




KEEPING in TOUCH

News from the South Shore Housing Action Coalition

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- Municipality of the District of Lunenburg
- Queens Community Health Board
- Region of Queens Municipality
- Second Story Women's Centre
- South Shore Health
- South Shore Transition House Association
- Town of Bridgewater
- Town of Lunenburg
- Town of Mahone Bay
- Western Regional Housing Authority

New Approach to Housing Options?

Could thin-shelled concrete domes be a partial solution to the affordable housing problem on the South Shore? That's the opinion of Quin Nilsson, a builder/contractor from Waterloo, Lunenburg County who was the guest presenter at the March meeting of SSHAC.



Monolithic domes, as the structures are also called, are built following a method that requires a tough, inflatable airform, steel-reinforced concrete and a polyurethane foam insulation, all applied in a technologically specific way. According to Quin, these

domes are economical and quick to build, and, thanks to their energy efficiency, low cost to operate. (It is estimated that a monolithic dome uses about 50% less energy for heating and cooling than a same-size, conventionally constructed building.) In the US these domes are increasingly being built for disaster-resistant schools, churches, fire stations and more. In Nova Scotia three such dome homes have been built and many of these structures are popping up in elsewhere in the country. For example, the City of Edmonton recently built a new Monolithic constructed Paper and Glass Recycling Facility as its Waste Management Centre.

Here in Nova Scotia, Quinn thinks their application is particularly suitable for senior living. The finished cost of a 314 sq foot "studio" dome is approximately \$35000. With a monthly operating cost of all utilities at approximately \$56 they are very cost-effective. A cluster of small domes could make for a very comfortable and economical senior complex.

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Bridgewater's Smart Plan

SSHAC welcomed Eric Shaw, the Director of Planning for the Town of Bridgewater to our meeting on April 2, 2013. Eric shared with us some of housing-related highlights from Bridgewater's Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS), the municipality's primary planning document. Since 2010, the MPS and its accompanying Land-Use and Subdivision By-Laws have been under review. After months of planning, research, consultation, and writing the Town now has a draft MPS.

Endorsed by Council and guiding the MPS is Smart Growth, a planning theory which promotes a collection of principles designed to reduce wasteful development, limit environmental disruption and create vibrant, compact communities. Smart Growth offers municipalities a variety of options aimed at improving diversity, accessibility and affordability of

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Update on UNSM Resolution on Housing Standards

In our last newsletter, SSHAC reported how the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities unanimously passed, at its November AGM, a resolution brought forward by SSHAC partner Municipality of the District of Lunenburg. The motion was aimed at working with Housing Nova Scotia to establish minimum provincial standards for all rental housing stock, and to expand the role and resources of those agencies enforcing the Residential Tenancies Act, so as to effectively maintain standards in all communities, for all residents, across the Province. The responses of relevant government departments have just been received. For your information they are listed below.

These responses will be discussed at SSHAC's September meeting to assess what, if any, further action is required on our part.

Response from Department of Community Services:

As set out in the Province's Housing Strategy, the Province believes the real success in implementing the strategy involves building partnerships with Nova Scotia's municipalities, businesses, non-profit organization and individuals. We recognize the need for improving the Province's existing rental housing stock that is in need of repair and we are prepared to work with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities to take positive steps to address the issue. The Department of Community Services does not have the legislative authority to assume responsibility for the enforcement of the Provincial Building Code and the Residential Tenancies Act nor are we seeking to take on these responsibilities.

Housing Nova Scotia offers housing programs that provide financial assistance to help landlords who rent to low income households to upgrade their rental units. Recent data released from the 2011 National Housing Survey indicate that 29% of Nova Scotian households are renters, and 10.5% of the rental units are in need of major repairs. Housing Nova Scotia is interested in exploring how we can improve the situation by working with the UNSM.

"Housing Nova Scotia is interested in exploring how we can improve the situation by working with the UNSM."

Response from Department of Labour and Advanced Education:

Labour and Advanced Education as a provincial partner, with responsibility for the provincial building and fire codes under the Office of the Fire Marshall, supports the Provincial Statement on Housing and the associated Provincial Strategy on Housing through the adoption of minimum standards for the construction, renovation, and alteration of housing in the Province under the Building Code Act, and a system of inspection for housing under the Fire Safety Act may be carried out by municipalities.

Response from Service Nova Scotia & Municipal Relations (Residential Tenancies)

The purpose of the Residential Tenancies Act is to provide landlords and tenants with an efficient and cost-effective means for settling disputes. While the Act does provide tenants with an avenue that may lead to landlords being required to address standards of health, safety and housing as a lease obligation, it was never intended to establish the standards for consideration or provide authority to take remedial steps. This is left to the Building Code and Municipal bylaws.

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SSHAC Member Profile: *Peter Simpson*

SSHAC member Peter Simpson took a circuitous route to the world of affordable housing. He was working as an editor and columnist with the Toronto Sun decades ago when his work led him to an interest in development issues, including the delivery of affordable housing, different forms of housing, homelessness and suburban sprawl.

After Simpson had started writing about these issues, he got a call from the Greater Toronto Home Builders Association (GTHBA): would he take on the position of Director of Public Affairs and Research? At that point he had been at the Sun 16 years. "I didn't like to stand still," he joked, and so he agreed to take the position. He thrived at GTHBA, and a year and a half later was promoted to CEO. After five productive years there, he transitioned to the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association (GVHBA). Over the course of 19 years as President and CEO he helped build the association from 225 member companies to 750. At the same time he forged strong relationships with the media, helping to create widespread awareness of the need for affordable housing.

While working for GVHBA, Simpson was appointed to the Board of the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society, which addressed the needs of men and women going through transition from homelessness in B.C.'s second-largest city. His connection with housing insecurity has deep personal roots as well - his younger brother lived on the streets of Toronto for nearly 30 years.

When it came time to hang it up and retire, Simpson and his wife knew they wanted to move to her home province of Nova Scotia. Like many seniors in the province, they needed a space that would accommodate current or emerging mobility issues. They also wanted a home with a strong sense of supportive community. A home with single-level living in Dayspring fit the bill, and they've settled in to a

warm and welcoming neighbourhood. "We met our immediate neighbours - all of them - the weekend we moved in," he said.

Simpson has managed to keep busy in his retirement by volunteering as a firefighter and medical first responder with the Dayspring and District Fire Department, as well as writing the occasional newspaper story. The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg named Simpson as its representative on the Board of the Western Regional Housing Authority, under the auspices of Community Services and Housing Nova Scotia. Between that and his involvement with SSHAC, he's done an excellent job of bringing his housing experience to bear on the South Shore.



What does he see as the South Shore's biggest housing problem? "Seniors housing," answers Simpson. "The Silver Tsunami is washing over us now as the leading edge of baby boomers recently turned 65." The list of people looking for affordable single-level housing is already lengthy, and growing rapidly.

High up on the list also is the economic stability of the region. "I worry for young people ... you're not going to buy a house if you don't have a job." He also noted that although homelessness is less visible here than in urban areas it is certainly present, often taking the form of couch-surfing. "We need to be looking at how to adequately house those people and help them get a leg up into the housing continuum."

(submitted by Elisabeth Bailey)



**September 3
2014**

1:30—4 p.m.

**Next meeting
of the**

South Shore Housing Action Coalition

at Bridgewater Fire Hall

(81 Dominion Street Bridgewater)

Domes (cont'd from p. 1)

Quin told us he first got excited about this type of building in 1996 when a fellow worker on a job site in British Columbia described a new type of construction technique that was being used in the US. Immediately interested, Quin followed the progress in the technology for the next 17 years. The website www.monolithic.com was particularly helpful. In 2010 he took the plunge of flying to Texas to take a dome building training course. Since then Quin has completed two domes on his own property as well as helped constructing a dome house in Oakhill. With the experience of these domes under his belt, his next plan is to go public and offer his services as a dome-builder to anyone .



Quin Nilsson puts finishing touches on a dome pad.

In Nova Scotia, where houses have traditionally been made of wood, and more or less rectangular in design, Quinn says his biggest obstacle is overcoming people's perception about what a house is. And trying to educate people on the benefits of the structures is also a challenge.. But if the interest shown by those attending our March meeting is any indication, the appetite for different housing structures may be increasing in this province. This technology is something for us all to keep our eyes on.

To contact Quin, email quin_nilsson@hotmail.com

(submitted by Phyllis Price)

Bridgewater's Smart Plan (cont'd from p.1)

housing. In recognizing the need to enable the development of diverse and affordable housing options in Bridgewater, Smart Growth principles have informed the planning policies established in the MPS and Land-use and Subdivision By-Laws.

These include:

- The inclusion of a variety of land-use zones to encourage residential growth of a range of housing options;
- The promotion of increased residential density;
- Encouragement of infill development (to encourage growth in existing communities and repurposing of existing buildings);
- Support for mixed compatible land-use (to encourage neighbourhoods with a mixture of homes, retail, business, and recreational opportunities);
- A 3-tiered site-plan approval process to fast-track the approval process for new mid-sized housing development;
- Support for residential conversions, where appropriate (to improve the availability and affordability of housing options, to diversify the use of older building stock and to promote aging in place);
- Incentives for the development of provincially subsidized affordable housing units.

SSHAC's rural best practices committee has been researching and learning more about options for rural municipalities with regards to improving housing, including Smart Growth and its principles. It's encouraging to see these being endorsed locally.

Currently, the MPS remains in draft form, with the expectation that it will be finalized in the coming months. More information on the MPS review is available at: <http://www.bridgewater.ca/planningreview>.

(submitted by Nancy Green)