

HOUSING STRATEGIES FOR IMMIGRANTS IN RURAL SOUTHERN MANITOBA

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Immigrants can help revitalize local economies, fill critical skills shortages, bring new investment to communities, and offer access to global markets. Small towns offer immigrants a lower cost of living, more affordable housing, safer neighbourhoods, and faster economic integration than larger cities do.

The benefits are mutual

Douglas Watt

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Executive Summary

The number of immigrants moving to rural communities has been increasing in recent years

The number of immigrant arrivals in the Province has increased from 3,000 in 1998 to 13,500 in 2009. An increasing number of these immigrants are moving to centres outside Winnipeg – 510 in 1998 up to 3,551 in 2009. Approximately eighty percent of those moving outside Winnipeg settle in ten communities but over 100 centres have been destinations for new arrivals.

Immigrants arriving in small centres fill labour force shortages and provide many other benefits but they also generate a demand for housing. The housing options they need are not always available in small rural centres, although adequate, affordable housing is essential to successful integration and retention.

Immigrants require affordable but not necessarily low income housing

Most of the immigrants who settle in rural Manitoba communities arrive under the Provincial Nominee Program. The majority of arrivals are families with children. The average household size is almost double the Provincial average. The vast majority are working at full time jobs they have good education and skill levels, earn reasonable incomes and can afford to pay a reasonable amount for housing. Very few are candidates for public or low income housing. They need affordable but not low income housing.

The greatest need for affordable housing occurs in the early settlement period – the first one to two years. During this time there is often a need for modestly priced rental housing – a scarce commodity in many small rural centres. Over the longer term the objective of most immigrants is to own a home.

The housing units in small rural communities are not always appropriate for immigrant households

The housing stock in small rural centres is generally older, sometimes in poor condition, and rental projects, if they exist, are generally older one and two bedroom units – not the type of accommodation required by immigrant families. Rental units in the secondary rental sector (basement suites, units above stores, etc.) are generally more affordable but are often older, smaller and not always suited to immigrant needs.

The housing market is tight, vacancy rates are low and affordable homes are scarce

Vacancy rates in nearly all small communities are very low – often approaching zero. There are a limited number of existing homes for sale and most new homes being constructed are unaffordable for many immigrant households.

Serviced lots for affordable home ownership are also in short supply in some centres and lots available are often used for “high end of the market housing”. Servicing costs often make housing unaffordable for modest and low income people. In the smaller communities the capacity of the building and development sector is also a limiting factor in addressing housing need.

The demand for housing is often regional

The demand for housing in some centres is not generated by jobs and investment in the centre but by immigrants accessing jobs in nearby centres and looking for housing in various centres in the region. Demand has to be examined on a regional basis and housing strategies planned accordingly.

Strategies to address housing needs vary by centre size

All communities should keep in mind that a high priority for new immigrants is to own their own home. They work hard to achieve home ownership. Rental housing options are often viewed as a needed but temporary strategy.

Two broad, but different, delivery strategies are required:

- Larger centres need to build new units; they have to add new stock to the existing inventory. Some of these units have to be rental projects as there is likely to be on-going sustainable demand for rental housing as new immigrants continue to move to the area.
- In smaller communities with less demand the priority should be to work within, and modify the existing stock or convert other buildings to residential use. New housing, particularly if it is rental housing, should be limited to small projects – probably less than ten units.

Larger Centres → Greater Demand → Build New Units

Smaller Centres → Limited Demand → Modify Existing Stock

The study provides a menu of housing options both larger and smaller rural centres can review to decide if they might work in helping to address housing needs in their centres.

Case studies are also provided as there are excellent examples in many centres in southern Manitoba that have been used to provide needed housing. These examples can be replicated in many other centres.

All centres should not lose sight of the fact that any housing provided for immigrants should also be flexible enough to meet local needs. Immigrant demand is not always permanent demand, particularly for rental housing.

All centres should work to assess needs and develop a strategy

Assessing needs and developing a housing strategy requires at least seven basic steps:

- **taking leadership:** someone to spearhead action and the necessary work – preferably a Housing Committee with a Chair to provide overall direction;
- **building partnerships:** addressing housing needs for immigrants requires the involvement of many organizations in the community;
- **conducting a needs assessment:** determining who is looking for housing, their characteristics, the type of housing they need, what is available, and the gaps that have to be addressed;
- **community consultations:** obtaining the opinions, ideas, and suggestions of the broader community;
- **identifying priorities:** what are the most important housing options to address the needs;
- **assessing funding needs and delivery options:** should housing be delivered by the private sector, with funding from government or the local municipality? Can local citizens modify their homes to provide accommodation?
- **choosing options:** Picking options that serve needs, are likely to attract private or public investment and are sustainable over a long period of time. Some housing needs may go unanswered.

Many small rural communities need immigrants and small communities have a great deal to offer. However, adequate, affordable housing is not always part of the package communities can offer when immigrants arrive. More housing options have to be available but there is no “one size fits all” housing approach.

1.0 Introduction

The number of immigrants arriving in Manitoba has increased significantly in recent years (Figure 1). To address labour force shortages associated with an aging population and growth in some economic sectors, the Province has pursued a very proactive immigration policy. The objective is to capture a larger share of all immigrants coming to Canada, to attract immigrants with specific labour force skills, and to encourage a better regional distribution of immigrants throughout the Province, as opposed to the vast majority of immigrants locating in Winnipeg. Labour force shortages are also a problem in small rural centres.

The principal tool to achieve this policy has been the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). Under the Program the Province is able to select immigrant applicants according to criteria established by the Province to suit provincial circumstances. The Federal Government still has to undertake health and security checks to finalize provincial selections.

Using the PNP as the principal policy tool, the Province has achieved the following policy objectives:

- It has increased the number of immigrant arrivals to the Province since the Program was introduced in 1998 from 3,000 to 13,520 in 2009.
- It has captured a larger share of all immigrants coming to Canada – increasing from 1.9 percent at the turn of the century to 5.4 percent in 2009.
- It has achieved the objective of attracting skilled workers required by the labour force. Recent studies suggest that close to sixty percent of principal applicants arriving have a university degree (Bachelor, Master, or Doctorate) (Carter, Polevychok, et al. 2009). Many others have skills in trades needed in the labour force.
- It has achieved the objective of encouraging more immigrants to move to centres outside Winnipeg. In 1998, 510 immigrants moved to centres outside Winnipeg. In 2009 the number was 3,551 (Figure 2). Immigrants have moved to more than 100 centres in the Province in recent years.
- The number of immigrants arriving in the Province under the PNP has increased from slightly over 400 in 1999 to more than 10,000 in 2009.
- The Province has a policy objective to continue to increase immigrant arrivals in the coming years with a target of 20,000 per year by 2016.

Although the PNP has been the principal policy tool to increase immigration to the Province and arrivals under PNP now constitute approximately 75 percent of annual arrivals, the Province continues to be the destination for refugees and federal program (skilled worker and family reunification) applicants. Arrivals under these classifications constitute a much smaller proportion of total arrivals, although absolute numbers have changed very little.

Manitoba is becoming home for an increasing number of immigrants and retention rates are high – most evidence suggests more than eighty percent of arrivals are still in the Province five years after they settle (Townsend and Pandey 2010, Carter 2009).

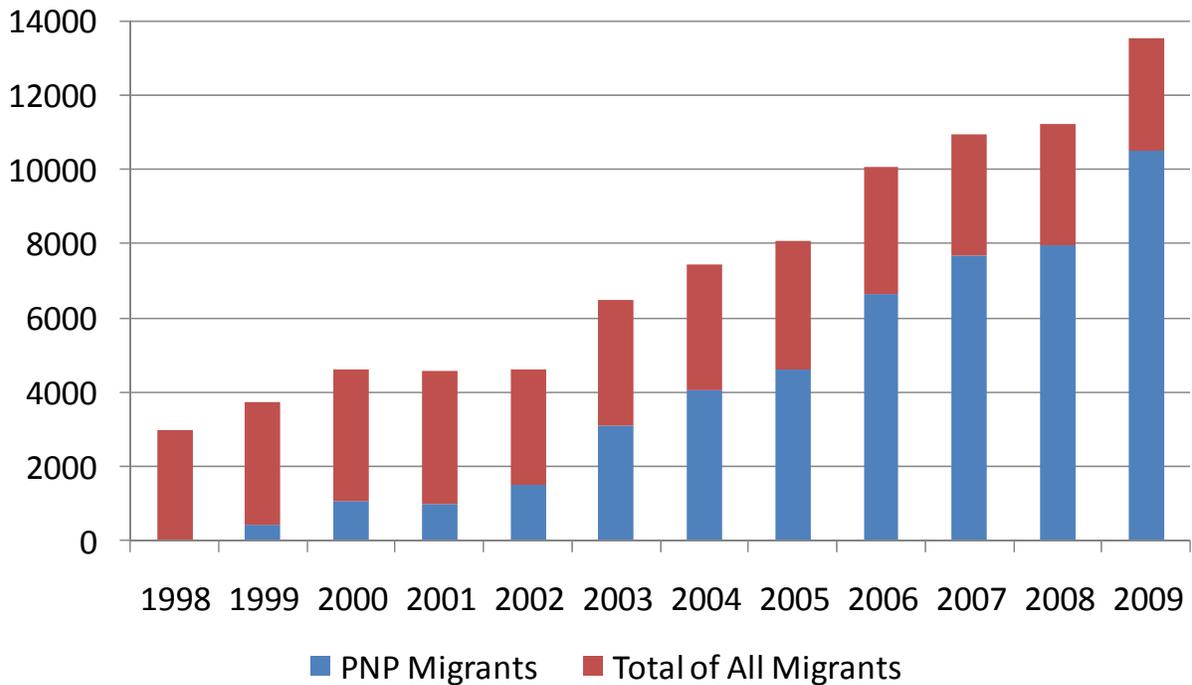
There are many benefits associated with an increasing number of immigrants: they address labour force shortages; they create jobs when they invest in new businesses; buy goods and service; they enhance the social, ethnic and cultural diversity of centres; and they reverse what in many centres has been a trend toward population decline and aging. They also increase Manitoba's profile and competitiveness through communications and knowledge transfer with co-ethnics abroad. This global connectivity has been severely lacking in the Province and improvements in this area strengthen chances for investment in the Province and sales abroad.

There is, however, another side to immigration. Growing numbers of immigrants require housing, education, and health care. They place pressure on these services. Housing is a case in point. Although most immigrants want to be homeowners, new arrivals generally require rental housing initially. They need a place to live until they get settled, get a job, and perhaps take language training or upgrade credentials. Once they are established and have steady employment and a reasonable income, they then become owners.

Many of the small rural centres in southern Manitoba have a limited supply of rental housing. There may also be a shortage of affordable, adequate ownership housing in many communities.

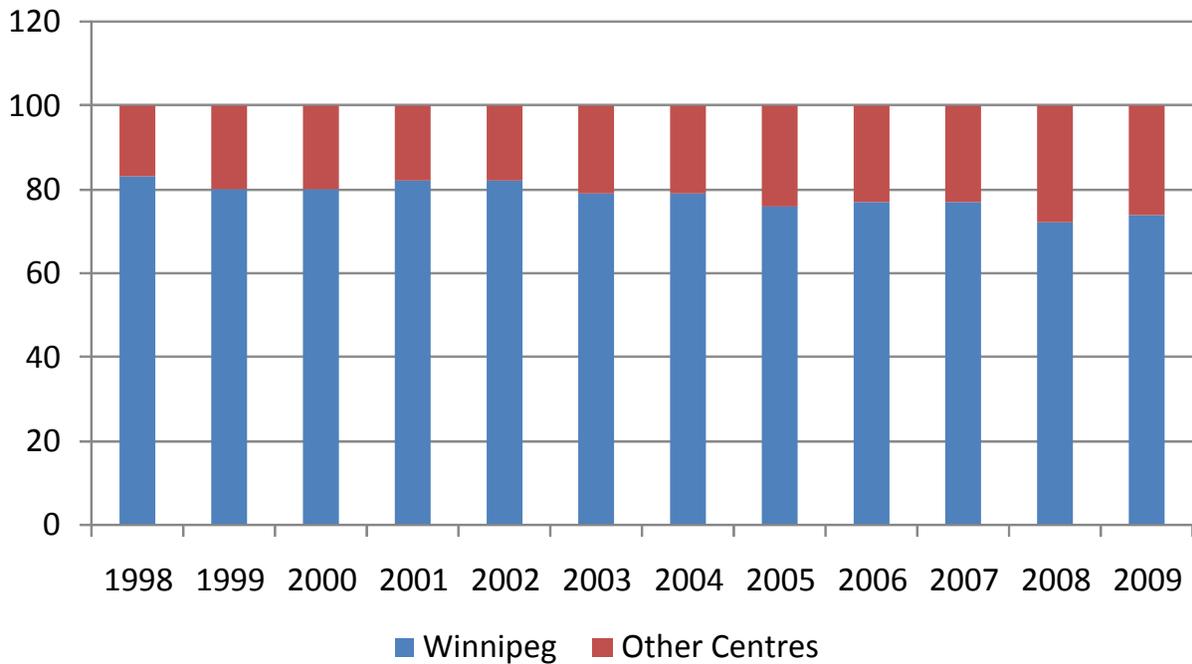
New arrivals need housing and the housing options they need are not available in many communities. More housing options are required if communities hope to attract and retain the immigrants the community needs. Adequate, affordable housing is essential to successful integration. Housing will be the focus of this report.

Figure 1: International Immigration to Manitoba 1998 – 2008



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Figure 2: Immigrants to Manitoba: Winnipeg versus Other Centres 1998 - 2008



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

2.0 Report Objectives

This paper has five objectives: to identify the housing needs of new arrivals and the housing problems they face; to describe the market circumstances in small rural communities; to highlight some of the challenges communities face in their efforts to provide housing; to develop a menu of housing options the communities may be able to use to provide more housing options; and, to outline a process communities can follow in assessing need and planning housing options for immigrants.

Although the focus of the work is “how best to provide the housing new arrivals require”, it has to be acknowledged that the pressure immigrants place on the housing market affects all residents. It may drive up prices and rents and reduce availability, so all residents feel the effect. Providing options for new arrivals helps improve the housing circumstances for all people in small rural communities.

3.0 The Characteristics of Immigrants Settling in Rural Manitoba

There are four classifications of immigrants arriving in Manitoba:

- immigrants arriving under the Federal Skilled Workers and Family Reunification Programs, and those arriving under the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (skilled or economic immigrants);
- refugees, either privately or government sponsored, and refugee claimants;
- temporary foreign workers brought in to address labour shortages in specific industries; and,
- foreign students who come to study, mainly at Manitoba's universities.

Only small numbers of refugees settle outside major centres such as Winnipeg, Brandon, and Portage la Prairie. They do not represent a significant element of housing demand in small rural centres in southern Manitoba.

Foreign students also go to very select locations, specifically those with universities or community colleges and again do not affect housing demand to any extent outside Brandon and Winnipeg.

Temporary foreign workers (TFWs) live in very select locations where substantial numbers of workers are required and the local labour force cannot meet the demand. Current locations include the meat processing plants in Neepawa and Brandon, horticultural activities around Portage la Prairie, and other centres in south central and south east Manitoba and construction workers in Winnipeg. Employers are responsible for finding housing for TFWs.

TFWs, when they arrive in substantial numbers as they have in Neepawa and Brandon, have a significant effect on the housing market, but this effect is limited to relatively few centres.

Most of the immigrants who settle in rural Manitoba communities arrive under the PNP. Over thirty percent of Nominees settle outside Winnipeg so, with approximately 3,500 immigrants settling outside Winnipeg in 2009, it is estimated that over 3,000 will have arrived under the PNP. PNP immigrants represent the most significant element of immigrant housing demand in small rural southern Manitoba centres.

Of the specific centres that have become home for immigrants outside the City of Winnipeg, the top ten communities in the 2003-2008 period include: Winkler, Steinbach, Morden, Brandon, Virden, Altona, Arborg, the Rural Municipality of Rhineland (near Altona), Ste Anne, and Thompson in the North. Other centres that have been the destination of more modest numbers of immigrants include Teulon, Stonewall, Plum Coulee, Richer, Swan River, Niverville and Kleefeld. Centres receiving even smaller numbers include Minnedosa, Souris, Dauphin, and Portage la Prairie (Table 1).

Table 1: Manitoba Provincial Nominees by Community Destinations 2003 - 2008			
Centre	(Principal Applicants and Dependents)		
	Total Arrivals	Percentage	Rank
Winnipeg	23,594	69	
Winkler	3,537	10	1
Steinbach	2,114	6	2
Brandon	1,530	4	3
Morden	635	2	4
Total	7,816		
% of Total		23	
% Outside Winnipeg		75	
Altona	153	0.4	5
Thompson	127	0.3	6
Rhineland	115	0.3	7
Virden	68	0.2	8
Ste Anne	52	0.2	9
Stonewall	43	0.1	10
Total	558		
% of Total		1.6	
% Outside Winnipeg		5	
Other Centres	2,123		
% of Total		6	
% Outside Winnipeg		20	
Total Outside Winnipeg	10,497	31	
Total Provincial Nominees	34,091	100	
Source: Manitoba Labour and Immigration			
Note: The above figures do not include the arrival of TFWs in centres such as Neepawa.			

The top ten destinations excluding Winnipeg account for more than eighty percent of newcomers and even more settle in communities and rural municipalities around these major destinations (see Table 1). Steinbach, Winkler, Morden, and Brandon alone are the destination for 75 percent of Provincial Nominees settling outside the City of Winnipeg.

The characteristics of the immigrants are important background in determining the nature of the housing required, what the newcomers can afford, etc.

Based on a recent (2008/2009) study of Provincial Nominees, these important characteristics include (Carter 2009):

- over eighty percent of the households that arrive are families,

- seventy percent of the households are families with children,
- twelve percent are extended or multiple family households, and
- the average household size is four people, almost double the average household size of the total provincial households.

The majority are large family households with children so there is a need for larger units – many with at least three bedrooms.

- 85 percent were working, some were furthering their education or expecting a child;
- most had permanent jobs and were working full time;
- two thirds of spouses were working;
- close to sixty percent had a university degree. Another twenty percent had trade certificates or diplomas;
- the average annual income was \$49,000, just \$11,000 less than the average provincial household income;
- only eighteen percent earned less than \$30,000, about sixteen percent earned \$70,000 or more;
- 85 percent of income was from wages and salaries. No one was on social assistance;
- although figures are not available, anecdotal evidence indicates many households brought assets with them;
- although forty percent were initially below the poverty line, this was a very temporary situation. After five years the poverty level approximates the provincial average;
- sixty percent live in houses with three or more bedrooms;
- on average those who owned a home were paying \$700 per month for a mortgage, those who rented were paying \$600 per month for rent;
- 25 percent of both owners and renters were paying thirty percent or more of their gross household income for housing (characterized as a housing affordability problem). In Manitoba as a whole, twelve percent of owners and 35 percent of renters have housing affordability problems.

The typical immigrant household is working, earns a reasonable income, and can afford to pay a reasonable amount for housing. Very few are candidates for public or low income housing. They need affordable housing but not low income housing (see note at end of this section). There are immigrants with low incomes, but for many this is a short term circumstance. The recent study found that after five years in the Province, 76 percent had become homeowners (higher than the provincial average), incomes were as good, or better, than the provincial average, and poverty rates approximated the provincial average.

The greatest need for affordable housing is in the early settlement period – the first one or two years. During that time there is a need for modestly priced rental housing while households get settled, find permanent jobs, establish a career path, and upgrade skills and qualifications if necessary. Because many arrivals have large families there is often a need for three bedroom units, a scarce commodity in the rental sector.

The situation is quite different for temporary foreign workers. Many work in the meat processing or horticultural sector for not a great deal more than minimum wage. Many are here as single individuals. They need modestly priced one bedroom rental accommodation, or perhaps hostel accommodation in some cases.

Affordable housing is defined in many different ways. There is no one satisfactory definition. Often it is considered housing whose total costs (rent/mortgage payment, insurance, utilities and for owners, taxes and insurance) are deemed affordable to those who have a median income. Affordable also means that households should not have to pay more than thirty percent of their gross, before tax, income on housing costs.

It may include a range of non-market and market housing options. Rent-geared-to-income housing or public housing, although it may be affordable, is often considered low-income housing. Entry level market housing (rental or ownership) with rents and costs at the lower end of market rates is also generally considered affordable. Non-profit housing with fixed rents, often at the low end of the market, may also be considered affordable housing. Some immigrants, and certainly many refugees, do need low-income, rent-geared-to-income public or social housing. However, in the context of this study, most of the Newcomers require housing with modest rents or prices more in line with entry level costs in the market. Their incomes are not necessarily high, but are higher than many requiring public or social housing.

4.0 The Market Place

4.1 The Settlement System

Centres in southern rural Manitoba vary substantially in size, the nature of their economic base, and the services they provide. Some are more attractive destinations for immigrants than others. Some communities are growing rapidly, others are characterized by decline. Future growth is not going to be uniform across the Province.

Centres in the Province can be prioritized on the basis of their rates of population growth, the services they provide, and the nature of their economy – diversified and stable, or growing, or single industry and stagnant, or declining. Based on these criteria communities in southern Manitoba (excluding northern communities and Winnipeg) can be divided into the following categories (see Figure 3):

Tier 1: Priority growth and service centres

- strong growth and a strong diversified economy
- new business and institutional investment
- top destination for immigrants
- growth in surrounding RMs and commuter centres
- examples *Brandon*
Steinbach
Winkler/Morden

Tier 2: Secondary growth and service centres

- some growth or modest decline
- important to their regions because of service base
- economies illustrate some diversity
- potential for future growth
- examples *Portage la Prairie*
Selkirk
Dauphin

Tier 3: Small centres with strong (potential) growth

- generally populations under 3500
- modest growth or minor decline
- important regional service centres
- some diversity in their economy but generally with one or two important industries
- examples *Altona*
Neepawa/Minnedosa
Virden
Beausejour
Gimli

Tier 4: Regional service centre

- smaller centres with declining populations over the last five to ten years
- their size within the region makes them important service centres
- their economies are more service than industry based
- examples *Swan River*
Russell

Tier 5: Secondary regional service centres

- centres that are smaller and service a smaller geographical area than Tier 4 centres
- offer a smaller range of services
- a service as opposed to industry based economy
- generally characterized by decline over the past ten years
- examples *Killarney*
Melita
Grandview
Ashern
Lac du Bonnet

Tier 6: Communities near Tier 1 growth centres – Bedroom communities

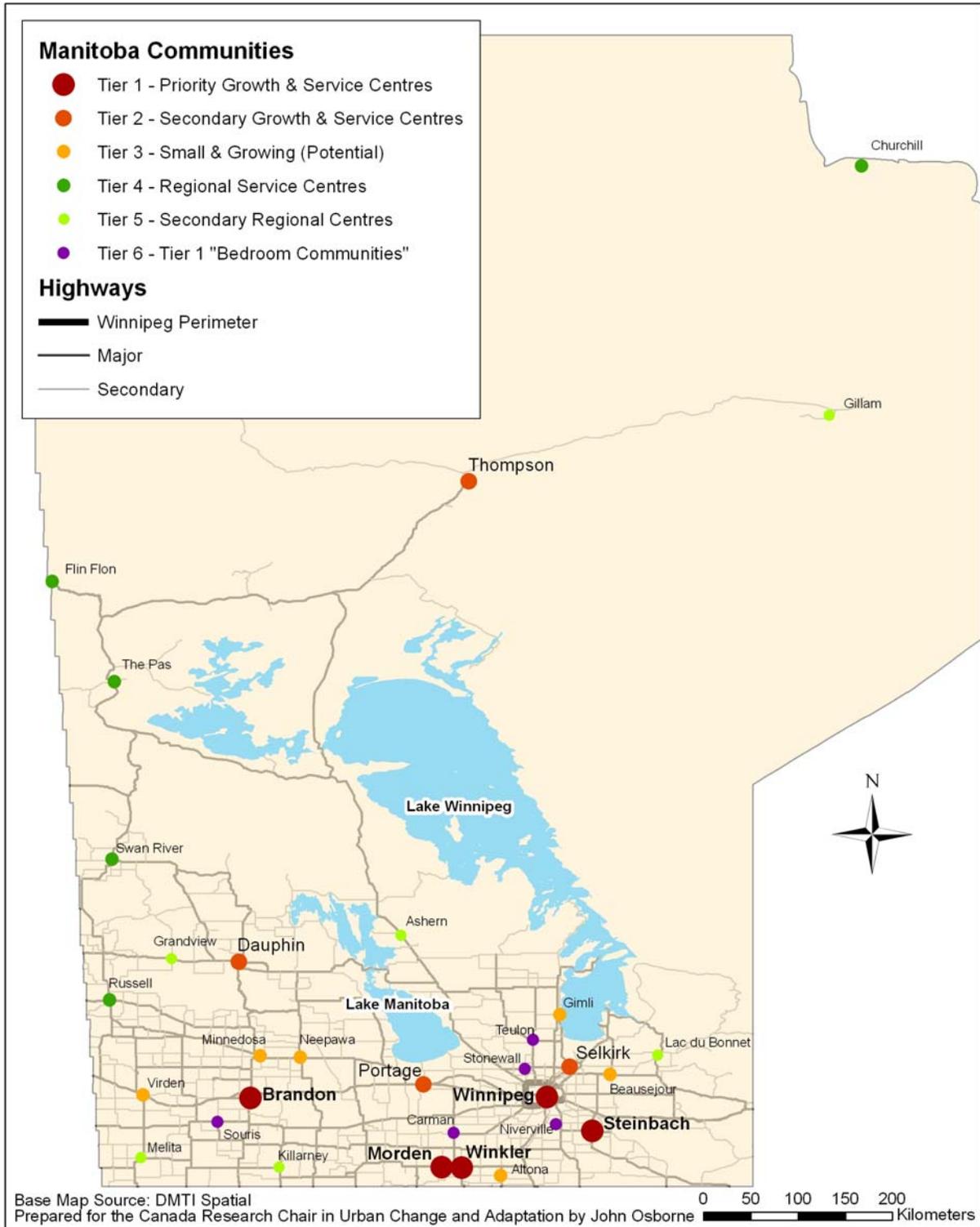
- often bedroom communities for larger centres
- some have illustrated significant growth in the last ten years (e.g. Niverville 42%)
- relatively modest service and employment base
- unlikely to develop services and employment as community residents shop and work in large centres nearby
- examples *Stonewall*
Teulon
Niverville
Souris
plus other centres

As noted above, some of these centres are more attractive destinations for immigrants than others. For most the number of immigrant arrivals is small. If Winnipeg is removed from the figures, over the period 2003-2008, 75 percent of immigrants settling outside of Winnipeg settled in one of four centres – Winkler, Steinbach, Morden, and Brandon – all tier one centres (Table 1).

Other notable centres, however, include Altona, Virden, Teulon, Ste Anne, Stonewall, Selkirk, Arborg, and the RM of Rhineland (near Altona). All these smaller centres received between forty and 150 immigrants over the 2003 and 2008 period.

Many other centres received fifteen to forty, but there are dozens of centres that received less than fifteen over the past five years, some have received five or less.

Figure 3: Prioritized Ranking of Manitoba Growth Centres



Points worth noting from this discussion include:

- growth in general in Manitoba is very concentrated in a few centres
- the destination of immigrants is also very concentrated in a few centres
- the numbers noted above do not include TFWs and they can be very concentrated in specific centres – Neepawa and Brandon for example
- there are many centres that are destinations for small numbers of immigrants
- in a small rural centre with limited housing options even a very small number of arrivals can create considerable pressure on the housing market. Housing simply might not be available even for as few as five new arrivals.

This discussion suggests that housing options in southern Manitoba, particularly options to accommodate immigrants, have to range from very few units to projects of a significant size.

Housing is a long term investment. Communities and the private sector have to carefully look at the longer term when making investments in housing asking key questions such as:

- what is the potential for future growth?
- is housing demand likely to be sustainable over the longer term?
- is the service base in place to provide new households with the services they will need?
- will immigrants stay or move to the larger centres?

Growth trends in the community, service availability, and the long term sustainability of housing demand are key factors in choosing housing options to address immigrant housing needs. They are also key factors the private sector considers before making investments in housing.

4.2 The Housing Inventory

There are a number of characteristics of the housing inventory that affect the potential to provide a range of housing options:

- there are a number of abandoned and/or derelict homes in small communities. Some of the derelict homes are occupied, others are vacant. Those that are occupied provide very poor accommodation (Figures 4 and 5)
- substandard or poor quality housing is common
- the housing stock, particularly in the smaller, slow growing, or declining centres is aging
- the older stock is not energy efficient which increases housing costs and is a burden for low income people
- the older stock is on average smaller, not always suitable for large immigrant families
- there are few, if any, three or four bedroom rental units
- rental projects, if they exist, are generally older one and two bedroom units. Some centres have very few, if any, units in the primary rental sector – purpose built projects

of three or more units targeted specifically to the rental sector. Projects that do exist are generally triplexes, fourplexes, or small apartment blocks of ten to twelve units (Figures 6, 7, and 8)

- much of the rental housing available is in the secondary rental sector: duplexes, single family homes, basement suites, accessory apartments, units above shops, etc. In some of the smaller communities as much as 45 to fifty percent of the rental stock is in the secondary sector (Gunn, Carter, et al. 2009)
- secondary rental units are often more affordable but they are generally older, smaller, more suited to individuals and couples as opposed to families, and may be in poorer condition
- in some smaller communities virtually no new rental stock has been built in the last fifteen years. Newer rental units, if there are any, are generally targeted to seniors
- some centres have low income/public or non-profit stock but most have been targeted to seniors. Family low income public stock is generally more limited, often older and in some cases in poor condition
- mobile homes can provide a more affordable housing option, and do in many centres. Some centres have very new and attractive mobile home parks (Figure 9)
- in other communities both mobile home parks and the units in these parks have aged, providing less attractive and often poor quality accommodation (Figure 10)
- in some communities there is a shortage of lots for mobile homes
- in some communities hotel/motel units are being used to house new arrivals.

The housing stock in most small rural communities can generally be characterized as older, smaller, and composed mainly of single detached owner occupied homes. The rental sector is limited in both numbers and types of units and very few new rental units have been built in recent years. The poor quality and poor energy efficiency of some units raises housing costs. Many of the rental units are in the secondary market and are older, smaller, and often in poor condition.

Figure 4: Vacant Home in Neepawa MB



Rental options for recently arrived immigrants are limited and new housing for purchase is also in limited supply in most centres.

Figure 5: Derelict House in Minnedosa MB



Figure 6: Fourplex in Neepawa MB



Figure 7: Small Apartment Block in Grunthal MB



Figure 8: Row Housing in Grunthal MB



Figure 9: Mobile Home Park in Neepawa MB



Figure 10: White Horse Village Trailer Park, Elie MB



4.3 Land Supply

The supply of land can be another barrier or challenge in efforts to increase housing options in smaller communities

- many centres find their inventory of serviced lots is running low or has run out completely. Many centres mentioned that they have had many requests for lots from people wanting to build houses
- some municipalities do not own any serviceable land
- the cost of servicing land has risen considerably in the last few years. A few centres cannot finance the cost or borrow to finance it because they would exceed their debt servicing ratio
- once the land is serviced, the cost often makes housing unaffordable for modest and lower income people
- in other municipalities most serviceable land is held by private developers whose interest is mainly in the high end of the market – not affordable housing
- there are very few infill lots available in most communities. Some lots have old derelict houses on them that could be demolished to provide new lots as has happened in Elkhorn
- some communities have also run out of lots for mobile homes (trailers).

An affordable land supply for housing development is a problem in many communities (Glenboro), on the other hand, some centres have a good supply of reasonably priced lots and have been using cheap lots (one lot for one dollar or at reduced prices as in Reston and Melita) to try and attract growth to the centre. In some centres lots are also very large and there is potential to subdivide to increase supply.

Another land issue, particularly in the South East and South Central areas of the Province around centres such as Altona, Morden, Winkler, and Steinbach, is the demand for large lot residential developments. Many of the arriving German Mennonites have an agricultural background or prefer to live a more rural lifestyle. They want acreages where they can keep chickens, goats, perhaps a few pigs, sheep, or even a cow or two. They prefer two, three, and five acre lots.

The supply of these lots in some areas is limited. Developments such as these also run into difficulties with Provincial regulations on the size of lots required to permit a septic system. Supply and regulations are limiting people's housing opportunities in this sector of the market. Solutions in this case rest with discussions between the Province and the Municipalities and their ability to develop planning regulations that meet environmental and land use standards, and at the same time accommodate these lifestyle choices.

4.4 The Housing and Development Industry

The characteristics of the housing construction and development industry present a number of challenges to the development of housing in smaller centres:

- most developers and construction firms, if they exist at all, are small, local, and lack the capacity and often the expertise to take on large (multiple units) projects. Apartment construction is “foreign” to these firms
- most small local firms are focused on maintenance and repair, and renovation of existing units as opposed construction of new homes or apartments
- the work noted above keeps these local firms very busy
- builders to construct larger projects have to come from larger communities in the Province – Brandon or Winnipeg
- comments on land developers are very similar – no local firms or capacity.

There is skilled construction, repair and renovation labour in all but the smaller centres – also plumbers and electricians. However these firms are small and lack the capacity to undertake larger rental and ownership projects. The smaller firms probably also lack the borrowing power to finance larger land and housing developments.

The capacity of the building and development industry may be a limiting factor in addressing housing needs in many centres.

4.5 Market Trends and Characteristics

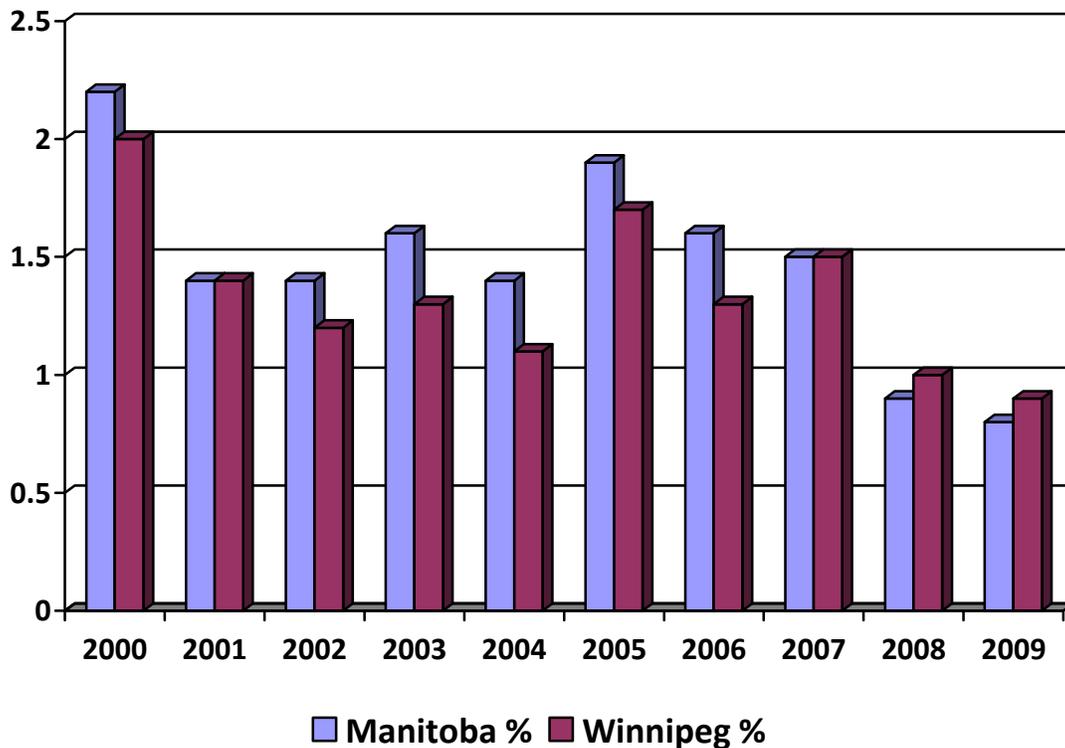
Market place circumstances make access to adequate, affordable housing difficult for newcomers and for many people in the population as a whole. Key aspects of the market that affect housing access include:

- vacancy rates are very low and have been for several years. Many centres – Steinbach and Brandon, for example – have had rates near zero for the past few years (Figure 11)
- rates are low in all unit types and sizes
- increases in rents have exceeded inflation rates for the last several years (Tables 2 and 3)
- public/low income housing projects have vacancies in some centres, but many of the vacant units need repair
- the limited number of three or more bedroom units restricts access for large families and the higher rents for these units creates affordability problems for the families
- in tight rental markets landlords can become considerably more discriminatory. This may affect access for larger families, certain ethnic groups, and the more difficult to house
- in some centres there are few homes for sale. Builders are concentrating on building high end of market units that carry higher profit margins. There are few mid range or

entry level homes (new or existing) for sale. If more such homes were for sale, more renters could move out and into ownership units freeing up rental units

- low vacancy rates also keep some seniors in older homes who might opt for rental housing if units were available. This reduces the number of older modestly priced homes for sale
- the market in many centres can be classified as “constipated”. There is too little movement. People cannot get into rental or modestly priced ownership units. People in modestly priced ownership units who may want to move into rental cannot so these units are not freed up for purchase. Those with enough money can buy in at the high end
- although there are units in the secondary rental sector, some are in poor condition. In some centres some of these units are disappearing, particularly basement suites and accessory suites in single family homes. With a shortage of homes for sale, particularly for larger families, if these homes are purchased often the extra units disappear as they are used by the purchasing family.

Figure 11: Rental Vacancy Rate: Manitoba 2000 - 2009



Source : Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

	Bachelor		One bedroom		Two bedrooms		Three + bedrooms		Total	
	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009
Vacancy Rates (%)	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2
Average Rents (\$)	398	415	500	519	636	666	762	805	586	614
% change Rents		4.3		3.8		4.7		5.6		4.8

Source: CMHC Rental Market Report, 2009

	Bachelor		One bedroom		Two bedrooms		Three + bedrooms		Total	
	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009	Oct 2008	Oct 2009
Vacancy Rates (%)	4.5	0.0	0.0	0.4	2.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.6	1.3
Average Rents (\$)	336	345	504	522	623	660	701	709	580	612
% change Rents		2.7		3.6		5.9		1.1		5.5

Source: CMHC Rental Market Report, 2009

In summary, the housing market is tight, vacancy rates are low, in most centres few, if any, new rental units have been added to the housing stock and prices for both ownership and rental have been increasing. Homes for sale (new and existing) are scarce and additions, if any, are at the high end of the market. Older homes for sale are often smaller and in need of considerable upgrading. In some centres there is too little movement in the market to free up affordable units.

People most affected include:

- the low income – both families and individuals
- seniors who may be looking to move into rental options away from the responsibilities of owning and maintaining a home
- young professionals, nurses and other health care workers for example, moving to take jobs in the community
- families who need larger (more bedrooms) accommodation
- immigrants (families and individuals) moving to these centres, particularly in the initial stages of settlement
- temporary foreign workers.

Employers, local councillors and economic development officers in many centres stated that there were many examples of jobs going unfilled because people could not find suitable accommodation in the community, hence sought employment elsewhere.

4.6 Regional Market Issues

The demand for housing in some centres is not generated by jobs and investment in the centre. In many cases it is spill-over demand from other centres. There are many examples.

Several centres around Brandon – Rivers, Boissevain, and Souris, for example – reported housing demand was generated by people working in Brandon and commuting. They were coming to the communities looking for housing as opposed to being long term residents of the community.

Minnedosa is also an interesting case in point. It seems certain that Minnedosa is the recipient of spill-over demand from both Brandon and Neepawa —TFWs and employees in other industries. With a housing shortage in Minnedosa there are also people working in Minnedosa who live in Brandon because they cannot find accommodation in Minnedosa. A study to document this situation is currently underway in Minnedosa.

Housing demand in these situations is regional and spill-over from one centre to another is common. This raises some important policy and housing investment issues:

- should Minnedosa, for example, respond to this demand? If it does and housing is also provided in Neepawa and Brandon will Minnedosa end up with vacant units?
- if the source of employment (meat processing, for example) disappears or jobs decline in these and other industries will this spill-over demand in Minnedosa evaporate?
- demand from TFWs and immigrants often fluctuates. TFWs and immigrants do not always remain in small communities. Some go home, others move to larger centres when contracts expire, or they get permanent immigrant status. Many move to centres where there are more people of their own ethnic group.

Given these circumstances housing demand in some communities may be subject to fluctuations and at times may disappear entirely. This type of situation does not instil confidence in investors. Private developers and builders look for longer term, assured investment opportunities.

Circumstances such as this suggest two broad policy approaches have to be considered in addressing housing needs in some communities:

- demand has to be examined on a regional basis; and,
- in some communities new housing options provided have to be flexible enough to serve a range of household types and both local demand and demand from other communities. Purpose built housing for a specific clientele increases the possibility units will sit vacant in the future.

5.0 Strategies to Resolve Rural Housing Needs

There is no one solution fits all. Communities would be wise to conduct needs studies to better assess housing requirements before undertaking any initiatives. Assessing the need for immigrant housing should only be one part of a larger needs study. Keeping units full, particularly in small communities, requires that the projects be able to accommodate local, as well as immigrant, housing demand.

There is a difference in scale in provision of the housing required. In the larger centres that attract the greatest number of immigrants, a significant number of units are required. Initiatives may be required to address many areas of the market: increasing the lots available, adding new units to the rental stock to reduce vacancies, increasing the supply of affordable home ownership units, and making better use of the existing stock. Certainly some purpose built housing targeted to specific types of households is required.

In smaller centres that are attracting only a few immigrants, only a very modest number of units are required. Demand is smaller and perhaps uncertain over the longer term. A different approach is required. A priority for these centres should be to work within the existing housing stock as much as possible – fixing up derelict homes, adding accessory suites, converting non-residential uses to residential, etc. Flexible units that can serve other families and individuals should immigrant demand disappear, have to be a priority.

This leads to two different delivery approaches. Larger centres need to build new units; they have to add new stock to the existing inventory. In smaller communities with less demand, the priority should be to work within, and modify, the existing stock, or convert other buildings to residential use.

Larger Centres → Greater Demand → Build New Units

Smaller Centres → Limited Demand → Modify Existing Stock

All communities should keep in mind that a high priority for new immigrants is to own their own home and they work very hard to achieve homeownership. Most view rental housing or other housing options as temporary. This should be front and centre in the minds of those developing strategies. Affordable homeownership is the end objective. Strategies in both large and small centres should take this into consideration.

5.1 Case Studies

There are many good examples illustrating ways communities have responded to immigrant housing demand. Before a broader menu of strategies is discussed, the focus is on initiatives in three centres that tell the story of practical approaches to addressing demand.

A) Altona Transitional Housing (Tier Three Centre)

In 2005 Altona was the destination for a significant number of immigrants. Most were families with a German Mennonite background. Many families had as many as eight children.

At that point, and even now, Altona had very little rental housing these families could access upon arrival. Housing was needed for large families during that early settlement period until they could find work, get to know the community, access the services they needed, etc. Transitional housing was required until they could find more permanent accommodation.

The Altona Development Corporation purchased a building that formerly housed the School Division offices and renovated the two floors to provide housing.

Total renovation and modernization costs were approximately \$5,000.

There are two units. One is large enough to hold eight to ten people, the other holds five to six people. A private room is provided for the parents but children sleep in bunk beds in other rooms.

Each unit has its own bathroom and kitchen.

Rents are set depending on family size and ability to pay.

The Development Corporation tries to achieve eighty percent occupancy over the year and tries to have rents cover operating costs and financing. No government funding was provided.

The units are provided fully furnished.

Units also have telephones but this has been the source of minor problems with long distance charges.

Occupancy is limited to three months, although there are some situations for which this time frame has been extended.

When there is no demand from immigrants, the Development Corporation seeks other alternatives to keep the units full – work crews from the pipeline construction, refugees sponsored by local churches, etc. Immigrants, however, are the first priority.

The Community Development Officer works with the new arrivals to help them access healthcare, school, recreation, language training, etc. The housing provides some stability while they get settled, familiar with the town, and access other services.

Altona also has an Immigration Committee that includes representatives from Council, Chamber of Commerce, the Development Corporation, Schools, Health Care, Police, Recreation, Churches, Labour and Immigration, etc. The Committee helps people access services and provides overall direction.

Using this transitional housing gives families time to find permanent housing. Most purchase or build homes. Few continue to rent.

The project is a good example of how small centres can deal with immigrant demand. The project is:

- large enough to accommodate large families
- flexible enough to accommodate other types of renters
- can be used for local demand if there is no demand from immigrants
- makes good use of existing buildings
- relatively modest cost
- generally self-sustaining and did not require government funds
- more cost effective approach than providing permanent rental housing when long term demand is for ownership
- the Development Corporation (Economic Development Officer) and local Immigration Committee work with tenants of the building to access other services they need.

B) Minnedosa Converted Use Housing (Tier Three Centre)

Minnedosa is not a major immigrant destination but the recent arrival of health care workers and spill-over from Neepawa and Brandon has created a shortage of housing.

Close to two years ago the Assiniboine Health Area recruited thirty health care workers from the Philippines. Four were located in Minnedosa.

Because of the extreme shortage of rental housing, Minnedosa and area decided to renovate vacant office space in the old Town Office (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Minnedosa Old Town Office Converted to Temporary Housing



The Town of Minnedosa covered the cost of materials, the surrounding Municipalities of Minto and Odanah covered the cost of furnishings and volunteer labour did the necessary work. This labour included plumbers, carpenters, and electricians. Total costs were less than \$5,000.

The four people from the Philippines arrived and moved in and paid a rent of \$800 per month – \$200 each.

After a few months the four people were able to rent a home closer to the hospital. They do not have vehicles, and the long uphill walk was difficult, particularly in winter.

The Town have been able to keep the residential space occupied by

- renting to tourists
- renting to the sound crew for the “Rock in the Field Festival”
- renting to a TV crew filming an outdoor fishing feature

- and, renting to TFWs from Neepawa.

This is a good example of creative conversion of non-residential to residential space.

It has the flexibility to accommodate other uses when immigrants leave.

It was fully funded by local municipalities with no government support.

C) Steinbach Affordable Home Ownership (Tier One Centre)

Over the last several years Steinbach has been the destination for more than 2,500 immigrants. Most have arrived under the PNP, many are large families and homeownership is their desired housing choice.

Affordable homes for purchase, for both immigrants and other residents of the community are in short supply.

This has prompted a more innovative approach (at least for small centres) to the provision of housing (Figures 13 and 14). The approach incorporates:

- a movement to much smaller lots, some with 30ft frontage
- reduced side yards and set backs
- two story units to provide reasonable floor space at a higher density
- units range from 878 to 1566 sq.ft
- a range of two, three, and some four bedroom units
- space saving designs
- driveways but no garages in some units although space to provide small garages in the future
- attached garages in some units
- no sidewalks in some parts of the project
- energy efficiency features (furnace, insulation, etc.)
- small front porches
- some units come fully landscaped
- selling for \$182,000 to just over \$200,000
- the subdivision and design include features of both smart growth and new urbanism.

Using both unit design and subdivision design, the project provides increased density and affordability for modest income households (Figure 15).

Not all units are occupied by immigrants but immigration has been the major driver of demand for affordable home ownership in the community.

Units have been selling well and there are plans to proceed with further development in the subdivision.

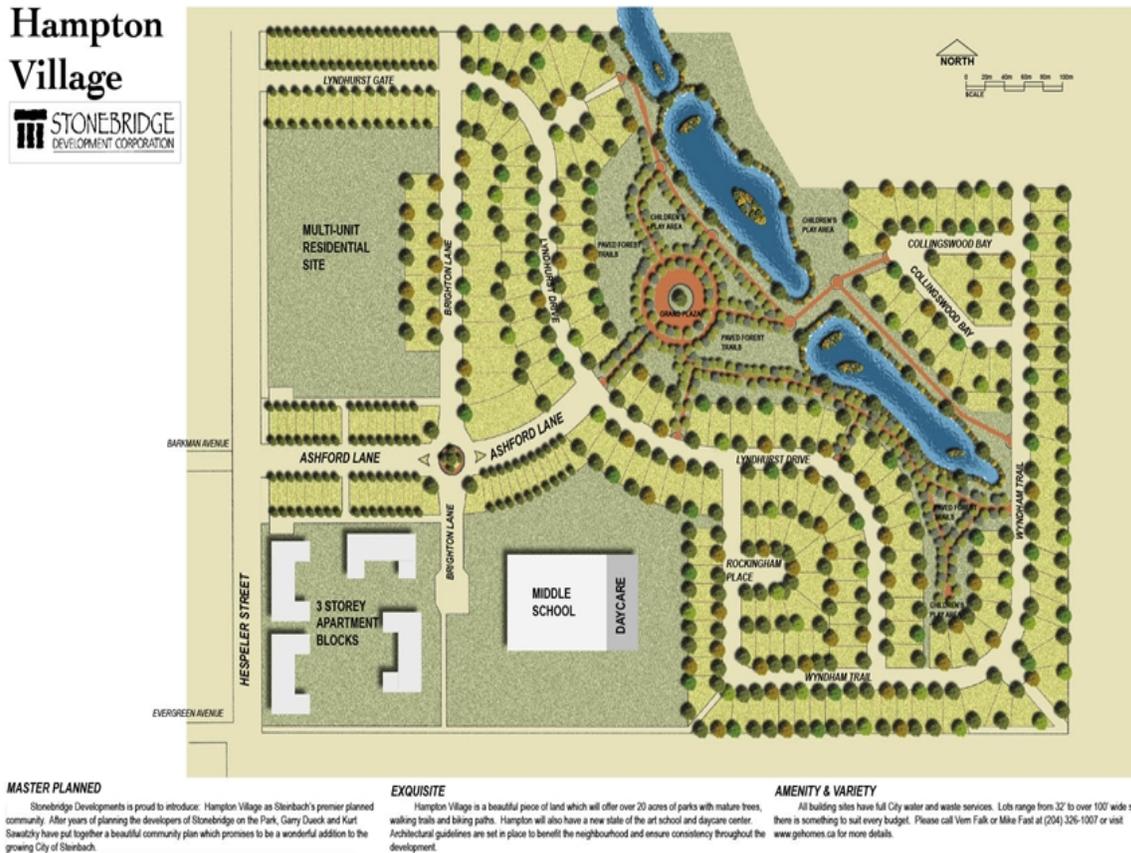
Figure 13: Affordable Housing in Steinbach MB



Figure 14: Small Lot High Density Ownership Units in Steinbach MB



Figure 15: Innovative Subdivision Design in Steinbach



5.2 A Menu of Options for Addressing Immigrant Housing Demand

The material below outlines initiatives that communities can adopt or introduce to address immigrant housing needs. The ideas are drawn from communities within Manitoba and also from communities across the nation.

The options are arranged under organizations that would be able to take the lead to introduce such an initiative, provide expertise and, if necessary, provide funding. The initiatives are also organized according to their suitability for large or small rural communities. This does not mean an initiative listed under small centres would not work in larger centres. It simply means that it might be a more appropriate and realistic option for a particular size of centre. The appropriate centre size for each initiative is further refined by the column that lists the “Tiers” (see Section 4.1) or types of centres within the settlement system where the initiative might be applicable. The other two columns in the Table provide the type and a very brief description of the initiative. Communities can review the options and choose those they feel might be suitable given their centre’s characteristics, market circumstances, and housing needs, then proceed to developing more detailed program criteria.

Organization	Centre Size	Initiatives/Programs	Comments	Most Suitable Tiers
Federal/Provincial Government	Small Rural Centres	Support development of adequate supply of serviced lots	Funding for municipalities, partnership with the private sector, profits, if any, to assist with housing development	1 – 6
		Assist with demolition and preparation of infill lots	Grants or loans to municipalities for work, recoverable on sale of property. Perhaps combined with matching grants from municipalities	1 – 6
		Make surplus (if any) public housing units available	Some centres have vacant family or seniors units. Repairs might be necessary	1 – 4
		Fund housing information and education programs	Funding flows to community organizations working with immigrants	1 – 6
		Provision of expertise, technical assistance	Help for municipalities, non-profit groups during the housing development process. Provided by government or people funded by government	1 – 6
		Funding to demolish or repair derelict homes	Grants or loans – some funds recoverable on sale/rental of units	1 – 6
		Funding for development of secondary suites, accessory apartments	Grants to homeowners for required renovations	1 – 6
		Funds for development and repair for units above businesses	The Main Street Approach. Grants or repayable loans (Minnedosa case study)	1 – 6
Local Municipalities	Small Rural Centres	Changes in Zoning and Building Code By-Laws to permit secondary suites	Makes better use of the existing stock	1 – 6
		Changes in Zoning to permit home businesses in residential areas	Allows home purchasers to supplement household income, improves affordability	1 – 3
		Zoning to permit mixed use development with residential dwellings as a component	Makes affordable housing more attainable	1 – 3

Organization	Centre Size	Initiatives/Programs	Comments	Most Suitable Tiers
Local Municipalities	Small Rural Centres	Develop and continually update a housing strategy. An Official Community Housing Plan	Provides ongoing direction, useful in obtaining funds from other levels of government	1 – 6
		Implement Alternative Development Standards – narrower lots, reduced setbacks, reduced road allowances	Reduces housing unit costs (Steinbach project is a good example)	1 – 3
		Provide financial incentives for rental and affordable homeownership	Small grants – \$1,500 - \$2,500 per unit (Steinbach provides \$1,500 Municipal rebate for units under \$155,000)	1 – 4
		Change zoning to support use of upper storey of commercial properties for housing	Adds to affordable stock. Increases downtown population	1 – 6
		Using zoning, building code and health by-laws to take over abandoned, derelict or tax arrears property and convert units/lots to affordable housing	Maintains or adds to the affordable stock	1 – 6
		Incentives to homeowners to provide secondary suites in their homes	Small grants – \$1,000 - \$1,500 per unit adds affordable rental stock without significant expense	1 – 4
The Private Sector	Small Rural Centres	Concentrate on provision of affordable ownership housing	More affordable design options	4 – 6
		Development of duplex, triplex, and fourplex rental projects	Small unit rental projects are more sustainable over the long term	4 – 6
		Production of modular housing	Reduces per unit cost	4 – 6
Community Organizations	Small Rural and Large Centres	Work with community, government, and private sector to assess needs	Contribute to a Community Plan or Long Term Strategy	1 – 6
		Involvement in planning and perhaps management of housing projects	Brings local expertise to the planning and development process	1 – 6
		Collect and provide housing information	Builds awareness, provides information newcomers need	1 – 6

Table 4: Housing Initiatives by Centre Size and Participants				
Organization	Centre Size	Initiatives/Programs	Comments	Most Suitable Tiers
Community Organizations	Small Rural and Large Centres	Maintain list of rental units available, rooms for rent, board and room	Good source of housing availability – a one stop location for accessing housing (Steinbach)	1 – 6
		Provide Landlord/Tenant information, housing maintenance and operation information	Provides a source of housing education for newcomers (Winkler)	1 – 6
		Volunteers to work with newcomers to find housing, access other services	Improves housing accessibility and integration in general	1 – 6
Local People	Small Rural and Large Centres	Make rooms and secondary suites available	Adds to affordable stock, a source of income	1 – 6
		Provide board and room	Adds to affordable stock, a source of income	4 – 6
		Work as volunteers helping people find housing and other services	Assist with overall integration of newcomers	1 – 6
		Provide a welcoming community	Promotes retention of immigrants	1 – 6
Federal/Provincial Government	Large Centres	Assist with demolition and preparation of infill lots	Grants or loans to municipalities for work, recoverable on sale of property. Perhaps combined with matching grants from municipalities	1 – 6
		Make surplus (if any) public housing units available	Some centres have vacant family or seniors units. Repairs might be necessary.	1 – 4
		Fund housing information and education programs	Funding flows to community organizations working with immigrants	1 – 6
		Make surplus federal/provincial land available	Can be used as a subsidy/grant to promote affordable housing where available. Available to private or non-profit sector	1, 2

Table 4: Housing Initiatives by Centre Size and Participants				
Organization	Centre Size	Initiatives/Programs	Comments	Most Suitable Tiers
Federal/Provincial Government	Large Centres	Help establish trust funds for housing development	Trust funds to municipalities for affordable housing development. All or part of funds recovered on sale of property, from rents, etc. Can be used for renovation, building new and other housing related activities. Objective is to establish a revolving fund	1 – 3
		Provision of expertise, technical assistance	Help for municipalities, non-profit groups during the housing development process. Provided by government or people funded by government	1 – 6
Local Municipalities	Large Centres	Property Tax Incentives or Property Tax Rebates, Property Tax Holidays	Municipalities throughout Canada forego taxes to encourage development of housing (Steinbach)	1, 2, possibly 3
		Tax Increment Financing	Municipalities promote housing development by using future gains in taxes as a result of the development. Future anticipated revenues are used to borrow to finance the project. Used for over fifty years in many Municipalities	1, 2
		Municipal Infrastructure Lending Program	Federal funding that can be used for municipal housing. Deadline March 31, 2011	1 – 2
		Changes in Zoning and Building Code By-Laws to permit secondary suites	Makes better use of the existing stock. Adds to rental stock without significant investment	1 – 6
		Changes in Zoning to permit home businesses in residential areas	Allows home purchasers to supplement household income, improves affordability	1 – 6
		Zoning to permit mixed use development with residential dwellings as a component of commercial uses	Makes affordable housing more attainable	1, 2

Organization	Centre Size	Initiatives/Programs	Comments	Most Suitable Tiers
Local Municipalities	Large Centres	Develop and continually update a housing strategy. An Official Community Housing Plan	Provides ongoing direction, useful in obtaining funds from other levels of government	1 – 6
		Relax regulatory controls/zoning to permit smaller lots, conversions of buildings, single family to duplex, reduced parking for multi-unit projects	Reduces overall cost of housing. Adds to inventory without significant investment	1 – 3
		Discourage condominium conversion when vacancy rates are low	Preserves rental stock	1, 2
		Using zoning, building code and health by-laws to take over abandoned, derelict or tax arrears property and convert units/lots to affordable housing	Maintains or adds to the affordable stock	1 – 3
		Change zoning to support use of upper storey of commercial properties for housing	Adds to affordable stock. Increases downtown population	1 – 6
		Provide financial incentives for rental and affordable homeownership	Small grants – \$1,500 - \$2,500 per unit	3 – 6
		Implement inclusionary zoning. All housing developments must include a percentage of affordable units	Adds affordable rental stock	1, 2
		Implement Linkage Programs Fees on commercial, industrial and retail development to support affordable housing	Helps finance affordable housing	1
		Implement Alternative Development Standards – narrower lots, reduced setbacks, reduced road allowances	Reduces housing unit costs	1 – 3
		Establish Housing Reserve Funds for government contributions, development charges	Invest in affordable housing	1 – 3

Organization	Centre Size	Initiatives/Programs	Comments	Most Suitable Tiers
The Private Sector	Large Centres	Provision of affordable rental housing. Incorporate more affordable design options	Work with government to structure funding packages	1 – 3
		Provision of affordable ownership housing. Incorporate new subdivision and architectural designs	Work with governments to structure financing, draw on expertise	1 – 3
		Explore Public/Private Partnership	Increases funding sources	1 – 3

With respect to the strategies outlined there is no ‘one size fits all’. Communities have to choose what suits their needs and their pocketbooks. There is also the potential to mix and match, or to modify the approaches provided.

Smaller centres where demand is lower and with few guarantees that demand from immigration will be sustained over a period of years should certainly work to provide units within the existing housing stock, or conversion of other buildings to housing. It is important to keep in mind that most immigrant households want to be homeowners and most achieve this objective within a short period of time. Many of them view rental housing (of whatever type) as transitional housing on the way to ownership. Small communities should view it in the same fashion and make sure the housing will be suitable for non-immigrant households or other uses. Altona’s Transition House is a good case in point (see Case Study 5.1A).

6.0 A Community Process for Addressing Immigrant Housing Needs

The following discussion outlines the actions required and possible initiatives that could be introduced to respond to housing demand, particularly demand generated by immigrants. The discussion also speaks to possible partnerships required and, in smaller centers, positions housing with a broader community development approach.

6.1 The Process

All centres have to move from a point where housing is identified as a problem to choosing options to address needs. There are at least seven steps in this initial stage.

Taking Leadership

Someone has to 'lead the show' and be prepared to take charge of building partnerships, organizing the community, and leading the subsequent steps of the process. In some centres Council has taken the lead, in others a Housing Committee has been established and given the mandate to lead and direct. The latter is perhaps the best approach as such a Committee has a **specific** housing mandate and **only** a housing mandate. With a specific focus such a committee is less likely to get distracted by other duties. A Chair to provide overall direction is essential.

Building the Partnership

Housing is a complex issue, and addressing housing needs requires the involvement of many organizations in a community. This is particularly true when immigrants are the target of housing initiatives. Housing is only one of many services required in the settlement and integration process, particularly if communities want to retain immigrants. Key partners in addressing housing needs include:

- Town Council
- Local Employers
- Employers in the Region (if important)
- Representatives of the Provincial Department of Labour and Immigration
- Health Care and Hospitals
- The Building and Development Industries
- Schools
- Property Management Representatives
- Non-Profit/Seniors Housing Agencies
- Real Estate Firms
- Local or Regional Housing Authorities

Perhaps one of the best models is Eastman Immigrant Services in Steinbach and area. Eastman is much more than a housing organization but members of the partnership are active in helping immigrants to arrange accommodation, providing information on different housing options, information on rents, vacancies, encouraging people to rent rooms, basement suites, provide

room and board, providing information to new tenants on Landlord/Tenant regulations and responsibilities, what tenants should know about repairs, rent increases, security deposits, tenancy agreements, condition reports, giving notice, subletting, etc. Eastman does not provide housing but it certainly facilitates access to housing and other services.

Conducting a Needs Assessment

Once the committee is in place the next step is to identify needs and determine what housing is available. Key pieces of information include:

- who is looking for housing and what are their characteristics – families, individuals, family size, the number of bedrooms they need, how much they can afford to pay, do they want to rent or own, do they work in the community, or another community, etc.
- household needs have to be matched with what is available to rent, to buy so an inventory of what is available has to be prepared
- putting the two together identifies the gaps.

Community Consultations

Obtaining the opinions, ideas, and suggestions of the broader community is important. Sharing the results of the Needs Assessment is an excellent way to get this feedback. Broader community consultation also raises community awareness of the situation and the mutual benefits of providing better access to housing for immigrants and others. It may facilitate a better community buy-in to the process. Often it is best if consultations are conducted both prior to, and after, the needs assessment and at other key decision making points in the process.

Identifying Priorities

The consultations and needs assessment can then be used to identify the priorities/initiatives required to make housing more accessible. Priorities have to address the gaps between housing needs and the options available in the market place. Is it rental housing that is needed? If so, at what rent levels? What unit types? Is there a shortage of homes for rent? for sale? Is there a need for transition housing? Is there a need for serviced lots? Who needs housing? families? individuals?

Assessing Funding Needs and Delivery Options

Based on an assessment of who needs housing and what type of housing is required, it is then possible to determine, in a general sense, the target markets in terms of price. It is also possible to determine, again in a general sense, if the housing options required should be delivered by the private sector, with funding from governments including the local municipality, or by investment from the current residents – modification of their home to provide rental options, for example. The private sector is simply not going to invest in large rental units for

low income people unless some level of public subsidy is available, but they may well be interested in providing modestly priced ownership units (as in Steinbach), condominiums for moderate and higher income households (as in Brandon) or investing in land development (as in Portage la Prairie).

Determining general price/rent levels of the product required, the type of units, and who is likely to be interested in making such investments, helps communities choose the most viable options.

Choosing Options

It is rare that communities are able to address all the needs. However, using the process above provides the information necessary to make choices: choices that serve needs, are likely to attract public or private investment, and to be sustainable over a long period of time. Investments in projects that are empty two years down the road and are not flexible enough to accommodate another client represent wasted money.

Some housing needs may go unanswered.

The above sets out a general planning process that communities can use to assess housing needs and make wise choices on the nature of the housing initiatives they want to pursue and the investments they want to make or attract. It is a general framework or approach, and it can be modified to suit local circumstances. Some communities undertake needs assessments, most do not. However, regardless of how big or small the centre and how large or small the demand for housing, it is a worthwhile exercise. It helps to avoid mistakes down the road, often costly mistakes.

7.0 Conclusion

Many small rural communities need immigrants and small communities have a great deal to offer. However, adequate, affordable housing is not always part of the package communities can provide when immigrants arrive in town.

More options have to be available but there is no one solution for all centres. Larger centres with long term sustainable demand may have to add new rental and ownership stock and increase the supply of residential lots. Small centres are best advised to work within the existing stock to add units that provide more temporary or transitional housing. Rural municipalities have to find ways to provide large lot developments that respect environmental and land use guidelines. All centres, when working to provide housing, must not lose sight of the fact that any housing provided for immigrants should also be flexible enough to meet local needs, as demand from new immigrants is not always permanent demand – particularly for rental housing.

Municipalities across the Nation have taken many different approaches and there are several models to follow, but each community has to determine what best suits local circumstances. A local assessment of housing needs is a good first step to satisfying local housing needs.

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