

## SECTION 3.0

### SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION

The housing consultations confirmed that there are common issues across Northeast BC *and* there are circumstances that are unique to each community. Sections 3.1 through 3.6 presents a framework for discussion, including the potential roles of key participants. Section 3.7 contains selected measures for each municipality, as raised during the consultations.

The framework for discussion is set out in six themes:

1. Enhancing Municipal Involvement;
2. Removing Barriers;
3. Building Local Capacity;
4. Attracting More Developers and Investors;
5. Engaging Employers; and
6. Taking a Regional Perspective.

#### 3.1 THEME – ENHANCING MUNICIPAL INVOLVEMENT

Historically, municipalities have been “arm’s length” in relation to housing. Their traditional roles have been through land use planning and servicing. Today, across BC, municipalities are becoming involved in diverse ways. In light of the unique issues of the Northeast, the following actions are suggested for municipalities to consider:

- Undertake an inventory of land availability within the municipality and calculate the development potential. Subsequently, approach owners to determine what the municipality might do to assist the owners to bring land onto the market;
- Where a municipality has being land banking, consider pre-servicing and selling, with a portion of the revenues going towards the purchase of additional lands or, possibly, to assist a non-profit housing society through a one-time financial contribution;
- Be open to participation in partnerships with non-profit societies in order to build more affordable rental or special needs housing. These partnerships will involve bringing something to the table – for example, land, staff assistance, a low-interest loan;
- Take a leadership role in contacting major employers to determine how these employers might assist in tackling local housing issues; and
- Continue to advocate about housing needs in such venues as the North Central Municipal Association, and making contacts with Provincial ministries, BC Housing and CMHC.

#### 3.2 THEME – REMOVING REGULATORY BARRIERS

This theme refers to making changes in regulations that may unintentionally impede the timely development and construction of new housing. The following actions are suggested for further consideration:



Housing Consultations:  
Challenges and  
Opportunities in  
Northeast BC

May 2006



- Municipalities could update their OCPs to include positive statements of municipal intent in relation to affordable, rental and special needs housing. Policy statements that allow for diversity of housing types, tenures and sizes are also suggested. Not only do these statements provide encouragement to possible developers, they also can be a helpful reminder when a municipality is facing NIMBYism in relation to a specific development;
- Municipalities could review and update the zoning bylaw to ensure more efficient land use through such measures as reducing minimum lot size, setbacks and parking requirements; permitting secondary suites, mixed-use developments, multi-family forms of housing and bare-land strata title subdivision, and resubdivision of existing lots; consider rezoning for multifamily sites;
- MRH/BC Housing to support municipalities in providing information to CMHC to explore current mortgage lending requirements in Northeast BC. Some municipalities have higher requirements than others for down payments to obtain mortgage insurance. This inequity may be as a result of out of date information about the rapid change in the region's housing market;
- MEMPR to approach the Ministry of Transportation / Solicitor General to request a review of the regulations on provincial highways that may impede the transportation of some forms of modular housing from Alberta to BC. Alberta highway regulations are said to be less restrictive than BC's regulations;
- Municipalities, along with representative Northeast builders, to approach the Homeowner Protection Office (HPO) to identify if there are any requirements for owner/builders that would have a uniquely negative impact on construction in Northeast BC; and
- Government to share the results of this report with the Integrated Land Management Bureau (ILMB), the provincial agency responsible for the sale/lease of Crown lands, to explore freeing up Crown lands adjacent to municipalities for housing development<sup>2</sup>. ILMB has a core interest in the sustainable economic development of the province's natural resources.

### 3.3 THEME – BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

Without exception, every municipality in Northeast BC identified the lack of developers, investors, design professionals, builders and tradespeople as an impediment to meeting housing needs and demand.

May 2006

With respect to the lack of trades, this is a concern throughout BC and the provincial government is taking a comprehensive approach to improve access to trades and skills training and expand apprenticeships programs.

The following actions are suggested for consideration to assist in building local capacity within the development industry and planning profession.

- Holding a regional forum to convey practical, current information to developers and builders about housing. Provincially sponsored and, potentially, organized

2

At present, local governments are able to apply for a *free* Crown grant for the purpose of *affordable* (non market) housing.

by MRH, BC Housing and the Home Owner Protection Office with input from the Urban Development Institute, Canadian Housing Builders Association, and CMHC.

- MEMPR and local Economic Development Officers to approach local banking institutions to convey the opportunities in Northeast BC.
- MRH to host a regional session for municipal staff with a responsibility for planning, subdivision approving officers, and other municipal staff about how land use measures can be effectively used to facilitate housing development and what roles municipal/regional district staff can play in partnerships with others to build new housing.
- Regional Districts (Peace River, Northern Rockies) to consider hiring a social planner who would work with individual municipalities to facilitate responses to their housing needs.

### 3.4 THEME – ATTRACTING MORE DEVELOPERS AND INVESTORS

In light of growing demand, it appears necessary to attract additional development capital/expertise – beyond what is locally available – in order to build at the scale that will be required in the coming years. The following suggestions are offered for consideration:

- Economic Development Officers to approach the Vancouver UDI and the Edmonton UDI offices to provide ongoing information on the housing needs and opportunities in Northeast BC. Provide similar information to the Vancouver and Edmonton branches of Canadian Home Builders Association (CHBA);
- Economic Development Officers to coordinate the distribution of materials and host a booth at job recruitment fairs in BC and Alberta, providing information on the housing needs and opportunities in Northeast BC;
- Economic Development Officers to visit selected financial lenders in Alberta and BC, including BC Housing and CMHC, that deal primarily with multi-family development and large scale subdivisions. The object of these visits is to convey opportunities in the growing Northeast (cross-reference 3.2)
- Municipalities to consider reducing or deferring fees and charges associated with development for a specific period of time and for a specific size of development (e.g., 30+ units, 10-unit subdivision). These fee structures vary by municipality but may include items such as application processing fees, development cost charges, building permit fees, service connection fees, etc.

### 3.5 THEME – ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

There are multi-national and other key employers in Northeast BC that have experience and expertise that they may be able to share with local interests in connection with housing.

- MEMPR (or other provincial government entity), together with municipal officials, visit a number of key employers to discuss possible involvement of these employers in relation to housing. The Chambers of Commerce will be a good source to assist in the identification of these employers.



Housing Consultations:  
Challenges and  
Opportunities in  
Northeast BC

May 2006

- Partnerships – The nature of partnerships would vary by community but could take the form of lending project management expertise, guaranteeing rentals if new rental housing is built, providing equipment and machinery for infrastructure servicing, etc.
- Directly provided housing – Building and renting apartments and homes to employees. Could take the form of “transitional” rental housing until employee finds permanent accommodation.
- Financial assistance – Assistance in down payment or a rate reduced second mortgage to employees.

### 3.6 THEME – TAKING A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The municipalities of the Northeast share many interests and challenges. They are accustomed to taking a regional perspective. In relation to housing, the following actions are suggested for consideration:

- Mayors to approach UDI Vancouver and UDI Edmonton to request a featured speaking opportunity at a scheduled event. The Vancouver chapter regularly attracts up to 200 people for luncheon events; and
- Economic Development Officers and planners to share information about their housing needs and what approaches are being taken locally to respond. This could be in the form of a web-based discussion forum or as a component of annual meetings of Economic Development Officers.



### 3.7 SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS BY COMMUNITY

Appendix B contains a host of suggestions raised at the housing consultations and the reader is encouraged to review this material for a comprehensive picture. The following material focusses on one or two items that were unique to each community and where there was broadly-based interest. For this reason, they are put forward for possible early consideration by municipalities and local stakeholder groups.

#### 3.7.1 Dawson Creek

The redevelopment of the downtown core was discussed as a significant opportunity to create more affordable housing and more diversity of housing types. It was suggested that the City take a lead role in facilitating redevelopment through such measures as pre-zoning, density bonusing, mixed use buildings, and incentives to developers.

#### 3.7.2 Pouce Coupe

The Village owns 12 unserviced lots in the Peterson subdivision. Suggested options to bring these to market include a developer proposal call, and partnering with the other land owners. There is also local interest in expanding Tremblay House (seniors housing) as land is available. A volunteer group is planning to approach BC Housing and the Northern Health Authority.

### *3.7.3 Chetwynd*

Chetwynd is still subject to CMHC's restrictive mortgage insurance threshold. The local Economic Development Officer and the Chamber of Commerce are taking action on this matter.

### *3.7.4 Tumbler Ridge*

The District owns land and is working on a strategic plan to bring more serviced land onto the market within the next two years. This includes a proposal call to prospective developers. The community is also actively interested in working with BC Housing to build affordable seniors' housing, potentially with an assisted living component.

### *3.7.5 Hudson's Hope*

The District's lack of potentially developable land is considered to be a problem and Council is planning to approach ILMB to acquire additional lands. The District does own the Atkinson subdivision and is considering ways to bring a diversity of housing types onto the market. This might include a partnership with a developer.

### *3.7.6 Fort St. John*

The City is open to partnerships to bring about affordable housing, including possible partnerships with First Nations. The community is pleased that BC Housing and the Northern Health Authority have issued a proposal call for an assisted living seniors' facility.

### *3.7.7 Taylor*

The District owns land and recognizes the need for seniors' oriented housing. The District may also consider approaching Duke Energy about a partnership, especially for short-term accommodation (e.g., potential guaranteed room bookings in a new hotel).

### *3.7.8 Fort Nelson*

The Town has a recently updated OCP and is actively working on securing additional lands for development via exclusions from the ALR and from the Integrated Land Management Bureau (Crown Land).



Housing Consultations:  
Challenges and  
Opportunities in  
Northeast BC

May 2006