

Operations Director Report: 1 January–31 December 2023

This is the second annual report for Otter Housing Association (OHA) covering the second full year of operation. It has been another busy year with sufficient funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Planning grant of \$20k and the additional STF–local projects grant of \$5k from The Community Housing Transition Centre (CHTC) to continue our work without any delays. We had several new funding opportunities coming to our attention and were able to have one of them confirmed before the end of the year. The new funds will enable us to make great strides in achieving our mission to construct sustainable, affordable rental housing in our community.

OHA has a Board of five local residents who have been active in guiding and overseeing the activities of the organization. The Board has met monthly during this period and had its first AGM in June. The Directors two year term will expire at the next AGM and they will need to reapply for the position. After reviewing matters of governance with respect to the Board I am pleased to recommend that the current structure is maintained.

OHA's Community Project Coordinator, Olivia, has continued to work passionately and diligently for the organisation. As the sole employee, Olivia is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organization, research, communication, accounting, planning, grant-writing and proposing strategies. She has been supported in this role by myself and the Board. In September, Olivia joined Atlantic Canada's social entrepreneurs and change-makers at the Social Impact Exchange Summit in St John's for three days of networking and knowledge-sharing. She was also interviewed for the *Lock & Key* podcasts released by The Independent in December. This podcast provides excellent insight into the province's housing issues with personal stories, recent statistics, key players, and potential solutions.

One of the key elements of the FCM/CHTC grant was to research co-housing communities. After realising that there were many suitable and varied projects in the UK that were accessible within a relatively small area in the UK coupled with the fact that I have friends and relatives who could accommodate us on our travels, Olivia and myself set off on a 17 day tour of eight co-housing communities in March. The outcome was an excellent report *Otters in the UK* which is available on our website. Olivia concluded the report with:

*“The tour has given us lots to consider in respect to the design of Otter Housing's new build project in Port Rexton. It has also given us insight on a cohousing community's internal operations, governance, and finance. Along with feeling fascinated and influenced, we feel very fortunate and hopeful with the position of our own project's journey. **Every** cohousing community's first question was if Otter Housing owned land. The second and third question regarded funding and planning permission. We feel lucky to have all three. Otter Housing is surrounded by even more support with these intentional communities cheering us on. We've created a network that we are eager to learn from and for that we thank you! Otter Housing is looking forward to our International Cohousing Community Swap!”*

On return from our fact-finding mission to the UK we invited the team from Woodford Architecture to view the proposed site and to discuss our initial ideas for the co-housing community. Following the visit we jointly agreed on an initial specification for ten units of mixed size, shared spaces and the community resources we wanted to accommodate within the design. The architects followed this up with a site analysis and preliminary massing diagrams for the development, featuring six different options for organising the project. We were delighted by these preliminary designs and agreed on our favorite option. We have established an excellent working relationship with Woodford Architecture and they continue to provide us with vital information for our funding applications. The 4 acres of land we had agreed to use for the co-housing community was surveyed ready for transferring ownership to OHA next year.

Our search for funding has continued with some vigor during the year. In partnership with the Town of Port Rexton, we submitted an application to the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) for the Federal Housing Accelerator Fund. This fund encourages systematic and policy change within local governments to increase affordable housing. Part of this application is to contribute towards the capital costs of our co-housing project—with a first estimate of \$10M for the build. The remaining application is for housing and community-related infrastructure that supports the growth of housing in the community. Our application, submitted in September, has received favorable comments but we have not yet received approval [note: it was approved in February 2024]. Further to this application, we pursued provincial funding for housing newcomers to the province—for capital costs, design and administration. We were delighted to be awarded substantial funding to contribute towards an additional two units to the proposed housing development of ten units conditional on being awarded the Housing Accelerator funding.

One of my responsibilities as Operations Director is to annually evaluate the performance of the organization in achieving its mission and objectives. I can wholeheartedly assure the Board that Otter Housing Association is fulfilling its mandate and has achieved everything it set out to within this period of time.

David Ellis

2 May 2024