

**Regional Tripartite Housing Committee
Minutes
Meeting of February 9 and 10, 2021**

In attendance:	Lance Haymond, AFNQL	Bruce Labrador, ISC
	Guy Latouche, AFNQL	André Dansereau, ISC
	Pierre Bélanger, CMHC	Pascal Dubé, ISC
	François Sauvageau, CMHC	Nathalie Spénard, ISC
	Jean-François Samuel, CMHC	Oumar Ba, ISC (FNIHB)

Facilitator: Guy Latouche

1. Welcoming address and introduction

This meeting takes the form of a virtual conference on the ZOOM platform due to health measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agenda was accepted without addition. However, the order of topics was modified to take maximum advantage of Chief Haymond's presence in the second half of the meeting.

2. Follow-up of the actions of the last meeting

All the actions listed in the minutes of the November meeting have been completed, with the exception of the update of the document "Chronology of the RHTC's achievements". The updating of this document is not considered essential for the moment since a series of actions are carried out on an ongoing basis, such as the annual report, the distribution of the Committee's newsletter, the regular updating of the web page and the emailing of the AFNQL Secretariat.

3. National and regional environments

ISC

Pandemic context

The ISC Regional Office is still in emergency management mode due to the pandemic, and adjustments were imposed. To date, \$180M in new COVID-19 funds have been announced and transferred to First Nations in Quebec during the 3 funding rounds of the Community Support Fund. The majority of the requests from the communities have all been answered positively.

Increased construction costs

Rising construction costs are a concern. The situation continues. The application of sanitary measures, in particular, leads to additional costs on building sites. The costs of some materials have almost doubled. The situation needs to be monitored, as budgets are not increasing accordingly. Nationally, ISC estimates that \$162 million of the increase in project costs is not covered. ISC Headquarters is well aware of this situation, and they are looking for solutions.

Next draft of the Housing Initiative and catch-up projects

We are all waiting for the 2021 Federal Budget. The current Housing Initiative will end on March 31, 2021. The question is not whether there will be additional funding for housing; it is how much. All this is tied to a potential economic stimulus package that is yet to be confirmed. A list of multi-million dollar projects was prepared by all regions. For housing in Quebec, the projects come from the contingency list (\pm \$50M in housing per year).

First Nations have forwarded requests to ISC for large residential construction projects. Several conditions must be met for ISC to be able to support these projects; the communities will notably have to demonstrate their capacity to deliver such large-scale projects. CMHC notes that it is prepared to work with partners to explore the implementation of these projects, in particular via its co-investment fund.

Community health

Oumar Ba (FNIHB) presented a status report on the ongoing vaccination in communities in Quebec. A discussion followed on travel in communities. Vaccination may provide better security for people who need to visit communities, but on the other hand, communities are not necessarily open to receiving visitors from the areas most at-risk areas (e.g. red zones).

CMHC

Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI)

The application process ended on 31 December. There were very few incomplete or late applications in Quebec. The analysis team processed between 600 and 650 applications from First Nations, municipalities and other eligible organisations across the country. Demand far exceeded the available budget. There was a very high proportion of Aboriginal projects. The results of the analysis of the expressions of interest submitted were communicated directly to clients. CMHC is exploring ways to support communities whose applications were not accepted within this budget.

Shelters

The application process ended on January 15: First Nations from all regions submitted 60 projects on reserve (including 4 in Quebec) and 8 in the territories. The selection committee will choose 12, including 10 on reserve.

Regular Programs (Section 95)

A portal will be set up for First Nations who wish to apply to any of CMHC's programs. This is a new feature for regular programs. A training plan will be deployed to help communities deal with this new procedure. A transition phase is also planned.

Reconciliation

An Advisory Council will be created by CMHC. It will consist of 9 people, including one in Quebec. It will be deployed over the next few months to advance reconciliation and remove barriers to housing. The process is supported by senior management. One of the objectives is to increase the employees' awareness of the realities of Aboriginal people, so that policies and processes are better adapted to the clientele served.

New funds in housing

As with ISC, no additional investments are confirmed as of February 2021. The only confirmations obtained so far concern shelters (see above) and the Youth Internship Initiative, which will receive significant additional funding. For the rest, we must wait for the release of the 2021-2022 federal budget.

AFNQL

National update

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) passed a resolution urging the Government of Canada to provide additional funding to better support First Nations housing and infrastructure in the long term.

A study is currently underway regarding the establishment of a national centre for First Nations housing research and policy. This is a component of the National First Nations (AFN) Housing Strategy that was approved by the Chiefs. The idea is for a national organization to act as a clearinghouse for information, tools and best practices, as well as innovative approaches to housing in First Nations communities. Consultation with the regions has begun. First Nations housing managers and partners have participated in the sessions held in our region. They have had the opportunity to provide input on what services the centre should provide, how it should be governed, accountability, financial structure, etc. There are links to be made with the "Skills and Capacities" component of our Regional Strategy, as well as our initiatives on financial literacy, best practices, etc. The issue of language in Quebec was raised during the consultation.

Returning to the National First Nations (AFN) Housing Strategy, it was mentioned that the AFN is in the process of estimating implementation costs. Consultants will be hired to do this work.

In the context of institutional development conferences, the AFNQL has had the opportunity to share our Regional Housing and Infrastructure Strategy and its status. There is a lot of interest in our approach. Other regions also shared their experiences. In summary, we are all working to lay the foundations for a full takeover of housing and infrastructure management. However, this needs to be defined and clarified. Taking over a faulty programme is not healthy. The situation has to be corrected before the transfer.

Regional update

The project presented to CMHC by the Regroupement Mamit Innuat (RMI) under the Federal Land Initiative was accepted. The RMI is acquiring two buildings totalling 24 units in Sept-Îles, in order to provide housing for people undergoing long-term care (dialysis) who normally come to Quebec City to receive such care. The buildings are located near the Sept-Îles Hospital Centre.

4. Follow-up on the RTCH Action Plan

The Action Plan 2018-2020 has come to an end. Many of the items in the plan have now been completed or are being implemented. A new 2-year plan is proposed for discussion.

From the outset, the 2021-2023 Action Plan includes an important mention of the actions that will be deployed by the RHTC to contribute to improving the resilience of First Nations communities in Quebec, with a view to minimizing the impacts of events such as COVID-19. The vulnerability of First Nations was highlighted during the pandemic that has been raging for several months. The prevailing context in the field of housing is one of the factors at the origin of this vulnerability. Our actions in the area of skills and capacity building and in the area of funding and financing are making a positive contribution.

The impact of COVID-19 could continue. More specifically is the issue of increased construction costs. This will necessarily affect the ability of First Nations to deliver housing projects in the quantities expected. We do not know how long it will take for the situation to return to normal.

Skills and capacities

The overall capacity building initiative is developed. This component is now in its implementation phase. The Manager Training Program is a success. The First Nations Housing Professionals Association (national association) is taking steps with partners (FNAESC, CoPH) to extend certification to housing managers in Quebec. Discussions are underway. There is also a need to re-explore capacity development with the First Nations Market Housing Fund. This includes support for the FNAESC in its dealings with the Fund.

Funding and financial management

The financial and economic analysis is underway (modern financing tools, partnerships, catch-up work - on and off community - economic spin-offs). This component is entering the second phase of its development. We are waiting for a proposal from the FNQLEDC on this subject.

Governance and service delivery

The possible orientations in terms of governance depend on the results of the analysis and the progress of the other two component of the Strategy.

There are no real trends in governance at least for the time being. The analysis of institutional development options that we propose to undertake at the appropriate time will provide clarity at various levels: local, tribal, regional, national. Ultimately, ISC and CMHC will withdraw from First Nations housing. There needs to be a proper transition; we don't know what form that transition will take.

The AFNQL made it clear that First Nations will not take over a program that does not work. More money is needed. This will also require more involvement from communities. They need to be involved in the process of defining programs and initiatives. The work on the other two components will help to determine what structures are required. We hear from the communities that they do not want large structures that take funds directly from the source. The FNQLHSSC has done a lot of work on governance. We hope that this work will be applied to housing. Prior to heading in one direction or another, one thing is certain: it will be imperative to obtain a mandate from the Chiefs' Table.

5. Housing Initiative 2018-2021 - Update

Of the \$400M allocated to the last two years of the Housing Initiative, i.e. from 2019 to 2021, the Quebec region's share was \$34.3M (actual = \$34.9M). It is this amount that was "regionalized", i.e. adapted to the more specific context of the First Nations in Quebec by the regional office of ISC, with the collaboration of the partners (ABSCAN, CMHC and AFNQL). More than three-quarters of this amount (79%) was allocated to capital assets: construction, renovation and infrastructure (lot servicing). The other two components (capacity building and innovation) took up the balance (21%). The AFNQL had recommended that ISC put a lot of emphasis on lot servicing to increase the capacity of communities to implement housing construction projects.

Once again, requests has far exceeded available budgets, as evidenced by the figures shared by ISC.

- Construction component, applications for 272 units, 48 units built.
- Renovation component, applications for 620 units, 468 units renovated.
- Servicing, requests for 500 lots (15 projects), 225 serviced lots (8 projects).

It is imperative that the interventions of ISC and CMHC be coordinated, because there is a lot of requests for housing, and the development of lots is often a critical element. This has already begun, and must continue and even be strengthened. The common infrastructure fund held in trust by ABSCAN has been used to carry out more lot servicing projects. ISC's goal is to replenish this fund.

AFNQL's question *Allocation formula. How are funds allocated? Part of our responsibility is to ensure that funds are allocated to meet the needs of all First Nations. Sometimes the greatest needs come from communities that have less capacity!*

ISC's response *A set of criteria is used (22). The data is largely from the AFNQL's housing needs report. Thus, there are 2 steps: First, an expression of interest by the First Nation; second, an evaluation of the applications using criteria that focus on the evolution of the data over a certain period of time. In the end, all communities benefited from at least 1 of the 5 components of the Housing Initiative. Budgets are not sufficient to cover all needs, but the approach taken aims to be equitable.*

The fact that we can share statistics to show how funds are allocated is a good thing. We are able to share the results.

Next Housing Initiative, 2021....

ISC's Regional Office has been sharing documentation and holding brainstorming sessions over the past few months to get stakeholders to contribute to a revised version of the Housing Initiative, again with a view to regionalization. This exercise aims at being ready as soon as possible for a call for proposals in 2021, with an improved version of the Housing Initiative that will respond to the regional and local realities of Indigenous communities.

6. Collaboration with Quebec - Energy Transition Program

Information sharing. The Quebec *Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources naturelles* (MERN) has approached ISC and CMHC regarding their energy transition programs. MERN has noted to date that First Nations do not participate much in the programs. *Transition énergétique Québec* (TEQ), with the data on construction and renovation projects, will identify a budget for First Nations. This is relevant if we consider that energy issues were extensively mentioned during the consultations on the regionalization of the Housing Initiative. The FNQLSDI is a partner that works a lot with TEQ.

7. Integrated Capital Management System (ICMS)

Information sharing. ISC and CMHC make extensive use of data from the AFNQL's housing needs report. ISC (QRO) wishes to integrate the AFNQL's figures on the housing needs of communities into its database.

AFNQL Comment *The AFNQL agrees with this principle, but invites partners to be cautious, because if the data is updated at the national level, the Quebec region may lose out.*

8. Regional housing meeting

Because of the pandemic, the context is still not conducive to holding face-to-face meetings. However, there is nothing to prevent holding conferences that cover a number of topics; for instance, a presentation on the margins of the federal budget combined with an update on the component of our Action Plan.

9. Follow-up of certain issues

As time permits, the following topics will be discussed at future Committee meetings:

- Discussion with ABSCAN (Jean Vincent is now a trustee of the First Nations Market Housing Fund);
- Home insurance file (ongoing issue);
- Exploratory discussion with Unifor, which has expressed interest in investing to help catch up in housing and infrastructure.

10. Next meeting

May 26 and 27, 2021.

Prepared by: Guy Latouche
May 3rd, 2021