

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
MLA Cumberland North



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Députée Cumberland North

Nova Scotia Legislature

Date: April 26th, 2023

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns regarding the ongoing housing crisis in Cumberland County. I share those concerns and agree that immediate action is needed.

As your member of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly for Cumberland North, I spoke about these urgent needs in the legislature as part of the most recent spring session as well as during previous sessions. Be assured I will take every opportunity in the future to continue to advocate for more affordable housing.

I am pleased to outline a few of the actions I have taken in recent years to support improving access to affordable housing:

- In April 2023, I organized a meeting at the NSCC Campus in Amherst with the Apprenticeship Agency and local contractors (tradespeople) to seek ways to improve conditions for students and apprenticeship experiences with the goal to increase the number of tradespeople to assist in building more housing supply.
- In March 2023, I tabled a petition in the NS House of Assembly on behalf of local residents asking government to invest in more housing in Amherst and Cumberland County.
- In January 2023, I facilitated connecting an Oxford area businessman with Housing NS regarding a subdivision he is building in Oxford. Through this connection, they are also discussing building housing on provincially owned land in Springhill. This has not been finalized but is in the works.

- I have communicated with the Minister of Housing regarding the need to increase rental supplements. Unfortunately, the government recently made it harder for people to qualify for a rental supplement. Housing advocates are very upset about this recent requirement for housing costs to be at least 50% of revenue rather than 30% as was past practice.
- On September 7th, 2022 I held a meeting with 50 community stakeholders to discuss the issue of the growing number of people living unsheltered in our county. We left that meeting unified with a goal of opening a winter shelter. From September through December 2022, I worked collaboratively with community members and staff from Department of Community Services (DCS) to prepare a proposal and budget. We were fortunate to receive full funding from DCS to operate a Winter Emergency Temporary Shelter (WETS). The shelter opened in January and provided a warm, safe place for overnight stays during the winter months,
- The WETS Taskforce sought support from a local non-profit, Cumberland Housing and Homelessness Association (better known as Cornerstone), as that organization's mandate is to provide affordable housing. Cornerstone has been given a building by the Town of Amherst as well as funding to hire an executive director. Considering their mandate and support from Affordable Housing Nova Scotia, Town of Amherst and DCS, I would expect a permanent shelter to be in place for the upcoming winter season if it is needed.
- As Hurricane Fiona approached Nova Scotia in September 2022, my team and I worked with community members including Red Cross and the YMCA Housing team to set up an emergency hurricane shelter for those living unsheltered in our community.
- Last May, I contacted the provincial Department for Housing to request they work with a local builder to supply of microhomes.
- A meeting held in May 2022 brought together the Mayor of Cumberland County, the Mayor of the Town of Amherst and Chief Administrative Officers from both municipalities with 10 contractors (builders) as well as staff from the Department of Housing. The meeting identified areas where the provincial and

municipal governments could help builders to get more housing built as quickly as possible.

- On January 21, 2022, I sent a letter to the Minister of Housing, John Lohr, outlining the housing needs here in our area.
- A public meeting was held on November 3rd, 2021 to discuss local housing matters with guest speakers including local municipal leaders, Department of Housing, Efficiency Nova Scotia, NS Health, NSCC and CMHC.
- Another public meeting was held on November 17th, 2020 with guest speakers Jim Graham of Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia and Jill Snow of Canada Mortgage and Housing. A large number of people attended including municipal leaders, contractors and general public.

Discussions at the public meetings brought forward several suggestions on how our communities can help improve the housing situation. They included:

- Encourage more private investments
- Request municipal governments examine by-laws with regards to land-lease communities
- Improve access to health care services for those with addictions to support having healthier tenants
- Request municipal governments publicly identify land that is available for housing development
- Request municipal governments brainstorm on ideas to invest capital in old homes to ensure liveability.
- Support the ongoing work of Cornerstone to build a permanent shelter
- Request municipal governments support co-op housing by offering a 25% property tax break
- Encourage each municipality to create their own Housing Strategy that will look at, among other things, zoning and providing lands for co-op housing
- Request the province make amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act (regarding land lease communities, rent paid directly to landlord from tenants on income assistance and lessen time for late notice to fall in line with other provinces)
- Look for opportunities to convert non-residential buildings to residential

- Work with the apprenticeship agency to increase number skilled trade workers
- Utilize the CMHC assessment tool to complete an assessment of housing need

Adequate housing is universally viewed as one of the most basic human needs and housing directly impacts one's health. As a Registered Nurse, one of the first things learned was the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs where he considers housing as a basic need for life. Accordingly, I am committed to continuing to advocate for the development of more affordable housing, including public housing, as well as pressuring the provincial government to make improvements and investments in the current public housing stock.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elizabeth" and last name "McCrossin" clearly distinguishable.

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin