – asked for a Turkish interpreter – for assistance with someone in quarantine.

2:30 PM Adjourn. Next meeting: Thursday February 18 at 1:00 pm on zoom