

PHRN SYMPOSIUM 2013 A SUCCESS

Carolyn Fast, Co-ordinator, PHRN

The Pacific Housing Research Network hosted its first annual Housing Research Symposium at the University of Victoria, October 17th, 2013. The topic for the Symposium was "Affordable Housing for Low Income People: Solutions and Challenges." More than 70 people attended the Symposium, participating in keynote presentations, panel discussions, presentation and review of 13 research posters, networking and discussion forums.

The symposium day began with an opening prayer by Joyce Underwood, Elder of

the Tsawout First Nation, followed by opening comments by Jeff Vasey, the Assistant Deputy Minister for the Office of Housing and Construction Standards in the Ministry of Natural Gas Development and Minister Responsible for Housing.

A keynote presentation from Dr. Bernie Pauly, Associate Professor in the School of Nursing and Geoff Cross, an MA candidate in the School of Public Administration, both of University of Victoria, explored the emergence of homelessness in urban (Continued on page 4)

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REFLECTIONS ON HOUSING IN VANCOUVER FROM THE HOUSING JUSTICE PROJECT

Penny Gurstein, SCARP and Margot Young, Faculty of Law, UBC

The Housing Justice Project (<http://housingjustice.ca/>) is focused on the issue of housing justice in Vancouver and how effective policy development and law can ensure a more equitable delivery of housing resources. The project involves an action plan that seeks to understand how access to housing resources is central to the substantive citizenship—socially, politically, economically, and environmentally—of a city's

occupants and to the shaping of the urban environment.

As the Housing Justice Project is entering its third and final year there are a number of key observations made from data gathering. Data gathering included community engagement, public forums and dialogues on housing issues, and an online and hard copy survey of housing experiences. From conversations with various academics, activists, and



Vancouver's Housing Justice Project addresses the issue of housing access and affordability in Vancouver.

professionals addressing housing in Canada and other national jurisdictions, key conclusions have (Continued on page 9)

HOUSING RESEARCH NEWS

▶ 2ND ANNUAL PACIFIC HOUSING RESEARCH NETWORK SYMPOSIUM

October 17, 2014

To be held at the University of British Columbia

Watch the website and forthcoming newsletters for further information and call for abstracts later in the spring.

▶ See www.phrn.ca for further information on the Pacific Housing Research Network, research items, new and links to resources and events.



PACIFIC HOUSING RESEARCH NETWORK IS NOW ONLINE. CHECK US OUT AT PHRN.CA.

WHAT IS THE PACIFIC HOUSING RESEARCH NETWORK?

The PHRN is a non-partisan organization with members and stakeholders from a variety of sectors across the province. It will encourage the development and dissemination of quality housing research, and will promote the connection among researchers and practitioners. The PHRN intends to place in the public realm relevant material that will aid rational discussion on BC's housing issues, inform policy making, and support the development of solutions.

VISION

To facilitate multi-sectoral housing research activities across BC and foster dialogue and collaboration among housing researchers and stakeholders to encourage the effective application of research results to housing solutions.

GOALS

- Encourage sharing of findings across researchers, knowledge users, and stakeholders
- Support each other for developing and conducting research
- Leverage capacity to find funding solutions for housing research and dissemination
- Encourage students to consider housing as an area of choice for their career

WEBINAR SERIES ON AFFORDABLE MARKET HOUSING

Dale Anderson, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Housing and Construction Standards, Ministry of Natural Gas Development and Minister Responsible for Housing

A pilot webinar series devoted to improving market housing affordability in B.C. is hosting its third and final webinar January 30, 2014. Many families across the province struggle to find housing they can afford. At the same time, employers face challenges attracting employees when housing costs are high. The goal of the webinars is to provide a provincial forum for talking about affordable market housing, and sharing examples of affordable market housing options used in BC communities.

The first webinar in October set the context for the series by focussing on economic and other drivers affecting housing affordability. The November webinar examined housing costs from a developer's perspective, and included a review of a pro forma. The final webinar in January explores the issues and challenges associated with secondary suites in the Cities of Nanaimo and North Vancouver, and the solutions these local governments have developed in response.

The webinars are free and open to anyone interested in watching. Registration for the January 30 webinar is open until January 28 and can be accessed online at <http://www.ruralbc.gov.bc.ca/webinars/>



The province's pilot project features webinars in subjects including secondary suites.

[index.html](#). If you missed any of the webinars, you can access podcasts and the PPT presentations for each one at the same link. Each webinar is eligible for 1.5 Learning Units from the Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC).

The series is a collaboration amongst BC Housing; the BC Real Estate Association; the Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC; the Union

of BC Municipalities; the Urban Development Institute; the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development; and the Ministry Responsible for Housing, with support from the Economic Development Division of the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training.

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PHRN SYMPOSIUM, CONTINUED



Photos by Ben Fast

Left: Participants listen to Rebecca Siggner present her research poster on Modular Housing; Participants examine a research poster over the networking lunch.

(Continued from page 1) centres in Canada, noting its association with extreme poverty and poor health. The emergence of homelessness in Canada is shown to parallel significant shifts in housing and income policies affecting the supply of and access to affordable housing and income for those with already low incomes. In this presentation, the focus was on social, political, and economic shifts that are driving homelessness in Canada. Ultimately, recommendations to address homelessness in BC must include the development of affordable housing as a key part of the response.

A second keynote address from Jill Atkey, Director of Research and Education at BC Non-Profit Housing Association

(BCNPHA), explored future trends and needs for housing in BC by introducing extensive research conducted by BCNPHA. Issues of affordability, need for rental assistance, and areas of demographic and geographic demand were all reviewed with the conclusion that 150,000 to 200,000 new rental units will be required in BC over the next 25 years. Of these households, roughly a third will be in core housing need, meaning that they will require some form of assistance to make their housing affordable. Given that there are currently 12,500 households on the waitlist for social housing, it is clear that the status quo will not be sufficient to meet future demand. The presentation concluded by touching upon BCNPHA's developing plan

to track progress towards these projections.

A panel of four people working in the housing field addressed a number of questions: what is one challenge to creating new sources of affordable housing and how can we address it? What are some innovative solutions that could increase the supply of affordable housing? Who is responsible for addressing the challenge or promoting the innovations? Kevin Albers, CEO of M'akola Group of Societies (Victoria), Lance Jakubec, Senior Consultant, Research and Information Transfer, of CMHC (Vancouver), Greg Steves, Executive Director of the Housing Policy Branch in the Office of Housing and (Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)
Construction Standards (Victoria), and John Reilly, Planner with the City of Victoria, all provided unique perspectives on the questions posed.

Thirteen posters covering a wide range of current housing research were displayed and presented to the group, including a poster created by an innovative partnership of youth working together with a SSHRC-funded research project based at UVic. Three posters were selected as prize-winners in a competition for "best poster." Lindsay Monk, MA in Environmental Studies, UVic, won first prize with her poster, "Decolonizing home: A re-conceptualization of First Nations' Housing in Canada." Second place went to Tanya Cooper, a BSW student at UVic, with her poster, "How to Address Youth Homelessness

in the Capital Regional District through Alternative Models of Housing and Service Delivery." Finally, third place went to Rebecca Siggner, Manager of Research, BC Housing, with her poster, "Modular Housing: Benefits, Challenges, and Lessons Learned." Each of the 13 posters represented passion, commitment to high quality research, many hours of work and vision for how specific sectors of affordable housing might be changed or improved.

Finally, the group broke into talking circles to consider several key areas of housing: seniors housing, housing for women and youth, housing policy, housing for people with disabilities, mental health or substance use concerns and First Nations housing. Each group was tasked with coming up with one "big idea," all of which were shared in the closing plenary session.

The Symposium was a great success, emphasizing the need for and timeliness of housing research in constructing solutions that are specific to individuals, groups and communities. Strong connections among researchers, community and government practitioners and policy-makers were forged, which will lay the groundwork for further development in the housing research field. We look forward to the second Symposium to be held on October 17, 2014 at the University of British Columbia. Watch for further information on the Symposium on our website (www.phrn.ca) and in our Spring and Summer newsletters.

(For further details on posters, keynote presentations and discussion, please see the PHRN website, www.phrn.ca)



Photos by Ben Fast

Left: Talking Circle discussing housing and mental health; Dr. Bernie Pauly gives her keynote presentation.

HOUSING IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS IN CENTRAL OKANAGAN, BC

Carlos Teixeira, University of British Columbia – Okanagan

While Canada has long been a country defined by immigration, there has been a profound transformation of the urban and suburban landscapes as a consequence of changes in the immigration policies of the federal government since the 1960s. In particular, immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America have reshaped the economic, cultural and political dynamics of Canada's metropolitan areas, rendering them among the most multicultural regions on the planet. Policymakers at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels realize that these changes in the social geographies of Canada's metropolises are raising both challenges and opportunities in terms of the future direction of social and economic development. Canada's increasingly diverse immigration flows have come to be understood not only as contributors to population growth, but also as a significant engine for economic growth and social transformation in an era of globalization. Research into the opportunities and obstacles faced by immigrants to Canada is of critical importance in assisting scholars, policymakers, and leaders from civil society and business in promoting the development of a more equitable and dynamic Canadian society.

There is consensus that the successful integration of immigrants in a new society depends on their meeting basic needs in several areas, including:

(1) access to affordable housing in a hospitable community; (2) employment and an adequate source of income; (3) access to the education system; and (4) attaining an adequate level of social knowledge and engagement with their new society (Teixeira and Li 2009). Of these basic needs, one of the most important – particularly in the initial stages of settlement – is access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing (Carter et al. 2008; Murdie 2008; Preston et al. 2007; Ghosh 2007; Murdie and Teixeira 2003; Rose and Ray 2001). While this has long been a concern in major Canadian gateway cities such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, it is increasingly an issue in growing small and mid-sized cities such as Kelowna, Vernon, and Penticton in BC's Central Okanagan Valley. The real estate market in this region, particularly in Kelowna, is one of the most expensive in Canada. Rapid urbanization and growth in the Central Okanagan has led to an increasing demand for housing paralleled by a lack of an affordable supply of housing for vulnerable populations at risk of becoming homeless (Teixeira 2009). Housing affordability determines who can afford to move to Central Okanagan and who, from lack of housing choices, cannot settle in this region. Immigration has been identified as an engine of economic growth, therefore the fact that newcomers, including immigrants and refugees, face barriers in securing affordable housing in this area have

policy implications of interest to politicians, planners, and community workers.

This study examines the housing experiences and coping strategies of new immigrants in the Central Okanagan Valley, and makes policy recommendations to improve access to affordable housing by immigrants in the region. This study uses data from eight focus groups with 53 new immigrants and 35 interviews with key informants, conducted in Kelowna, Vernon, and Penticton in the summer of 2008.

The findings suggest that despite efforts to attract new immigrants to Central Okanagan in the last few years by all three levels of government, as well as the local business community, the development and implementation of attraction and retention strategies has been challenging. The main cities of the region have developed a reputation as "tourist and retirement communities." Although new immigrants are necessary to supply labour for the region's service and tourist industries and to replace an aging population in Central Okanagan, new immigrants continue to avoid this part of the interior of BC in favour of Vancouver or Calgary.

Most new immigrants have chosen to settle in one of the three cities in Central Okanagan to join families already established in the region. Not surprisingly, ethnic networks of family (Continued on page 7)



Despite beautiful surroundings, Okanagan cities like Kelowna aren't attracting new immigrants.

© RobertCiavarr/flickr

(Continued from page 6) members and friends from the same background already established in the Valley played a determining role for the majority of new immigrants, both in finding temporary housing and/or a first job upon arrival, and later in their subsequent housing search. In contrast, few new immigrants relied on help from NGOs or government organizations to find a place to live in the Valley. Despite the advantages these personal networks can provide in terms of help to new

immigrants in their housing search, they may be limited in terms of the quantity and quality of housing information they are able to provide. More research is needed into the efficiency and reliability of these social networks, particularly their role and impact in the housing trajectories of immigrants as well as in their integration.

This study found that the barriers encountered by our respondents in their housing search were numerous and varied. About 40% felt they had been discriminated against

by landlords. In a "landlord's market" with very low vacancy rates, landlords tend to filter who gets rental housing and at what price. The country of origin, including the immigration status and the ethnicity or race of the immigrants, has influenced some landlords' behaviours and decisions in the rental housing market. The issue of discrimination in accessing housing, as well as the role and impact of landlords as urban social gatekeepers, is an important one and clearly needs further research.

The cost of housing has also been a significant barrier in Central Okanagan, with 60% (32 out of 53) of the immigrants spending between 30 percent and 50 percent of their incomes on shelter. Most of the participants in the focus groups identified two main strategies to cope with (Continued on page 8)

HOUSING NEWCOMERS IN OKANAGAN, CONTINUED

(Continued from page 7) this barrier: (a) sharing housing with relatives and/or friends; and (b) renting a basement. These strategies have advantages (savings) and disadvantages (poor housing conditions, overcrowding, and lack of privacy).

Findings suggest that government should help address the affordable housing crisis in Central Okanagan, by funding affordable housing construction, regulating and cooperating with developers, facilitating dialogue between landlords and renters, and supporting community organizations. Municipal governments lack the resources and the constitutional powers to deal with this issue on their own. Although the Province of BC has been supportive, action on the part of the federal government has been lacking.

Key informants recommended higher levels of intergovernmental cooperation, such as closer integration of the local governments in the Okanagan Valley to provide mutual support and lobby the provincial and federal governments for help. Policymakers at the municipal, regional and provincial (as well as federal) levels, in cooperation with the private sector and local community organizations, need to develop a range of strategies to meet the challenges of affordable housing in such complex mid-size housing markets as those of Kelowna, Vernon, and Penticton.

Note:

This study is a “summary” of a larger study published by Metropolis British Columbia – Carlos Teixeira. *Housing Immigrants and Newcomers in Central Okanagan, BC*. Vancouver: Metropolis British Columbia, Working Paper No. 10-03, March 2010.

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REFLECTIONS ON HOUSING IN VANCOUVER, CONTINUED

(Continued from page 1) been reached. First, it is increasingly clear that a central plank of provision of adequate housing will involve a reimagining and reinvigoration of public housing. Second, any approach to adequate housing provision necessarily involves a diverse and therefore nuanced understanding of housing needs and circumstances. Third, we have been astonished by the range and diversity of civil society actors eager to engage on housing issues, including for example, visual artists, feminist urban development groups, individuals representing credit unions and mortgage brokers, municipal professionals, professional associations, and post-secondary graduate students.

We have also identified significant challenges to the implementation of our goals. First, working across ideological and practical divides in this key area of policy and law has proven challenging. Second, a starting premise of this project is the notion of housing justice, framed as a right to adequate housing which references both Canada's international human rights commitments and domestic constitutional rights document. Thus our project proceeds from a particular normative position to which our community partners are also committed. However, it is not a position that is uniformly occupied across the spectrum of housing actors. Our project is not, thus, a clearing house for any and all perspectives on housing. Rather it is focused on

advancing and promulgating a nuanced but shared commitment to the right to housing, translated into what this might mean by way of policy and law, backed by an informed public engaged with this issue. Third, the initial articulation of this project envisioned synthesis across the three strands of community engagement, policy development and legal action, with, ideally, concrete outcomes that could be directly attributed to Housing Justice. This has proven impossible in the current political environment. There is little receptivity for renewed housing policy at the federal, and even provincial, levels. We have had encouraging responses from municipal governments and have shifted research and activity to reflect access to this level of government. Fourth, civil society and government actors have bemoaned a too limited understanding of the diversity and extent of housing insecurity across Vancouver. This observation has shifted the project focus to generating and disseminating information about groups underrepresented in the housing debate in Vancouver. Thus, we are working to increase awareness of housing issues in relation to, for example, youth, urban on- and off-reserve indigenous peoples, and women.

The project focus in 2014 will be on policy development and dissemination of preferred policy options. To the extent that distinctive projects continue in the other two streams—public engagement and law—these projects will be incidental to and reinforcing of this policy

concentration. As academics, we have an important, albeit somewhat limited, role in policy articulation leadership. Our capacity to provide evidence-based research and information synthesis is valuable for both informing and explaining policy. In the last two years our process in the Housing Justice Project has closely followed current literature on the relationship between research and policy formulation and implementation. The engagement strand of our project has resulted in forums, roundtables, public lectures, the online survey, and media productions with young artists. These, in turn, have facilitated a conceptual "mapping" of the political context of housing delivery and identified key stakeholders relevant to affecting change. A more intense policy development and dissemination phase will pull from this work with the general goal of creating a fertile environment for policy change, particularly at the municipal level. Receptivity at provincial and federal levels for policy discussions with respect to housing policy is somewhat limited right now. This is not the case at the more local level, nor, we anticipate, will it always be the case at the more senior levels of government. Consequently, our policy development and discussion efforts will take advantage of the enthusiasm for policy innovation municipally while at the same time generating information and ideas for provincial and federal government involvement.





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