

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Affordability of Home Ownership
Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review
NWT Housing Corporation—March 7, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to pick up where my colleague from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh left off. I wonder if there are people who are living in public housing who have incomes where they may be able to afford to pay for market housing if they live in a market housing community. I am just going to take the number arrived at yesterday by the Alternatives North living wage report. Of the three communities they surveyed, let's say, about \$90,000 is the common threshold of income that someone would have to earn to pay their own way. Is the Minister able to give me any idea of how many people in public housing earned more than that amount of money? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have to get the specific details for the Member, but I am pretty sure that it is definitely under 10 percent. As I mentioned when we talked about the lease-to-own program, we do want to reward good behaviour of people who are in public housing to own their own homes. We are looking at other options moving forward and maybe through you, Mr. Chair, I will ask the president and CEO just to add a little bit more detail. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. The Member's question was a specific one about the number of people. I will give it to Mr. Williams here, but if he can just keep his answer brief and to the point. Thank you.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, we certainly could come up with the exact number, but as the Minister said, it is a small percentage of people who are paying the max rent, but these are people who we want to target. As long as they are good tenants, we will be targeting them for home ownership opportunities. I would say that that is one way of adding to the inventory without adding to the inventory, because we don't have to worry about O and M costs. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Even if the number were 10 percent, that would be 240 units, which would be a considerable help for the availability of affordable housing. I'll say that, here in Yellowknife, where I am, that would be very helpful. Is there any thought of setting an upper limit that people can earn and still stay in public housing? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are going through a strategic renewal process right now. In terms of the numbers, we all know that Yellowknife, with the public housing waiting list, the need here is the most significant in probably the Northwest Territories. We will look at that, and we will have the strategic renewal information out in April. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that answer from the Minister. I am glad to hear that this option is on the table. It would free up units for lower-income families in Yellowknife. The uptake on buying houses from people who are clients of public housing has been low, and I think that that is primarily because the incomes are low. How is the Housing Corporation going to entice more people to buy? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. Williams.

MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are doing a number of things. We are reviewing the Core Need Income Threshold. That is one method. We are looking at coming up with a new CNIT for April 1st, and that usually determines the rents that we charge.

As to getting more people interested in home ownership, it is one of our big priorities this year in this budget. We are rolling out the new home program, which is going to be a multigenerational home. It is kind of modelled after the old program. We are very encouraged there. In this budget, we have five units, one in each district, that we will be rolling out as a start. We are going to really promote the lease-to-own program for rewarding good behaviour for our tenants in public housing who are paying max rent, are looking after their home, and are good tenants. We want to reward good behaviour and move these people into the option to lease-to-own the unit that they are living in. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Just for confirmation, in government we always use acronyms, CNIT is Core Need Income Threshold, just so that all Members know when we are looking at that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. I know that the people in Hansard appreciate that, as well. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: That takes a question off my list, so that's awesome. I appreciate that the Housing Corporation wants to reward people who are good tenants with the opportunity to own their own homes, but the whole premise of public housing is that people have low incomes, and so then, as a result, they have less money for operations and maintenance of a home, as well as paying a mortgage on it. I would like to know how the Housing Corporation is going to address that need, and what they would consider to be a successful number of people taking up this program in the next fiscal year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and as I mentioned, we'll continue to promote these programs through our communications strategy in terms of our office doing work with the district offices and with the LHOs. Further to the Member's questions, sometimes Housing is really the only game in town, when they need to pay those rental costs. Like I said, we're the only game in town in some cases, and it's something we will be looking at. As I said, we're doing a strategic renewal right now.

We'll have that information out in April. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the Minister for that. I'm talking here about communities that have a market, such as Yellowknife, not communities which only have public housing. What does success look like for the Housing Corporation in terms of getting people to buy homes? How many homes do they hope to sell in the next fiscal year? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you heard me speak earlier, one the programs that we're looking at, and hopefully will be successful, is the lease-to-own program, and we do have a target of 60 over three years. We also have the new home ownership program that we're hoping to have one in each of our five districts. You know, the more information that we can get out there, I think we can have more people applying, and also just changing attitudes in terms of public housing units. That's what we want to do. We want to change attitudes so people are a little bit more responsible. Our O and M costs are pretty high. If we can get people into home ownerships, then better for us, better for them. Thank you, Mr. Chair.