

Affordable Housing in Peterborough

Includes:

Final Report

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GEOG 470 – Research in Human Geography

**Host Organization: Affordable Housing Action
Committee (A.H.A.C.)**

**Through the Trent Centre for Community-Based
Education**

**Course Instructors: Professor Mark Skinner and
Professor Heather Nicol**

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1. Abstract

The Affordable Housing Action Committee is an organization composed of volunteers devoted to informing the Peterborough community about issues surrounding affordable housing within the City and County. A.H.A.C. works from within the bureaucratic structure to influence policy development about affordable housing at all levels of government. Through their close connection with the Peterborough municipality, A.H.A.C. aspires to generate further support from the provincial and federal governments regarding the provision of affordable housing. The current goal pursued by A.H.A.C. is to reach members of the community and educated public. The aim of this goal is to raise further awareness about affordable housing issues in order to encourage partnerships with other organizations and essentially to effect policy.

The purpose of this report is to inform A.H.A.C. about their readerships' interpretations of the yearly publication "Housing is Fundamental" with the hope that improvements will be made to the following years. Currently "Housing is Fundamental" has a specific readership in mind and provides information directed to this audience. Upon receiving this report, A.H.A.C. will be provided with information directly from their target audience regarding the content, style, and distribution of their publication as well as general information regarding the audience.

2. Introduction

2.1. Objectives

The goal of this project is to strengthen the content and the information provided by the Affordable Housing Action Committee in their yearly publication "Housing is Fundamental." The objective is to critically analyze the 2006, 2007, and 2008 A.H.A.C. publications with those of six other housing education publications in conjunction with surveys and interviews from the

Peterborough community. The first step in reaching this objective was deciding on the key research questions, which were: What are important changes that can be made to the AHAC publication “Housing is Fundamental” in order to make it more useful and widely read? Why is a publication like this important for discussing housing issues and social geography issues? Through our explorations of relevant literature and our assessment of the “Housing is Fundamental” publications and its distribution, our objective is to improve the dissemination of key information on the subject of affordable housing, not only within Peterborough, but also within the greater county and surrounding regions. The end result of this research project was therefore to provide suggestions to A.H.A.C. that would enable them to heighten awareness about problems that Peterborough faces surrounding the availability and affordability of the housing stock for low-income individuals/groups.

2.1. Importance of the Report

Housing affordability has become a hotly debated issue within Canada, as the number of people facing poverty and accessing welfare continues to rise at a substantial rate. At this stage in its development “Housing is Fundamental” is used as an education tool for community organizations and housing providers as well as city councilors. The goal of this publication is to provide up to date and useful information for citizens to make informed decisions that not only affect individuals, but the community as a whole. A.H.A.C. is a relatively young organization that has been producing publications for three years. There has been, to date, a research gap within the scope of the organization in conducting research regarding the public’s interpretation of the content of their yearly issue. Ideally, this report will fill this research gap and enable A.H.A.C. to make effective improvements to “Housing is Fundamental” that will allow them to continue to meet their goals.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Social Geography

Human geography as a discipline is expansive, and includes cultural geography, feminist geography, and tourism geography to mention a few. The study of poverty and more specifically affordable housing falls under not only human geography but more specifically the sub-discipline of social geography because of the similar focus on people and their environments. The study of social geography as a sub-discipline encompasses “the study of social relations and the spatial structures that underpin those relations” (Jackson, 2000, p. 753). As the subject area of this field has broadened over the past twenty years with the ‘cultural turn’ so to have the definitions.

Social geography as a warranted subject originated in the mid 1880s when it was used in France to study the complex relationships between landscapes and *genres de vie* or “ways of life”, which they called *la géographie humaine* (Eyles, 2007, p. 559). These scholars studied geography as a science of place, rather than a social science, focusing on social phenomena as tools and techniques that are used within an environment rather than examining the social networks and values of that environment (Eyles, 2007). People cannot be divorced from the environments in which they live, work, and play, and these environments are appraised by the cultures that exist in them. The geographer Emrys Jones asserted in 1960 that, “the landscape is as much the outcome of social values as of physical background and history” (Eyles, 2007, p. 559). During the 1960s the focus had changed and was more politicized as a result of events during this period. Ray Pahl defined it during this decade as “the theoretical location of social

groups and social characteristics, often within an urban setting”, which was an attempt to emphasize spatially differentiated social inequalities leading to social justice (Smith, 2000, p.753). The term social justice makes reference to the distribution of society’s benefits and burdens and how this comes about (Smith, 2000). Poverty, and more specifically adequate and affordable housing issues, are deemed social justice issues in that they deal with distribution within society. As one of many subject areas covered under the branch of social geography, housing is an important aspect of the use of space as well as the cultural characteristics existing within that society.

Social geography is today a broadly encompassing study of poverty and health as well as a variety of social movements that struggle for social change and are still concerned with analysis of spatial incidence of social problems. The importance of space in the constitution of social life and in examining the spatial structures that underpin social relations is an important aspect of both social geography and low-income housing availability (Jackson, 2000). Social geographers are significant contributors to studies in housing affordability because of their concern with income distribution as well as with other sources of need satisfaction on which the conditions of a community depends.

3.2. Policy Development in Affordable Housing Provision

To start, there are several methods used to gage affordable housing needs and that are applied to housing provision and distribution services in order to evaluate one’s candidacy for affordable housing. One method used to measure the level of need and to assess who receives affordable housing is Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) (A.H.A.C., 2006). This is usually provided under some kind of subsidized method on rent control or supply so that housing is made

affordable for those in need (Hulchanski, 2004). Other measures include health factors, such as the need for long-term care facilities, and cost of living assessments.

One of the leading contributors to affordable housing funding and policy formation in the last several years has been the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Agreement that was signed on May 30, 2002 (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2007). This agreement essentially pledges that in the first phase “federal funding of \$245 million together with matching contributions from the Province of Ontario, municipalities and other housing partners” would be provided and that approximately \$73 million of federal funding had been committed under this agreement (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2007). Today, the total investment under the agreement has reached \$734 million in funding to be committed by 2009. This funding will go to four main areas: Affordable Urban Rental Housing, the Affordable Home Ownership Program, Affordable Remote Housing, and the Housing Allowance/Rent Supplement Program (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2007). These four areas represent the main goals and key areas agreed upon within the provincial and federal governments as necessary and in need of attention. These areas form the main programs set up to aid in the provision of affordable housing and to address associated issues. These programs take on a local character through municipal organizations and through partnerships with community groups in the provision of these services to the public.

In terms of some key changes in perspective in the provision of housing from a government level a couple of key trends can be shown. From around the mid 1970s until the mid 1980s the government decided not to encourage direct lending for housing projects as this would turn up in the government’s books but encouraged non-profit groups to borrow funds on the private market and the government would then guarantee those loans. Responsibility was also given to provincial authorities for housing allocations and program administration and it was thought that

the non-profit approach would replace public housing initiatives and that requirements would be set for who was to be housed (Sewell, 1994). This changed in 1986 when the federal government decided that it would fund housing only for those in need. This need was measured as those who are paying more than thirty percent of their income on housing costs, a figure used by AHAC and the CMHC still as a relevant measure of the affordability of housing (Sewell, 1994; AHAC, 2008). This focus towards core needs groups allowed for the allocation of housing units in non-profit and co-op projects for low-income groups to be increased to 66-75 percent in opposition to the 25 percent that was seen in 1979 (Sewell, 1994).

In the early 1990s, however, the federal government dramatically decreased its spending on housing and non-profit and co-op agreements had to be carried out under formed partnerships with provinces, Ontario being one of them. As of 1994 the federal government announced that no more federal funding would be delivered towards non-profit or non-profit co-op units (Sewell, 1994). As a result of these actions municipalities started to take a much more focused interest in affordable and social housing provision. After the early 1990s non-profit housing initiatives started to slow down and those involved in the production of affordable housing started to turn to alternative and perhaps more innovative sources to build housing instead of relying on government subsidies (Sewell, 1994).

The Toronto Board of Trade (2004) talks about the importance of government policies at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels as one of the biggest contributing factors in a developer's decision to construct affordable housing either for rental or ownership. They state that taxes play a large role, and specifically that property taxes and federal tax policy in general from as early as the 1970s has had a role in decreasing the number of new, purpose-built multi-residential rental units that could have been built (The Toronto Board of Trade, 2004). The

Toronto Board of Trade speaks to other factors also affecting the long-term profitability of rental investments such as “interest rates, access to low-cost mortgage insurance...the availability of serviced land...rent-control laws, as well as landlord tenant legislation” (2004, p. 329).

On a municipal level it can be hard considering the vast differences between cities all over Canada, with each of their unique problems and approaches, to generate policy that will suit the needs of these various communities in meeting affordable housing provision. Arnold (2004) gives the example of the National Housing Policy Option Team (NHPOT) that has been formed as the advocacy arm of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to voice needs, concerns, and goals for affordable housing provision in municipalities across Canada. This organization works in partnership with other organizations, such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, to put together strategies. They have developed a three-pronged policy that aims to meet the needs of the diversity of municipalities across Canada (Arnold, 2004). This policy includes:

1. A capital grants program to provide new and renovated housing for those who cannot afford market rents in markets where vacancy rates are low.
2. Canada-wide shelter allowances, rent supplements, or improved shelter components of welfare for those who have shelter but cannot afford it.
3. Changes in tax regulation and CMHC mortgage underwriting policies to make it easier for both the private and the not-for-profit housing sectors to provide affordable housing. (Arnold, 2004, p. 244)

Through these policies and goals common trends can be seen for change that needs to happen now in affordable housing policies as well as possible future trends. Collaboration at this level, taking into account municipal diversity, suggests a national strategy that is catered to meet local needs and is geared by municipalities where national policy and funding no longer extends to within affordable housing circles.

3.3. Activism and Social Justice Movements

As has been defined above, the term social justice refers to the distribution of society's benefits and burdens and how this comes about (Smith, 2000). Through this very basic definition we can get a sense that being advocates for social justice means that inequalities need to be articulated and policies and strategies for dealing with the treatment of minorities at varying levels of political, economic, cultural, and social standing need to be realized. Social justice is primarily advocacy against inequality. In the affordable housing sector we can see how suffering is realized by people who are unable to meet their own basic housing and living needs and how insecurities are created and maintained through unequal societal mechanisms. Affordable housing social justice movements include the identification of the leading causes of housing, food, and economic insecurity and where affordable housing can be provided to meet the needs of a greater community to aid in the elimination of these inequalities.

Housing activism was initiated by a variety of church and community groups through the creation of a wide variety of community-based organizations and non-profit groups in the 1970s as well as in the formation of partnerships with institutions such as the YMCA and local labour councils. With the creation of partnerships between different community groups and municipal agencies community activism for housing means took off and remains a dominant presence in the provision of services associated with affordable housing (Sewell, 1994).

There are a variety of different groups that make up the social justice movement for affordable housing issues within Peterborough. Included in these are not-for-profit groups, community-based organizations, interest groups, municipal sectors, and individual actions. All of these groups are involved at varying levels in affordable housing issues and their involvement can range anywhere from the provision of shelter services (the Youth Emergency Shelter) or

food banks (like the Kawartha Foodshare program) to advocacy and education groups like A.H.A.C. or the Peterborough Social Planning Council. They can also range from community partners such as the YWCA or the Peterborough County City Health Unit to the actual housing providers such as Kairo's Non-Profit Housing of Peterborough. Depending on the roles that each group plays in the provision of different services their stance on advocacy and position in the social justice movement changes and is shaped by their individual goals.

3.4. Affordable Housing – Defined

When the government cut back spending on social assistance by 21.6 % in 1995 there were drastic increases in the demand for affordable housing, although these rates have not changed despite the increase in cost of living (Statistics Canada, 2001). Low-income families are continuing to spend a disproportionate amount of income on housing at the fundamental risk of financing other life necessities because government subsidies still remain too low to serve the ever growing needs of communities in Canada, especially when regarding affordable housing. The term “affordable housing” refers to housing that is affordable to low and moderate income households while the term “affordable” directly refers to the maximum spending of 30% of their gross annual household income on shelter costs (A.H.A.C., 2006). In most areas of Peterborough, over a third of tenants are living in housing that is not affordable, especially in the greater Peterborough County area (Statistics Canada, 2001). Provincial and Federal initiatives within the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program, have assisted in attempting to answer the problem of insufficient housing but are still falling short of funding to develop enough new affordable housing units to suffice the growing numbers of people in need of these improvements. Currently one in six Canadians face housing issues at the same time that the Federal social housing and funding programs are set to expire (March 2009);(A.H.A.C., 2008).

Funding for existing programs is about to expire and therefore acceptable housing, which “refers to housing that is adequate in condition (requiring no major repairs), suitable in size (enough bedrooms for the size and makeup of the household), and affordable (costing less than 30% of before-tax income)” will continue to be difficult for low-income members of Peterborough to attain (A.H.A.C., 2008).

3.5. Poverty Reduction Strategy

Poverty is an international phenomenon that radiates through society and has severe implications at the local level. The problems that create poverty are intertwined and tend to be multifaceted with immense implications in other areas of society. Peterborough Mayor Paul Ayotte stated in the City’s Poverty Reduction Strategy that there is “no single cause of poverty...and no single solution” and therefore the need for a holistic solution is necessary (Gilchrist, 2008, p. 4). The report was released on Thursday November 27th, 2008 and outlines issues surrounding poverty and initiatives to improve the situation in the City of Peterborough and the County.

The debates surrounding poverty reduction are complicated due to the multi-dimensions of the issue at hand. One of the many facets adding to the debates surrounding poverty reduction has been the shortage of low-income housing in Canada as a whole and Peterborough in particular. The City of Peterborough, which has approximately 75,000 citizens has been named “the homeless capital of Ontario”, a title for which the city earned in 2000 following a study on eleven municipalities in the province, including the City of Toronto (Hicks, 2008). This study and many others have revealed that of the 3.4 million homeless in Canada as a whole, Peterborough City and County has 12,000 (Gilchrist, 2008). John Martyn, chair of the City’s Stewardship Committee argued that, “It’s not just a local issue, it’s a national issue and it’s being

addressed by communities small and large.” The United Nations stated that, “housing is a fundamental human right and a major determinant of the health of individuals, families, and indeed, our whole community” (A.H.A.C., 2006). Affordable housing in Peterborough cannot therefore be entirely separated from discussions on poverty nor from the inclusion of the community in its strategies for improvement. The façade of poverty reduction and wealth redistribution have repeatedly failed to manifest in a meaningful and effective manner and it is now up to the community to advocate for change and improvements (A.H.A.C., 2008).

3.6. Affordability and Access

As mentioned above, there are many underlying problems associated with poverty issues in general and housing issues in particular. One of the major concerns surrounds the consistently increasing cost of rent, which has outpaced growth of income since 2003 at the same time that housing prices have continued to increase from between 35-50% (A.H.A.C., 2007). The need for low-income housing is increasing while the actual provision of low-income housing has been decreasing. Since 2003 there have been no new Rent-Geared-to-Income units added in Peterborough, while waiting lists have grown and time spent on these lists remains three to five years (A.H.A.C., 2006). It is estimated that 87% of applicants on the waitlist for social housing in Peterborough, which continues to be above projected numbers, have annual incomes below \$20,000 and most of these actually earn less than \$12,000 per annum (Peterborough Housing Corporation).

The City and County of Peterborough have taken some initiatives to improve the conditions surrounding homelessness such as the “Warming Room,” but these facilities continue to be inadequate for the number of people without permanent and affordable shelter. Most programs are operating above capacity, and almost all shelters operate at capacity, while Kawartha Food

Share usage has increased by 34.4% since 2003, resulting in 13% of Peterborough City and County being food insecure, of which 43% are children (A.H.A.C., 2007). Improvements in the general economy have occurred, raising the hourly wage from \$7.45 in 2003 to \$8.75 in 2008 but the housing provision sector is still falling short in the tens of thousands in terms of the demand within Peterborough for affordable one-bedroom apartments (Housing Resource Centre, Peterborough Examiner, May 6, 2008; and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007). The rising cost of utilities in Ontario has also caused serious concern as one in five households spend 12% of their household income on utilities and for low-income families this is usually increased, as a result of their being less energy efficient due to inadequate insulation, poor maintenance, inefficient furnaces and appliances, and poor windows (A.H.A.C., 2006). In Peterborough 51.65% of tenants spend over 30% of their household income on housing and one-third of those served by the Housing Resource Centre were spending over 70% of their gross household income on housing costs including utilities, the highest percentage of the twenty-seven sampled Ontario municipalities (The Ontario Urban Sustainability Report, 2007). In order to stop poverty across Canada it is therefore important to look at local issues, which often include housing and to address these keeping in mind the other problems that arise to make poverty one of the most pressing concerns effecting Canadians.

3.7. Negative Result of Not Providing Affordable Housing – Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the major outcomes of the inability to access affordable housing for low-income families and individuals. Visible homelessness is defined as those forced to sleep outside or in “local shelters, as well as those who may be living in unsafe, overcrowded, illegal, temporary or transient accommodations” and also includes “those who are imminently at risk of losing their housing and those who need to migrate in and out of the area” in search of housing (Peterborough Social Planning Council, 2000). Rural areas are impacted severely by

homelessness although it is sometimes not as obvious because of the dispersed nature of the settlement. Although the City of Peterborough has some of the infrastructure to deal with homelessness, rural areas lack facilities to alleviate the day-to-day struggles. The difficulties faced by rural areas include smaller tax bases and such ones therefore have fewer means to improve the infrastructure, address the erosion of transportation and telecommunications systems, have limited access to building materials, and face infrastructure challenges such as water and sewage provision (Canadian Rural Partnership, 1998). According to Statistics Canada, the past three decades have revealed that there is a trend in rural communities of lower incomes than provincial averages. These communities are often marked as having some of the lowest average incomes in Canada (Peterborough City and County, 2002). In both rural and urban areas, access to information on government programs is often inadequate and vulnerable residents often do not have regular access to telephones, internet, or cable and therefore continues to be out of reach for those most in need.

The lack of government resources and infrastructure to avoid homelessness is forcing community groups to take action locally and address growing social problems, such as inadequate affordable housing, in their own backyards (Barnhart, 2003). In order to address homelessness then, issues surrounding housing insecurity, food insecurity, and economic insecurity need to be addressed using a holistic approach as a result of the intricate interrelationship among these issues. An increase in the minimum wage alone will not solve problems associated with homelessness nor will simply providing more food share programs. According to Paul Armstrong of A.H.A.C. in Peterborough, “homelessness and other forms of housing insecurity are becoming more prevalent modern day phenomena” and therefore it is likely that Peterborough citizens may see an increase in the number of physical health problems, addictions, and compromised health positions experienced within the community (A.H.A.C.,

2007). “If people are not adequately housed, it becomes difficult for them to find or keep a job, to care for a family, or to deal with all the small concerns of everyday living” (ONPHA, 1998). It is therefore the concern of the entire community to help improve the conditions that lead to homelessness in order to provide for a healthy community and atmosphere in the County and City of Peterborough.

3.8. Outcome of Providing Affordable Housing – Community and Individual Health

There are many benefits that are associated with providing low-income housing that go beyond a basic sense of community well-being. The provision of low-income housing, in a financial sense, is actually more cost effective to maintain than emergency shelters and with greater numbers of low-income units more people would be provided for than is currently being met through shelter services (Bruce and Chisholm, 2000). The inherent social cost that is realized by those citizens who lose access to their established supports through evictions and loss of shelter needs to be taken into account in policy discussions. These social implications can be detrimental to the establishment and maintenance of a healthy community (Clove & Milbourne). In addition, the link between housing and health becomes clear through examples of people, identified as from lower socio-economic groups, having higher rates of ill health and who experience mortality at much younger ages than the national average age of mortality (A.H.A.C., 2008). Paul Armstrong has clearly stated that “Our physical and mental health, our sense of security, our life choices, and our self-worth are very much dependent upon the way we are housed. When housing is unable to meet basic needs for any number of reasons, our ability to function effectively in all aspects of life is impaired” (A.H.A.C., 2008, p. 1).

3.10. Role of A.H.A.C.

The Affordable Housing Action Committee has clearly positioned itself within the realm of social justice issues as an organization that works within the bureaucratic structure, as opposed to advocating for change from outside. One of the professed identifying features of the organization is that they influence policy development about affordable housing at all levels of government. Working in close interaction with and through the Peterborough municipality is the starting point for this position and from there, along with the identification of community needs and general trends in the county, AHAC hopes that their advocacy will generate further support from the provincial and federal governments. These governments provide a large number of the policies and funding strategies available on affordable and social housing issues and a growing partnership with them would have a greater impact on the structure of the affordable housing needs within Peterborough.

Firstly, AHAC is an advocacy group. Paul Armstrong, the chair of the Community Education Working Group within AHAC states that it is an organization made up of a group of volunteers, that aims to “bridge the knowledge gap” about affordable housing issues instead of “rallying” (Armstrong, 2008). The kind of public forms of protest, and the raising of awareness through that form of collective action, meant by the term “rallying” is not something that AHAC generates or sees as part of their advocacy role (Armstrong, 2008). Through the support received by the City of Peterborough, and specifically the Housing Division, AHAC is an organization that is supported by the bureaucratic system that it advocates for change within with the aim of generating further collaboration (Armstrong, 2008).

The Affordable Housing Action Committee has positioned itself, as an organization, which informs the public about affordable housing issues and as such has a quite specific target audience. Their current goal is to reach members of the community and educated public to raise

further awareness about affordable housing issues, so that partnerships with other organizations can be formed and so that policy can be affected. Housing is Fundamental is a culmination of the research done by the Community Education Working Group within A.H.A.C. and, in addition, recommendations are made based on this research as to what the public can do to help in the advocacy for these issues. Some of the A.H.A.C. recommendations include to:

- Advocate for renewed federal/provincial long-term investment in affordable housing development
- Lobby the provincial government to provide permanent, sustainable funding for the Rent Bank and the Emergency Assistance Fund
- Advocate for the increased shelter allowance for those receiving income support program payments
- Pressure the federal government to establish a nation wide housing strategy that establishes targets for communities along with adequate funding to meet those targets
- Petition, in collaboration with Peterborough Utilities Inc., the Ontario Energy Board to reduce the energy burden on low-income tenants.

(A.H.A.C., 2008, p. 8)

As can be seen through these recommendations specific groups and forms of advocacy are being promoted and the target audience, as can be seen through the distribution list, would be those people within the Peterborough community most likely to take an interest in this kind of action and to support these methods.

The AHAC organization is made up, primarily, of 14 members and the Community Education Working Group (C.E.W.G.), that is actually responsible for the production of the Housing is Fundamental publication, is made up of five volunteer members, headed by Paul Armstrong. The publication has been produced annually, since 2006, and is “available to the public through mail, by request, through the city municipal website, at city hall and the county office and during community forums throughout the year” (Wedley, 2008).

The Housing is Fundamental publication is used primarily as an education piece for the community and it is in that sense that the importance of the publication is clear. Sources such as Statistics Canada, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Peterborough Housing Corporation, and reports from the Peterborough County-City Health Unit and Kawartha Food Share are used to support the information provided. The use of statistics and facts as a primary way to represent the realities of affordable housing issues supports a stance of objectivity and informed authority that places the organization within the spectrum of advocacy itself, and presents a language used to relate to the intended target audience. The importance of the publication itself, as a link between policy formation and community advocacy, shows how publications of this type can be used to serve a social justice purpose and can seek to advocate for change through information.

4. Methodology

4.1. Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a research method that allows for the in-depth exploration of the issues and alternative texts that are available surrounding a relevant geographical topic. Using a variety of texts and publications an overview and comparative analysis can be formed on the topic and further issues can be brought out. This methodological approach allows us to address such research questions as to what information is lacking within the A.H.A.C. publication in relation to other materials, such as publications from the CMHC and information provided by the Peterborough Social Planning Council, as well as how other sources of literature compare to this publication. Exploring the usefulness of the text through our own understanding of the issues involved in the provision of affordable housing, and being able to assess both visually and conceptually the layout and the information and statistics provided within the publication, will allow us to evaluate their effectiveness to readers and prospective readers. Information has been

gathered throughout the research process as to the different sources of educational material that has been made available to the residents of Peterborough, Ontario, and more broadly Canada.

Due to the difficulty in comparing the approaches of different organizations towards housing issues and the scale at which each of the different organizations operate, our focus will be primarily on the various education tools that each organization uses in transferring knowledge to the broader public. These education tools often take the form of reports disseminated by organizations or pamphlets and leaflets that address or speak to these issues. Part of the effectiveness of community organizations is judged through their communication with the public and the way in which they are able to transfer knowledge. Because A.H.A.C. is committed to this purpose, the method of comparison becomes relevant. The primary focus in this section of the research is on the types of information provided by the various educational materials, the statistics made available, the issues addressed, the images employed, the colours used, the length and format of the educational tool, the target audience, and the accessibility of the publication.

Throughout Canada, a variety of groups have formed with the objective to advocate for affordable housing and to educate people on the different experiences of the many diverse regions of this country. Although the various materials they produce have taken different forms and approaches, their commonality, that is to say their devotion to educating the public to affordable housing issues, is what makes them worthy of comparison. The sources chosen to be analyzed were randomly selected from a vast array of material, all of which can be accessed through the internet as well as in hard copy through contact with those organizations who have produced the publications.

The starting point for this analysis was to begin with the “Housing is Fundamental” publication itself. The 2006, 2007, and 2008 editions of “Housing is Fundamental,” as stated

earlier, are produced in a joint-effort between A.H.A.C. and the Peterborough City and County in order to inform organizations who have a vested interest in the provision of affordable housing as well as policy makers who make important decisions regarding affordable housing. “Housing is Fundamental” is usually between six (2006) and eight (2007 and 2008) pages in length, and addresses issues pertaining directly to the housing crisis being experienced within Peterborough City and County. It makes suggestions for further future advocacy on the part of the community. Key issues addressed include the connection between health and wellness, income opportunities, access to food, and homelessness. It also address the inability of people to acquire housing that meets their needs as low income earners and often single parent households.

The next publication that was analyzed was written by Willa Rea, Jennifer Yuen, John England, and Roberto Figueroa, entitled “The dynamics of housing affordability.” The material provided was presented in the Statistics Canada catalogue in January of 2008 as a joint-effort with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The information provided is in specific reference to the dynamics of housing affordability and the likelihood of spending more than 30% or more of household income on shelter. This publication reviews Canada as a whole, looking primarily at those who exceed the affordability benchmark. The information is provided in twelve pages of text, graphs, and charts.

The next two publications are both produced independently by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and were published during the Fourth Quarter in 2008. Although these educational tools were produced by one of the groups who was included in the joint-effort previously mentioned, these two are more focused on region, one being Ontario in general and the other, more specifically, focused on Peterborough. The “Housing Now: Ontario Region” publication is more of a report, spanning thirty-nine pages in total. The primary focus of this

research has been on the quantitative analysis of the types and price trends of new home construction in Ontario. Used in conjunction with information regarding income trends and affordability benchmarks, the material in this report is important in understanding the housing situation in Ontario as a whole. The “Housing Now: Peterborough” is twenty-six pages of tables, written data, and maps regarding the provision of housing in Peterborough CMA. This report looks at employment in connection with the sales of different housing types and houses in various price ranges.

The “Where’s Home” publications of 2006 and 2008 were compared next. Both reports are primarily concerned with the focus area of Ontario, one published on March 2, 2009 regarding information gathered throughout 2008 (sixty-six pages) and the other published regarding information gathered in 2006 (forty-five pages). Both were published by Lapointe Consulting in effort with the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. The first “Where’s Home” report was produced in 1999 and has been produced regularly since, focusing on housing availability and development. The 2008 publication is dependent on 2006 census data because there was no contemporary data to measure the impact of the recession at the point that data was being collected. The connection made through the use of these reports is between housing affordability and the intensifying debate regarding the impact of poverty in Ontario. The argument made in the 2008 publication is that housing, health, and job availability initiatives are needed in conjunction with one another in order to combat poverty within Ontario. Both publications have taken a stance against government policy as it stood when the research was conducted, placing emphasis on the importance of putting affordable housing issues at the forefront of anti-poverty policies.

The last piece of material analyzed was the Fall 2008 Newsletter of the National Housing Research Committee. This publication is a bi-lingual document, written in both English (fourteen pages) and French (fourteen pages) as it is composed from information that spans the nation. The Committee was established in 1986 and is made up of the federal, provincial and territorial, and municipal governments as well as representatives from the industry and social housing sectors, academic community and consumer representatives. The objective of this publication is to identify priority areas for housing related research; to foster cooperation, partnerships, and minimize research overlap; encourage support for housing research; and to promote the dissemination, application, and adaptation of research results. Beginning on page four, each page is devoted to a specific topic ranging from developing sustainable housing initiatives in Iqaluit to the changing patterns in homeownership and shelter costs in Canada. This publication is significant because of the voice that it gives to marginalized populations from across Canada and in doing so, provides opportunity for change to take place.

4.2. Surveys

The survey approach to collecting data is aimed at answering questions surrounding how the Peterborough community feels regarding the effectiveness of the A.H.A.C. publication and, in addition, provides quantitative data pertaining to the readership of the publication. This method has enabled us to address additional research questions such as what the publication is used for, how useful it proves to be, and whether more information is desired. Many different types of questions were employed including open-ended and closed questions as well as scaling and multiple choice, in order to gain the most relevant information from the surveyed audience (see appendix for survey questions).

Surveys were sent out via e-mail to those community members who appeared on the distribution list for the A.H.A.C. publication. The list that was provided for this report included a variety of organizations and individuals involved in housing provision as well as community groups who have expressed an interest or perhaps have an invested interest in the outcome of affordable housing issues.

As a start to the survey process, an advertisement was sent out with the current “Housing is Fundamental” publication (2008) alerting community members of the research that was being conducted. We also provided them with an opportunity to ask us any questions they may have had or to express a general interest in our study. Following the distribution of this advertisement, in January, we contacted the individuals on the distribution list by phone and email to ask for their participation and depending on their chosen method, we collected that information from them personally. The survey results were then coded and analyzed for common trends which were then placed in charts and graphs.

4.3. Interviews

Interviews were conducted as part of the research process in order to allow us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of this publication. In addition, these interviews provided a more personalized opinion and review of the publication by readers as well as additional suggestions by some of the readers. The four interviews that were conducted were done over the phone with members of the city council who receive the publication and may directly use or recommend this text. The eighteen questions that composed the interviews (found in the appendix) included discussions around the usefulness of the publication, suggestions for improvement, ideas around their understanding of the issues, and to gather information about the

readership and the effectiveness of the dissemination as it currently stands. In order to properly analyze this data the interviews were transcribed and then coded to show common trends.

4.4. Background Research

This field of the research process encompassed the collection of information, such as census data, that was necessary for proper analysis of the issues of geographical distribution and population demographics in the Peterborough County. This information has helped to address the variations in readership by geographic location and has been useful in developing background information on the Peterborough County as a whole and where Peterborough stands in terms of affordable housing provision.

Research in this area was conducted from the very beginning of the project, beginning with the review and assessment of general information around affordable housing issues to ensure that we, as researchers, are up to date on these issues. As a result of contemporary poverty issues it is important to understand the need for a holistic approach to the study specifically surrounding affordable housing issues. The background research was primarily informed through our use of resources produced by the CMHC, who are a reputable authority on housing issues in Canada, through government publications, as well as through an exploration of policy initiatives in Peterborough, Ontario, and in Canada as a whole.

5. Results

The results gained from the surveys collected and the interviews conducted have provided the information needed to assess the effectiveness of the publication by the readership. The information gathered covers a wide variety of topics that aim to address what the publication is used for, what the information levels of the readership are, the intended target audience (and

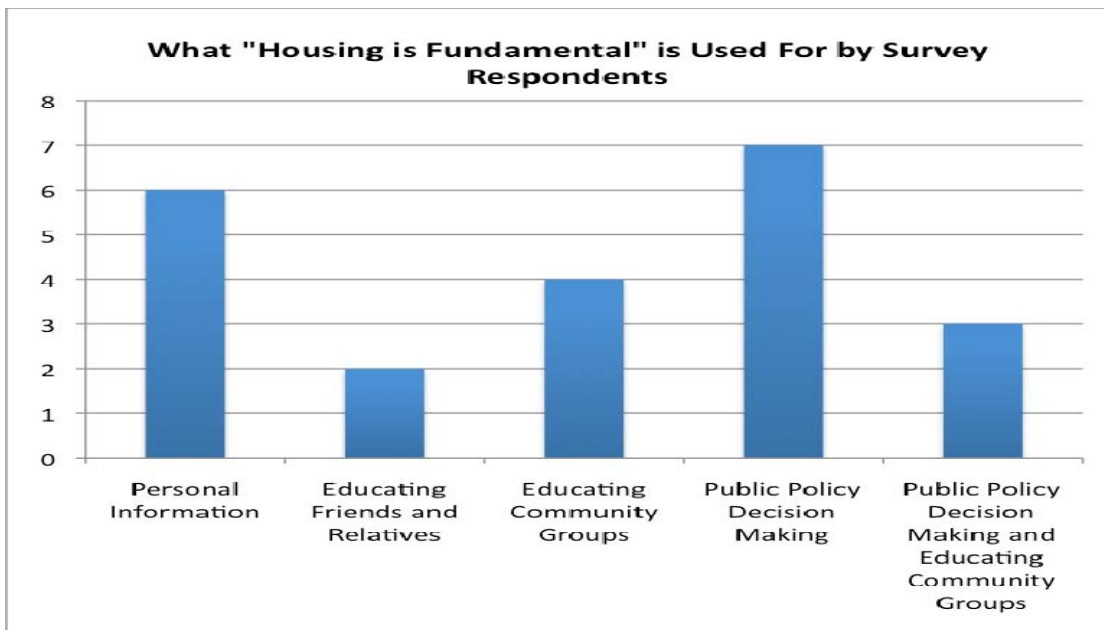
whether there is anyone left out), what aspects of the publication are helpful and what could be changed about the publication. The results from the surveys will be presented in this order with the aid of graphs to represent the quantifiable data. The results from the surveys will primarily be used to inform and to analyze within the discussion section below. Out of the sixty surveys that were sent out by email we received twelve responses. Two of these respondents declined to take part in the survey therefore leaving us with ten significant responses and a twenty percent response rate.

5.1 Who the Respondents Are

The respondents to the survey have been living in Peterborough anywhere between 5 and 47 years at an overall average of 19.4 years in Peterborough. Three of the respondents do not live in Peterborough but are from the surrounding area. In terms of the length of subscription 70% of the respondents have received the “Housing is Fundamental” publication all three years that it has been published, 20% have received it two of the three years and 10% have received it just this past year. When asked to rate their perceived knowledge of affordable housing issues 80% of respondents stated that they were aware of the issues, 50% said that they were actively involved, and 30% of respondents listed that they were both aware of the issues as well as actively involved. In addition to this, 70% of respondents used the document additional times beyond the first reading and 70% said that they would know where to find their personal copy of the “Housing is Fundamental” document three months after their initial reading or receipt of the publication.

5.2 What the Publication is Used For

In terms of the different uses for the publication respondents were given four choices on the survey: personal information, educating friends and relatives, educating community groups, and public policy decision-making. Of these four things 60% of respondents cited that they used the publication for personal information, 20% for educating friends and relatives, 40% said that they used the publication in the education of community groups, and 70% stated that they used the publication in public policy decision-making. Three respondents stated that they use the publication for both public policy decision-making as well as for educating community groups.



The city councilors who were interviewed stated that they used the “Housing is Fundamental” publication as reference material and background information in understanding and accessing affordable housing issues or factual information about Peterborough. In addition, they use this publication to analyze where to put council votes in reference to affordable housing, and to see how other communities can be affected down the road.

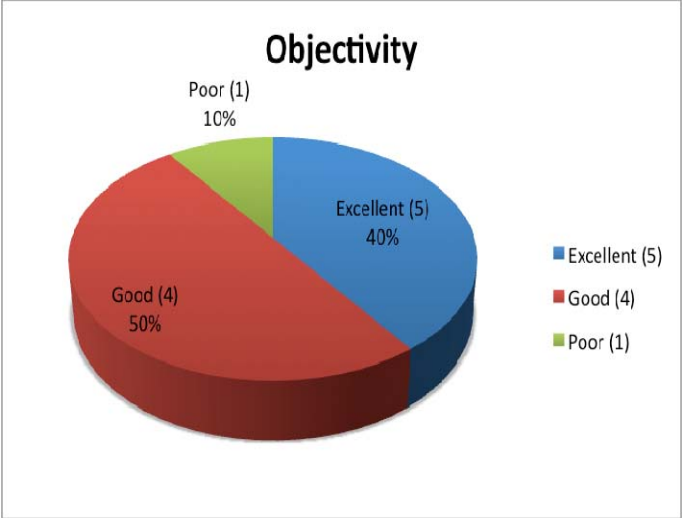
In looking at the use and availability of the publication 70% of survey respondents had accessed the A.H.A.C. website and 90% said that it is useful to have the “Housing is

Fundamental” document on the A.H.A.C. website. In support of this point, the additional comments made included that the website provided easy access for those who cannot get a hard copy or do not have it with them, that the website makes the publication easy to find and share, and that it provides public access to information and is helpful for research. The one person that stated that the website was not useful stated that this was a duplicate service because of the mail out format of distribution.

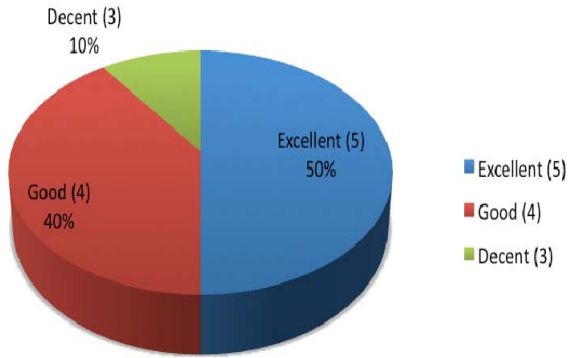
5.3 Assessment of the Content Information and Usefulness

The content of the publication was evaluated on a number of different levels. All of the participants, when asked in a general sense, stated that they found the content informative. As part of the survey one question asks respondents to rank the document from excellent to poor based on seven categories: Professionalism, Accuracy/Reliability, Quality of Content, Usefulness of Information, Appearance, Comprehensive Content, and Objectivity. The following graphs display the results.

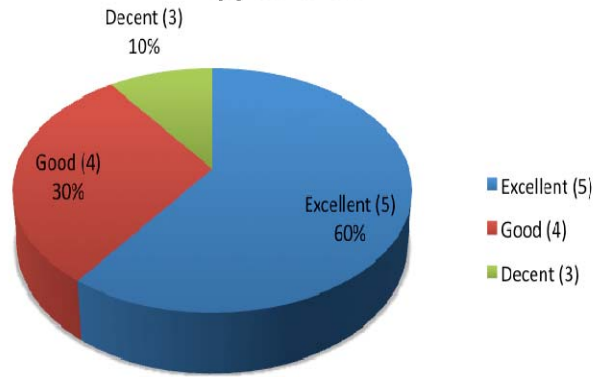
Respondents were asked, in addition to these criteria, whether the design and layout of the publication is effective and easy to follow to which 90% responded yes and 10% responded no. The response was that the charts were useful and that the use of columns and colour was professional. Some found the layout easy to read while others found it to be too busy with lots of repetition of same issues or that the printing too small and that the white printing on a grey background was hard to read.



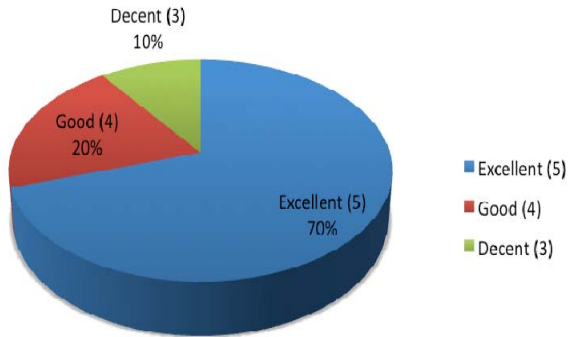
Comprehensive Content



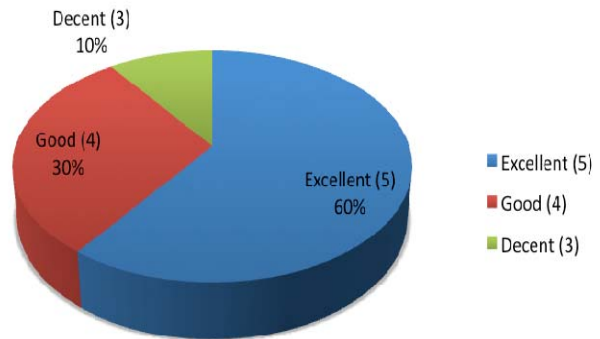
Appearance



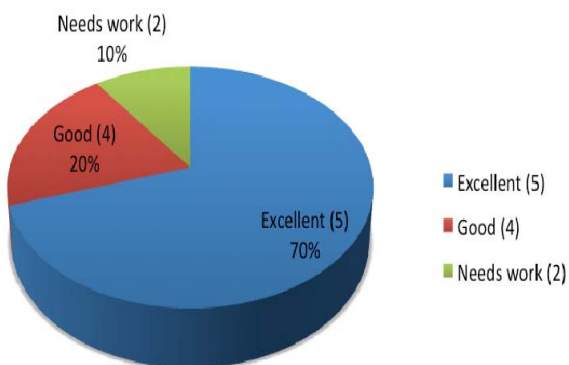
Usefulness of Information



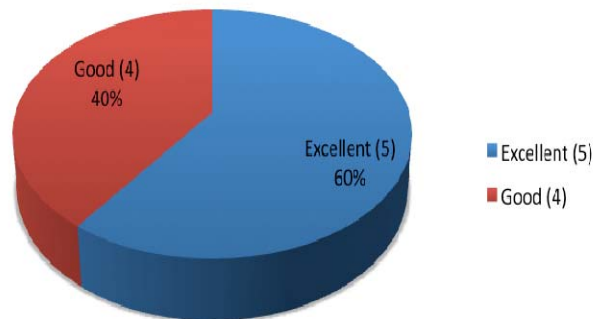
Quality of Content



Accuracy/Reliability



Professionalism



Respondents were also asked whether the “Housing is Fundamental” documents was useful for the community to which 80% responded that yes it is useful, one person chose not to respond, and one person stated that they were “not sure of the accuracy of information – or interpretation of content.” In addition, respondents were asked which information they found useful. Respondents listed issues such as “income vs. housing changes,” the connections to poverty, health, and mental health, income requirements in relation to the Peterborough housing market, demand and supply information, and “information pertaining to what developments and activities are actually occurring in the community.”

A total of 40% of respondents stated that they found the statistics most useful, especially those pertaining to the local area, the number of needy households, and the summary tables. In addition to this, the recommendations made within the document were also found to be useful to one respondent. Lastly, one respondent stated that all of the information was valuable but that it also depended on the use. The material within the document itself is generally found to be easy to understand and moderately accessible. When asked 60% said “Housing is Fundamental” was easy to understand while 40% stated that it was moderately accessible. In the interviews with city councilors one councilor stated that the discussions surrounding affordability itself were most valuable and what this terms means, the cost of utilities, and what the implications are within the Peterborough profile.

5.4 Who is the Intended Target Audience?

When asked who the perceived target audience is respondents included a variety of key stakeholders within the community. These mostly include the general public and concerned citizens as well as a variety of community organizations, advocacy groups, and policy makers. In addition, the government, the city council, and housing providers were also included. One

respondent suggested that the target audience was people in office environments, who know about the issues, but are not able to work with them. This respondent further suggested that developers (for construction purposes) and provincial, federal, and municipal governments (for construction incentives) need to be targeted because there seems to be a lack in developers who want to be involved in social housing projects. In addition, when asked whether this was an appropriate target audience 70% said that yes it is and 20% said no.

5.5 What Changes Can Be Made

When asked how the layout of the publication could be changed a couple of respondents stated that they would not change it and to keep it simple and to the point. Another respondent suggested that having a large visual on the front page instead of the “editorial text section” would be more appealing. In addition to this other suggestions included to “add some personal stories from people trying to find housing, having trouble finding affordable housing, or living in situations with poor quality housing” and to use info or mapping techniques to highlight important information.

5.6 Opportunity for Comment

When given the option to provide additional comments respondents expressed a great deal of enthusiasm over the publication. One respondent stated that, “This is an excellent resource, that brings together tons of useful information in one place that would otherwise be quite inaccessible to the average organization or person.” It was also stated that the “Housing is Fundamental” publication is “really excellent to hand out at training/education events on poverty and housing issues.”

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Significance of Results

6.11 General Significant Facts

It is clear from the user responses within the surveys and from the impressions given within the interviews that “Housing is Fundamental” is a useful document for the community. In stating so survey respondents added that the publication is an “up to date source of information on housing and homelessness” and that it is a “benchmark to access changing conditions and/or progress.” In addition to these comments the publication is also seen as giving “vital info to all concerned stakeholders” and that “contrary to belief very few people actually know the plight.” One survey respondent stated that it is “an excellent education and awareness tool” and another stated that it is “a concise source of housing facts” and that it is “applicable to many situations”. Based on this great sense of positivity surrounding the publication it is hard not to see the potential for growth and expansion within the community that this publication has.

The most significant response was that 40% of respondents stated that they found the statistics most useful, especially those pertaining to the local area, the number of needy households, and the summary tables. In addition to this, the recommendations made within the publication were also found to be useful to one respondent. Lastly, one respondent stated that all of the information was valuable but that it also depended on the use.

The responses within the survey that indicate what respondents use the publication for (i.e. personal information, educating community groups, public policy decision making and educating friends and family) shows the potential of the document in enacting social change, in being used to inform policy decisions, and in educating the public. The broader reaching potential to inform groups in a variety of different sectors and backgrounds at a community level is something that has already been started by readers and can be further directed in the future.

Along the lines of advocacy, when asked what the publication could be used for (with changes), one respondent stated that the document could be used in lobbying for program changes and funding and another respondent stated that the Affordable Housing Action Committee is able to show the variety of problems as well as their perceived solutions but that the need should focus on direct involvement.

In addition to the uses of the publication city councilors were also asked to identify the issues that they see as necessary in discussions about affordable housing. The resulting answers were that rent and tax issues were very important as well as partnerships that can be formed within the municipality to provide housing. This was brought up in multiple responses and indicates that the municipality is often overwhelmed in meeting affordable housing goals, especially with limitations placed on them by provincial and federal governments. This identifies the importance of issues surrounding good governance, accountability, and management as well as the monitoring and evaluation of partnerships. In addition to these ideas, issues were also raised about information provided concerning the criteria for tenant selection and the difficulties associated with maintaining affordable or supportive housing once they have gained access to it.

6.12 Perceptions of the Target Audience

The target audience for this publication is one that has been focused by the A.H.A.C. organization in the formation of their distribution list and who has been kept in mind in the creation and production of the publication as a whole. With the aim of reaching people that can inform decision-making processes and policy formations, as well as concerned community members, this publication has been specifically geared in one direction. This becomes clear when respondents were asked whether they found themselves shocked, surprised, or reacting substantially to the information or statistics found within the document. Only 20% of

respondents had this surprised reaction while 60% were not shocked or taken aback and 20% only somewhat reacted. This reaction amongst the readership of the publication shows that these readers have some knowledge of these issues within the community and that they have been informed previously as to the seriousness of this issue, whether or not they were aware of the specifics. In support of this point, as is previously mentioned, when respondents to the survey were asked to rate their perceived knowledge of affordable housing issues 80% of respondents stated that they were aware of the issues, 50% said that they were actively involved, and 30% of respondents listed that they were both aware of the issues as well as actively involved. This shows that the readership of the publication is already engaging in affordable housing issues and that they are working towards informing themselves more. This also means that there is more room to expand the readership and to perhaps reach a target audience who is not quite as informed or actively involved in affordable housing projects.

When asked whether respondents knew anyone who should be receiving the publication that may benefit from it the most significant answer to this question, with a 40% response, was no. This response implies that the publication is reaching its intended target audience. However, when further prompted with a question as to how this publication could be reaching a broader audience respondents stated that the publication could be distributed at public displays or events, could be highlighted in a library display cabinet, or could be made available in public places, that it could be inserted in community newspapers, mentioned in newspaper articles or other local media, that it be sent to real estate associations, home builders associations, and construction associations as well as the FCM and other municipalities (of whom produce similar products). Only one respondent stated that the document should have a limited circulation, which they believed that the publication is currently being distributed to.

When asked what the target audience should be respondents stated that real-estate associations, home-builders associations, construction associations, as well as the public and local decision makers, were all key groups. The different levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) were also brought up by 40% of respondents. In addition to these key stakeholders, one respondent suggested that all agencies providing social housing as well as service groups such as the CNIB, the Alzheimer's Society, the MS Society, etc. also be included. One city councilor, in addition, added that churches would benefit from this publication.

Keeping in mind that the target audience for this publication has primarily been those people who have the ability to influence policy initiatives and are involved to some extent within the affordable housing field, as well as those people who may take a concerned interest, the enthusiasm of the city councilors interviewed further reinforces the current effectiveness of this publication to date. Throughout the interviews a general sense was gained by the researchers that because this publication is produced by a community organization through the City of Peterborough it is an exciting initiative and one that the city councilors are very much in favor of. One city councilor stated that they "commend community groups who try to make changes because the city participates can't do it alone."

6.13 Suggestions for Changes by the Readers

One area in which a possible change could take place is in how often the publication is published. With the general enthusiasm of the readership it is not far off to assume that increased frequency in the publication of this document would not be received well. Most of the respondents, however, recognize the limitations of the A.H.A.C. publication in producing this document and are therefore supportive of the annual publication as it currently stands. A total of

80% of the survey respondents stated that the annual publication of the document was suitable while 20% suggested that the document be produced on a quarterly basis.

In terms of the constructive criticism offered by readers of the publication it was stated that “the document is quite text dense, and some of the affordability tables are difficult to understand.” Also included with this was a statement specifically addressing the ability of the publication to provide practical suggestions for the future. This statement is as follows: “The section on "You can help" should have lots of practical ideas, and be very specific. Contact information for more information or follow-up should be very clear (missing from first two issues).” This is an issue that came up in the interviews conducted with city councilors. One city councilor found that when looking to find contacts or practical housing opportunities for those in need that it would be helpful if information like this were included in a resource such as “Housing is Fundamental.” In this way direct and accessible practical solutions would be at hand for readers and a feeling for something that can be done may be gained.

On that note, one reader stated that, “the continued need for decent affordable housing is very real, but to overstate the negativity to make the point is often counter-productive. Especially in tougher economic times, the middle class population are financially stressed, and a hard sell approach to the needs of the marginalized population can actually be a “turn off’.” This reader made the suggestion that,

It is better to state the facts in an informative way, acknowledge any progress that has been made in a definite way (“not as a token comment such as: “while some progress has been made....”), and yet still make the needs known. This is not to say to water down anything negative, but don’t add more water in the hopes of making your point stronger. All negativity will turn off the very people we need to read this publication. Because of the compassion of so many people in this realm of need, there has to be at least some “positive” activity.

This need for positive solutions and suggestions for engagement with the issues is one that many people look for in reading material that may make them feel uncomfortable about the state of their community or even about the world in general. There seems to be a demand for reassurance that all hope is not lost and that positivity can be gained. This is not to take away from the seriousness of the issues but in providing information about the possible solutions and the success of projects already underway readers will be able to see that real change is possible.

In addition to these suggestions it is also suggested that further expansion take place in broadening the scope of the publication to include a comparison with provincial and federal statistics in addition to those provided about Peterborough. The city councilor who suggested this, in particular, stated that the publication is “pretty comprehensive for its size” but that it does lack federal and provincial government information.

6.2 Recommendations

Through the analysis of the research collected we have been able to assemble a variety of suggestions and recommendations for the A.H.A.C. organization as to possible future directions that the “Housing is Fundamental” publication could take. The first of these suggestions is to encourage further exploration and inclusion of Federal and Provincial Statistics in addition to, and in comparison with, the Peterborough City and County statistics already used successfully within the publication. This is something that has come out of both the survey and the interview responses and is something that we feel would be beneficial in providing greater context to the situation in Peterborough and a broader look at the situation experienced by others in Ontario and Canada. Being able to identify trends not only on a local level but in context with a broader scheme of things can often foster solidarity and communication between communities in engaging with issues that are as important as affordable housing provision.

In conjunction with these broader statistics we would recommend further engagement with the area immediately surrounding Peterborough in addressing affordable housing issues. There have been great initiatives in surrounding towns and counties in providing social or affordable housing. Presenting alternative cases and smaller scale initiatives would address the differing levels of scale involved in these issues as well as further engagement with the county that is perhaps not as developed as it could be. This would also open doors for the further distribution of the publication to a wider readership and a larger geographical scope.

In addition to this area of research it is also our recommendation that contact information, or additional information for how further resources can be accessed, be provided within the publication. This information would include the availability of affordable housing options in Peterborough and the current projects that are underway. This may include profiles of success stories and who is responsible for such initiatives. Having ready contact information and resources available within the publication also acts as a link for community members in easily acting towards change or in addressing the needs of others in providing assistance. In engaging with a broader community it may also be helpful to show comparisons between housing affordability within the City of Peterborough in relation to the surrounding county and the differences in initiatives that can be seen between the two.

During our research issues such as the diversity of the readership were raised and in our communication with community members concern over the accessibility and inclusivity of the publication for low-income groups was raised. To address these issues we would suggest the expansion of the distribution list to include a variety of community groups (such as churches and community centres) as well as a selection of people experiencing the real effects of affordable housing issues and the disparity present there. This initiative could be done on a trial basis and

could then be reassessed for its effectiveness. This leads into our further suggestion of the general update of the distribution list as well as an expansion of the readership to a more diverse group of citizens. Further research may have to be done in order to assess and organize the different groups that would possibly benefit from this publication.

Lastly, we recommend that personal stories and accounts be included within the publication as a way to engage personally with people who are living in affordable housing projects, who have suffered from the lack of affordable housing, and who are able to shed light on the experiences of people who live in low-income situations and who are unable to meet their basic needs. As part of our experience as researchers we have learned the importance of offering qualitative and descriptive data in addition to quantitative statistics and the variety of perspectives and sense for the scope of the issue that this can provide to a research framework. In addition to this we would also suggest more pictures and use of colour within the text as a way to catch the eye of prospective readers of the publication. Pictures of current housing projects would be beneficial in allowing readers to envision the real spatial impact that these projects can have.

6.3 Were Our Objectives Met?

The first of our original research questions outlined in this report is as follows: What are important changes that can be made to the AHAC publication “Housing is Fundamental” in order to make it more useful and widely read? The analysis and assembly of the current uses of the publication as well as the suggested uses and possible directions for further improvement suggested by the survey responses and the interviews have been instrumental in meeting this first question. In successfully completing this part of the process we feel as if we have gained a comprehensive view of the importance of affordable housing issues within Peterborough and can

see the passion and dedication of the Peterborough community in engaging with these issues. Through the interest expressed, solid action may result, and based on the suggestions made by the readers of this publication, as well as the suggestions that we have been able to form ourselves, we feel as if we have been able to make significant suggestions for further improvement and direction that can be taken within the scope of this publication.

Our second research directive addressed the question as to why a publication like this is important for discussing housing issues and social geography issues. The scope of social issues and community initiatives that are addressed as part of this publication bring about patterns of the disparities that are felt and the real spatial differences that can be made as a result of social change. Through our analysis and engagement with the “Housing is Fundamental” publication we have been able to see the kind of context for these issues that this publication provides. “Housing is Fundamental” provides a successful framework for addressing policy issues and gaps in housing provision within the bureaucratic structure that helps to dictate these policies. In recognizing this, through our exploration of background research and our textual analysis we have been able to see the variety of movements surrounding these issues and the different forums for addressing these across different levels of scale. As we have seen in the community response to this publication community initiatives like this one can have a real effect on the people living in the community and can influence their decisions and actions for the future.

6.4 Roadblocks

The first challenge faced at the onset of this project was in designing the scope of the research and the direction that we wanted to pursue in achieving our research objectives. This project was presented to us in an open-ended format in which we had quite a bit of leeway in terms of the framework of the project. In making these decisions we were faced with difficulties in trying to

comprise our personal engagement with the issues surrounding affordable housing with the objectives of the A.H.A.C. organization and with the requirements of the City of Peterborough. It was important to meet the geography requirements within the scope of the project as well as maintaining an objective stance as researchers.

In trying to meet the geography requirements presented as part of the Geography 470 course we were challenged with creating an additional scope in which key geographical issues could be represented. After much thought we were able to identify different subcategories of geography in which we were able to situate the realm of this project, the primary one being social geography. Within the context of social geography we were able to identify various health indicators, security challenges, demographic representation, income distribution, and physical distribution. Following the identification of these social geography issues within the topic of affordable housing we were able to focus the scope of the project in this direction.

The scope of the project, being as broad as it was, made it difficult to maintain the objectivity often stressed in approaches to research and a stance that was specifically stressed to us in our initial engagement with the project. Objectivity became a challenge within this project because of the temptation to bring in our own personal stances on affordable housing issues and to gear this project towards our own personal activism within this realm. Upon consultation with the different stakeholders in this project, we were able to redefine our role as researchers. Our focus became the analysis of the “Housing is Fundamental” text rather than our role as social activists.

Upon embarking on the research phase of this project we encountered further issues pertaining to the collection of significant survey data because of challenges we faced in regards to the distribution list that we were provided with. Our first issue with this list was in that it was not fully up to date. This created difficulties in tracking down certain personnel because some

had moved on from their positions or were no longer available for contact. The second challenge we faced with the distribution list was that we were not provided with significant information for all of the listed contacts to meet the format of the email survey. As a result we took on extensive searches for additional contact information but ended up having to exclude some of the included contacts from the survey.

Lastly, we faced uncertainty in gaining significant numbers in response rates and participation in the surveys and interviews. Our goal was to engage with as many contacts as possible in gaining a significant understanding of the readership of the “Housing is Fundamental” publication. Because initial participation was lower than expected we were discouraged in the consideration of the significance of our findings. We were able to overcome this uncertainty through the sending out of a reminder to recipients of the survey to make them aware of the importance of their feedback as well as the realization that a 20% response rate is well above the 2% average response rate gained by many researchers.

7. Future Direction for Research

As researchers we were limited in our ability to address all of the issues associated with the production of a publication that covers a wide variety of topics and that reaches people personally in a variety of different ways. First of all, we would suggest further research and compiling of information on the personal accounts and stories of people living with the real effects of the lack of affordable housing with the aim of including this research within the publication in the future. The compilation of these stories would add to the personal affecting quality that the publication itself has and would create a greater understanding and personal association to the issues presented within the publication for the readers directly. Being able to establish a personal connection to affordable housing issues would enhance the importance of

these issues to real members of the Peterborough community. In addition to this, we believe that it would be important to survey a variety of groups/people that have viewed the publication from community locations (not included on the current distribution list) where the publication has been provided in advance. This would allow for user feedback from a more diverse population. Both of these areas present complex research topics on their own but we feel that these would be important additions to the research that we have already conducted.

8. Conclusion

The goal of this project has been to effectively contribute to the A.H.A.C. organization through their publication of an important document to the community. Our mission was to assess and provide suggestive feedback for the future of the publication, “Housing is Fundamental,” and to strengthen the content and the information provided. Through engagement with readers and users of the publication we have been able to gain a comprehensive overview of the importance of this publication to the community in raising awareness for affordable housing issues and for providing a framework to address these issues within the realm of the formal municipality. What we have been able to produce has been a list of recommendations for the future of the publication, such as the expansion of the distribution list and the broadening of the scope of the initiative, as well as an overview of how the readers of the publication engage with the text and view the organization itself. Through community involvement and the analysis of literature that is relevant to the debate over affordable housing we have been able to engage with the pressing issues of affordable housing and hope to be able to contribute to the action and initiatives that are being taken within this field.

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10. Appendix:

10.1: Survey Questions

User Survey for the Affordable Housing Action Committee “Housing is Fundamental”
Publication

Disclaimer: You are being invited to voluntarily participate in this user survey. The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness and usefulness of the “Housing is Fundamental” publication as well as to gain knowledge about how it is used within the Peterborough community. Your name will not appear on your completed survey, no identifying information is being collected as part of this survey, and you will not be putting yourself in any known risk by your participation. You may leave the survey at any time before completing it. There is no cost to you except for your time and you are not compensated monetarily or otherwise for participation in this study. Only the principal investigators will have access to the information that you provide. **By participating in the survey, you are giving permission for the investigators to use your information for research purposes.**

If you have further questions you may feel free to ask the principle investigators, Jessica Reeve and Kelly McGann.

1. How long have you lived in Peterborough? _____

2. How many years have you been receiving the AHAC publication for?

- a) First time
- b) 2 years
- c) 3 years

3. Do you use the document additional times beyond your first reading?

Yes_____ No_____

4. Please rate the document on the following where 5 is excellent and 1 is poor:

Professionalism 1 2 3 4 5

Accuracy/Reliability 1 2 3 4 5

Quality of Content 1 2 3 4 5

Usefulness of Information 1 2 3 4 5

Appearance 1 2 3 4 5

Comprehensive Content 1 2 3 4 5

Objectivity 1 2 3 4 5

5. Have you ever accessed the A.H.A.C. website?

Yes_____ No_____

6. Is it useful to have copies of the publication on the website?

Yes_____ No_____

Explain_____

7. Would you know where to find your personal copy of this document three months after your initial reading or receipt?

Yes_____ No_____

8. Do you ever compare statistics contained in the current document with statistics from the previous year(s) documents?

Yes_____ No_____

9. Is the "Housing is Fundamental" document useful for the community?

Yes_____ No_____

If so, how?

10. Do you think the design layout of the publication is effective and easy to follow?

Yes_____ No_____

Explain_____

11. Explain how you might change the layout of the publication.

12. How often should "Housing is Fundamental" be published?

a) Annually

b) Bi-Annually

c) Quarterly

13. Rate your perceived knowledge of affordable housing issues?

- a) Uninformed
- b) Some understanding
- c) Aware of issues
- d) Actively involved

14. Do you find the content informative?

Yes_____ No_____

15. Do you find yourself shocked, surprised, or reacting substantially to information or statistics found within the document?

Yes_____ No_____ Somewhat_____

16. What information do you think is the most useful?

17. What do you use the publication for? Circle all that apply.

- a) Personal information
- b) Educating friends and relatives
- c) Educating community groups
- d) Public policy decision making

18. With changes what could it be used for?

19. Do you know anyone who should be receiving the publication who you think would benefit from it?

Yes _____ No _____ Not Sure _____

20. Do you have any suggestions for how this publication could be reaching a broader audience?

21. Upon reading this publication who do you think the targeted audience is?

22. Is that an appropriate target audience?

Yes _____ No _____

23. Who do you think the target audience should be? (Ex. Types of organizations or groups of people). Explain.

24. Do you think that the material in this document is accessible and easily understood for all readers?

a) Easy to understand

b) Moderately accessible

c) Not accessible to all

d) Don't know

25. Additional comments:

Thank You for your Participation!

10.2: Interview Questions:

Verbal Disclaimer: You are being invited to voluntarily participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness and usefulness of the “Housing is Fundamental” publication as well as to gain knowledge about how it is used within the Peterborough community. Your name will not appear on your interview transcript, no identifying information is being collected as part of this interview, and you will not be putting yourself in any known risk by your participation. There is no cost to you except for your time and you are not compensated monetarily or otherwise for participation in this study. Only the principal investigators will have access to the information that you provide. **By participating in the interview, you are giving permission for the investigators to use your information for research purposes.**

If you have further questions you may feel free to ask the principle investigators, Jessica Reeve and Kelly McGann.

The signature of the interviewer represents the consent given by the interviewee in participating in this interview and that he/she has been informed of the participation agreement.

X_____

1. How many years have you worked with the city?
2. What division do you work for?
3. Have you received all three “Housing is Fundamental” publications?
4. Have you noticed a change over the years in the format of the publication?

11. What issues do you see as necessary in discussions about affordable housing?

12. Do you see this publication as an important contributor for social change?

13. How do you feel about the annual publication? Should it be done more often

14. Who do you think benefits most from receiving the publication?

15. Based on your knowledge of the types of groups that receive this publication is there a group that you think may be left out?

16. Is there any group you think that would not benefit or be able to actively use this publication?

17. Suggestion for further improvements?

18. Any additional comments?

Thank You for Your Participation!