



AANDC Case Study 1: Tsleil Waututh Nation Rent Collection Practices

The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) acknowledges the financial contribution of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for the preparation of these case studies. CHRA is solely responsible for the views and information presented herein.

September 2014

TSLEIL WAUTUTH NATION RENT COLLECTION PRACTICES

Before 2007 the Tseil Waututh First Nation (TWF), on Burrard Inlet adjacent to North Vancouver, British Columbia, had a housing portfolio comprised of both privately-owned and band-owned residences that fell well short of serving the community's needs. There were too few homes to accommodate all the members who wished to live on-reserve, and they were in generally poor condition. The Chief and Council, recognizing that the current path was not healthy or sustainable, made engaging the community in an inclusive process to address this critical issue a priority. The TWF Housing Committee formed out of this engagement process, and was tasked with developing a new set of housing policies and strategies that would address the need for better management and development practices that did not compromise, but enhanced, the well-being of band members.

One of the critical factors that contributed to community's housing woes was difficulty collecting rent, and the committee recognized that without effective rent collection the system would never function properly. When rent is not paid the money to maintain the unit must either come from the band council, at the expense of addressing other community priorities, or not be invested in the housing at all, which is a recipe for dilapidation. Prior to the committee's work, few mechanisms existed to bring tenants whose rent was in arrears into compliance.

A private landlord would, after making some efforts to collect arrears, enter into an eviction process. First Nation Housing, however, is part of a broader set of services and supports targeted to members in need. Management of that housing is seen in the context of this broader mandate to serve members' interests, and those interests are rarely served by eviction. As Lorissa Demoskoff, TWN's Director of Housing, explains, "The band has implemented safeguards for tenants who find themselves having difficulty paying rent, including an 'Acceptable Delay in Rent Payment' policy. A tenant experiencing a family or personal crisis may defer rent payments for a period of time that we both agree to."

Another key rental policy is the 'Arrears Repayment Agreement', through which a tenant in persistent arrears may enter into a contract with the housing office to pay the debt within a period of time that is manageable for them and acceptable to the administration. Offering tenants flexibilities to address short-term financial problems, and working with them to plan and commit to a path out of debt for those in serious arrears, have together contributed to the goal of realizing nearly 100% rent collection success while reducing the stress on tenants associated with potential or actual eviction. Says Demoskoff, "This has proved to be a real win-win situation for both the business side of TWN Housing and the social goal of bringing members back to the community and better supporting their success."

The Tseil Waututh First Nation demonstrates that housing crisis can transition to housing success when purposeful community engagement, effective development and application of rental and other policies, and commitment to using the housing portfolio as one of several

tools that support wider community and tenant success, are applied. In recent years the positive financial position resulting from rent collection and tenant relations success has in part supported housing development innovation. TWN Housing has constructed at least four new units per year since 2011, including developing multi-unit residential buildings for the first time while shifting the development standard from single family dwellings to more efficient duplexes.



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