
Affordable housing in HRM: a snapshot

— Ren Thomas Research & Planning —

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Overview

Affordability has sharply decreased in HRM since 2008: increased immigration/migration to a region that hadn't seen growth for decades

Since 2019 there has been a very low rental vacancy rate and increased number of people experiencing homelessness (AHANS estimates 814 people in February 2023)

Overview

Most housing in Canada is built in the private market for people with incomes well over area medians

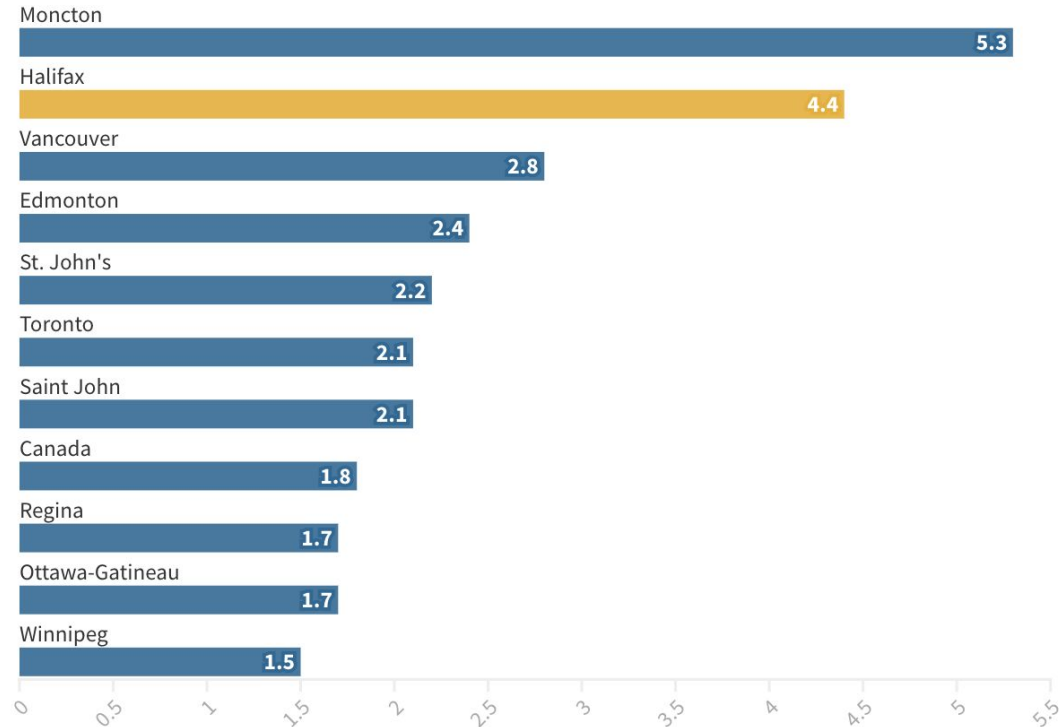
Canadian municipalities are unable to build, or incentivize, much of the housing they need. This responsibility was delegated to them in the mid-1990s with no extra funding or ability to raise funds. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that we need 50,000 units in Nova Scotia by 2030 to meet housing need

National Housing Strategy funding has not prioritized long-term affordability and has not, and will likely not, change the percentage of households in core housing need.

Atlantic boom: No other urban centres in Canada saw as much population growth by percentage as Moncton and Halifax in 2022



Halifax's population grew more than twice as fast as the national average from July 1, 2021, to July 1, 2022.



Acknowledgement of the need for systemic change

ScotiaBank Insights and Reviews (January 18, 2023) recommends buying, building, retrofitting and building new social housing units to meet the need of low-income households

CMHC 2022 Rental Market Report (January 2023) showed a vast increase in the number of rental units being built (including a record number in Vancouver), but also in the number of renter households

Rentals.ca January 2023 Rent Report noted average rent increases of 12% from 2021, but individual cities were as high as 32% (Kitchener)

What has the Province done?

The Province established an Affordable Housing Commission in 2020 to engage with the public and key stakeholders to come up with recommendations, reporting back to the Premier and Minister by July 2021. The Commission report emphasized 17 recommendations including four Quick Start actions:

- \$35 M Housing Supply Fund for demonstration projects in mixed-use and mixed-tenure (including 714 affordable units), 425 new rent supplements, and targeted funding to support the federal Rapid Housing Initiative
- \$2.5 M Community Housing Growth Fund for co-ops and non-profits
- \$2 M for existing public housing repairs/renewal
- \$500,000 for housing needs assessments to help the 49 local authorities understand their housing needs, including African NS communities

What has the Province done?

Recommendations

1. Establish an arm's length independent provincial housing entity
2. Recognize housing as a right and a key strategic sector for economic development, health, and social equity
3. Modernize provincial legislation and regulations
4. Develop a long-term provincial housing strategy
5. Empower municipalities to become key partners in affordable housing
6. Support the creation of more affordable housing, prioritizing a mixed-income, multi-partner approach
7. Reduce costs for new affordable housing
8. Reduce regulatory and non-cost barriers of new development
9. Prevent the loss of affordable homes
10. Build community housing capacity
11. Transform our public housing model
12. Expand housing options that meet the needs of seniors and vulnerable Nova Scotians
13. Provide targeted resources and supports to vulnerable and underrepresented communities
14. Enhance renter protections, equitable access, and better-functioning conditions for rental housing
15. Address the specific needs of rural and non-urban communities
16. Improve access to rental housing data
17. Support innovation and promote cross-sectoral partnerships

What has the Province done?

- Consolidated the five regional housing authorities into a central authority managing public housing
- Collaborated on helping communities develop Community Land Trusts, such in as Truro and Hammonds Plains
- Amended the Municipal Governance Act (allowing them to use inclusionary zoning, provide private-sector housing incentives)
- Amended the Residential Tenancies Act to enhance protection from eviction due to renovations
- Supporting a housing needs assessment for African NS communities and supporting Tawaak Housing Association in their work on the National Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy
- Created an inventory of publicly owned land to identify sites for affordable housing development
- Amended the Halifax Charter to allow faster decisions, free up staff times, and improve development agreements (Deloitte Report October 2022)

What has the Province done?

Less action on:

- Establishing an arms-length provincial housing authority
- Developing a provincial housing strategy (engagement process began July 2022)
- Data sharing
- Education and awareness campaigns
- Online rental housing registry
- Rental unit preservation

Find their reports here:

<https://beta.novascotia.ca/documents/affordable-housing-reports>

What has HRM done?

- HRM Task Force on Housing (representatives from HRM Planning and Development, HRM Infrastructure, Housing NS, Municipal Affairs) allows the city and province to coordinate their efforts
- Introduced legislation to create a landlord registry
- Introduced regulations on short-term rentals, restricting those outside of primary homes and commercial zones (coming into effect Sept 2023)
- HRM led the country in new residential development in 2022

What are other stakeholders doing?

Mi'kmak Friendship Centre is building a tiny homes project for three individuals

With provincial and federal funding (RHI), Adsum for Women & Children, the Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre, North End Community Health Centre, AHANS, Soul's Harbour, and Coady's Place are building new affordable units

Akoma Holdings Inc. is redeveloping their property

Nova Scotia Non-Profit Housing Association, developed in partnership with the Community Housing Transformation Centre, Pauline MacIntosh at St. FX/Coady Institute

Lessons from other provinces/municipalities

There are many successful municipal strategies and programs (e.g. AccèsLogis and strong Technical Resource Groups promoting co-operatives in Québec, capital grants and long-term leases on City-owned land at low rates in Ottawa, municipal/provincial affordable housing supply programs (e.g. Cornerstones Edmonton, Secured Rental Housing Policy Vancouver), municipal housing development corporations (e.g. Hamilton, Edmonton, Calgary, municipal land banks (e.g. City of Saskatoon)

Conclusions

The housing situation in HRM is typical of that experienced across the country. Our provincial government has taken action, not as strong as some provinces but stronger than others. HRM is large enough to have also taken action where possible

The solutions will likely include a range of federal, provincial, and municipal initiatives to create different types of housing

The private-sector led model for housing development must transition to encourage more government-led and third sector-led development

Researchers hope for new policies on housing for LGBTQ seniors



Recommendations from Dalhousie researchers include better data gathering, anti-discrimination training

 [Shaina Luck](#) · CBC News · Posted: Dec 14, 2020 3:35 PM AT | Last Updated: 3 hours ago



Ren Thomas, left, an assistant professor at the school of planning at Dalhousie University, and Jacqueline Gahagan, a professor of health promotion, are gathering information on housing for LGBTQ seniors. (Shaina Luck/CBC)

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CBC MarketPlace (“Behind Closed Doors”, [February 24, 2023](#))