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Rapid Housing Initiative Community Information Resource

October 17th, 2023

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**Ally Centre
OF CAPE BRETON**



**New Dawn
Enterprises**

Project Summary

The Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) is a fund administered by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to support municipalities in building housing quickly for those who are most precariously housed in our communities. The Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) received funding from the CMHC to proceed with a proposal submitted by New Dawn Enterprises and the Ally Centre of Cape Breton to build an affordable supportive housing development in Sydney.

The RHI development in Sydney is a 25-unit affordable supportive housing development. Five point two million dollars of capital funding for the building design and construction was provided by the Government of Canada's Rapid Housing Initiative and the Reaching Home Initiative from the Federal Homelessness Strategy. Ongoing operating funding will be provided by the Province of Nova Scotia's Department of Community Services.

Once built, New Dawn will own the building and act as the landlord while the Ally Centre of Cape Breton will operate and support residents living in the units. The RHI development will house individuals who are in the most precarious housing situations in our community to provide them a safe, secure and beautiful home.

About New Dawn & Ally Centre

New Dawn

Since 1976, New Dawn has operated in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality as a not-for-profit social enterprise. New Dawn is governed by a volunteer board of directors and employs more than 100 people across its eight divisions. The organization's mission is a self-reliant people in a vibrant community, and the mission is to engage the community to create a culture of self-reliance.

In the last number of years, New Dawn has executed various renovations and developments in our residential and commercial portfolios. These activities include:

- **New Dawn Rental Properties:** More than forty years ago, New Dawn's work in the community first began with the acquisition, building, and provision of housing and commercial rentals. Today New Dawn owns and operates 6 commercial buildings with 17 commercial tenants, 150 apartment units housing more than 250 people, and 28 Supported Housing for Individuals with Mental Illness (SHIMI). The SHIMI

program was the supportive housing of its kind in Cape Breton (when it was launched in 2004) for individuals living with or recovering from mental illness and/or addictions. It is a partnership with NS Mental Health and Addictions wherein MHA provides the wrap-around and support services that tenants require with their activities of daily living and New Dawn is the owner/landlord and property manager of the buildings.

- **Building Ownership and Management:** New Dawn Rental Properties is responsible for the acquisition, management, and maintenance of New Dawn's many physical assets. They look after maintenance requirements for all of New Dawn/s residential and commercial properties. Over the last thirty years they have acquired considerable knowledge of caring for lands and buildings and the importance of scheduled, routine maintenance to ensure building healthy and longevity.
- **Major Capital Builds:** For the last 40 years, New Dawn has undertaken and has overseen the construction and renovation of multiple residential and commercial buildings and facilities. New Dawn built or renovated much of the housing that makes up its housing portfolio today. New Dawn has built, and subsequently renovated its 20,000 square foot Guest Home, and its 36,000 square foot arts centre. The latter was a 130-year-old convent. Given the age of the building, while well-maintained, all of the interior infrastructure and finishes had to be removed and replaced. The first six months of the design and construction period were dedicated to asbestos removal. We employed a construction management approach to the work rather than general contracting because remediation, condition investigations and analysis, and design and construction had to happen simultaneously as layers of the old structure were removed. The design, remediation, and construction represented a \$17.5 million project with \$5.5 million provided by Canada Cultural Spaces, \$3.2 million provided by Nova Scotia Communities, Culture, and Heritage, \$1.4 million provided by Invest Nova Scotia, \$1.5 million provided by private donations, and \$5.5 million provided by New Dawn.

Ally Centre

Established in 1991, the Ally Centre of Cape Breton is a non-profit, community-based, harm-reduction based organization that provides prevention, support and education services to people living with mental health and/or addictions. Using a harm reduction philosophy and a community development approach, they encourage citizens to engage in healthy practices, creating healthy communities across Cape Breton.

Their services are available to every Cape Bretoner and are especially focused on the most vulnerable people, including those with substance use disorder, street-involved people, injection drug users, sex workers and People Living with Blood Borne Pathogens. The Ally Centre offers a primary health care clinic, take home naloxone/overdose prevention program, as well as the Sharp Advice Needle Exchange.

The Ally Centre serves a vulnerable population in the community: those dealing with addictions and, in some case, mental and physical illness and/or disability. These are often

individuals who are in and out of the homeless shelter, erecting tents as an alternative to the homeless shelter, or "sleeping rough" in whatever buildings they can get access to. Often, these are individuals who cannot access the homeless shelter or cannot stay for more than one or two nights at the homeless shelter because of their substance use, mental illness, past traumas, and/or incompatibility with collective living arrangements.

Project Timelines

The RHI project kicked off in the Spring of 2023 and a significant amount of the design work has been completed to date. We started site development in September 2023, and we are aiming to have residents living in the building by late 2024.

As the name suggests, the Rapid Housing Initiative is a fund intended to house individuals quickly. Given the dangerous reality of the residents' current housing situations, the team is doing everything we can to move forward the project with the expediency it requires and welcome these individuals to their new home.

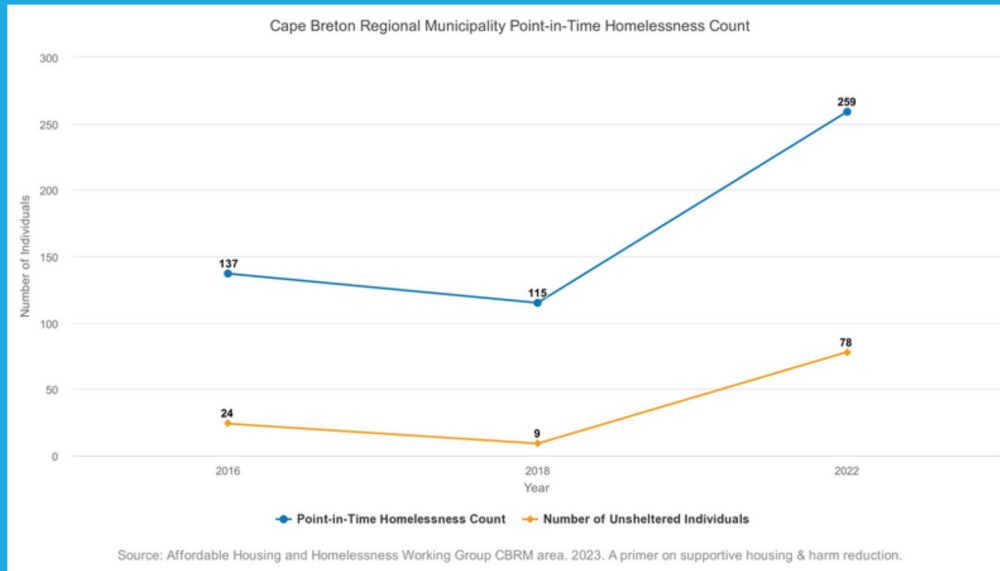
See blow for an overall project timeline:



Topic 1: What is affordable, supportive housing and why do we need it here?

- Based on CMHC data, the CBRM vacancy rate in the fall of 2022 was 1.5%. This is drastically lower than in the fall of 2021 at 6.1% (CMHC, 2022).
- Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid's rental housing and tenant study found that most affordable housing is provided to families and seniors in the CBRM, **with one-person, low-income, non-senior households in the community falling through the cracks**. They experience **core housing need and homelessness more than any other type of renter in the CBRM**, and there are **fewer rental options available to them to fill this growing need** (Leviten-Reid, C., & Parker, B., 2018).

- Less than 4% of households in Nova Scotia live in non-market housing. Due to a lack of government investment over many decades, there is very little non-market housing stock currently available to meet the dramatic increase in affordable housing need (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2021).
- % Change in CBRM Point-in-Time Homelessness Count: 2022 compared to 2018 Growth of 125% .
- % Change in CBRM Unsheltered Count 2022 compared to 2018: Growth of 767%.



What is Affordable Supportive Housing?

Housing that costs less than 30% of before-tax household income and includes specialized support services to ensure the ongoing health and wellbeing of the resident.

This could be help with the activities of daily living (laundry, transportation, meal planning, budgeting), assistance from a social worker in mapping out goals, and/or referrals to mental health programs and clinicians, among other things.

Is this type of housing new to CBRM?

No. For the last twenty years, New Dawn has operated almost 30 Supportive Housing for Individuals with Mental Illness (SHIMI) units throughout the CBRM. These are affordable and supportive housing units for individuals living with or recovering from addictions and mental illness.

We have operated these in partnership, and with great care, with Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions (who provide support services to SHIMI tenants), and with little to no disruption to residents in the neighbourhoods where these developments have been built. New Dawn is one of many providers of supportive housing in the CBRM.

Affordable Supportive Housing Examples



Common Myths & Facts about Affordable Housing

Change can be difficult. Even if the change will ultimately be positive, the unknown can produce negative feelings. We know that, historically, creating mixed communities has improved the health and wellbeing of its members; raised the diversity of residential neighbourhoods; encouraged cross-cultural relationships; and promoted social cohesion. Sometimes, initial community reactions to new affordable housing developments are based on fears related to that change, which can result in myths and misinformation being spread. We hope that the facts and research presented below dispel and disprove these myths, making the community informed and more at ease.

The body of evidence found below was developed over the last many decades across North America and points overwhelming to there being no measurable negative impact from affordable housing built in new communities. Instead, these facts show us the abundant benefits to new residents and to our communities from these types of developments.

We must remember when discussing these topics that we are speaking about someone's home. While asking questions and seeking information is acceptable, doing so in a way that is discriminatory or unwelcoming is not. Please approach your conversations with the sensitivity and care you expect others to speak about your own home.

- **Myth 1: Our Property Values Will Go Down**
- **Myth 2: Increasing Density will cause More Traffic or Lack of Parking**
- **Myth 3: Increasing Density will Strain Public Services & Infrastructure**
- **Myth 4: Affordable Housing Spoils the Character of the Neighbourhood**
- **Myth 5: Affordable Housing will mean More Crime**
- **Myth 6: Supportive Housing will Harm Local Business**

Scan the QR Code on the cover page for more information.

Topic 2: What is harm reduction; how will the Ally Centre support residents by using a harm reduction approach?

Harm Reduction

Harm Reduction is an evidence-based, client-centred approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with addiction and substance use, without necessarily requiring people who use substances from abstaining or stopping use. The harm reduction approach provides an option for users to engage with peers, medical and social services in a non-judgmental way that will 'meet them where they are'. This allows for a health oriented response to substance use, and it has been proven that those who engage in harm reduction services are more likely to engage in ongoing treatment as a result of accessing these services.

There will be 24-hour staffing supports on site 365 days a year at the RHI building. The Ally Centre will staff the building with a Housing Coordinator and Peer Support Workers. At a minimum, two qualified staff will be on-site at all times.

Services will be offered both on-site at the RHI building, with staffing and supports available 24/7, and at the Ally Centre's Prince Street location, for access to the Ally Centre's many existing programs.

The Ally Centre will offer the following supports on site:

- Harm Reduction Supplies
- Harm Reduction Education
- Naloxone Kits and Training
- Outreach Street Nurse
- Managed Alcohol Program
- Peer Support
- Referrals to other support services

Residents will also be encouraged to seek out additional supports available at the Ally Centre's location on Prince Street, including:

- STBBI Testing
- Primary Health Care, including physicians, nurse practitioners, and social workers
- Food Bank
- Clothing Bank
- Daily Meals and Refreshments
- Sex Worker Encouraging and Empowering Peers Support Group
- Foot Care
- Acupuncture
- Music Therapy
- Friendship and connection

The Ally Centre has more than 30 years of experience in harm reduction in the CBRM and brings a wealth of expertise in their role as the operations manager of the RHI development.

To learn about the Ally Centre of Cape Breton and the amazing work they have been doing in Cape Breton for the last thirty years, please visit www.allycentreofcapebreton.com or scan the QR code on the cover of this booklet.

Topic 3: The Rapid Housing Initiative Building

The RHI building is a 25-unit residential development. The building is being designed to complement the aesthetic of the North End community where it resides. While the designs are still being finalized, what we can share now is that it will be a two-story L-shaped building, with a courtyard greenspace in the interior of the L-shape for building tenants to enjoy. The building will have small, private units for single individuals or couples, with some accessible units as well. There will also be communal space for residents to come together and invite friends and family into their home. The Ally Centre will have an office for staff and a private area to offer health and wellness services on site. The Ally Centre will also make good use of the communal space in the building to bring residents together around many forms of activities and programming.



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We are fortunate to have a diverse and skilled group of professionals working hard on the design of the building. The general contractor and builder is Dora Construction, the same contractor who led the Eltuek Arts Centre renovation. The architect is Passive Design Solutions (PDS), a firm that focuses on net zero buildings. Dora and PDS recently worked together on the affordable housing developments: True North and Sunflower Court in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

We anticipate site preparation and construction will begin in the month of October 2023, and are aiming to have the building ready for occupancy in November 2024. With only 13 months for construction, it is an ambitious timeline. Our contractors and architects are working to make the building construction design as efficient as possible, such as modular construction techniques.

The building will have security cameras both outside the building and inside common areas, which will be monitored by Ally Centre staff 24/7. An Ally Centre staff will also always be stationed at the welcome area/reception desk in the front foyer of the building to monitor everyone who comes in and out of the building. Safety and security for residents is of utmost importance in the design and operations of the building, as well as maintaining residents' privacy in their new homes.

Topic 4: New Dawn as community developer and affordable housing provider

More than forty years ago, New Dawn's work in the community first began with the acquisition, building, and provision of housing and commercial rentals. Today, New Dawn owns and operates 6 commercial buildings with 17 commercial tenants, 150 apartment units housing more than 250 people, and 28 units of Supported Housing for Individuals with Mental Illness (SHIMI). Over the last forty-five years, New Dawn's buildings have provided housing and commercial space for thousands of families, individuals, and businesses.

Today, New Dawn is confident in, and proud of, the safety, aesthetic, and quality of our rental portfolio, as well as our ongoing management of these units, maintaining a near 100% occupancy. New Dawn has developed significant expertise in the operation of these units. The current housing environment in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) and beyond demands that New Dawn turn our attention to new development opportunities in a strategic, measured, and informed manner.

For the last twenty years, New Dawn, for one, has operated almost 30 Supportive Housing for Individuals with Mental Illness (SHIMI) units throughout the CBRM. These are affordable and

supportive housing units for individuals living with or recovering from addictions and mental illness. Six of these units have operated in Sydney's North End neighborhood for over ten years.

We have operated these in partnership, and with great care, with Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions (who provide support services to SHIMI tenants), and with little to no disruption to residents in the neighbourhoods where these developments have been built. Most people in the CBRM would not be able to identify any of these units as the tenants have been able to live well, safely, and with dignity and privacy for two decades. Although residents in SHIMI units have housing support staff visit and check-in with them on a regular basis, as their needs dictate, this housing is not staffed full time.

You can read more about New Dawn's SHIMI housing at this link:

<https://newdawn.ca/partnerships/shimi/>, including a study by Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid on the outcomes of the housing after its first decade.

New Dawn has never sold any of its supportive housing units (market units, yes, supportive housing units, no) and has made a 25-year commitment (which we intend to exceed) to both the federal and provincial government to own, maintain, and manage this new RHI development. Our commitment is both deep and indefinite.

New Dawn Properties staff will maintain the RHI development to the same excellent standards as they maintain all of New Dawn's existing residential and commercial properties.

As community developers and affordable housing landlords, New Dawn Enterprises emphasizes our commitment to education and transparency. In an effort to answer questions and provide updates on our current developments, including the RHI building development, we have created a Public Dashboard which will act as an ongoing information hub for the general public, North End residents, and future residents of the RHI Building. If you would like to learn more about the rapid housing development, please visit: newdawnproperties.ca/developments or scan the QR code on the cover of this booklet.

Topic 5: A Role for North End Neighbours

The residents who will live in the Rapid Housing building are contributing members of our community. They will bring a diverse range of knowledge and talent, which has often been hidden in poverty, to our neighbourhood.

New Dawn, as the closest neighbour to the RHI building, looks forward to welcoming them into our North End community to share these gifts. We strongly invite other neighbours who want



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to join us in this welcoming process to identify themselves so we can begin to gather ideas and people.

Prior to welcoming, there is also a role for neighbourhood champions to play in building relationships and opening lines of communication between the existing community and this new development. If you feel you have time and the interest in offering a supporting role to the project as a neighbourhood champion, we'd love to work with you.

If you are interested in identifying yourself as a neighbour excited to welcome new residents and/or a neighbour who would like to act as a neighbourhood champion throughout the project's development, please visit <https://forms.office.com/r/JbcejgBqpz> or scan the QR code on the cover page of this booklet. This form will ask you to provide basic details about you and your interest in supporting the RHI project. If you know of other neighbours who may be interested, please send them the link as well.

Someone from our team will be in touch shortly!



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