

AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE TODAY (A•C•T) STREAMLINED APPROVAL PROCESS PROJECT

Case Study

A Management Strategy for the NIMBY Syndrome

**Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Corporation
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island**

Prepared for:

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Canadian Home Builders' Association

Canadian Housing and Renewal Association

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

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FOREWORD

The project documented in this case study received funding assistance under the Affordability and Choice Today (A•C•T) Program. A•C•T is a joint initiative, managed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Home Builders' Association, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, together with the funding agency Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The A•C•T Program is administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

A•C•T, which was launched in January 1990, was designed to foster changes to planning and building regulations and residential development approval procedures in order to improve housing affordability, choice and quality.

Through A•C•T, grants are awarded to municipalities, private and non-profit builders and developers, planners and architects to undertake innovative regulatory reform initiatives in municipalities across Canada. Three types of projects are awarded grants under the A•C•T Program: Demonstration Projects, Streamlined Approval Process Projects, and Case Studies (of existing initiatives).

- *Demonstration Projects* involve the construction of innovative housing that demonstrates how modifications to planning and construction regulations can improve affordability, choice and quality.

- *Streamlined Approval Process Projects* involve the development of a method or an approach that reduces the time and effort needed to obtain approvals for housing projects.
- *Case Study* grants are awarded for the documentation of existing regulatory reform initiatives.

Change and innovation require the participation of all the players in the housing sector. A•C•T provides a unique opportunity for groups at the local level to work together to identify housing concerns, reach consensus on potential solutions, and implement action. Consequently, a key component of A•C•T-sponsored projects is the participation and cooperation of various players in the housing sector in all phases of each project, from development to realization.

All projects awarded a grant under the A•C•T Program are documented as case studies in order to share information on the initiatives and the benefits of regulatory reform with other Canadian communities. Each case study discusses the regulatory reform initiative, its goals and the lessons learned. Where appropriate, the cost savings resulting from modifications in various planning, development, and construction regulations are calculated and reported.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) syndrome has become a common reaction to various types of new residential development, not only to social housing, but also to affordable and innovative market housing. NIMBY can result in significant time delays, additional costs and frustration on the part of project proponents, and can even result in the cancellation of a project.

Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Corporation (Kings Square), a non-profit provider of social housing in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, experienced NIMBY first-hand when it proposed to establish a temporary shelter for the homeless in a residential Charlottetown neighbourhood. The NIMBY-motivated defeat of the project prompted Kings Square to undertake a study of people's attitudes towards social housing which would form the basis for a NIMBY management strategy.

With the help of an A•C•T grant, Kings Square explored people's objections to social housing projects in their immediate neighbourhoods and, based on the findings of this study, concluded that the best way to confront the NIMBY syndrome is to be well prepared in advance. The project team developed a management strategy to confront the NIMBY syndrome which includes the following recommendations:

- Form a NIMBY committee.
- Identify and minimize potential objections.
- Prepare for public meetings.

The management strategy can be applied to social housing projects and unconventional proposals that run the risk of causing a negative local reaction. While it is unlikely that any strategy will eliminate opposition entirely, the management strategy developed by the project team could help to turn the scales in favour of a project, with a majority of residents supporting the project rather than opposing it.

1.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1 The NIMBY Syndrome in Charlottetown

Over the last several years, as the economic climate has worsened, many Canadian cities have seen a marked increase in the need for more social housing units, including family housing, temporary shelters, and specialized residences. As waiting lists grew, it became clear that existing units could not meet the growing demand for social housing. At the same time, federal and provincial government funding and support for social housing has been substantially reduced.

Many municipalities have found it necessary to become more involved in providing housing than in the past. In many cases, private non-profit agencies have also taken on increased responsibility for the development and management of new social housing projects.

It is through the joint effort of the municipality, non-profit and other social housing groups that we can fulfill our commitment to meeting the diverse housing needs in Charlottetown.

*—Don Poole,
Planning and Development Officer
Planning Department, City of Charlottetown*

Even in ideal circumstances, developing social housing is a complex task for both private and municipal housing organizations. Projects are frequently delayed, altered or even cancelled, as proponents must often cope with negative reaction from a project's prospective neighbours. This expression

of public opposition is commonly referred to as the Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) syndrome.

“The NIMBY syndrome” describes a collective, negative reaction to a proposed change in the local environment. NIMBY can often relate to a proposal that has general social value, such as social housing, but that raises concern when located close to people’s homes. This has given the NIMBY syndrome a reputation as an expression of intolerance and prejudice. However, NIMBY can also arise when local residents have genuine concerns about such issues as appropriate land use or a neighbourhood’s physical appearance.

Following the successful development of two social housing projects in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, the Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Corporation (Kings Square) initiated the development of Charlottetown’s first shelter for the homeless, Bedford-MacDonald House, in December 1990. Despite the support of municipal bodies such as the Charlottetown Planning Advisory Board, there was a great deal of opposition to the project by local residents, who believed that the shelter would have a negative impact on the neighbourhood in which it was to be located. Faced with well-attended public meetings and petitions opposing the project, Charlottetown City Council turned down the proposal.

With the Bedford-MacDonald project we made the mistake of relying on past successes. The NIMBY battle has to be fought every time.

*—J.W. “Bill” Campbell, Chair
Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Association*

Despite this defeat, Kings Square believed that the need for a shelter for the homeless, and other social housing projects, still existed.¹ In order to ensure that its next proposal did not meet a similar fate, the organization decided to do a study of the NIMBY syndrome in Charlottetown. In November 1991, Kings Square was awarded an A•C•T grant to undertake the study.

1.2 Study Objectives

The study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

- To obtain an accurate picture of local residents' attitudes towards social housing
- To develop a management strategy that would minimize negative reaction to social housing projects

1.3 Study Methodology

Kings Square contracted the Waymarks Group, a Charlottetown-based private consulting company, to carry out the study. The work involved the following steps:

- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Development of a NIMBY management strategy
- Testing of the strategy

1.3.1 Data Collection

Neighbourhood Questionnaire

In order to obtain data upon which they could develop a management strategy, Waymarks' researchers conducted a survey of Charlottetown residents who lived in neighbourhoods containing a social housing project, such as a seniors residence, youth home or government-subsidized family housing. The existence of a social housing project within the neighbourhoods surveyed was determined by using information provided by the City of Charlottetown. The researchers did not distinguish between the different kinds of social housing developments.

A door-to-door survey was conducted with 350 Charlottetown residents in order to gather information about their attitudes towards social housing in their neighbourhoods. All respondents were first asked by the interviewer whether or not they were aware of a social housing project in their neighbourhood. This method was used to identify a group of 175 "aware" residents, and another group of 175 "unaware" residents. The researchers believed that this would enable them to obtain two sets of comparable data on the physical and social impact of social housing projects. It was predicted that the aware group would provide more factually based and thus more positive perceptions of the impact of social housing, and that the unaware group's perceptions were likely to be more negative.

¹ Section 3.1 contains further details on Charlottetown's housing needs.

The interviews with both aware and unaware residents used the same questionnaire, which consisted of 15 questions of two different types.² Questions relating to acceptance and neighbourhood characteristics (e.g., noise, traffic, physical appearance) were answered on a 1 to 5 scale. Other questions related to an assessment of current public consultation procedures used for social housing proposals, and were generally “open ended.”

Qualitative Research Activities

Additional qualitative data was gathered from comments made at a public meeting held to review a proposed shelter for the homeless (unrelated to the Kings Square proposal) in Charlottetown. Researchers believed that the sentiments expressed at this meeting, which was extremely emotional, would be less likely to be couched in “socially acceptable” terms and would thus reflect a more accurate picture of residents’ attitudes towards the construction of a social housing project in their neighbourhood.

Informal interviews were also conducted with seven individuals in order to assess their “true” feelings about the impact of social housing. While a somewhat unconventional research practice, researchers again believed that the data obtained would be a valid reflection of

people’s private attitudes towards the development of social housing in their neighbourhoods.

1.3.2 Data Analysis

The data collected by questionnaire was cross-tabulated and displayed in such a manner as to show the differences between the attitudes of the two groups. As mentioned above, the analysis was based on an assumption that the perceptions of the aware group would provide a more factual description of the impact of social housing on a neighbourhood, while the unaware group’s attitudes would provide examples of preconceived expectations about the impact of a social housing project.

The comments gathered from the qualitative research activities were loosely grouped into several categories, such as “residents of social housing are all unemployed,” “engaged in illegal activities,” or “are foreigners.”

1.3.3 Development of a NIMBY Management Strategy

The NIMBY management strategy was developed by the executive officers and board members of Kings Square in consultation with representatives of the City of Charlottetown, the P.E.I. Housing Corporation and the P.E.I. office of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

² The questionnaire may be found in Appendix A.

1.3.4 Testing of the Strategy

In order to assess the potential usefulness of the NIMBY management strategy, a “mini-survey” was conducted with a random sample of homeowners living in neighbourhoods that did not have social housing projects within them or in the vicinity.

The eight homeowners selected for the mini-survey had all provided negative responses to the question “How would you feel if a social housing project were to be built on your street, close to your house?” They were then asked whether certain actions (described in Section 2.2) on the part of social housing proponents would influence their reaction to a hypothetical, proposed project in their neighbourhoods.

2.0 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Kings Square study is documented in *(NIMBY) The Word We Cannot Say Out Loud: A Report on the Management of the NIMBY Syndrome*.³ Highlights of the report are presented below.

2.1 Study Findings

Survey Results: Perceived Impact

As the researchers originally surmised, the results of the analysis of the responses to the neighbourhood characteristics questions revealed that people who are unaware of a social housing project in their neighbourhood are more likely to believe that a project would have a negative impact on the neighbourhood than would people who are aware of a

project. Figure 1 below shows that, for most neighbourhood characteristics, approximately twice the number of unaware respondents were likely to attribute negative impacts as compared to the aware respondents.

Survey Results: Consultation Methods

When asked to assess current consultation methods for social housing proposals, the respondents demonstrated a general satisfaction with current municipal procedures, such as published notices and letters to residents. This portion of the survey revealed that 80 percent of respondents favoured a public meeting as the appropriate forum to discuss a proposal.

Figure 1. Comparison of Aware and Unaware Groups' Responses

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTIC	Aware Group	Unaware Group
Street Noise (slight increase)	13.2%	20.0%
Feeling of Safety (slight decrease)	30.0%	75.0%
Traffic (slight increase)	21.0%	42.3%
Physical Appearance (slight decrease)	29.8%	49.7%
Availability of Parking (no significant expected changes reported)	-	-
Property Values (slight decrease)	35.4%	64.6%
Overall Satisfaction with Neighbourhood (slight decrease)	29.7%	53.2%

³ A copy of this report can be purchased from Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Corporation, 292 University Avenue, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island C1A 4M4.

It may also be purchased or obtained on loan from the Canadian Housing Information Centre, 700 Montreal Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P7, Tel: (613) 748-2367, Fax: (613) 748-6192, TTY: (613) 748-2143.

Informal Data: Private Attitudes and Beliefs

While it is difficult to quantitatively assess the data gathered informally, (in comments at the public meeting and in informal interviews), the researchers contend that these methods were useful in revealing deeply held beliefs about residents of social housing projects. These attitudes ranged from negative perceptions of the personal and moral habits of social housing residents to assumptions about their ethnic backgrounds.

2.2 Study Recommendations

Using the information gleaned from the study as the basis for its discussions, the project team developed the following set of recommendations to anticipate and manage a potential NIMBY reaction.

Form a NIMBY Committee

As soon as a project is conceived, a small committee (with a maximum of three people) should be formed to handle all communications with the concerned public. Ideally, one member of the committee should have public relations experience.

Identify and Minimize Potential Objections

Prospective sites for the project should be carefully examined. Special attention should be given to sites which do not require zoning changes, as locating a project there would significantly minimize opportunities for public opposition.

The Rural and Small Town Research and Studies Programme NIMBY Guidelines

The Rural and Small Town Research and Studies Programme (RSTRSP) has done extensive research on the NIMBY syndrome, which supports the conclusions of the Kings Square project. The RSTRSP has produced a comprehensive report, **Meeting Housing Needs and the NIMBY Syndrome**, and a set of management guidelines for public use that propose a practical, non-confrontational approach to dealing with community opposition to housing development. The guidelines include active and conciliatory steps aimed at

- preparing for a NIMBY reaction,
- building acceptance, and
- educating community leaders.

For more information, contact the RSTRSP, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick E0A 3C0 Tel: (506) 364-2393, Fax: (506) 364-2601.

During the planning stage of a project, prior to a public announcement, care should be taken to examine any potential physical impact on the neighbourhood. At this point any relevant studies should be undertaken, such as traffic movement studies and building design options.

Before a general public meeting, the NIMBY Committee should contact individual neighbourhood residents to “test the waters” and gain a sense of the kinds of objection likely to be raised at the meeting.

Prepare for Public Meetings

The public meeting is a crucial step in ensuring a successful proposal. The proponents should do the following:

- Present relevant studies and plans.
- Request formal neighbourhood involvement, such as appointing a neighbourhood representative to the project's board of directors.
- Offer opportunities for residents to become more informed, such as visits to similar projects in other neighbourhoods.

2.3 Results of the Strategy Test

When interviewed in the mini-survey, the majority of the respondents who had previously expressed strong opposition stated that their opinions were unlikely to change. However, some did concede that having the opportunity to become involved in a proposed project and visiting other projects of a similar type were good ideas that might minimize their opposition.

The results of the test indicate that the management strategy developed by the project team could help to turn the scales in favour of a project, with a majority of residents supporting the project rather than opposing it.

3.0 THE COMMUNITY AND THE KEY PLAYERS

3.1 The City of Charlottetown

The City of Charlottetown and surrounding region (Greater Charlottetown), with approximately 58,000 people, represents 46 percent of P.E.I.'s population. According to a P.E.I. Housing Corporation report,⁴ the municipality's demographic profile is characterized by a high incidence of low-income single parent families (23 percent). This factor contributes to a significant housing affordability problem in Greater Charlottetown and a correspondingly high demand for assisted housing.

Figure 2. Housing Affordability in Charlottetown

Percentage of Charlottetown households with annual income lower than \$15,000	36%
Average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Charlottetown	\$500
Annual household income required to rent a two-bedroom apartment in Charlottetown	\$20,280

Since 1989, there has been a 67 percent increase in the number of applicants on the federal Family Housing Program waiting list in Greater Charlottetown. The report also notes that the number of applicants is quite large relative to the number of units that become available in the area (through turnover or new projects) in any given year.

3.2 Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Corporation

The Kings Square Non-Profit Housing Corporation has its roots in an organization formed in 1986 to establish a food bank and soup kitchen. It has since extended its efforts to developing various social housing projects in Charlottetown. These include a housing co-operative, "second-stage" housing for individuals attempting to re-integrate into mainstream society, and a multi-family housing project.

Kings Square owns or manages over one hundred housing units, placing it among the most significant providers of social housing in Prince Edward Island.

⁴ Prince Edward Island Housing Corporation, *Need and Demand Study for Family Housing*, (1992).

4.0 REGULATORY REFORM INITIATIVES AND IMPACT ON HOUSING COST, CHOICE AND QUALITY

The Bedford-MacDonald House experience, in which an established and respected non-profit housing provider failed to gain approval for a project despite a recognized need, is an example of how the NIMBY syndrome can stop a development proposal. While in this case it was a social housing project that was turned down, NIMBY can also hinder other housing projects which may require changes to zoning or building by-laws, such as innovative or affordable market housing proposals. A NIMBY reaction can cause substantial delays in the approval process, attendant increased costs and, possibly, cancellation.

The Kings Square study revealed that there are steps that can be taken to mitigate NIMBY. The management

strategy proposed by the Kings Square team is based on the principle that the key to confronting the NIMBY syndrome is to expect it and prepare for it ahead of time. Similar conclusions have been reached by other researchers in the planning field. By acknowledging and responding to *all* objections, those based on discriminatory attitudes as well as concerns about a neighbourhood's heritage status, a project's proponents can greatly improve their chance of success.

While it is unlikely that any strategy will eliminate opposition entirely, the management strategy developed by the project team could help to turn the scales in favour of a social or unconventional housing project, so that a majority of residents supports the project rather than opposing it.

APPENDIX



APPENDIX A: NEIGHBOURHOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

1

QUESTIONNAIRE N.I.M.B.Y. SYNDROME

I am doing a study on low cost housing on behalf of Bill Campbell, King's Square Non-Profit Housing. By low-cost housing we mean any type of subsidized housing, for example, housing for youth, seniors, single parents, people on social assistance, low income and the homeless

We would ask your co-operation in completing a questionnaire to determine the perceptions of individuals toward low-cost housing.

1. Are you aware of low-cost housing in your neighbourhood?
Yes ---- No ----

2. The following is a list of neighbourhood characteristics that may have an impact on low-cost housing where you live. Please rate your answer on a 1 to 5 scale, in which 1 is decreased greatly, 3 is neither increase nor decrease and 5 is increased greatly.

	Decrease Greatly	Neither increase nor decrease	Increase Greatly		
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Level of street noise	1	2	3	4	5
b) feelings of safety	1	2	3	4	5
c) level of street traffic	1	2	3	4	5
d) physical appearance of the neighbourhood	1	2	3	4	5
e) availability of parking	1	2	3	4	5
f) property values in your neighbourhood	1	2	3	4	5
g) overall satisfaction with your neighbourhood	1	2	3	4	5

3. If a low-cost housing project were built in your neighbourhood, how acceptable would this be to you? Please rate your answer on a 1 to 5 scale, in which 1 is totally unacceptable, 3 is neither acceptable nor unacceptable, and 5 is totally acceptable.

Totally Unacceptable	Neither Acceptable nor Unacceptable	Totally Acceptable		
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

4. How would the following factors influence your acceptance of low-cost housing projects in your neighbourhood? Please rate your answer on a 1-to-5 scale, in which 1 is substantially decrease, 3 is neither decrease or increase, and 5 is substantially increase.

	Substantially decrease	1	2	3	4	5	Substantially increase
a) adequate parking		1	2	3	4	5	
b) design of project is compatible with rest of neighbourhood		1	2	3	4	5	
c) size of project is small		1	2	3	4	5	
d) personal involvement in the planning process		1	2	3	4	5	
e) the properties are well maintained		1	2	3	4	5	

5. In some cases before proceeding with a low-cost housing project, regulation requires that all property owners within 200 feet of the proposed project are given notice, and notice of the proposed project is published in the local newspaper.

Overall, how satisfied are you that this process will allow you to raise your concerns? Please rate your answer on a 1-to-5 scale, in which 1 is extremely dissatisfied, 3 is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 5 is extremely satisfied.

Extremely dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	Extremely satisfied

Overall, how satisfied are you that this process can allow your concerns to be resolved? please rate your answer on a 1-to-5 scale in which 1 is extremely dissatisfied, 3 is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 5 is extremely satisfied.

Extremely dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	Extremely satisfied

7. How would you like to be informed that a low-cost housing project was to be built in your neighbourhood?

Notice in the newspaper	1
Signage on the proposed site	2
Radio	3
Television	4
Letter from City Hall	5
Letter from the applicant	6

Other (please specify) 7 _____

8. What kinds of information would you like to have about the project?

9. How would you like to be consulted about the proposed project?

Individual meetings with the applicant	1
Public meetings	2
Other (please specify) _____	3

***** THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY. *****

A. What is the highest level of formal education you have achieved?

Primary School	1
High School	2
Some Community college	3
Community College graduate	4
Some University	5
University Graduate	6
Post graduate	7

B. Which of the following best describes your household?

One person, living alone	1
One adult, with children	2
A married or common-law couple, no children	3
A married or common-law couple, with children	4
Two or more unrelated persons	5
Other (please specify) _____	6

C. What was the approximate total household income in 1991 before taxes? Please include all sources including employment wages or salaries, pensions, investment, rent and employment payments from government

Less than \$ 10,000	1
\$ 10,000 to \$ 19,999	2
\$ 20,000 to \$ 29,999	3
\$ 30,000 to \$ 39,999	4
\$ 40,000 to \$ 49,999	5
\$ 50,000 to \$ 59,999	6
over \$ 60,000	7

D. Are you affiliated with any community organizations?

Yes	1
No	2

If yes, what organizations do you belong to? (please list)

Participation in the next phase of the research

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. Your answers will help us identify ways to improve the integration of low-cost housing projects into residential neighbourhoods. The next phase of the study involves identifying methods to ensure that the public is adequately and appropriately informed about low-cost housing projects before they are built. Would you be interested in participating in working groups to explore this issue in more depth?

Yes	1
No	2

If yes:

NAME -----
 TELEPHONE # -----
 ADDRESS -----

