

Local Implications of a National Housing Strategy: The Case of Toronto

April 27th, 2021 James Ankers Blanche and Sandy van Ginkel Graduate Fellow







What is the National Housing Strategy (NHS)?

How is it different? Federal Metagovernance (Bradford 2014)

Why does it matter? Implications for Municipalities

Where to go? Recommendations



The NHS: An Introduction

- \$40 billion dollars over ~10 years (since expanded)
 - 15% increase over previous ten-year average
- Three significant focuses:
 - Federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) agreements \$13.7 billion (down ~12%)
 - Combatting homelessness \$2.2 billion (up 62%; recently increased to ~ \$4.7 billion)
 - Direct support for building and renovations \$6.8 billion (new; recently increased to ~\$16.8 billion)



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What Changes?

- In terms of mechanisms? *A lot*
- Nobody works alone
- Long-term contracts and provincial partnerships down; flexible, 'steerable' arrangements are prioritized
- New, 'place-based' policy



How To Interpret the New Federal Role?

- Ottawa is working as a *metagovernor* (Bradford 2014)
- Managing the ongoing work of governments and society, rather than complementing it
- Using financial leverage to empower local communities and 'co-steer' affordable housing policy



Example #1: Reaching Home

- Ottawa selects a local Community Entity, and tasks it with funding distribution
 - Here? The City of Toronto
- A separate Community Advisory Board oversees spending
 - Here? The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH)
 - Together? The Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum (THHSPF)
- Ottawa sets goals and guidelines



Example #2: Housing Development

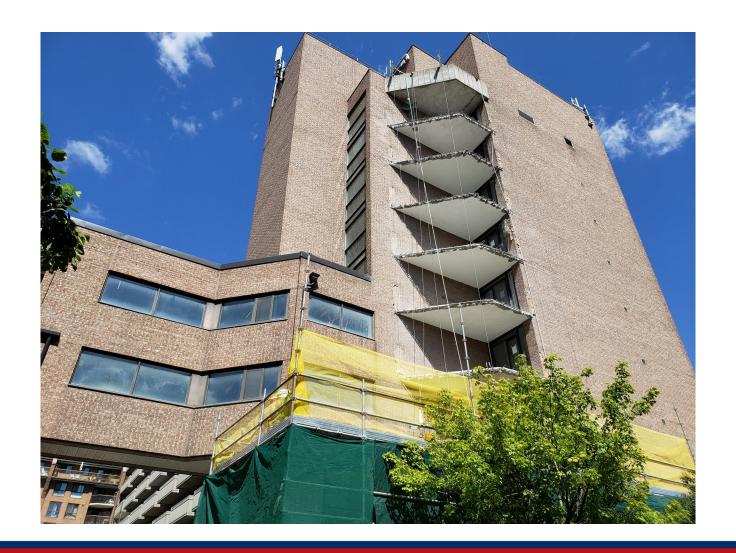
- Most programs invite applications; some require governmental partners
- Program design incentivizes beyond-minimum affordability commitments
- Ottawa influences location, affordability, and ownership of tens of thousands of units, with minimal commitment













• What do new mechanisms, new building funds, and new homelessness funds mean for Toronto?



First: A Newly Available Role

- Most programs invite municipal applications
- \$1.34 billion for Toronto Community Housing came through the National Housing Co-Investment Fund (previous photo)
- Cities like Toronto can build or rebuild ambitiously, but must *opt-in*
- There's no backup coming!

Second: A New Partnership Role

 Most non-FPT programs either require additional governmental partners, or score co-partnered applications more highly



Third: A (Quiet) Federal-Municipal Relationship

- Some programs invite (or require!) direct intergovernmental coordination between Ottawa and municipalities
- Reaching Home: An *available* relationship
- Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI): a mandatory relationship



Three Implications

- A new role as an applicant
- A new role as a *partner*
- A new role in delivering federal policy
- How to respond?

Recommendations: Be Entrepreneurial

- Billions of dollars are available
- Get out there and get them
- Enormous advantages built into NHS programs for municipalities

Recommendation: Be the *Leader*

- Dozens of local groups seeking these funds
- Who understands government? You do
- Who is an invited partner? You are
- Who can plan and coordinate? You can
- Be a metagovernor

Recommendation: Be a Housing Nexus

- Housing funds and planning have to be coordinated vertically (between governments) and horizontally (between developers)
- Cities need *institutional capacity* to leverage their position
- A 'one-stop shop' for affordable housing
- Look to Shelter Services and the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness

Conclusion

- Canada has its first 'National' Housing Strategy, but most of it is *local*
- No panacea: not much change in spending, but a big shift in *mechanisms*
- Cities will have to *rise to the occasion* (or at least delegate effectively)
- *Informal* powers are still *real* powers, and can get a lot done without even having to *think* the word 'negotiation'

Thanks!

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