

Strathcona County Affordable Housing –County Land Report



March 2023

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0. Introduction

0.1 Background

In August 2020, the Rural Development Network (RDN) completed a housing needs and demand assessment for Strathcona County. The assessment underscored that housing is unaffordable for many residents in Strathcona County and low-income households may face challenges finding and maintaining suitable housing.

The assessment concluded with the overarching recommendation to initiate a community led approach to affordable housing, with four specific recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Review best practice strategies to mitigate housing gaps

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Prioritize the Land Use Bylaw amendments for the Urban Service Area

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Conduct a homeless estimate to better understand housing needs

RECOMMENDATION 4 – Continue to build local and regional partnerships to respond to housing and homeless needs

In May 2021, Planning and Development Services presented the PDS Affordable Housing Options report to Council, outlining various actions and strategies that would advance recommendations 1 and 2 of the Alberta Rural Development Network's Housing Needs and Demands Report.

To address the Planning and Development Services actions and strategies of the Affordable Housing Options May 2021 Council report, the PDS Affordable Housing Implementation Plan was completed in February 2022, and recommended four initiatives, including:

INITIATIVE 1: Affordable Housing Units - Private Development

INITIATIVE 2: Affordable Housing Units - County Lands

INITIATIVE 3: Community Redevelopment Strategy

INITIATIVE 4: Community Redevelopment Strategy Implementation

Each initiative has associated projects. Initiative 2: Affordable Housing – County Lands includes the following project:

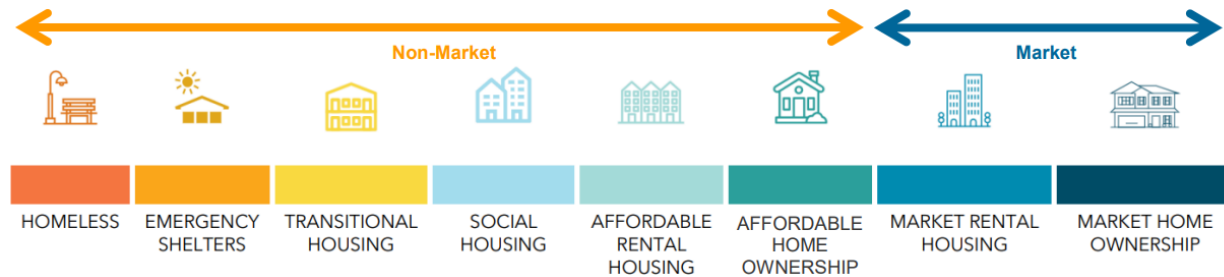
- Project 1: Affordable Housing on County Lands

The intent of this report is to explore the benefits of, and the County's legal ability to, implement tools, policies or frameworks that can be used to guide County decisions regarding the creation of affordable housing units on or with County lands.

0.2 Project Overview

Land has been identified as a key constraint to the ability to build new non-market housing units within Strathcona County. The provision of land through donation, exchange, lease or other means can increase the amount of affordable housing offered within the community.

The proposed actions within this report focus specifically on non-market housing offered by non-profit affordable housing providers.



Sections one to four outline both the potential actions that the County can undertake to increase the amount of County lands made available for affordable residential housing types or improve the leasing structure of new and existing County leases for affordable housing providers.

A summary table of proposed actions has been included under Section 0.3.

0.3 Summary of Proposed Actions

Table 1: Summary of Proposed Actions	
Item	Description
1. Strategic Land Acquisition	Strategic Land Acquisition Incentive Program for the purpose of non-market housing
2. Extended Lease Periods	Update the Land Management Policy to allow for extended lease periods for non-market housing developments
3. Residential Units in County Facilities	Consider the feasibility of including residential units in new County Facilities
4. New Mixed-use Community Service District	Create a new Community Service District that allows for housing as a permitted use in addition to a variety of public facilities

1. Strategic Land Acquisition

1.1 Action Summary

Through the Affordable Housing Incentive Program Options Report it was noted that land costs and availability are a major contributing factor for housing supply and pricing. This makes surplus and vacant public lands a valuable public resource and presents a major opportunity to produce new affordable housing. By making publicly owned lands available for the development of affordable housing, municipalities can help to ensure an adequate supply of lower-cost homes in areas with high land costs or limited development opportunities. The property may be offered at fair market value, at a discount, or even at no cost.

While the County has provided lands for the purpose of affordable housing in the past, it has always been through a reactive process following a specific request. By actively seeking and acquiring lands for the future purpose of future affordable housing, with budget set aside for such purposes, the County can leverage tools provided at initial subdivision and development stages in new development areas to ensure the best possible locations are secured. A proactive approach to land provision can also result in costs savings, greater transparency through the use of expressions of interest or even inspire innovation through competitive processes.

1.2 Implementation

Should Council wish to move forward with the Strategic Land Acquisition Incentive Program Administration would return to Council with a holistic Strategic Land Reserves Funding Strategy, as outlined in the Municipal Land Framework. This strategy would apply to all County strategic land acquisitions, including those intended for affordable housing, and will require dedicated funding to implement.

Additional discussions will be needed with Council to confirm preferences between disposals or long term leases and define goals in terms of dollar contributions. It should be noted that should a municipal reserve designation require removal to accommodate a lease, Council approvals would still be required as per the Municipal Government Act. Further the Municipal Government Act also requires that transfers of land for less than market value would require Council approval.

2. Extended Lease Periods

2.2 Action Summary

Through the stakeholder engagement for the Affordable Housing Incentive Program Options Report it was noted that short term land lease agreements can have negative effects for affordable housing providers who may be located on leased County lands. Though extended leases are considered under the policy they require Council consideration on a case by case basis. It would provide greater assurance to providers and streamline the land lease process if the policy was amended to consider a longer lease term for non-profit, non-market housing providers. It should be noted that should a municipal reserve designation require removal to accommodate a lease, Council approvals would still be required as per the Municipal Government Act.

2.1 Implementation

Should Council wish to move forward with the Land Management Policy update Administration will prepare, for Council's consideration, necessary amendments to the Land Management Policy which include extended lease periods for non-profit, non-market housing providers.

3. Residential Units in new County Facilities

3.1 Action Summary

Innovation regarding the integration of residential units into municipal facilities has expanded over recent decades. Exploring the addition of residential units to new County facilities (where such uses can be supported by County plans, policies, and infrastructure) maximizes utilization of County properties and often allow for synergies or cost savings.

If directed by Council, the addition of new non-market units or market housing units could be considered in appropriate locations where a new County facility is required. Appropriate locations may include growth hamlets, Centre in the Park or future urban centres in new development areas. As the County would not own or operate the residential units, the feasibility of partnerships or sale to existing operators would need to be determined through expressions of interests. Expressions of interest allow for a fair and transparent process, while maintaining substantive control over the specific requirements of the end product. It should be noted that for County facilities where expressions of interest are required, project timelines may need to be expanded to accommodate this process.

Some examples of potential opportunities have been provided in figures 1 through 9 below.

*Figure 1 Fire
Hall and
Affordable
Housing
Complex
Vancouver, BC*



*Figure 2 Youth
Community Centre
and Affordable
Housing York
Region, ON*



Figure32 Fire Hall, Squash tournament facility and Affordable Housing Complex Washington, DC

Figure 4 Greater Toronto Area two elementary schools, childcare, community centre, market housing affordable housing, ON



Figure 5 Fire Hall and Affordable Housing Complex Minneapolis, Minnesota

Figure 6 Chilliwack
Community Services and
Affordable Housing, BC



Figure 7 Fire Hall and Affordable Housing
Complex City of Calgary (Concept), AB

Figure 8 ArtsHub 118 Gallery and Studio,
Affordable Housing Co-op City of Edmonton, AB

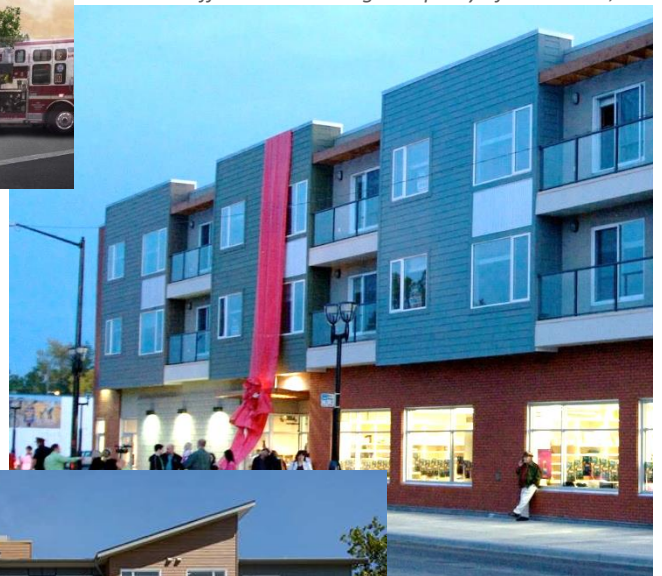


Figure 9 City of Mission Seniors Activity
Centre and Affordable Seniors Housing, BC



3.2 Implementation

Should Council wish to move forward with the consideration of new residential housing units in new County facilities it is recommended that Council direct administration prepare an amendment to the Municipal Land Framework, to provide guidelines for the consideration of residential housing units in new County Facilities.

4. New Mixed-use Community Service District

4.1 Action Summary

The creation of a mixed-use community service district has previously been identified as an implementation item of the Municipal Development Plan and other new statutory plans. The County's existing general public service districts do not include a wide variety of housing uses as potential options for development. Land is expected to be a finite resource as the County implements the density targets and intensification targets from the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. Based on these targets, the 2017 Municipal Development Plan, as well as statutory plans in newly developing areas, both encourage mixed-use public sites to ensure that County land is used to its full potential. The proactive creation of a Community Service District which allows for a variety of public services and housing forms would support County and Regional policy and goals.

Though likely the most relevant application of such a district would be for newly created parcels in developing areas, once a new district has been created, administration can also review all existing County properties to assess whether they met the necessary criteria to be rezoned for potential mixed-use. The creation of this new district would also support any action taken under Section 3. regarding mixed-use County facilities and reduce red tape for the County or non-market housing providers should lands ultimately be used for residential purposes.

4.2 Implementation

Should Council wish to move forward with the creation of a new Community Service District that allows for housing as a permitted use in addition to a variety of public facilities and review it's application on existing County parcels, it is recommended that Council direct administration to prepare, for public hearing and Council's consideration, a bylaw for the creation of a new Community Service District that allows for housing as a permitted use in addition to a variety of public facilities and includes associated rezonings, if applicable.