

Using S P A C E Wisely

Communities Receive Surplus Federal Properties

With the announcement of the National Homelessness Initiative in 1999, the Government of Canada created an innovative program to transfer surplus federal properties—at no cost—to municipal, provincial and territorial governments and non-profit community organizations working to alleviate homelessness.

Since 2000, upwards of \$4 million worth of surplus properties have been transferred to communities province-wide to help them provide affordable housing.

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– Bridget Foster

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Spearheading the initiative in Newfoundland and Labrador, former federal government employee Joe Connors has helped Service Canada

provide 42 surplus properties to nonprofits across the island. From St. John's to Corner Brook, receiving organizations include: the Association for New Canadians, Cabot Habitat for Humanity, Cara House, the City of St. John's Non-Profit Housing Program, Iris Kirby House, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC), the Jan Peters Foundation, and Stella Burry Community Services.

Initially a call for proposals helps to determine the best way to use the surplus federal government property to address homelessness. Proposed projects have ranged from residential/non-residential emergency services to permanent afford-

able housing. Upon selection of the most suitable proposal, the Surplus Federal Real Properties Initiative (SFRPHI) then compensates federal departments and agencies at the market value for the surplus property and transfers it to the new owner at a nominal cost.

Several Government of Canada organizations—Public Works and Government Services Canada, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Service Canada, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation—work together at the national and regional levels to implement the program.

Along with contributions of real property, additional funding for construction and renovation costs is also available to eligible projects through other federal and provincial initiatives, including the NLHC and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

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A Closer Look at How Surplus Properties Tackle Housing Deficits

Stella Burry Community Services

Affordable housing is a major focus of Stella Burry Community Services (SBCS).

Since 2002 SBCS acquired seven houses in St. John's through SFRPHI, providing a total of nine housing units ranging in size from two to four bedrooms. Together, these houses are now affordable homes for 29 low-income people.

Additional funds were accessed from the

NLHC to renovate the properties.

Stella Burry's Executive Director Jocelyn Greene says the SFRPHI properties also provided equity, allowing the non-profit agency to provide even more affordable housing in the downtown area.

“We were able to use them to acquire other run-down properties and renovate them, so that's been a hugely successful kind of domino effect.”

This strategy has helped SBCS create a further 20 units of affordable housing for 23 people through the acquisition and renovation of four private properties, using equity from its SFRPHI properties.

The Association for New Canadians NL

The Association for New Canadians (ANC) acquired three residential properties through SFRPHI.

Two properties near Memorial University were used to create affordable housing for new Canadian families with special or specific housing needs.

The Joseph S. Connors property in Amherst Heights is used as a transitional or temporary housing unit.

ANC Executive Director Bridget Foster says these residential properties provide a great foothold for newcomers to the province.

“A house gives you a greater sense of permanency. These properties provide families with a terrific start. You have your own front door, back door, and garden.”

Foster says she's also pleased with the sense of community these locations afford.

“The transition to all three locations has been seamless,” says Foster. “They are all very comfortable situations.” ■

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