

## **November 2009 Symposium Update**

### **Coop Housing Futures: A Spatial Design Research Approach**

#### **Research Project Overview**

In the Fall 2008 BALTA meetings, researchers provided an overview of findings of a research project designed to investigate the potential to leverage Housing Coop assets for the provision of new affordable housing units and complexes. The researchers found that the potential of this financing mechanism was less than anticipated. Several barriers were identified including the high cost of new construction and the preference among many members of existing coops to realize housing cost savings rather than invest in new construction.

This research project proposes to take a different approach to the issue. The project will use a design methodology to explore possible futures for the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative in Calgary. A team of graduate design students, with skills in architecture, urban design, planning and industrial design will work with the cooperative to produce alternative physical designs for the renovation or reconfiguration of the existing Coop, and potentially, adjacent municipal-owned land.

The rationale for the project is to test the hypothesis that engaging Coop members in a design-based visioning process can provide the catalyst for creative re-investment in green renovation and/or new and green affordable housing construction, and can advance the incorporation of social enterprise into the co-op housing model. Given that municipal government support and policy is crucial for innovation in housing design, the project will identify barriers and opportunities for municipal government support for sustainable co-operative housing retrofit and new construction.

The project has already been approved in principle by the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative board, based on the attached project brief submitted to the Cooperative in January 2009. The attachment provides some detail on the proposed vehicle for this research - a graduate design course in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary.

There is also the potential for the City of Calgary to support the project with the inclusion in the design exercise of what is now a surface parking lot to the east of the Cooperative. Based on the design document produced through this exercise, and given a willingness of the Cooperative to pursue the project further, CMHC would be approached for funding for a more detailed assessment of the potential for renovation or redesign of the Cooperative.

The site in question is in a very strategic location in Calgary. It is a very visible inner city location with significant pedestrian and auto traffic, on the north side of the Bow River adjacent to the downtown. There is thus the showcase potential for the Cooperative as well as for each of the potential sponsors – BALTA, Enmax, The City of Calgary and CMHC.

The renovation option for the design exercise would include green space and public realm design as well as energy efficiency and renewable energy integration. The more ambitious design option would include provision of more housing and the inclusion of

mixed-use (i.e. the potential for retail, commercial and even light industrial uses that could support social economy enterprises).

The design course runs from September to December 2009. The product would be a high quality 40-60 page report detailing the proposed design alternatives for the site.

Objectives:

1. Produce a set of alternative designs for the eco-retrofit and/or reconfiguration of the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative.
2. Investigate the opportunity for Housing Cooperatives to incorporate commercial, retail and or light industrial space in support of social enterprises.
3. Test the hypothesis that a design methodology can catalyze action toward long term sustainability of housing cooperatives.

Outputs:

1. Three preliminary designs for the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative retrofit/reconfiguration.
2. A final detailed design for the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative retrofit/reconfiguration.
3. A High quality design document of the final design.
4. Assessment of the opportunity for design methodology to advance action on coop housing green retrofit, new coop housing construction, and incorporation of social enterprise into coop housing models.

Intended Outcomes

1. The enhancement of the internal capacity for the Sunnyhill Housing Coop to plan for its long-term future.
2. The Sunnyhill Housing Coop design document becomes an integral component of the Coops Vision 2020 exercise.
3. Sunnyhill Housing Coop members endorse a design for the coop and agree to move forward on securing funding for detailed economic feasibility. (note: this is an ideal outcome. The purpose of the design exercise is to test the hypothesis that a design research methodology can be a catalyst for action)
4. An action research model that could be adapted for use by other Housing Cooperatives.

## **Progress to Date**

The student design team has been working since the second week of September. The team consists of 4 masters students and 1 PhD student: one architect, one urban designer, one environmental scientist and one industrial designer and one Environmental Design Phd student with a masters degree in Engineering.

On October 10 the 5-member EVDS student project team facilitated a very successful all day design charette in a tent erected on the grounds of the Coop. About half of the members of the Coop participated in the charette including enthusiastic participation of Coop kids, the majority of the Coop Board of Directors and the SASHA Vision 2020 project team.

The attached sketches of the project site provide an overview of progress to date and the approach to the project being taken by the project team. Map A shows the strategic location of Sunnhyill Housing Coop in the city of Calgary.

It was decided that the design process would address three distinct areas as depicted on Map B. The focus of the project is obviously the Coop itself. However, through the early stages of the design process and the interim presentation to the Coop members, it was decided that a more ambitious and sustainable objective for the Coop would be to influence development of lands directly to the east of the Coop. The rationale put forward is that to secure city of Calgary support for the Coop lands to remain with the Coop beyond the expiration of the original lease, the Coop should champion a more inclusive vision for the east end of Sunnyside. To that end the final design project will produce a masterplan social economy vision for the Sunnyhill Housing Coop, the lands now owned and occupied by the Calgary Curling Club facility and the city-owned surface parking lot.

The final design will contain the concept for a masterplan for the lands depicted on Map B, and a more detailed design and phasing of the Coop lands. Final designs will be presented to the Coop on December 9.