



FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION

HOUSING SOLUTIONS LAB | MARCH 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is the purpose of the evaluation?

This evaluation serves as a final culminating document to reflect on overall effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the project.

What are the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations?

- **A matchmaking program between home seekers and home providers** is an important way to increase adoption of housing options like home sharing, secondary suites and coach houses. Especially for older adults who may not feel comfortable sharing or renting out spaces in their home without support for conflict management and finding appropriate tenants.
- **Local governments can take action** to support broader adoption of these housing options. See the [government recommendations report](#) for more information.
- **Sustainable funding** is needed to implement a pilot program, especially if the goal is avoiding extra costs to the home provider and home seeker.
- **These housing options allow older adults to age in place.** Secondary suites and coach houses tend to be more attractive to older homeowners, but have a high cost.
- **Financial incentives** are also important to facilitate adoption of these options due to high renovation and construction costs associated with secondary suites and coach houses.
- **Home sharing is quick and less expensive to implement**, but offer the least amount of privacy of the three options. While this can create more housing units quickly, it will take work at individual and community levels to share the benefits of this type of housing.

INTRODUCTION

What is the project being evaluated?

There is an evaluation of the Housing Solutions Lab with objectives of collecting and reflecting on learnings of the project.

Hollyburn Community Services Society and SFU Renewable Cities partnered to design and deliver a Solutions Lab that focuses on increasing the uptake of different housing options by solo and couple older adults (age 55+) living in single-detached houses on Vancouver's North Shore. Funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Vancity and catalyzed with support from North Family Foundation, the lab ran from fall 2022 through spring 2024.

The major components of the lab included:

- A review of the costs and benefits of the three types of housing options.
- Engagement with various stakeholders to discover needs, barriers and potential solutions.
- A design of a program to support the uptake of these solutions.
- A map of next steps to implement the program.

The hope is that similar solutions and programs could be replicated across B.C. and Canada or integrated into existing work by service providing organizations.

The evaluation is based on internal reflections of the project team.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Below is a very brief summary of the project. For more details, please refer to the accompanying [problem solving brief](#).

Project goals and objectives

The project aims to address the challenge of overcoming barriers for seniors living in single family homes to open up housing options to seniors, and other renters, in need of secure, long-term housing through home sharing, secondary suites and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

What activities were planned and implemented?



Hollyburn Family Services Society, SFU Renewable Cities followed CMHC's recommended social innovation methodology for meaningful, emergent engagement processes, collaborative critical analysis, multi-faceted communication, and integrated design thinking through the following project phases:

Phase 1: Journey Ground Truthing ensured that the scope of the issue is framed appropriately, and that the project team have a shared understanding of their role in the project.

Phase 2: Discovering Home focused on desk and field research, creating initial persona composites to represent various stakeholders and users, and understanding their experiences through journey mapping.

Phase 3: Exploring Our Future focused on developing more robust composites and high-level needs and journeys of users to explore and co-develop potential solutions for establishing a strategic direction.

Phase 4: Forging Pathways focused on adding more granularity to the solutions, adding in a cost-benefit study to assess feasibility from various perspectives and indicators (including outcomes

relating to transportation, health, walkability, affordability and carbon emissions) to help assess the value of various interventions or pathways.

Phase 5: Road Mapping included a broad robust key stakeholder engagement strategy to advance implementation more broadly and disseminate and enrich findings to accelerate social diffusion.

Expected outcomes

The lab expected to produce prototypes and feasibility case studies of options for gentle densification of single-detached dwellings occupied by seniors who live by themselves or with one other person.

The lab was intended to provide space for examining a complex and persistent housing challenge of ‘over-housed’¹ seniors living in single-detached dwellings through an innovative and emergent process that looked at the challenges from a systems-level to address interrelated elements of social isolation, risks of houselessness, vulnerability, affordability and greenhouse gas per capita emissions. The result developed a robust understanding of barriers as well as delineated best practices that can help inform successful policy and practices for replication across B.C. and Canada.

This Solutions Lab aimed to better characterize barriers and develop a roadmap that contributes to integrated, systemic solutions. It was intended to learn from and add rigour to collective knowledge on home sharing and ADUs in seniors’ single detached homes.

Expected beneficiaries

This project’s primary objective was creating housing units by unlocking options for new housing units in single detached homes owned by low-income seniors. The project targeted seniors as part of CMHC’s National Housing Solutions priority populations.

EVALUATION FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This evaluation uses multiple criteria to offers a balanced and thorough assessment of the project from multiple perspectives. Creates a clear picture of what the project accomplished, how efficiently it was executed, the broader changes it instigated and its future prospects. This holistic approach informs better decision-making for future initiatives and offers valuable lessons for improving project design and implementation.

Effectiveness

CRITERIA PURPOSE

To assess whether the project achieved its stated goals and objectives. This helps in understanding the extent to which the project delivered the expected outcomes.

¹ Many of older adults downsize within their home as they age, or use fewer spaces due to factors such as accessibility constraints.

ASSESSMENT

The project team was able to closely adhere to the project plan and successfully deliver the planned activities and deliverables of the project objectives.

The emergent and iterative process allowed the lab to incorporate and reflect diverse perspectives into the pilot design

The project explored and addressed a wide range of issues and concerns. This was particularly important for developing a clear picture of concerns, ideas and perspectives of homeowners, who are crucial for ensuring buy-in and ultimately providing housing units through these type of solutions. Through the workshops, focus groups and an open house, the lab gathered diverse perspectives, identified key themes and reflected them in the materials produced (e.g., the [‘what we heard reports’](#) provide sample quotes of what participants said). The lab incorporated and addressed these perspectives in the design of the pilot program matchmaking program between home seekers and home providers.

INCREASING PRESSURES AND LACK OF GUIDANCE

The housing crisis creates a lot of stress for seniors deciding how and where they want to age. Both homeowners and renters expressed stress and anxiety about their current housing context and lack of affordable or palatable options.

"These options **aren't accessible** to everyone."

"There aren't any **downsizing options** for big houses."

"[I have a] large lot with a lot of upkeep **mentally** and **physically**."

"It's a lot and **it's all on me**. Nobody can advise me."

- Older adult who spent 18 months exploring downsizing options.

Excerpt from the Open House Report Back

The lab's emergent and iterative design process was an effective way to build on ideas and narrow down specific solutions and design elements of a pilot program. The inquiry approach created space for building connections and using existing assets and resources, such as the diverse set of social support programs specifically operating in North Vancouver and West Vancouver.

Iteration can feel slow and frustrating for seniors who are ready to take action

One challenge of the iterative approach and series of workshops and engagements meant that for participants ready to sign up for a pilot program immediately, the discussions felt like they was moving too slow. Some participants were ready to take action and join a pilot program, rather than continuing to discuss potential program details. This could be considered an inherent limitation of the lab, which is intended only to explore ideas and approaches and co-design solutions, but not to actually implement a pilot.

Strategic support will be needed to ensure changes are stewarded and implemented by local governments and community organizations

Ultimately, as a niche project focusing on Vancouver's North Shore, strategic support that will be needed to ensure its implementation. This can be achieved through the support of some key community champions. For example, the lab identified some strategic areas where [changes at the local government level](#) can create an enabling environment for higher uptake of housing options like home sharing, secondary suites and coach houses; these changes can be incorporated into OCP planning and requires an advocate to oversee its prioritization and ensure it is moved forward. Similarly, a pilot program will likely require the organization to connect with other supportive programs like social services, as participants may need referrals to help address other struggles in their lives. Finally, community champions will also be needed to support the socialization and acceptance of these housing options in some neighbourhoods. During the lab a few participants shared stories of neighbours raising concerns about new secondary suites in their area. Community champions – people who can share the benefits of these options and share positive experiences that can outweigh the worst-case scenario stories shared in conversations and media – can help normalize these housing options.

Efficiency

CRITERIA PURPOSE

To evaluate how well the project used its resources (time, money, human resources) to achieve its goals. Efficiency is about the relationship between outputs (the results achieved) and inputs (the resources consumed).

ASSESSMENT

Cost efficiencies were achieved by tapping into community networks and resources

This project was led by SFU Renewable Cities (RC) as the innovations lab consultant. The consultant team was able to work fairly efficiently and focused on the lab by keeping a small team engaged on tasks, and while drawing on resource of the broader team to support specific events (e.g., workshops, open house) and research activities (e.g., cost benefit analysis). The lab was also able to minimize expenses through low-cost room rentals (e.g., community centre facilities), engaging virtually with community service organizations, and networking with existing groups on the North Shore (e.g., the Community Housing Action Committee, libraries, seniors service provider groups, neighbourhood associations) to share information and gather input as presenters during their regular meetings. These organizations were able to share information with their membership and community members about upcoming workshops, which helped to reduce costs of advertisements and participant recruitment.

There were benefits and challenges of using a consultant

One challenge in efficiency can be inherent when grant recipient organizations use a consultant, particularly in ensuring that results are tailored to reflect the needs and reality of the host organization. Social service organizations are often overstretched, with staff facing high demands for time and energy, which can make it hard to prioritize the research and development of a new project and to

avoid feeling disconnected from the results of the lab. This is where a consultant role can help alleviate this pressure, and also where constant connection between groups is crucial. To ensure regular input and coordination between the consultant and the host organizations, RC set up regular monthly check-in meetings to provide key updates and gather input and information to the process (in addition to the quarterly advisory board meetings).

Impact

CRITERIA PURPOSE

To measure the broader effects of the project on its target audience and beyond, including unintended positive or negative outcomes. Impact assesses the difference the project made in the short and long term.

ASSESSMENT

Ultimately, the long-term impact of this project remains to be seen. There are a number of factors that will determine the effects of the project.

Pilot program funding is needed to test and scale this housing solution

Program participants have expressed being ready to start as home share providers; for some participants, they have decided not to wait and pursued alternate home sharing options on their own. Others are waiting for local restrictions to be eased, such as regulations that specify the types of properties where coach houses or secondary suites are allowed to be built.

The project has potential and is ready to go; the housing crisis is felt so acutely on the North Shore that service providers have commented multiple times that adding even a few units of housing at a time in the community can make a bit impact. Service providers have expressed eagerness to partner with an implementing organization. Yet this program model needs funding for a pilot so that it can be tested and refined through implementation. Without funding, the model remains untested and therefore has some limits for replicability and uptake. Uptake will ultimately, therefore, depend on funding of a pilot program, which, as of March 2024 is not yet in place. A pilot project can reveal the viability of the project concept; the lab has found that other home sharing programs face challenges with uptake and scaling.

Interested groups expressed enthusiasm for the pilot model and available resources

The project was received with enthusiasm by participants, seniors' groups and social service agencies who are eagerly looking for other options for housing in the community. One example of the interest was seen through very high turnout at a [webinar](#) presenting the results of the lab attended by people across B.C. and other provinces – there was nearly zero participant drop off until the presentation was over. Participants and service organizations have provided feedback that the lab has provided a great set of resources that they will use in the future.

Broader changes are needed in the way we think about housing

This is also part of a longer-term change this is needed in the way that we approach housing and societal norms and expectations of housing. There is no shortage of demand but at a societal level there is a lack of uptake by homeowners. This project sowed some seeds for shifting narratives and norms about housing options like home sharing and secondary suites. During the current housing crisis, the conversation seems more well-received and welcome as residents are realizing that a range of options and solutions are needed to reflect the diverse needs and situations of folks in the community.

The changing B.C. legislative landscape may help shift change

The BC Government has recently passed new housing legislation that will remove barriers for small-scale, multi-unit homes on single family zoned land and expediting approval processes. A few of these intersect with solutions explored by the lab:

- In most areas within municipalities of more than 5,000 people, these changes will also require bylaws to allow for three to four units permitted on lots currently zoned for single-family or duplex use, depending on lot size; up to six units for larger lots close to transit stops with frequent service.
- Allowing all communities in B.C. to have a minimum of one secondary suite or one laneway home in all single-family or duplex residential zones.
- In the new Standardized Housing Design Project, the province is creating new standardized, customizable residential designs for small-scale, multi-unit housing built on single lots, including coach houses/laneway homes to reduce permit processing times.

Sustainability

CRITERIA PURPOSE

To determine whether the benefits and outcomes of the project are likely to continue after the project funding ends. Sustainability looks at the long-term viability and continuation of project results.

ASSESSMENT

Project materials and resources will be available on a continuing basis

Many of the resources will also be shared directly on CMHC's resource library, ensuring information and lessons learned continue to be available for groups interested in the lab findings. The solutions lab also built a [resource website](#) that will remain available as a resource for years to come. This includes detailed versions of activities (e.g., [detailed workshop designs](#)), overview of the lab activities, as well as templates for groups to use if they are considering implementing a version of this program (e.g.,

sample [project design, budget, workplan, job description](#)). It also is set up to guide different types of users (e.g., [homeowners](#), [home seekers](#), and [service providers](#)) to materials relevant to their context.

Uptake depends on program funding

Since a solutions lab is intended to iteratively explore and build on ideas to create a solution, there is some risk that ultimately the solutions develop will not be funded or implemented. This is inherent to the model.

As discussed earlier, funding is needed for actual housing solution programs to make a meaningful impact, as the model relies on a service provider to support homeowners engaging in the program.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Uncertainty and wariness of different forms of housing can result in slower uptake

Throughout the lab, there were some challenges with recruitment of homeowner participants, as well as a general sense of wariness expressed about neighbourhoods on the North Shore culture regarding coach houses and secondary suites. There is also a sense by homeowners of uncertainty regarding risks involved with having a renter.

As a result, the housing solutions explored by the lab continue to see relatively low uptake and is not typically a prioritized housing form. More traditional forms of housing, particularly multi-unit housing developments, continue to take priority, despite high development costs and long timelines.

This challenge was addressed through sharing information, discussing concerns and challenges in the workshops, and designing solutions that help minimize and mitigate risks to participants.

To recruit participants for the lab workshops, the lab worked within existing social networks and connections, including neighbourhood associations, seniors' centres, community newsletters, social media ads targets to specific geographical areas, and posters in the community. However, there is potential demographic that were not reached by these methods.

How much should we rely on 'citizen developers?'

In the broader context, this housing solutions approach relies on [citizen developers](#) creating additional housing units, rather than a government creating housing units. There is a broader question of how much reliance should be placed on citizens to create more housing units and how much the government should be investing for affordability and growing populations.

Some of the housing solutions explored can still face affordability challenges

Some of the solutions explored through this lab were found to not necessarily be financially affordable to homeowners. Home sharing is more affordable; however, it was also generally received by participants as less desirable. Secondary suites and coach houses were received with more enthusiasm, however they both are associated with high capital costs and might require market rate rents to cover costs. The solutions lab therefore designed a pilot where the rental amount was dependent on homeowner, needs rather than applying fixed rates

A pilot program requires ongoing support of a social support organization

There are costs associated with matchmaking, monitoring, and supporting participants in the housing solutions explored by these labs. This is a different conversation about funding than investments in capital building costs, and is about ongoing operational costs, which seem to be a continuance challenge for governments and funders to support. Aside from a relatively fast implementation timeline of getting additional units of housing in a community at potentially low capital costs, the potential benefits of these programs can be profound, as there are many co-benefits discussed of gentle infill, enhanced social connection and community wellbeing that this project has demonstrated can be worth the investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations to [homeowners](#), [organizations](#), and [governments](#) already provided in our Roadmap to Implementation and on our archive website, [Seniors Housing Navigator](#).

These recommendations are meant as overall comments about the housing solutions explored through this lab:

- This project concept is ready for pilot funding and implementation, with some specific homeowners interested in taking up the solution.
- While it is impossible to eliminate risks associated with having someone else in the home, there are solid safeguards and mitigation measure to be implemented and minimize risks for potential vulnerabilities.
- Community, organization and neighbourhood champions are needed to promote and steward an enabling environment for these housing solutions and programming. During pilot implementation, the program would benefit from ensuring that the program is well connected with existing community networks and service groups and should consider how to ensure neighbourhood concerns are addressed (e.g., education/information).

CONCLUSION

Overall, this lab was able to meet goals and objectives. The challenge will be moving from plans to implementation.

This program can have a big impact for people interested in the project. Residents already interested in taking up these housing solutions and using a matchmaking program would find the program to be incredibly beneficial. They are ready and waiting with enthusiasm for the pilot to start.