

Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services
Administration Board

*Manitoulin-Sudbury Housing Needs, Supply, and
Affordability Study*

*Phase One Report: Identification of Housing Needs
and Issues*

June, 2009

Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, a number of trends have developed in housing conditions within the Districts of Manitoulin and Sudbury that have given rise to growing concern. There has been a significant change in housing affordability (both for ownership and rental housing), housing availability and use of emergency shelter programmes such as the Rent Bank and a DSSAB-administered Direct Shelter Subsidy plan. The lack of available and affordable rental accommodation within the Districts has reached new levels.

These concerns have led to the need to prepare a study to identify the extent and nature of housing needs across the Manitoulin and Sudbury Districts and to develop a sustainable Affordable Housing Program Plan that sets out approaches to meeting identified needs. As a result, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) is undertaking this Housing Needs, Supply and Affordability Study.

The study is being undertaken in two phases. Phase One involves the identification of housing needs and issues across the DSSAB area. Phase Two involves the development of recommended strategies and initiatives to address identified concerns.

This report presents the results of Phase One. It incorporates a range of information gathered through key sources such as Statistics Canada, local planning and building departments, CMHC and community organizations and agencies in the Manitoulin-Sudbury Districts. It also incorporates input and feedback obtained through two rounds of consultation sessions conducted in the four planning regions of the DSSAB (LaCloche, Manitoulin Island, Sudbury East and Sudbury North).

2.0 Summary of Key Housing Issues

This Phase One Report presents a wide range of data on demographic change, economic conditions and key segments of the housing market (including aboriginal households, senior citizens and persons with disabilities) and reviews housing market trends and conditions in terms of housing supply, age, physical condition, home ownership and rental housing. It also looks at the supply of social housing, housing affordability and the special issues related to rural and remote communities. It concludes with a summary of key housing issues identified over the course of Phase One.

These issues are outlined below and will form the basis of the recommended housing strategies and initiatives to be developed in Phase Two.

Key housing issues common to most areas across the Districts are:

- Homeownership has become the only option for many households as it is often more feasible than renting, due to higher rents. However, many low-income households still struggle to make down payments and may experience difficulty meeting growing utility and maintenance costs in ownership units. Therefore, there is a need to ensure a suitable supply of affordable rental housing across the area.
- As the population of seniors increases, a greater range of housing options for an aging population will be required, especially those providing supports to seniors to enable them to remain in their own homes.
- There are few family units in the social housing portfolio, all of which are in LaCloche or Sudbury North. However lone parent families, along with younger single households, have a higher incidence of low income and pay higher percentages of income on housing than other household types.
- A continuum of housing is required as part of the stock for people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and seniors. A limited choice of housing options cannot meet residents' needs as they require different services and supports.
- Improvements to accessibility are generally required in much of the public housing stock. None of the DSSAB buildings have elevators, which is a big problem for many seniors and disabled individuals.
- Some places do not have serviced lots, such as Espanola, which limits options for expanding the supply of social and affordable housing.
- Many homes in the area are in need of repair, especially among Aboriginal households.
- Many parts of the DSSAB do not have a shortage of social housing units. Rather, these areas require services attached to housing, in order to remain attractive for the groups for which they are built.
- Where facilities are located is a key issue. In many parts of the Districts, there are long distances with little public transit (if any).
- There is a need to rationalize the housing stock in some areas to ensure it better meets current and future housing needs.

Issues specific to the regions comprising the DSSAB identified during the consultation sessions are outlined below.

LaCloche Region

In LaCloche, the issues highlighted by participants in consultation sessions revolved around partnerships and working together, reusing existing structures and spaces for housing, and housing for people with disabilities and senior residents.

- The Town of Espanola, which as the largest municipality in the area, should be well-serviced and attractive for affordable housing, yet does not have a large supply of serviced lots. This limits options for expanding the supply of social and affordable housing.
- A “partnership” is required to provide supports for people with disabilities, including housing and support service agencies. This can then allow for a continuum of services as there otherwise is a limited choice of housing options for residents with special needs.
- There is a need to start working at renovating existing housing to suit seniors as they will start to look towards apartments rather than single detached homes, when those homes become burdensome to maintain. This is particularly the case when the seniors requiring affordable housing most are older, usually past 70 years of age.
- Rehabilitating existing homes has become crucial so that seniors are able to stay in their homes longer. New infrastructure and economic stimulus programs of Federal and Provincial governments are providing opportunities currently to expand the supply of affordable housing, including the renovation of existing stock.

Manitoulin Island Region

In Manitoulin Island, the issues highlighted by participants in consultation sessions revolved around the growing number of seniors and how they are to be accommodated, followed with some discussion on partnerships and gaps in housing for other priority groups.

- There are few options on the Island for seniors who need affordable rental housing with supports.
- An emphasis should be placed on continuing care communities. There may also be opportunities to work with the hospital when looking at connecting adjacent units for assisted living.
- Seniors prefer seniors-only housing as many feel they would rather stay in their homes than live in mixed housing. However, the DSSAB inherited mixed buildings from the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC), after OHC had mixed former seniors-only buildings. There was concern that these buildings may not

stay full if younger singles are taken out of buildings that have rents geared to income.

- There is great difficulty in housing wheelchair-bound tenants as there are no handicapped suites or elevators in the DSSAB's units.
- In many rural areas, a personal vehicle is required due to a lack of transportation options; though this becomes expensive when factoring in maintenance and lower incomes. Affordable housing should then be located in bigger communities where there are facilities and services.

Sudbury East Region

In Sudbury East, the issues highlighted by participants in consultation sessions revolved around the drawbacks and effectiveness of programs, municipal growth and infrastructure, difficulties with home maintenance, and the gap between housing supply and demand for many priorities groups.

- There are many catch-22s in programs that may adversely affect the lives of those most in need. For example, some people who are currently on Ontario Works may qualify for the Ontario Disability Support Program, which would provide for greater living allowances. However, when they cannot find a doctor to sign off on this, they are unable to apply and remain on OW despite the missed opportunities of ODSP.
- Many seniors living in their homes cannot maintain them or pay utilities. More options are required, including more supports. This is particularly so when some seniors face a big burden between home maintenance and other basic needs, such as food.
- People often retire to rural/remote areas to save on housing but find no services and then leave the area. Growth could be encouraged in order to service residents' needs, by upgrading infrastructure for residents already in the area and by building centered points where services are available to attract newer residents.
- DSSAB buildings require elevators and other accessibility upgrades in order to make their buildings more open to people with disabilities and seniors.
- Like in Manitoulin Island, seniors in Sudbury East prefer living in seniors-only accommodation where possible.
- Sudbury East has no family social housing units. This shortfall needs to be addressed.

Sudbury North Region

In Sudbury North, the issues highlighted by participants in consultation sessions revolved around the need to look at providing supports to existing residents, particularly with partnerships and appropriate housing for all household types.

- There is no shortage of social housing units; indeed the DSSAB is experiencing some difficulty maintaining full occupancy in its existing units.
- Unorganized communities such as Gogama and Foleyet are often overlooked in the provision of affordable housing and related programs and need a forum to make their voices and needs heard on a regular basis.
- It is necessary to cut through the “silo” structure of government departments and encourage collaboration, perhaps with a structure like a Housing Advisory Committee as a model.
- There is a need for more supportive housing. The Aging at Home Strategy from the Local Health Integration Network should be promoted, particularly with funding and actions to be taken, as a way to address this concern.
- Family units may need to be downsized in order to accommodate the trend toward smaller families without over-housing them.