

B.C.- Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA)

Project Proposal – Project A7-2009

- A. Title of project:** Co-op Housing Futures: A Spatial Design Research Approach
- B. With which BALTA SERC Is this project associated? Or is it a cross cutting project?** SERC 1
- C. Lead researcher, organization name and contact information:**
Dr. Noel Keough, University of Calgary, Faculty of Environmental Design
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- D. Names of other researchers and organizations involved:**
Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative, Calgary, Alberta
- E. Description of project, including objectives, outputs and intended outcomes:**

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.

F. Purpose and significance of the research, including congruence with the strategic research objectives identified for the SERC and BALTA. Why should this project be approved, given BALTA's limited resources? [Refer to the project criteria in the BALTA Workplans and Project Proposals Policy.]

This Coop Housing Futures research responds directly to several of BALTA's research objectives. The Coop Housing Futures research will enable BALTA to leverage strategic benefits. Affordable housing is an issue of relevance to Canadians. The key objective of this research is to test the potential for a design research methodology to catalyze action to leverage

the social economy assets held by Housing Coops and to stimulate social innovation. The research pairs an established housing coop with the University of Calgary and will enhance the capacity for their future collaboration in social economy research. The dissemination plan outlined in this proposal is designed in part to establish a dialogue between The University, The Housing Coop, CMHC and all levels of government. The dialogue is a first step to concrete collaboration.

The project will allow BALTA to ‘better understand and critically analyze key issues, opportunities, and constraints for adapting and scaling up what is working in B.C. and Alberta.’ The research is complementary to the “Innovative Use of Housing Co-operative Assets” project. That project examined the potential for the use of fully amortized housing co-op assets to leverage funding or financing for co-op housing or other social economy purposes. As reported in the October/December 2008 BALTA Newsletter this research found that the potential to leverage these assets was limited by several factors. Using a spatial design methodology the Coop Housing Futures research will probe potential solutions to the identified barriers.

G. Will the project involve student researchers in a paid or unpaid capacity? If yes, will they need to be recruited or have they already been identified? Briefly describe the roles and responsibilities of students involved in the research project, the skills/experience they will acquire, and how this will complement their academic training. Explain as well how adequate supervision and support of the student will be ensured.

Mr. Brad Braun will be research assistant to this project. Brad is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Calgary (Architecture) Brad has experience working on social housing design research. Brad’s PhD research also focuses on provision of social housing. Brad has taken this course as part of his Masters degree program requirements. This will be Brad’s fourth time as teaching Assistant to this course.

This project will be part of the course *Advanced Practice of Environmental Design (EVDS 702)*. This course is a requirement of the Masters and PhD programs of the Faculty of Environmental Design. Three to five Masters and PhD students will form the design team for this project. These students will not be paid. This is as degree program requirement.

The skills acquired by the students will include the ability to work within interdisciplinary teams (the student team will consist of urban designers, architects, industrial designers, planners and environmental scientists). Through the course the students will learn real life design skills they will employ in their professions of choice. The students will also be exposed to the field of social economy – something many of them will not be familiar with. These students will be the designers of our future cities and towns. Sensitizing them to the realm of social housing and social economy will enhance their ability to contribution to these fields in their future careers.

The course is team-taught. The students will be under the guidance of three full-time EVDS Faculty (myself, a professor of Architecture and a professor of Industrial Design) and one research/teaching assistant. It is a studio course, meaning the team will interact with the faculty team at least twice a week for the duration of the course.

H. Research activities, plan of work and timetable:

Completion of the research design – August 2009

Completion of the design terms of reference – August 2009
Student team formation – September 2009
Context Analysis – September 2009
Site Analysis – September 2009
Preparation and Presentation of Preliminary Designs – October 2009
Preparation of Final Design – November 2009
Presentation of Final Design – November 2009
Post-Design interviews/focus groups – December 2009
Submission of Research Final Report – February 2010
Conference presentation of research - Spring 2010
Workshop for the CHF Canada Vision 20/20 Project – Spring 2010
Submission of journal article for publication – Fall 2010.

I. Describe plans for communicating research results within the academic community. Indicate audience and specific output(s) i.e., refereed journal articles, conference presentations or other appropriate channels.

At this time we have not identified a specific journal or conference to present this research. It is our intention to do both.

J. Describe plans for communicating research results outside the academic community to practitioners, policy makers, and other people for whom the research results could be significant. Indicate audience and specific output(s).

Typically, final presentations for student research projects are open to the general public. Our plan will be to invite members of the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative, The Hillhurst-Sunnyside Community Association, The City of Calgary Planning Department, the Local Alderman, the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (a Sunnyhill neighbour and leader of the Official Opposition), A representative of the CMHC office in Calgary, and The Member of Parliament (Environment Minister Jim Prentice). We also anticipate a presentation of the final design in the community, hosted by the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative.

We also intend to offer a workshop to the CHF Canada Vision 2020 Project to inform them of the outcome of the Design project and discuss the opportunities for this type of process to contribute to the goals of Vision 2020.

K. Describe your plans for monitoring and evaluating your research project. Feel free to consult with BALTA's Coordinator on designing possible approaches. (Note that monitoring and evaluation are extremely important both for ensuring the success of the project as well as satisfying reporting to SSHRC.)

Evaluation will consist of either post-project interviews with both the student team and members of the Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative OR post-project focus groups with the same. The purpose of the evaluation will be to understand the efficacy of the design process and assess the extent to which project objectives were achieved. There will also be a mid-term preliminary design presentation adjudicated by the Faculty Team in the company of the Sunnyhill Housing Coop Liaison Group representative(s).

L. What are the research tools you propose to use in your project?

NOTE: If your research involves human subjects, you MUST provide copies of your proposed research tools (as well as your research plan) prior to commencing research. Please see the document “BALTA Ethical Review Process – Simplified” for information about ethical review requirements.

The research tool is a design methodology. Typical design software and methodologies will be employed including context analysis, site analysis, and planning and design software. The post-design evaluation will employ an open-ended questionnaire.

M. Budget and Contributions

Information can be both dollar figures and anecdotal, including in-kind contributions and requests for BALTA support (eg. staff support for dissemination).

Category	Requested of BALTA	In-Kind Contributions
Student salaries	\$2,000.00	\$12,800.00
Student benefits/overhead costs (if the student will be a CCCR hire, add 10.5% of the student salaries amount; if the student will be employed by another institution, add the relevant amount)	\$210.00	
Researcher Release Time		\$6,000.00
Research Support Costs (e.g. supplies, communication costs)	\$500.00	\$800.00
Knowledge Dissemination		
Travel		
TOTALS	\$2,710.00	\$19,600.00

Budget explanation

Student salaries & benefits: The student salary will constitute a portion of the Teaching Assistant salary for the PhD student. In-kind student salary contribution of \$12,800.00 is based on a 4-student team working 14 weeks, 10 hour per week at \$23.00/hour.

Researcher release time: This project will be a part of the Researchers teaching load. The \$6000.00 in-kind calculation is based on a portion of the lead researchers salary representing his teaching tie for the course and contribution to the research analysis, reports, article writing and presentations to interested parties (\$3000.00). It also contribution of a portion of the two instructors who will be contributing to the course and the Coop Housing Futures project (\$1,500.00X2= \$3000.00)

Research Support Costs: The \$800.00 in-kind contribution is based on a \$200.00/month cost for provision of a research team-work room in the Faculty of Environmental Design, for 4 months.

Travel: No travel anticipated. The Sunnyhill Housing Cooperative is within easy bike or transit reach of the University

Supplies & other: Supplies will include digital map acquisition, photocopying, report printing.

Knowledge dissemination: If travel outside of the city is required costs will be borne by the researchers.