

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE**Housing Needs and Demand Report****Report Purpose**

To provide the Priorities Committee with a housing needs and demand report for Strathcona County.

Our Prioritized Strategic Goals

Goal 1 - Build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents

Goal 6 - Provide facilities and services that are available and accessible to residents

Goal 7 - Provide opportunities for public engagement and communication

ReportCommunity Needs

Affordable housing is defined as housing that requires less than 30% of a household's income. When individuals and families lack affordable housing, it has far reaching negative impacts on health and well-being, household stability and outcomes for children and youth.¹ Access to affordable housing is a social determinant of health and plays a key role in community safety, cohesion and vitality.²

Access to appropriate and affordable housing has been an ongoing challenge in Strathcona County. The prolonged economic downturn has resulted in elevated levels of need for diverse housing options and associated supports. Indicators of affordable housing needs in Strathcona County include the following:

- In the Fall 2019 report, the Canadian Rental Housing Index ranked Strathcona County as 'severely unaffordable'.³
- In 2019, financial need and housing were the top two reasons for accessing navigation supports.
- Organizations in the County supporting affordable housing have identified growing waitlists for affordable housing and increasing demand for seniors housing.
- The 2019 *Youth Needs and Assets Report* revealed that youth and young adults would like to see more services and support around affordable housing in the County.⁴

Housing Needs and Demand Assessment

In response to these identified needs, in September 2019, FCS commissioned the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) to conduct a Housing Needs and Demand Assessment for Strathcona County. A summary of the final report (Encl 1) shares key findings from the assessment and underscores that housing is unaffordable for many Strathcona County residents, and low-income households may face challenges finding and maintaining suitable housing.

¹ Thomas, M.A. (2017). ON THE BENEFITS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING An Assessment of Recent Literature for Municipalities 2017.

² Ibid.

³ http://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/?#affordability_csd

⁴ https://www.strathcona.ca/files/files/fcs_-_youth_needs_and_assets_assessment_final_report.pdf

Author: Kristen Flath, Family and Community Services

Director(s): Bree Claude, Family and Community Services

Associate Commissioner: Gord Johnston, Community Services Division

Lead Department: Family and Community Services

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The report concludes with the overarching recommendation **to initiate a community-led approach to affordable housing**, along with four specific recommendations:

1. Review best practice strategies to mitigate housing gaps
2. Prioritize the Land Use Bylaw amendments for the Urban Service Area
3. Conduct a homeless estimation to better understand housing needs
4. Continue to build local and regional partnerships to respond to housing and homeless needs

Housing Estimate – Fall 2020

In partnership with Heartland Housing Foundation and members of the Social Framework Leadership Table, FCS will participate in the Alberta Rural Development Network's 2020 Fall Estimations project and conduct Strathcona County's first housing estimate from November 1-30, 2020. Over a thirty-day period, participating agencies will invite residents to participate in a survey to better understand their housing experience. The data collected will create a baseline to track future trends and a community report will be shared back.

Emerging Impacts

The current COVID-19 crisis and ongoing economic downturn has elevated the severity of affordable housing needs and the importance of housing solutions in the community. Alberta currently has the highest mortgage deferral rates in the country at 21%, an indicator of the housing affordability challenges in the province.⁵ Further, 24%⁶ of all Albertans have been receiving Canadian Emergency Response Benefits, and the current unemployment rate is 11.8%, the second highest in the country.⁷

Federal Funding

As a response to the growing need for affordable housing resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government, in partnership with the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, has launched a Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI). The \$1 billion investment will address urgent housing needs across Canada and funding will be available to municipalities, provinces, territories, Indigenous governing bodies and organizations, and non-profit organizations. Distribution details have yet to be determined.

Council and Committee History

May 23, 2017	Council approved the Social Framework, which included the outcome of affordability.
January 26, 2016	The Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing final report was presented at Priorities Committee.

Other Impacts

Policy: N/A

Legislative/Legal: N/A

Interdepartmental: Planning and Development Services, Communications

⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/cmhc-mortgage-deferral-1.5700021>

⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/claims-report.html>

⁷ <https://economicdashboard.alberta.ca/Unemployment#:~:text=PUBLISHED%20%2D%20Aug%207%2C%202020,the%20same%20period%20in%202019.>

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Master Plan/Framework: Social Framework**Communication Plan**

Various communication tools and channels will be used to communicate the housing estimate to the public and stakeholders as appropriate. The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment will be available on the County website.

Enclosures

- 1 ARDN Housing Needs and Demand Assessment Summary Report
- 2 Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing - Recommendations Update
- 3 Housing Needs and Demand Report Presentation