

Regional Tripartite Housing Committee Minutes Meeting of May 26, 2021

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

Facilitator: Guy Latouche

Summary of Actions

- Action 1: Interview Jean Vincent to learn more about the steps being taken to expand the activities of ASCC, and as well, about the perspectives surrounding the FNMHF.
- Action 2: Schedule a discussion with key industry stakeholder(s) to address the issue of home insurance, which remains a persistent issue.

1. Welcoming Address and Introduction

Initially, this meeting was to focus on the new housing funds that resulted from the 2021 Federal Budget announcements. As the information on this subject was not known at the time, it was agreed to deal with other points directly related to the Committee's activities and to postpone the discussion on the budget aspect.

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

The agenda was accepted without addition.

2. Follow-Up of the Actions of the Last Meeting

No specific action was required following the last meeting. However, Jean Vincent should be contacted in the near future to find out more about the steps being taken to expand the activities of ABSCAN, and also, at the same time, about the perspectives surrounding the First Nations Market Housing Fund (FNMHF).

3. National and Regional Environments

ISC

Federal Budget 2021

The ISC Regional Office knows very little about this. There was this announcement of \$6.0B, of which we know that \$1.7B is set aside for infrastructure operations and maintenance (O&M). This leaves \$4.3B in capital for infrastructure construction and rehabilitation, including housing. This amount is to be divided among Aboriginal groups (First Nations, Inuit and Métis).

Increase in Construction Costs

Increasing construction costs are a concern that has already been identified and shared by all stakeholders. Procurement difficulties and labour availability are also issues that First Nations are dealing with. It is possible that funds will be allocated to support communities facing significant cost increases, but nothing has yet been confirmed in this regard.

Pandemic

The situation is improving for First Nations in Quebec. The ISC Regional Office has lowered the emergency level, but remains on the lookout. A tour of schools was conducted to assess the air quality and performance of ventilation systems. In general, all schools are in need of improvement. The exercise identified priority remedial work to be done.

CMHC question *Is access to communities still restricted?*

ISC reply *It depends on the individual First Nation. For some, the issue of community immunity is fundamental, so until that goal is achieved they remain reluctant to open up universal access.*

E-ACRS Inspection

ISC will attempt to complete the inspections that didn't take place in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic. In addition, tribal councils will be testing the model for the new version of the "extended" Asset Condition Reporting System (EACRS). The enhanced tool will provide a more effective link to asset management planning.

AFNQL question *What about funding for ecocentres and comprehensive community planning (CCP)?*

ISC reply *Ecocentres: Funding was renewed for a 7-year period, as was O&M for waste management. As for CCP, the Regional Office will support the continuation of the Initiative.*

Community Health

A budget envelope will be dedicated to upgrading the ventilation of health centers and other institutions in the health network. Discussions are taking place with Environment and Climate Change Canada regarding the installation of sensors to detect fine particulate matter concentrations in order to protect populations that are most at risk from forest fires.

CMHC

Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI)

Twenty-five projects for the construction of 199 units were approved for First Nations in Quebec during the first phase of the RHI. This represents an investment of \$41M by CMHC. The good collaboration between the First Nations and CMHC specialists is not unrelated to this good result. It should be noted that despite the increase in construction costs, the budget allocated to each community remains unchanged; they must assume this increase if necessary.

The total budget for the 2nd phase (RHI 2.0) is \$1.5G, including \$1.0G for the "project" component and \$500M for the "city" component.

Internal Process

In response to ongoing feedback received from First Nations and other Indigenous partners about systemic barriers in its approach, CMHC has embarked on an initiative to improve its processes. This is not a reform of programs. They are currently in the process of validating the problematic points after speaking to a number of First Nations communities to this end. The next step will be to determine the solutions that the Aboriginal partners will jointly create with CMHC.

Shelters

The application process closed on January 15. One First Nation in Quebec will receive financial support to build a shelter. More investments are expected as most of these houses are very old.

National Housing Strategy

Eight funding applications are under analysis in the region, 3 of which are on reserve projects. Seven organizations have applied for initial funding. In all, there are 15 projects concretely under preparation. It should be noted that the project presented by the Regroupement Mamit Innuat within the framework of the Federal Land Initiative was accepted by the CMHC. However, one of the four buildings has burned down. In spite of this, there is a will to pursue the realization of the project on both sides.

Regular Programs (Section 95 and Renovations)

The national budget for renovation is only \$8M this year. Consequently, an envelope in the order of \$20,000 will be allocated to communities. CMHC encourages them to do urgent work rather than RRAP-type projects. As was the case last year, not all First Nations will receive a renovation budget this year due to the small size of the budget envelope.

Considering the increase in construction costs that was factored into the Section 95 program funding allocation model, it can be expected that approximately 20 fewer units will be built this year. This would decrease from 71 to 52 new units. This is a significant decrease, but the allocations will ensure that First Nations do not have to increase their capital outlay to offset the increased costs.

Youth Internship

The base budget has increased substantially (from \$1M to \$8M). This program is in high demand in our region. It appears that we will return to the original budget next year.

AFNQL

National Update

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has commissioned the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) to estimate the costs of First Nations housing and related infrastructure needs across all regions. The analysis will produce a range of scenarios on the investments required to close the First Nations housing gap on reserve. Among other things, the IFSD will use information collected through the National Data Collection (AFN). Case studies will also be conducted to identify variables that influence the cost and delivery of housing by community location.

The feasibility study for the establishment of a national First Nations housing research and policy center has been completed. It is proposed that this institution take the form of a research and archival center providing First Nations with tools and information on best and innovative practices.

The Chiefs Committee on Housing and Infrastructure (CCoHI) is losing its leader. Regional Chief Kevin Hart will not be in the next race for the Manitoba regional leadership.

A national symposium on homelessness is being held in early June. This issue disproportionately affects many First Nations people.

CMHC question *Is the issue of homelessness documented?*

AFNQL reply *Yes, the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) has been documenting this issue for a few years now. In fact, the results of the research carried out will be presented at the AFN symposium.*

Regional Update

Chief Haymond is anxious to see how much of the money announced in the 2021 Federal Budget will be dedicated to housing. He also points out that, during the pandemic, a lot of money was spent on temporary interventions rather than permanent solutions.

The AFNQL also points out that First Nations are strongly affected by issues of increased construction and procurement costs.

4. New Action Plan for 2021-2023

The Action Plan is reviewed and accepted by the RTHC authorities. This plan replaces the previous plan (2018-2020) which had expired.

5. Report of the Regional Tripartite Housing Committee for 2020-2021

The Annual Report for the year 2020-2021 is reviewed and accepted by the RTHC authorities.

6. Brainstorming sessions and collection of inspiring projects

Brainstorming sessions were held by ISC with several partners as part of the regionalization exercise for the renewal of the Housing Initiative. Partners who participated included the Community of Practice in Housing (CoPH), Tribal Councils, the RTHC Operational Committee, the Aboriginal Savings Corporation of Canada (ABSCAN) and the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Economic Development Commission (FNQLEDC).

Among other things, the sessions highlighted a need expressed by the participants to have access to examples of capacity building and innovation projects. Therefore, a compendium of examples is compiled and shared directly with partners and on the CoPH platform. It will also be integrated into the call for proposal documents for the next round of ISC's Housing Initiative.

7. Financial viability of housing projects

The ISC Regional Office has developed a tool to assess the financial viability of housing projects. The objective is to support First Nations who will be submitting construction projects under the new Housing Initiative.

8. Next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be determined when sufficient information is known regarding the additional housing funds in the 2021 Federal Budget.

Prepared by: Guy Latouche
July 8, 2021