

GROWTH COMMITTEE REPORT

M&C No.	N/A
Report Date	September 23, 2022
Meeting Date	September 27, 2022
Service Area	Growth and Community Services

Chair Killen and Members of Growth Committee

SUBJECT: Affordable Housing Action Plan

OPEN OR CLOSED SESSION

This matter is to be discussed in open session of Growth Committee.

AUTHORIZATION

Primary Author	Commissioner/Dept. Head	City Manager
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RECOMMENDATION

That the Growth Committee:

1. Receive and file the attached report, and,
2. Recommend Common Council adopt the attached Affordable Housing Action Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a synopsis of the development of the Affordable Housing Action Plan and highlights feedback received throughout August on the draft Plan, which was presented at Growth Committee and released to the public on July 26, 2022. At their September 14th meeting, the Action Team reviewed all feedback and recommended approval of the Plan.

PREVIOUS RESOLUTION

On July 26, 2022, the Growth Committee received a copy of the draft Plan and directed that the Plan be finalized and return to Committee before the end of October 2022, following a final period of public engagement.

REPORT

Housing affordability continues to remain a central issue in Saint John and elsewhere in the country. While adequate and affordable housing have long been issues for those in greatest need in our community, it has not been until

recently that the increasing cost of rent and home ownership has led to a broader crisis within the housing system. To understand the local system, in 2021, the City of Saint John struck an Action Team consisting of the local non-profit sector, Provincial Government, City of Saint John planning staff, and CMHC. The City proceeded to procure SHS Consulting / Re:Fact Consulting, a leading firm with over 30 years' experience in the sector, in order to assess housing needs as well as develop an Action Plan to respond to those needs.

As an initiative principled in community solutions, the planning process has been guided by the input of the Action Team at every step, in addition to a comprehensive stakeholder and public engagement program (Attachment 1, page 3). This engagement program occurred prior to release of the public draft in July and included a wide range of activities using multiple means and methods, including 6 focus group sessions, 3 town hall sessions, 18 key informant interviews, 2 staff workshops, and a Shape Your City campaign which yielded 19 discussion threads. A community survey was also undertaken, which included a third-party paper questionnaire facilitated towards harder to reach populations. Together the survey yielded 333 responses. By actively hearing from a wide range of community members, a fuller understanding of the more recent changes on the housing market was gained.

On July 26th, the draft Action Plan was publicly released at Growth Committee for feedback and to initiate a final engagement period. This final engagement period consisted of the following:

- Two virtual forums circulated to 80 stakeholders were held on August 17th and August 30th, with a total of 29 participants in attendance; and,
- Posting of Draft Plan to the Shape Your City platform and solicitation of comments, with a total of two comments.
- In addition, written submissions were received from Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI), the HOME Research Lab (UNBSJ), Envision Saint John, and resident Matthew Daluz (See Attachment 3).

On September 14, 2022, the Action Team met to review all feedback received during this period, in particular the detailed feedback received by key stakeholders BCAPI and UNBSJ. The Action Team voted to endorse the draft plan, subject to several minor tweaks in response to the feedback, including:

- Addition of stakeholder consultation activities for the draft Plan (Section 1.4)
- Clarifications of wording in regards to housing affordability and identified gaps (Sections 2.3 and 2.4)
- Refinements to clarify language (Section 4.3) – namely Actions 1, 5, 7, 10, 32
- Addition to Action 6 regarding exploring potential governance enhancements in 2023, and

- Minor adjustments to entities identified for lead & support roles (Implementation Plan – Appendix 3)

The Action Plan attached to this report outlines a vision for Saint John to be a vibrant, inclusive, and thriving community with a diverse range of safe and affordable housing. The vision is guided by key principles, which include taking a rights-based approach to housing, recognizing housing as a fundamental cornerstone of a healthy community, and promoting public investment for public benefit. These principles build on the policies set out in the City's Municipal Plan (2012), but most of all recognize the aspirations articulated by the community in the development of the Action Plan.

The housing system is complex, with various actors involved at different stages. Staged over 5 years, the Plan outlines the role for the City and community partners to achieve the vision and principles through 39 actions. The actions are organized into 5 objectives, which draw on areas ranging from improving coordination, investment in non-market solutions, preserving existing stock, expanding supply, examining existing regulations, and leveraging partnerships and resources.

To coordinate the implementation of these actions, establishing a Housing Facilitator function as soon as possible will be of utmost importance. The facilitator is to work closely with a newly established Housing Advisory Committee. Therefore 2022-2023 will require considerable setup work to get the Plan off the ground. Immediate actions led by the City would include launching an \$800,000 Affordable Housing Fund, exploring governance enhancements, examining surplus/underutilized land policies, and zoning by-law review, in addition to neighbourhood planning considerations. Below, staff have summarized three key City actions from each of the first three years in the form of draft work plan. The full list of actions, by theme, has been provided in an Implementation Table (Attachment 1, Appendix 3).

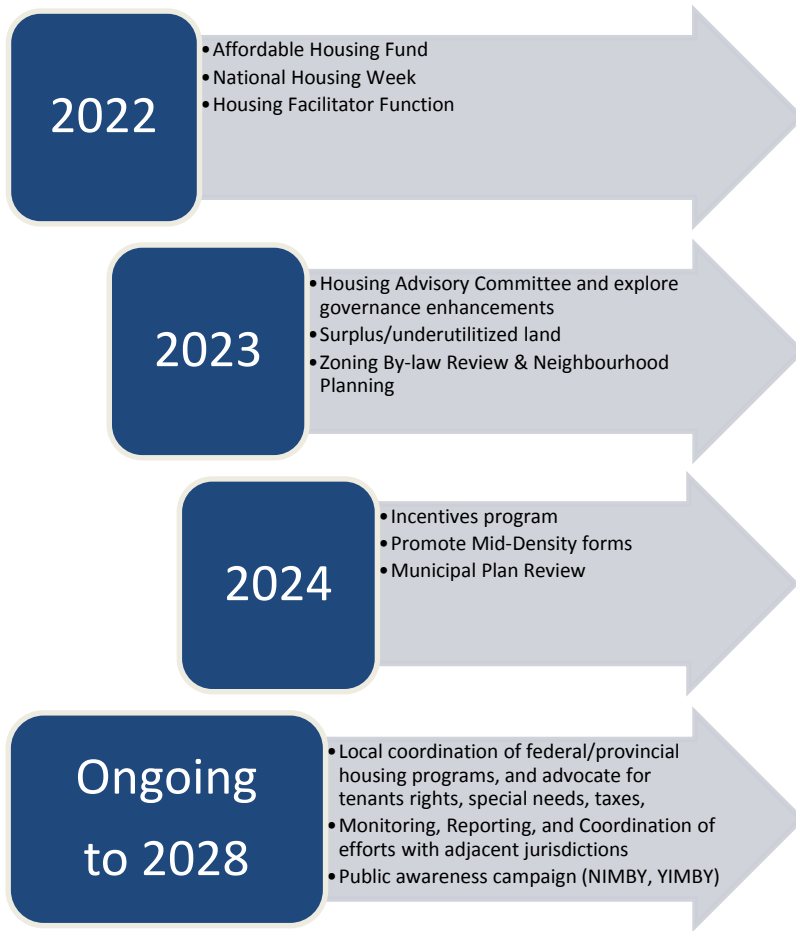


Figure 1 Draft Work Plan 2022 - 2024

The Plan will be to report annually on the progress of the 39 actions. Once feasible, staff will implement the monitoring framework to measure the targets set out in the Plan. Targets have been developed to comprehensively respond to gaps noted in the Needs Assessment and include dwelling types, tenure, and affordability targets. In terms of affordable targets, based on historical trends, the goal would be to see the addition of 265 affordable units (30% of new construction) over a 5-year period.

There is a documented need to establish a long-term vision for improved affordable housing outcomes in Saint John. In line with the Municipal Plan, the Action Plan presents a first and major step in this direction. Staff are supportive of the direction set out in the finalized Action Plan and thankful to the Action Team, stakeholders, and broader public for their time and energy into offering feedback throughout the process.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Common Council has established five priorities for their 2021-2026 term. Affordable Housing aligns with the following Council Priorities.

Grow:

- Population Growth
 - Grow our population at a rate of 2% annually by the end of Council's term.

Belong:

- Liveable Neighbourhoods
 - Facilitate a mix of affordable housing in all of our neighbourhoods.

Municipal Plan

Common Council's Municipal Plan provides a basis for decision making from 2011-2036. The draft Affordable Housing Action Plan is well aligned with and seeks to fulfill the City's Municipal Plan's policy on Affordable Housing:

HS-12 Council shall pursue the opportunity to partner with other levels of government and interested agencies to develop a housing strategy for the City to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing is available in appropriate locations and integrated with existing housing.

HS-14 Council shall encourage housing providers to build affordable housing using available incentives, when possible, such as tax rebates, grants or subsidies.

HS-16 Council shall work with housing agencies to monitor affordable housing development to ensure there is an adequate supply, tenure and range of quality affordable housing and ensure it is properly maintained over time so that it always adds value to neighbourhoods.

SERVICE AND FINANCIAL OUTCOMES

A project budget of \$100,000 was earmarked for the development of the Action Plan, including \$95,000 for professional consulting services and \$5,000 for material resources. As a community-based project, this cost was covered by contributions from the Creating Affordable Neighbourhoods Fund (CANF) and a sponsorship from the Labour Market Development Agreements Program. \$300,000 in implementation funding has been set aside to be used to implement the goals of the Action Plan. In addition, Action #13 will establish a one-time Saint John Affordable Housing Fund of \$800,000, which may be replenished should contributions become available from provincial or federal levels of government.

INPUT FROM OTHER SERVICE AREAS AND STAKEHOLDERS

As noted in the draft Plan, there was considerable input from the Action Team and a wide array of stakeholders.

In addition, staff were engaged throughout the development of the Plan, including Growth and Community Services, Transit, Communications, the One Stop Development Shop, and the General Counsel Office.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Final Draft Affordable Housing Action Plan

Attachment 2 – Final Affordable Housing Action Plan Implementation Table
(Redlined Changes from Draft July Report to September Final Report)

Attachment 3 – SHS Consulting / Re:Fact Consulting Presentation to Growth Committee

Attachment 4 – Written Feedback received on the Draft Plan during August-September, 2022