DSSAB: Phase one of housing study complete

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Phase One of the Housing Needs, Supply and Affordability Study which was commissioned by the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services Administration Board is now complete.

The first phase of the study, which resulted from a lack of available and affordable rental accommodation in the districts, was presented to the DSSAB at their June meeting by Ed Starr of SHS Consulting.

"I really appreciate the kind of work that Mr. Starr has done on the whole issue of housing," said DSSAB chair, Ray Chenier. "I'm particularly interested in the areas of small, small communities such as Gogama and Foleyet where there are no services. I think what the province has to look at is the possibility of developing ways of keeping people in their homes in the small communities but have also the services required to keep people in their homes."

Chenier said that since Starr is working on similar housing studies in other parts of Ontario that this may lead to the different groups, "such as ours will get together to put pressure on governmnt

to act in areas where they have not acted before."

The phase one report incorporates information from Statistics Canada, local planning and building departments, community organizations and agencies, as well as two rounds of consultation sessions conducted in the four planning regions of the DSSAB which include LaCloche, Manitoulin Island, Sudbury East and Sudbury North.

Key housing issues identified in phase one which are common across the districts are outlined below:

- Home ownership has become the only option for many households as it is often more feasible than renting, due to higher rents. However, many low income households still struggle to make down payments.

- As the population of seniors increases, a greater range of housing options for an aging population will be required, especially those providing supports to seniors to enable to remain in their own homes.

- There are few family units in the social housing portfolio, all of which are in LaCloche or Sudbury North. However, lone parent families, along with younger single households, have a high incidence of low income

and pay higher percentages of income on housing than other household types.

- A continuum of housing is required as part of the stock for people with disabilities, Aboriginal people and seniors. A limited choice of housing options cannot meet resident's needs as they require different services and supports.

- Improvements to accessibility are generally required in much of the public housing stock. None of the DSSAB buildings have elevators, which is a big problems for seniors and disabled individuals.

- Some places do not have serviced lots, such as Espanola, which limits options for expanding the supply of social and affordable housing.

- Many homes in the area are in need of repair, especially among Aboriginal households.

- Many parts of the DSSAB do not have a shortage of social housing units. Rather, these areas require services attached to housing, in order to remain attractive for the groups for which they are built.

- Where facilities are located is a key issue. In many parts of the districts, there are long distances with little public transit (if any).

- There is a need to rationalize the housing stock in some areas to ensure it better meets current and future housing needs.

These issues will form the basis of the housing recommended strategies and initiatives which will make up phase two expected to be completed early this fall.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSSAB covers 45,000 square kilometres and is comprised of representatives from 19 member municipalities and unorganised townships within the districts of Manitoulin and Sudbury. It does not include the City of Greater Sudbury. The DSSAB is responsible for coordination and delivery of services divested by the province to municipalities including Ontario Works, Social Housing, Emergency Medical Services (land ambulance) and Early Learning and Child Care services.