

Quint: CED and Affordable Housing in Saskatoon

Our community

Among the older areas of Saskatoon are the five neighbourhoods of Riversdale, Pleasant Hill, King George, Westmount and Caswell Hill. The neighbourhoods have many things in common: caring people, character homes, mature trees and a diversity of residents of all ages and many cultures.

Opportunities 2000 is a project of the Lutherwood Community Opportunities Development Association in Waterloo Region. This organization is working with numerous local partners to undertake initiatives that enhance employability and reduce poverty. In addition, a dozen community organizations from across the country have formed a 'Learning Consortium' to share ideas and expertise relating to poverty reduction. Quint Development Corporation is a member of the Consortium. The Caledon Institute is contributing to the learning, dissemination and evaluation components of OP2000. The initiative is funded by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, the Royal Bank and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

Over the years, these neighbourhoods also have seen a rise in the number of rental accommodations and absentee landlords. Housing stock is aging, many houses are vacant, residents experience higher unemployment levels, and subsequently greater numbers of families are on social assistance than in other Saskatoon neighbourhoods.

Typically, the attention that our community receives from the media tends to be focussed upon the negative features of life, while the attractive features go largely ignored. Attitudes shaped by this negative attention can further depress local residents' assessment of their neighbourhood and themselves.

In an effort to reverse this negative spiral, and in order to address specific concerns in a self-reliant manner, area residents came together to form several action groups in the early 1990s. By 1995, many of these groups were discussing poverty reduction strategies. After a workshop devoted to community economic development (CED), citizens came to recognize CED as a vehicle for taking control of their well-being.

Quint Development Corporation

Quint Development Corporation (Quint, meaning ‘five’ in Latin) came into being in February 1995 as a way for residents to work together to improve the social and economic well-being of Saskatoon’s five core neighbourhoods. From the outset, our not-for-profit community organization adopted a community economic development perspective. The guiding belief was that our organization and our neighbours were the primary agents for improving our neighbourhoods, and that by expanding our strengths and skills, we could succeed in revitalizing our community.

The community economic development approach involves critically assessing whether the larger economy benefits our communities. The goal is to restructure the local economy so that it can respond to community needs. CED seeks to strengthen the community’s capacity for self-

determination, realize local benefits from economic activity and improve opportunities available to lower-income and marginalized citizens. CED promotes local ownership and community control over capital and resources and aims to ensure that surpluses are reinvested locally.

Quint’s efforts concentrate on enabling minority or low-income groups to pool their talents and resources in order to create ownership, opportunity, jobs, training, income, stability and self-worth for themselves and other community members.

By definition, the CED movement reflects an awareness that economic development must be guided by the interests of the community. It also maintains that in order to create stable, healthy and economically sound communities, economic initiatives must be advanced by, not imposed upon, the community.



Housing co-op members participate in their annual general meeting, reviewing the year’s work and planning future efforts to revitalize their neighbourhood.

Quint's Affordable Housing Program

Through a process of community consultation, Quint identified that good quality, affordable housing was one of the highest priorities of local residents. There were concerns about the high number of renters versus homeowners in the core neighbourhoods and the impact this was having on the communities' stability. Some community members observed that if affordable homeownership options were offered, many other CED goals would also be achieved.

In 1997-98, Quint acted upon these suggestions with the first phase of its Affordable Housing Program. The objectives of Quint's housing program illustrate the broad scope of its community economic development approach. It was hoped that the program would:

- improve and stabilize family living situations within the community
- decrease social costs related to poor and unstable housing conditions
- reduce poverty and hunger by creating affordable housing alternatives
- create healthier communities by increasing neighbourhood stability, and residents' pride in and commitment to their communities
- establish housing co-ops which provide support for and build the capacity of the families/new homeowners
- achieve a sense of community by working together in housing co-ops
- help low-income families build equity

- stem the outflow of income from the core communities
- purchase, renovate and improve the aging housing stock in the core communities
- create employment and training opportunities for community residents through the restoration and improvement of the houses.

Partners

Only through fostering and cultivating many partnerships has this program come into being. The program relies on the support of several departments in two levels of government, the co-operation and trust of participating credit unions and the involvement of many local people and businesses including contractors, architects, a real estate agent, lawyers and insurance co-ops, all of whom offer technical support and preferred rates on their goods and services.

Selection

Eligibility to become a homeowner and co-op member is based on several criteria. Families must have at least one child 18 years or under. They may have had difficulty in qualifying for a regular mortgage due to a lack of capital for a down payment. Their combined stable income must be less than \$30,000 a year. They must be willing to participate in a co-op. The selection committee does not discourage applicants with past credit problems, and recipients of social assistance are encouraged to apply. Other assets include a demonstrated commitment to the community and various practical skills.

Community meetings are held in each of the five neighbourhoods. Child care is made



Four of Quint's refurbished homes testify to the progress being made 're-building' the community physically, socially and economically. Quint now has restored more than 50 homes.

available for meeting participants, enabling their participation. Information about the program is provided. Applications are offered only to those individuals who attend a meeting.

Quint staff conduct home interviews with prospective homeowners. These interviews are an attempt to gain a sense of families' circumstances, their housing conditions and other factors, which cannot be identified through a written application.

Staff drive by all potentially suitable homes for sale in the neighbourhood, selecting some for 'walk-through' assessments. Based on the home assessments and the information gathered from families at the home interviews, staff give lists of potential homes to successful applicants. Applicants choose homes, which they wish to visit, and have the option to turn down no more than two homes after walk-throughs.

Financing

One of the unique features of Quint's housing program is the funding arrangement that makes it viable: The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) and the City of Saskatoon fund the Affordable Housing program. The City contributes a grant amounting to five percent of the total cost of the program, including equity, renovations and support. Under the Neighbourhood Home Ownership Program, the SHC funds forgivable equity loans for 25 percent of the house's assessed post-renovation value, up to a maximum home value of \$55,000. These two sources make down payments possible by covering 30 percent of the required equity. The remaining funds are secured through mortgages arranged through St. Mary's Credit Union, Saskatoon Credit Union and Co-operative Trust.

The Saskatoon Housing Corporation and the City jointly provide each home with a \$900 renovation grant and a \$2,000 emergency repair fund. The emergency repair fund is available to Quint's housing co-ops (see below) for three years. During that time, each homeowner also builds up a separate emergency fund within the co-op through a \$50 monthly payment along with the mortgage.

Administrative funding for staff coordination of the program is contributed by Saskatoon Housing Corporation, the City, the Co-operators and the Saskatoon Credit Union. Homeowners pay an average of \$413 per month on mortgages which includes insurance, payments to the emergency repair fund, property taxes, a small administrative fee to Quint for bookkeeping and the mortgage itself. Significantly, the average mortgage payment for homeowners is \$33 less than their previous average rental payment. For low-income families, this saving can make a huge difference.

The co-ops

The shift from tenant to homeowner can be daunting. Quint has emphasized the importance of supporting and encouraging the growth of homeowners' skills for a minimum of five years after they take possession of their homes. Accordingly, participants in Quint's program join housing co-ops which serve to help them make the transition to homeownership. Each co-op consists of ten member families.

Co-ops offer various resources and security to individual members and families. Members share skills, organize and direct the business of the co-op, get to know their neighbours and offer practical and emotional support. One

new co-op member says: "It's great as a first-time homeowner to be part of a group of people who are all in the same situation; it is a learning process for everyone."

Among other things, each co-op develops its own policies on how to administer support funds, how members can contribute to their co-op, how to develop workshops for shared learning and how to pool various talents. The meetings also offer a forum for studying and interpreting the implications of the various legal documents pertaining to the relationships among the co-op, its individual members, Quint, the credit unions and the Saskatoon Housing Corporation.

There is a minimum five-year commitment to the co-op. During this time, the co-op is the legal owner of the ten homes, but individual families pay mortgages on their residences and, for all practical purposes, they are considered the owners. At the end of five years, the SHC equity loan is forgiven, and families have the option of assuming their mortgages and taking title of their homes. They may remain with the co-op longer if they wish, regardless of whether they have assumed the mortgage.

Quint staff believe that it takes more than just the provision of four walls to meet the goals of the Affordable Housing Program. Co-op members require support as they develop policies and direction for their organization. Besides monthly general meetings, there are monthly meetings of the co-op's housing, finance and membership committees. Quint staff and board members participate regularly in the monthly meetings in an advisory capacity. The role of board and staff is not to tell the co-ops how things must be done, but to offer suggestions when members ask for them.

As part of Quint's holistic approach to co-op support and community development, the Bent Nail Tool Co-op was created. The co-op allows access to tools and 'how to' workshops for a variety of renovations and repairs, offering community members the knowledge and the equipment they need to undertake their own renovation projects. The Tool Co-op was supported by a grant from Homegrown Solutions – a program conceived by the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, with funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Employment and training opportunities

A further initiative was launched to meet two practical goals and to maximize the community-building value of our program. To undertake the house renovations within a limited budget and to hire local help for the work, Quint offered a training program for local unemployed people who wished to learn carpentry and renovation skills as a springboard to permanent employment.

Funded in part by Saskatchewan's Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Community Works Program, with additional funding from The Co-operators, the renovation crew worked to ensure that the homes were attractive and surpassed health and safety standards. The on-site renovation work, coupled with training sessions in Quint's training shop, gave the crew six months of training and on-the-job experience which has improved their skills and provided opportunities for them to enter or re-enter the workforce.

The experience Quint gained from the training component has led us to conclude that a year-long program would be significantly better for acquiring skills and work habits than the six

months afforded by the pilot. A longer training period also would allow for the content of the program to be broadened. Although funding constraints have not permitted us to extend the training program, our goal now is to continue moving the training initiative in this direction. We hope to establish a 12-month program that offers Level I accreditation in carpentry and employs teaching methodologies tailored to the program's participants.

Outcomes

Success has many measures. Quint has tried to bring about a long-term, practical means for improving our community and its economic prospects. By working closely with the community and forging partnerships and plans from within, the Affordable Housing Program has been successful.

In the past 3 1/2 years, Quint and its community and government partners have helped facilitate the purchase and renovation of homes for 50 families. Five housing co-ops have been established to strengthen the community and to provide the financial support which co-op members need to make the transition from tenant to homeowner.

Stable and affordable housing is an integral part of an individual's or a family's life. The effects of its presence or its absence are far-reaching. Many of the new homeowners have discovered a sense of belonging and stability. Many are becoming more active citizens within their communities, demonstrating a firm commitment to improving their neighbourhoods. Through their experiences and with the support of their co-ops, homeowners are improving their skills for taking care of their homes and their finances. Along with the pride of homeownership, they are

acquiring a greater degree of self-determination and a corresponding sense of self-worth.

Hope Schurman, one of the new homeowners, describes the transformation owning a home has made in her life. “If someone asked me six months ago if my family would be in our own house, I would have said: ‘What world are you from?’ As I sit watching my family on our deck as I cook our supper on the barbecue, I wonder where I’ll plant flowers in the yard. What is my garden going to be like this year? It’s a bit scary, a bit like I am in a dream. My kids have the sense of belonging, a sense of comfort, a sense of home. They have more respect for the things around them. My youngest daughters asked if they ever move out, when they get older, will they still have their room? My answer was: “Your room will always be here, in our house, the house that you grew up in.” We have taken 20 years to get here and it will take many more years to finally have roots. To call this house ‘home’ – our dream has come true. We finally are home.”

New areas of activity

Since the inception of the first homeownership co-operative, the provincial government has expanded the concept into the province-wide Neighbourhood Home Ownership Program. Community-based organizations in four cities are now involved, and partial funding support is offered over a period of three years to help these organizations work with the co-ops.

Quint’s Affordable Housing Program has entered its fourth phase, and has led to the creation of the sixth and seventh housing co-ops consisting of another 20 families.

Over the past two years, Quint has expanded its horizons and CED initiatives. The experience gained from the Affordable Housing Program has led Quint to explore different ways of creating affordable housing options for various sectors of the community. Working with a diverse partnership representing organizations from schools,



Local residents gain training and work experience while developing affordable housing for their neighbours.

social services and health sectors, Quint recently developed Pleasant Hill Place, an affordable cooperative housing alternative for five teenage single mothers and their children. Pleasant Hill Place gives these young families a supportive, co-operative environment that teaches them about independent living while addressing one of the main barriers to completing their education – the provision of safe, supportive and affordable housing.

As part of our efforts to strengthen the local economy, Quint recently began the Support for Small Business Program. This program is designed to assist low-income community members in starting and operating their own small businesses or community and co-operative enterprises. The Support for Small Business program is an integrated approach that includes an initial self-assessment phase, followed by a training program that includes in-class instruction which helps participants refine their business plans. The training also offers individual counselling and support through the start-up and operation of the participants' businesses. In addition, Quint administers loan funds targeted towards new or expanding small businesses that are unable to get financing from traditional sources.

Quint has just celebrated its fifth anniversary and we are beginning a process of evaluating our initiatives with the aim of informing a strategic planning process for the next five years. We also are embarking on a community consultation process that will guide us in this work. The strategic plan will involve partners from the business, co-operative, voluntary and government sectors in the development of an industrial strategy, employment and training strategy and a broader housing strategy for the core neighbourhoods. Quint intends to ensure that all of this is done in keeping with CED principles and practice.

Partnership strength

One of the keys to meeting Quint's ambitious CED agenda has been the formation of diverse partnerships that have helped us to understand better the strength and potential of community economic development. Some of our partners have applied the lessons from the Affordable Housing Program and begun new organizations to help support a larger CED housing strategy for Saskatoon. These new organizations include the Community First Foundation, the Development Fund of Saskatoon, the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership and the Community-University Institute for Social Research.

As word of our CED work spreads, we hope to further broaden our network of partners and projects. Harnessing the financial and networking tools offered by government and business to the desires of the community is proving to be a highly successful and exciting model for growth.

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