

The Church of St John the Evangelist, Ottawa

Affordable Housing History

Presentation Prepared for Parish Consultation, October 18, 2003

In March 2002 Gay Richardson organized the first meeting of the Affordable Housing Committee. Any parishioners interested in the issue of affordable housing were asked to participate. Seventeen people, with 2 more having expressed interest, attended that first meeting. It was established that the committee would meet monthly and they have done so, with attendance and interested parties growing to include 25 parishioners.

The initial meetings were brainstorming sessions to determine where the interests of the committee members lay. We found that our interests were quite diverse; from refugee housing needs, to private sector partnering, to advocacy, to education.

Gay kept us informed on the work of the Multifaith Housing Initiative and we embarked on an education program to inform parishioners of the issues around affordable housing. In the fall last year, Bulletin Inserts were prepared and included with the Sunday Bulletin covering such issues as "Who needs Affordable Housing?", "Affordable Housing - Something Can be Done", "A Faith Community Response to the Housing Crisis", "Affordable Housing and Secondary Suites", "What are the Federal and Provincial Governments Doing?" and "Affordable Housing and Seniors".

This information campaign ended with a Forum on Affordable Housing on November 24, 2002, where parishioners were introduced to the concerns of the Committee around affordable housing and heard several speakers on possible solutions to the problems. In conjunction with the forum, a survey was handed out to solicit input as to where the specific concerns of St John's parishioners lay and as to the potential role for St. John's in addressing the affordable housing crisis in Ottawa.

The Affordable Housing Committee received 40 responses to the survey. A large majority of respondents (25 yes and 4 maybe, no "no" responses) felt that St John's should play an active role in advocating for change in affordable housing policies. Similarly a large majority of respondents (23 yes and 12 maybe) thought St John's should consider providing financial assistance to purchase and renovate existing housing and a slightly smaller number (17 yes and 16 maybe) would be willing to financially support such a purchase. People were divided on whether St John's should own a building itself or support an organization, such as the Ottawa Mennonite Church, who already owns housing. Only two respondents to the survey said that St John's should not be involved in such an endeavor. The preferred groups to target in providing this housing were seniors (14), families (10), refugees (9), and singles (3).

Armed with this direction from the survey, in January 2003, the Affordable Housing Committee heard a presentation from the Ottawa Mennonite Church outlining the work they are doing with their refugee housing.

After this presentation it was felt that St Johns wanted to take a more involved approach and

the Affordable Housing Committee began exploring the possibility of purchasing a townhouse unit to be offered as affordable housing. At the same time, following the lead of the Ottawa Mennonite Church, with the approval of Parish Council, we launched our Loblaws Gift Card program in support of affordable housing at St John's. To date we have approximately 60 participants and have raised over \$1,000.

In April, 2003, during the time that we were looking into purchasing units to be offered as affordable housing, the Committee was approached with a proposal from the Refugee Committee at St John's to purchase a townhouse for our refugee family arriving in May 2003. The Affordable Housing Committee agreed to this and with the approval of Parish Council, went to the congregation to ask for financial support for the down payment on a town house. Approximately \$11,000 from 50 individuals, was raised in pledges and gifts. After further discussions with the refugee family, it was decided that owning a home was not the best solution. This particular project was abandoned, but much of the work done and issues identified were carried forward into further investigation of the purchase of housing units to be offered as affordable housing in the future. This work is continuing.

During the summer, ARC received an exciting proposal from Teron Inc. with respect to the development of our parking lot. This project was proposed to include affordable housing units and offered St John's the option to purchase units if it so desires. Naturally, the Affordable Housing Committee is quite excited about this proposal as it fits directly with the mandate that was established with the survey back in November 2002 – namely, affordable housing units, available for purchase or rent to those who are in lower income brackets, which include those identified as target groups in the Affordable Housing Survey.

It is clear to all of the people on the Affordable Housing Committee that no action can be taken with respect to purchasing units in the Teron project without first obtaining approval from Parish Council and ultimately from Vestry. We also know that much work still needs to be done in developing a business case and plan, to move ahead with this project. We are committed to the issue of affordable housing and the current proposal on the table is to look into using the Teron project to make St John's mark in addressing the affordable housing crisis in Ottawa.