

BACKGROUND

The Jasper Community Housing Corporation works to determine the housing needs of Jasper residents and facilitate development that will benefit the community. The JCHC has been collecting data, conducting surveys and interviewing stakeholders to better understand the opportunities and challenges of the Jasper housing market.

In 2013, the JCHC held a Community Café to gather current and relevant information to help set a direction for the corporation's activities. All Jasper residents were invited to attend the event and discuss their housing concerns with JCHC board members, municipal Councillors, Parks Canada representatives and "resident experts" from financial institutions, construction companies, etc.

The goal of the evening was to engage community members to gather information on current housing needs and demands, which will provide a clearer picture of the community's expectations and allow the JCHC to set future direction and initiatives. The evening was also an opportunity for the JCHC board and other government bodies to clarify their roles, and what they can and cannot provide.

Residents in attendance were invited to split into groups representing different models of housing: rental units, adult independent living, perpetually affordable units and special needs housing were the only groups represented. None of the 20 to 25 participants showed interest in open market homes and open market condominiums.

Following a short session on housing myths in Jasper, participants were asked three questions and shared thoughts and ideas with a facilitator.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Question 1: What are your housing needs and wants? Please indicate your desired price range.

Group 1: Rental Units - This was the group with the most participants. The group cited safe, clean, private accommodations as a main desire. They indicated there was also a need for quality staff accommodation and suggested it should be supervised. They noted there is a lack of choice and availability in today's market.

They felt there was a lack of understanding of housing rules and standards by both landlords and tenants. A centralized office or website clearly outlining who to contact for accommodation or problems (maintenance, social, etc.) with rental units was suggested.

The group indicated they would prefer smaller units of a higher quality over larger units. The preference was for fewer roommates. Their “wish list” included private washrooms, pet friendly accommodation, subsidized accommodation, newly updated accommodation, privacy, more choice and affordable units for lower income families. Participants suggested “California Suites” and indicated that parking was not a priority for them as most did not own cars.

The participants’ desired price range for a two or three bedroom house was \$1200-\$1500/month, including utilities. Desired price range for bachelor or one bedroom apartments was \$450-\$700/month including utilities and \$600-\$900/month including utilities for two bedroom apartments.

Group 2: Independent Adult Living – This group was represented by two individuals. They cited a need for housing for individuals 55+ looking to downsize. They noted a gap in the market between their current housing and seniors facilities.

This group is looking for “one storey living” for ease of mobility as they age. They would like to have a garage as well as easily accessible storage. An outdoor space is important to them. Their ideal model is a small bungalow or town home. The desired price range is \$350,000 to \$550,000.

Group 3: Perpetually Affordable Units – Participants at this table were mostly local business owners. They recognized that they required both seasonal, apartment style staff accommodation as well as larger units. They agreed that perpetually affordable housing (co-op townhomes, condos, etc.) provide the larger units and are desirable to long term staff, middle management or employees with growing families. It was noted that “co-operative” developments have been very successful within Jasper, and the group cited a need for more of this entry level housing.

The group felt that there was demand for another 50, two to three bedrooms, co-op units. They also suggested a centralized administration for the co-ops, that could manage them all and place people in units as their needs changed. Providing growing families the space they need and moving “empty nesters” into smaller units when they wished to downsize.

The desired price range for this model is \$280,000-\$320,000.

Group 4: Special Needs Housing – One resident attended as a representative for a group of physically and/or mentally challenged individuals. She indicated that residents with special needs want to remain in town but feel they have limited options for appropriate housing; currently they are residing in seniors’ homes or the hospital.

This group needs a dedicated, sustainable facility that focuses on assisted living for adults. Government support through AISH or PDD funding was noted as something that should be explored. The desired end goal is a fiscally viable Group Home with accreditation.

Question 2: What is realistic?

Group 1: Rental Units – The group indicated they felt it was reasonable to see development in the form of a new apartment building. They felt that in their desired price range they would expect a 400 square foot bachelor suite, with available additional storage and laundry facilities. Common areas and visitor suites were also noted. They feel current Jasper rents are reasonable; there is just a lack of availability. They feel that parking requirements reduce available land for development and would forego that amenity.

When discussing realistic ways to add more inventory to the Jasper market, the group cited enforcing the “need to reside clause”, rezoning current land for higher density and making more land available.

Group 2: Independent Adult Living – The group felt that a development where each unit had an outdoor space was realistic; they indicated a yard was not necessary, a deck or patio would suffice. With the higher price range they cited in question 1, they felt it was realistic to expect a minimum 2 bedroom, 1.5 bath unit, with garage or storage, that was accessible.

They indicated that affordability was not so much an issue for them as they would appreciate the increase in equity the market could offer that they wouldn’t see in perpetually affordable housing.

Group 3: Perpetually Affordable Housing – The group felt that a \$300,000 mortgage was realistic for smaller (2 bedroom or 2 bedroom with den units) with standard finishings.

There was concern that it was difficult for people to save money for a down payment for a home on a tourism industry salary. The group of business owners discussed the possibility of the employer being the “lender” for their employees – building a co-op to house staff and offering the staff a “rent to own” option. They agreed there would have to be an agreement between the business owners to restrict resale price as well have one administering body for the development.

Group 4: Special Needs Housing – The need for fundraising was noted, without it the project could not happen. As building an entirely new facility may not be financially possible, the option of converting a residential dwelling was discussed.

Question 3: What would help you achieve your housing needs? Have your housing expectations changed after hearing tonight's discussion?

Group 1: Rental Units – The group reiterated that more rental units are needed to meet their current need for a place to live. They feel that more land should be made available for development.

A grant for subsidized housing, comparable to the grant required to construct MPL Place was noted as a measure that could result in a new development. The group recognized that there would have to be investment from a developer before for any new apartment buildings would be built. They noted that promoting development of infill areas would result in more rental units.

The group did not feel they had a change in viewpoint after discussions.

Group 2: Independent Adult Living – To meet their housing needs, the group discussed forming a co-operative of individuals over 55, they could also approach a developer for a market value development. Allowing for a rental unit (California Suite) could maximize land use and reduce cost.

The group was flexible with regard to housing models (single home, duplex, row house), recognizing that density may have to be higher to make a development fiscally viable.

The group noted that a development for individuals 55+ would release single family dwelling homes into the market for younger residents.

Group 3: Perpetually Affordable Housing – This group consisted mostly of business owners, they agreed they should form a group, rather than a group of individuals, to begin the process of developing a co-op. They agreed that more units on the market would answer their need for staff housing.

The group discussed approaching the JCHC with a development proposal and agreed that copying the perpetually affordable housing models that are already in place in Jasper would be efficient.

Those in attendance felt that their expectation of having someone else build something for their staff, had changed with the realization that businesses could build co-ops.

Group 4: Special Needs Housing – Funding is the main need for the realization of a Group Home. Support from the Municipality in the form of seed money was mentioned. Local charities would need to be approached for support. Family members of residents would have to participate in fundraising initiatives. The possibility of support from an anchor donor as a Legacy Project was noted.