

Creating Housing Solutions in Lanark County

...so we can all have a home

February 20, 2020

Housing Forum Report

By J. Youssef Sawan & Melanie Mills



This forum was organized by the Lanark County Community Action Network (LCCAN) at The Table Community Food Centre with the funding support of the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) 2019 grant from Lanark County.

A note from the organizers:

Three weeks after we held our countywide housing forum on February 20, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic. Since then, our everyday reality has been completely transformed and our work to reduce poverty, end homelessness and overcome food insecurity is more urgent than ever. As community centres, libraries and businesses close down or reduce hours in an effort to reduce the spread of the virus, those who are marginalized and the most vulnerable among us are left with fewer community resources to meet their basic needs.

At the same time, we have seen an incredible resiliency emerge as Lanark County residents are stepping up to support one another; various mutual aid groups, online and offline, are forming to ensure that while we practise “social distancing” – no one should be left alone.

Community organizations and agencies have stepped up to support grassroots efforts and work to continue providing essential services throughout the community. As outlined in this report, solutions can only be found when we collaborate through dialogue, learning and action.

The intention of the housing forum was to begin a dialogue around housing insecurity among the diverse stakeholders in our community and follow-up with individual and group action to develop solutions. However, in light of COVID-19, we realize that next steps will need to be re-evaluated in order to adapt to the changes in our community. Moving forward, we hope to facilitate more collaboration to develop strategies to ensure everyone has a home in Lanark County.

If you are interested in learning more about current work related to housing with the Lanark County Community Action Network (LCCAN) at The Table, please contact Youssef at youssef@thetablecfc.org or 613-267-6428 x4.

Youssef & Melanie

20 May 2020

Overview of the day

On Thursday, February 20th, The Table Community Food Centre hosted a housing forum in response to the current housing crisis with the aim to create housing solutions in Lanark County.

Housing insecurity is a complex issue that faces many residents in Lanark County in various ways. There are a myriad of potential causes for homelessness or housing insecurity. Some of the issues contributing to housing insecurity include; the inability to keep up with rising living expenses, job loss or illness, family breakdown, and a lack of transportation needed to access affordable housing options. In 2018, over 1,100 residents received support through Lanark County's Housing Options Program (HOP), which "assists people who are at risk of being homeless or experiencing homelessness to maintain or obtain housing." While this program has done a great deal to support those who are facing housing insecurity, these numbers indicate that adequate, safe and secure housing is a serious concern that must be addressed in our communities.

The housing forum brought together diverse perspectives including representatives from diverse sectors; local government representatives, health sectors, community organizations, social service agencies, and residents – including those with first hand experiences of what housing insecurity means. Among the various interests related to housing, there was an incredible opportunity to share insight and knowledge across the various stakeholders to consider how to resolve the current housing crisis.

Throughout the day, participants had the opportunity to connect with representatives from 16 agencies and organizations in a 'trade-show' style approach. Each organization set-up a table with information about resources available and the work they are involved with.

Additionally, there were six workshops that took place between 1 – 5pm, including: 1) Housing Issues and Options – An Evidence-Based Approach; 2) Community Bonds- What are they and how do they work?; 3) How the Perth and District Community Foundation works to create funding for community initiatives; 4) Housing First: An initiative to address homelessness; 5) Tenant's Rights in Ontario; 6) Affordable Housing Development 101. (see Appendix for workshop summaries)

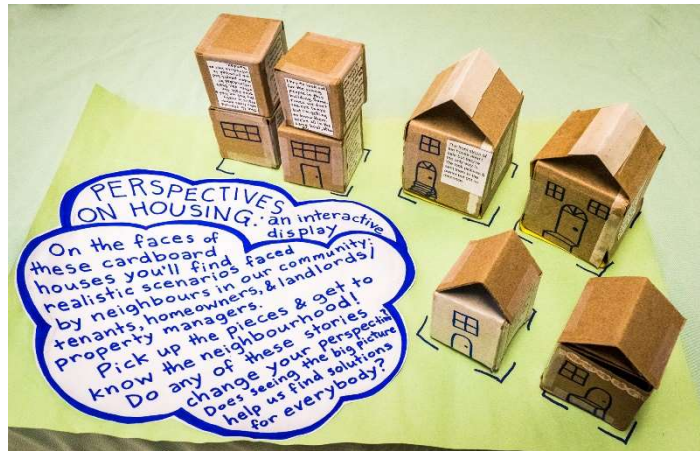


Photo credit David Zimmerly

Following the workshops, we held a large group discussion to develop an actionable plan to address housing insecurity in Lanark County. The group was split into four categories; Community, Agency, Government & Funders. The group was facilitated by Bonita Ford, who encouraged everyone to discuss challenges and solutions related to their respective groups.

Community participation

Based on registrations and observations throughout the day, we estimate over 200 people attended the forum. Out of those who registered (registration was not required), we identified the following breakdown of representation:

This could perhaps indicate “community” as being a resource that has not been tapped to its full potential.

Municipalities	18%
Health Sector	14%
Community	40%
Lanark County	10%
Social Services	19%

From the above categories, it is important to note that the diversity of participants allowed for dialogue and learning among attendees. Some of the key learnings emerged in the participant feedback:

“There were **a number of things that I learned and they were about the different organizations** that are trying to address this complex issue. It is a relief to learn that there is experience, commitment and purpose for the people involved in trying to help reduce the number of residents who are vulnerable”

“I was able to hear some **different perspectives on housing that I hadn't heard before**. I learned from my peers on what some of the challenges are with our current housing/programs/services are”

“[I learned] how committed elected officials are to addressing this issue (this really surprised me)”

“I learned that there are more agencies to help lower income families than I thought”

“I've learned **how many options there are to make a difference**. I now understand that housing inequality can be based on so many different factors, and that **homelessness doesn't simply mean living on the streets**”

As the above comments demonstrate, forum participants were engaged in dialogue with one another and had opportunities to share their personal experiences and expertise with one another.

Summary of forum attendance

Participation in the housing forum demonstrated that a wide variety of people are invested in resolving the current housing crisis and would like to participate in the conversation. Furthermore, when events provide sufficient supports (i.e. child-minding,



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accessibility, etc.), diverse stakeholders choose to attend and participate. Most of the constructive feedback received centered around comfort. While many enjoyed the opportunity for occasional coffee and snack breaks as well as a meal, those attending the workshops did not have enough of an opportunity to enjoy most of these breaks. In addition to the information-sharing that took place during workshops and the resource tables, the large group discussion

produced a number of commitments from everyone who attended the session – it is our hope to continue the conversation and support actions that aim to end housing insecurity in Lanark County.

In continuing the conversation almost all feedback indicated that a follow-up forum would be very welcome and most feel necessary. What we have learned from this forum will be an excellent guide for the next. With COVID-19 we are not able to gather, but this does afford us an opportunity to consider how responses to the pandemic may provide new opportunities for collaboration. For all of us, it is becoming very clear how our services respond to crisis and how we need to shore up those services. Indeed, we need to evaluate how the people we see or talk to every day felt when they heard our government say: “Go home and stay home.”

Next Steps: Commitments to End Housing Insecurity

A number of commitments came out of the large group discussion, and as we are now facing measures that limit our ability to congregate physically – note suggestions under each item that can encourage us to follow through with social distancing in mind.



Photo credit David Zimmerly

1. Organize a group of people who will commit to sending emails to government about housing issues/actions. The Lanark County Community Action Network (LCCAN) will take the lead to notify those interested regarding upcoming issues/actions.
2. Carebridge and Lanark County Interval House (LCIH) will co-host a bi-monthly “drop in”. We will use the peer support model and a strength-based approach. We will work in collaboration with Queer Connection Lanark and The Table’s Community Advocates. ***Since the intention of this item was to overcome social isolation, how can we support residents to connect with one another without physically meeting? Virtual meet-ups, phone tree?
3. “Tinder-Like” approach to set up co-housing options. LCIH will explore option and report back to the group.
4. Focus group to work out a business plan to encourage someone living in an underutilized home to move allowing house to be converted for multiple resident occupancy. (CareBridge, Lanark County, LCIH, Abbeyfield, United Way East)
5. Make tenants more aware of their rights using social media. (Legal Clinic)
6. Email the government about our community’s concern with our housing crisis. (a concerned community member)
7. Writing letters/emails to decision makers and politicians who have influence. We developed an email list to communicate with each other and to encourage each other to send emails. (Shannon is taking the lead)
8. ODSP and Legal Clinic to provide Housing Rights training to ODSP/Housing/OW staff and clients. ***Can we livestream tenant rights workshops (Zoom, Facebook Live, etc...) and post recordings that can be distributed widely?
9. Lanark County Housing Services will become the central source for information 613-267-4200 x2402 (already do this but it is not well known)
10. My action is to keep my word about the need for affordable housing on the internet. - Linda Seccaspina-Councillor Carleton Place

11. Community Wide/Community Improvement Plan for Affordable Housing to provide financial incentives such as reductions in fees and tax abatements for affordable housing units. Could include new development and renovations including secondary units. - Lorraine Allen-Councillor Smiths Falls, Shawn Pankow, Mayor Smiths Falls, 613-340-9037.
12. Actively work with our planning department and building department to adjust bylaws to allow for smaller units and houses to reduce rental and mortgage costs. - Andrew Tennant, Carleton Place Councillor
13. I'm not a resident of Lanark County, but I can personally contribute by writing a blog post about this forum for the Bronson Hub newsletter. I also fully support the development of an Abbeyfield Society in Lanark County communities. Jam Wright, Abbeyfield Canada
14. Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit. Promoting service direction on social media, influencing policy, consultations with municipal staff/council on policy improvements. Sharing data collection from the health unit. Chloe Brophy (chloe.brophy@healthunit.org), Alexis Green (alexis.green@healthunit.org), Danielle Shewfelt (danielle.shewfelt@healthunit.org), Patty Girard (patty.girard@healthunit.ca)
15. Mental health rent supplement agencies manage own supplement. (Lanark County Mental Health)
16. Tay Valley township will amend its zoning bylaws to allow multiple tiny homes on one lot. (Noelle Reeve)
17. The Table will continue to convene, co-ordinate and lead an educational awareness campaign.
18. Coalition of people, guaranteed rent mentoring. Township partnership meeting, David Kroetsch, Outreach committee for St James in Perth.
19. Continue to develop a community message board/system (Plan B in the Lanark Highlands)
20. Include community groups/leaders in training or information opportunities



Photo credit David Zimmerly

By increasing the dialogue across different sectors, the opportunities for collaboration between these groups have also increased. By keeping those connections alive there is an exponential access to ideas, networks, resources, all of the pieces that go into solving issues. Those connections keep everyone current and allow for all of us to check in with each other and to re-group when needed.

Appendix A Workshop Summaries

The following summaries are the descriptions provided by workshop presenters as well as some comments related to the discussions that emerged during the forum in relation to their topics.

1) Housing Issues and Options – An Evidence-Based Approach;

Robert Leitch and Nelson Rogers, Community Transformation Associates, Inc.

Nelson Rogers is a researcher, consultant, and conference speaker in areas related to program review and strategic planning, community development, postsecondary education, and applied research and innovation, with particular expertise in rural contexts. Nelson previously worked at Algonquin College as a professor, research manager, director and dean.

Robert Leitch is an educator, business analyst, information scientist and foresight strategist with graduate degrees in Educational Technology, and Library and Information Science. Robert has demonstrated leadership in program and project innovation, including with the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada's Financial Literacy program and the Lanark Communications Network - Canada's first community-based rural broadband network.

Housing Issues and Options – An Evidence-Based Approach

Suitable housing must be: Appropriate, Accessible, Affordable, and Available. However, the "housing needs continuum" is complex – including homelessness, formal and informal temporary housing, supportive housing, market and social rental housing, various forms of home ownership and innovations in housing. Current demographic and economic trends in rural Eastern Ontario reveal that housing challenges will become more serious in the decade of the 2020s. Considering the complexity of issues related to housing, and the urgency of effective action on many fronts, data access and analysis to support evidence-based decision-making is extremely important.

The Big Data for Small Places (BD4SP) program is a data literacy and data utilization capacity-building process relevant to a variety of topics. It was designed to allow working groups to focus on a current issue and access a wide range of data-related resources to address a specific challenge. The program includes topics such as:

- understanding the real needs of the community
- tips for reviewing community profile data to quickly identify areas of concern
- how to tap into local and national networks to enhance community data utilization

- how to balance hard data with local knowledge
- tips for communicating data-related insights to various audiences

This workshop will discuss how the Big Data for Small Places approach could address the key issues and options relevant to housing in Lanark County and area.

Community Transformation Associates, Inc. (CTA-Inc) helps rural and small-town communities thrive and prosper through effective use of data, research, and knowledge mobilization.

2) Community Bonds – What are they and how do they work?, Fraser Scantlebury, Regional Director United Way East Ontario

3) How the Perth and District Community Foundation works to create funding for community initiatives, Lynn McIntyre, Executive Director, PDCF

In both presentations on Community Bonds and funding options through PDCF, we learned how community investment can provide a means to support affordable housing solutions in Lanark County.

4) Housing First: An initiative to address homelessness;

Stephanie Manoni-Millar is a graduate student at the University of Ottawa working with Tim Aubrey (co-chair Housing First ON)

Housing First involves moving people experiencing homelessness —particularly people experiencing chronic homelessness—rapidly from the street or emergency shelters into stable and long-term housing, with supports. It is an approach that offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and then provides the supportive services and connections to the community-based supports people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness.

5) Tenant’s Rights in Ontario;

Linda Tranter is the Staff Lawyer practicing anti-poverty law at the Legal Clinic since 2000. Previously Linda has worked as a lawyer at Keewaytinok Native Legal Services in Moosonee 1997 to 2000, a Refugee Lawyer in Toronto, a Refugee Support Worker and Advocate for Sojourn House, and a Developmental Services Worker.

Linda's current position is at the legal clinic (which is distinct from legal aid) and provides free non-profit legal service for low income people in Lanark, Leeds, Grenville, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Counties.

As the staff lawyer her role is to advise and represent clients at the Landlord and Tenant Board, Social Benefits Tribunal, Social Security Tribunal of Canada, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

Today's Workshop focuses on Tenant's Rights in Ontario covering such topics as the duties of landlords and tenants, evictions, maintenance/repair issues, harassment and discrimination, rent-gear-to-income rules and homelessness prevention strategies. Know your rights and how to stay safe in your housing!

6) Affordable Housing Development 101

Graeme Hussey is the President of Cahdco, a non-profit real estate development corporation and sister to Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC). Cahdco develops affordable housing and social purpose real estate and provides consulting in the Ottawa area. Cahdco combines the experience and resources of CCOC with a team of development, construction, and project management experts.

His topic will be "Affordable Housing Development 101", or how to create and finance affordable rental housing. The presentation will include recent examples of projects Cahdco has completed.