ROOMING HOUSES IN HALIFAX

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BACKGROUND

What are Rooming Houses?

- **Rooming Houses**: a private market form of affordable housing in which people rent single rooms in a house, also called single room occupancies (Lee, 2016).

- **“Quasi” rooming houses**: similar to rooming houses but not licensed, or advertised as such – targeted at university students (Lee, 2016).

HALIFAX HAS LOST ROOMING HOUSES

Rooming houses are disappearing in HRM

We've gone from 153 in 2007 to just 25 last year.

Posted By Tim Bousquet on Thu, Nov 28, 2013 at 7:39 AM

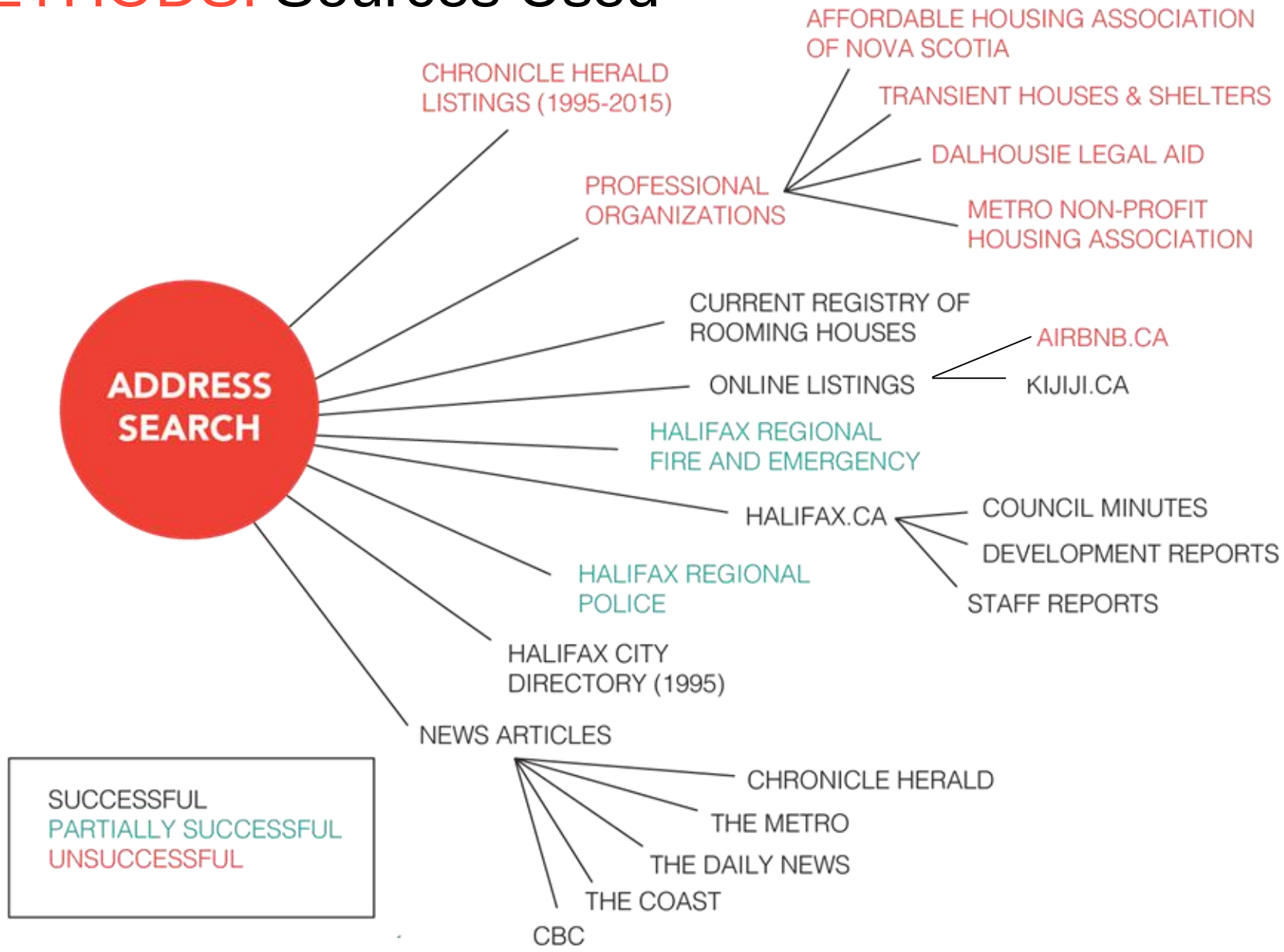
CBC INVESTIGATES | Halifax rental property under investigation, called 'overcrowded'

Former tenant calls Payzant Avenue property unsafe; landlord says she's victim of 'wicked Chinese carpenter'

By Shanna Luck, CBC News · Posted: Mar 17, 2016 6:00 AM AT | Last Updated: Mar 17, 2016 10:52 AM AT

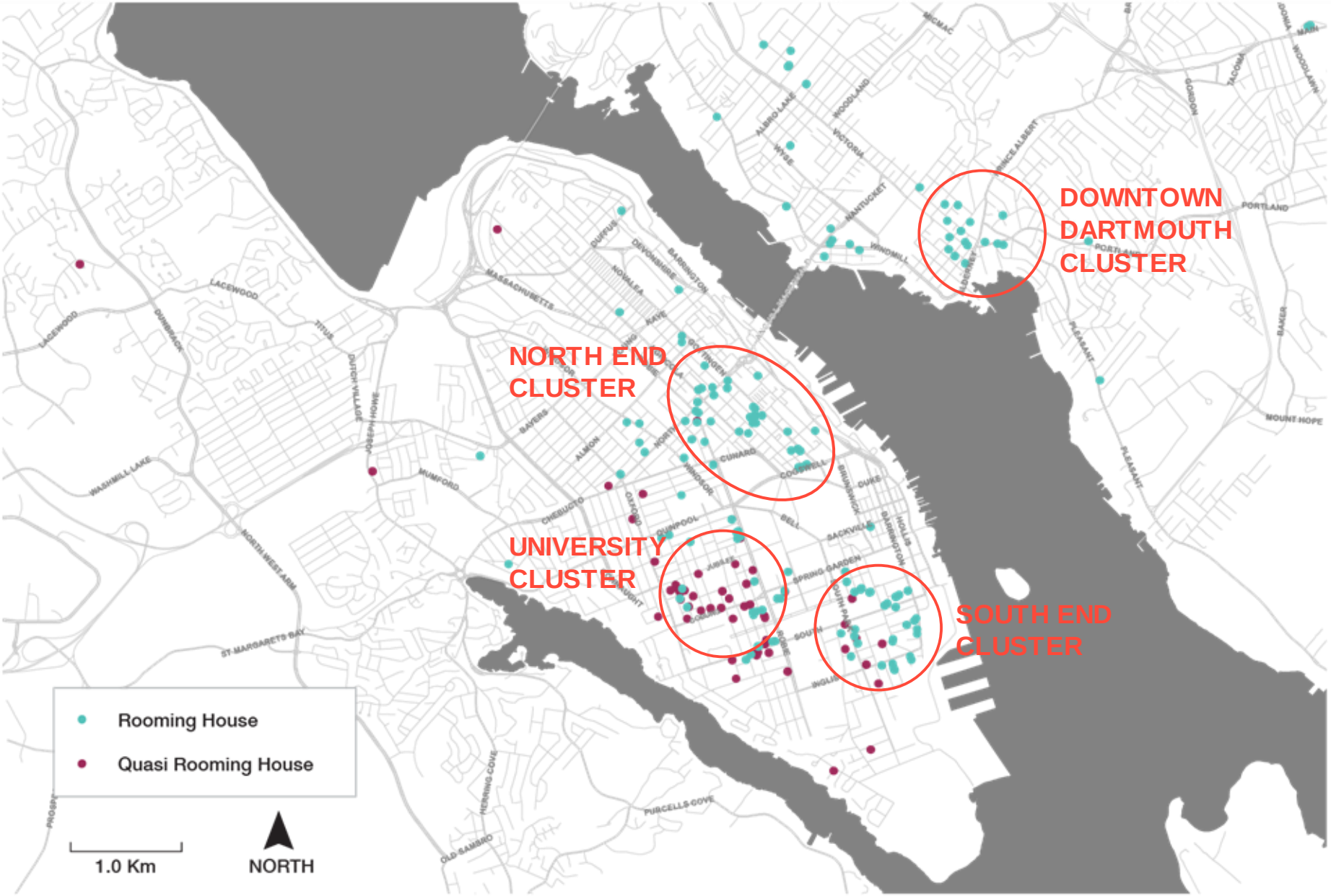
Planning officials are investigating whether this house at 6299 Payzant St. in Halifax complies with land-use bylaws. (CBC)

METHODS: Sources Used



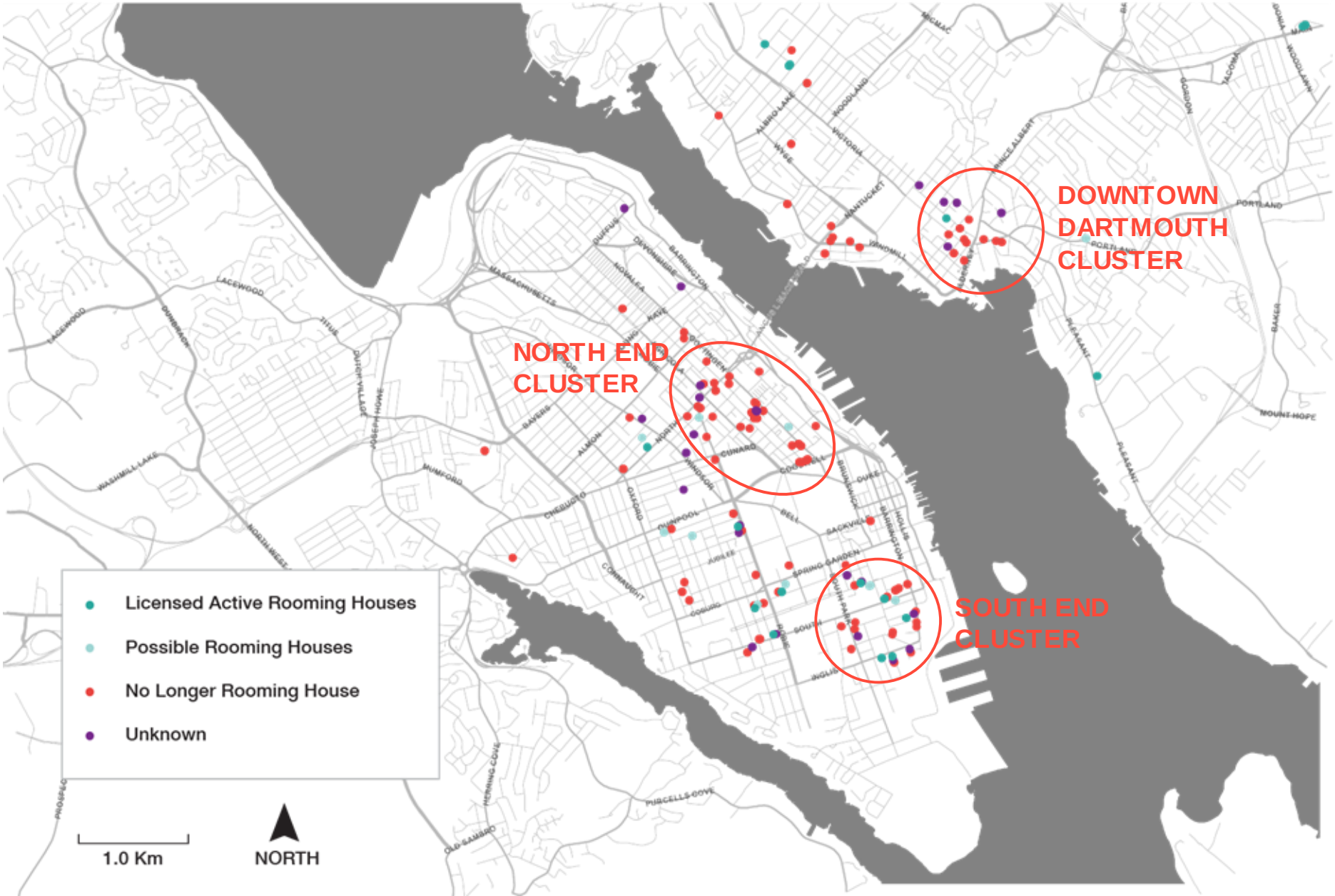
ROOMING HOUSES AND QUASI ROOMING HOUSES IDENTIFIED IN HALIFAX (1995-Present)

Data Sources: HRM Geodatabase 2012,
Rooming House Database
Map by Uytae Lee



CURRENT STATUS OF ROOMING HOUSES

Data Sources: HRM Geodatabase 2012,
Rooming House Database
Map by Uytae Lee



214 Portland St. (**Source:** maps.google.ca)

14 Victoria Rd. (**Source:** maps.google.ca)

5538 Inglis St. (**Source:** maps.google.ca)

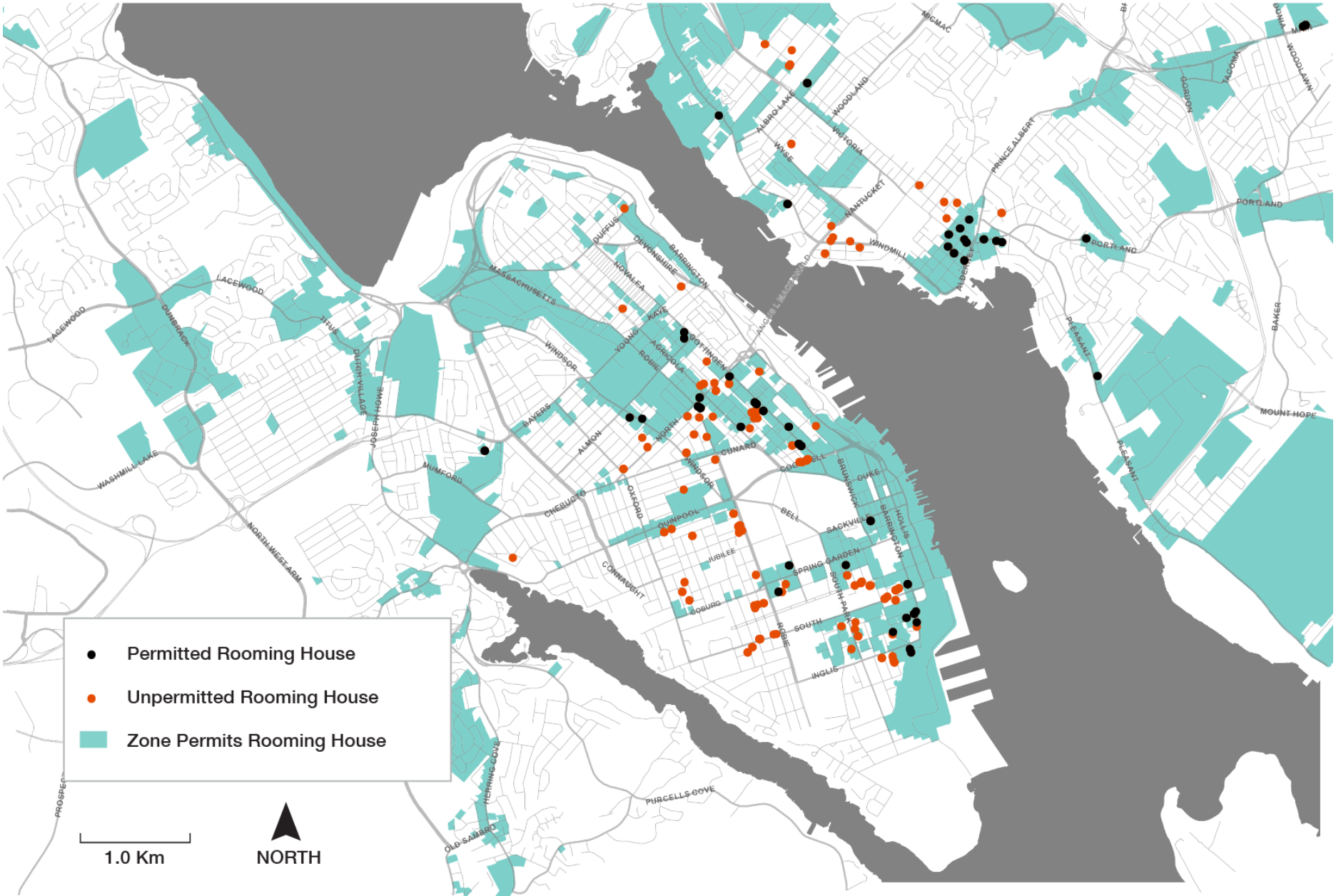
RH & QRH: Assessment Change

Relative to Census Tract (1995-2016)

Active Rooming House	Quasi Rooming House
-13.88%	19.79%

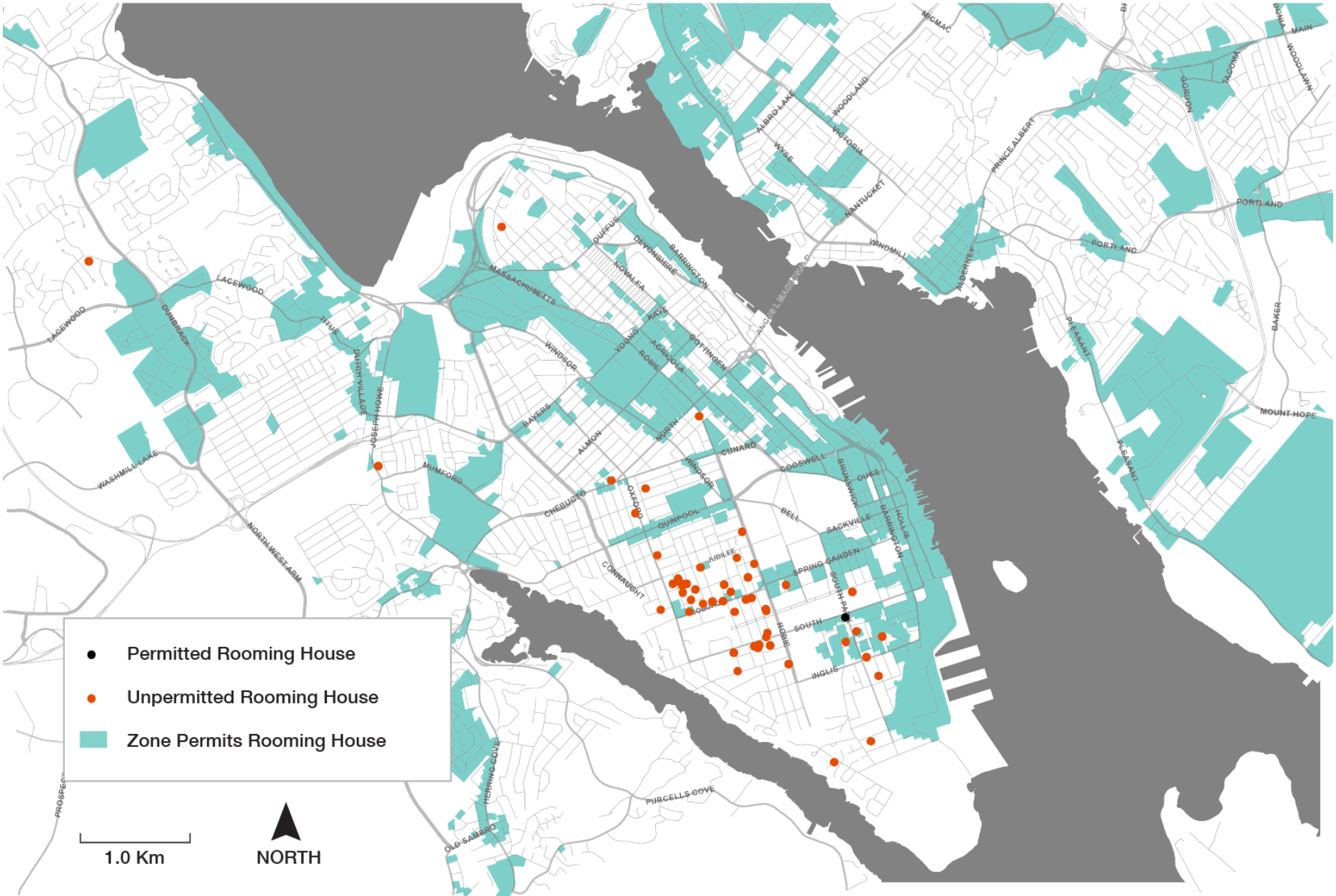
ROOMING HOUSES AND THEIR ZONING

Data Sources: HRM Geodatabase 2012,
Rooming House Database
Map by Janelle Derkson & Uytae Lee



QUASI ROOMING HOUSES AND THEIR ZONING

Data Sources: HRM Geodatabase 2012,
Rooming House Database
Map by Janelle Derkson & Uytae Lee



PERCEPTIONS OF ROOMING HOUSES IN HALIFAX

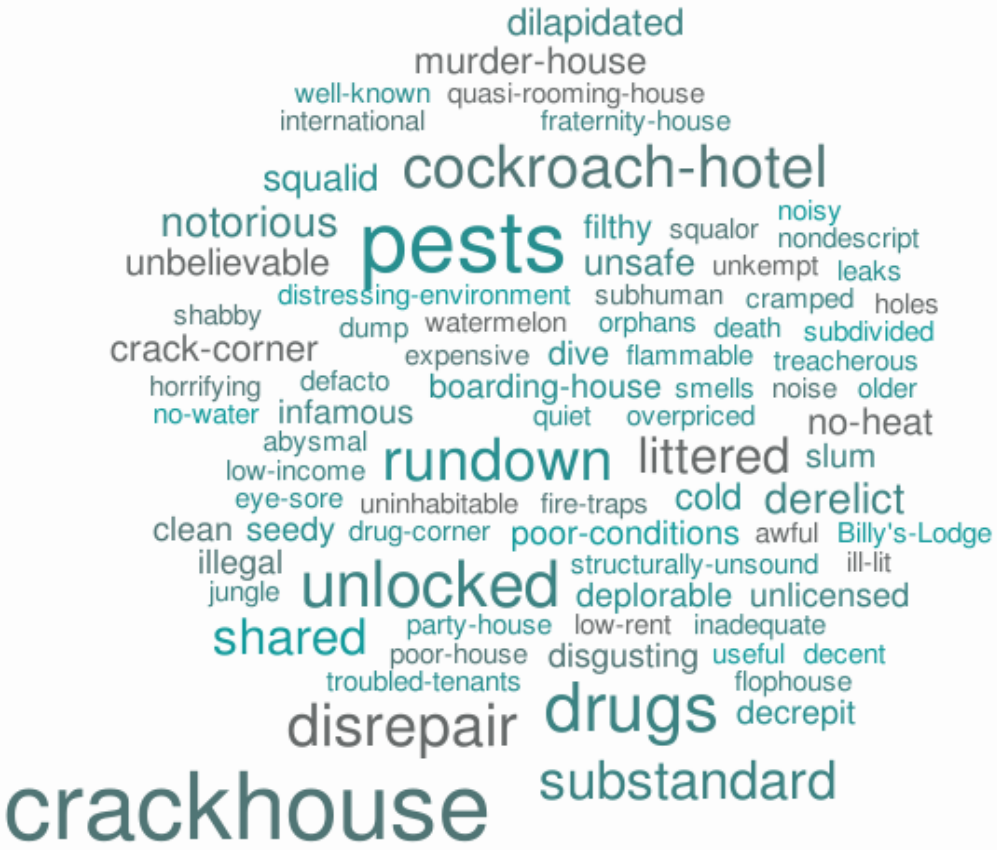
Herald News

Man stabbed, another hurt at Halifax rooming house

DAVENE JEFFREY STAFF REPORTER

Published January 15, 2015 - 9:45pm
Last Updated January 16, 2015 - 7:35am

Photo from CBC News


dilapidated
murder-house
well-known
quasi-rooming-house
international
fraternity-house
squalid
cockroach-hotel
notorious
pests
filthy
squalor
noisy
nondescript
unbelievable
unsafe
unkempt
leaks
distressing-environment
subhuman
cramped
holes
shabby
dump
watermelon
orphans
death
subdivided
crack-corner
expensive
dive
flammable
treacherous
horrifying
defacto
boarding-house
smells
noise
older
no-water
infamous
quiet
overpriced
no-heat
abysmal
rundown
littered
slum
low-income
eye-sore
uninhabitable
fire-traps
cold
derelict
clean
seedy
drug-corner
poor-conditions
awful
Billy's-Lodge
illegal
structurally-unsound
ill-lit
jungle
unlocked
deplorable
unlicensed
shared
party-house
low-rent
inadequate
poor-house
disgusting
useful
decent
troubled-tenants
flophouse
disrepair
drugs
decrepit
substandard
crackhouse

Methods

Table 1. Interview participants

STAKEHOLDER	Code	Male	Female	Total Participants
Municipal and Provincial Officials	MU/PR	3	3	6
Housing Advocates	HA	7	7	14
Rooming House Residents	RR	5	4	9
Housing Providers	HP	2	3	5
Neighbours	RA	1	2	3
Total		**18**	**19**	**37**
Percent		49%	51%	100%

Characterization of a Housing Option

"**Slums**" run by "**Slumlords**" require a "**crackdown**"

KEYWORD	Housing Advocates	Rooming House Residents	Housing Providers	Officials	Neighbours	Total
Total Stakeholders	***14***	***9***	***5***	***6***	***3***	**37**
Safe/safety	11	6	4	4	0	25
Option	10	4	1	2	0	17
Clean/cleanliness	6	5	2	1	0	14
Illegal	4	1	2	4	1	12
Privacy	4	3	2	1	1	11
Proper	4	1	2	2	0	9

Disagreement

“I think generally the first **image** that comes to mind has been sort of one that why would anyone want to live in a rooming house and why would we want to have rooming houses in our community?”

– Official

“They’re providing a **good** place for people. There's a few bad apples that are ruining the bunch”

– Housing Advocate

Sector Support Challenges

SECTOR SUPPORT CHALLENGES	Housing Advocates	Rooming House Residents	Housing Providers	Officials	Neighbours
Initiative barriers	11				
Coordination/communication	4		4	7	
Higher level support/oversight	**25**	**4**	**7**	**12**	**2**
Helplessness	5				
Tenant willingness to receive help	3				
Landlord willingness to collaborate	1				
Need Research			2		
Approach (reactive/agency or individual)	4				

Issues Identified

"For tenants who feel that the rooming house is their only living option...the **housing allowances** need to increase"

- Rooming House Resident

"The **social system** just drops them [tenants of rooming houses]"

– Housing Provider

Regulatory Challenges

REGULATORY CHALLENGES	Housing Advocates	Rooming House Residents	Housing Providers	Officials	Neighbours
Licensing and enforcement/oversight	**52**	**22**	**11**	23	6
Education/public information	14	10	1	4	**7**
Definitions/bylaw clarity	4	9	1	**27**	
Land use Bylaw				8	1
Reporting	11	2			1
Closures	16	3		3	
Policy/procedure	25	2	1	7	1
Departmental/ staffing/resources	2	2		9	3
Lack of initiative/incentives	11	1	5	6	1
Role of municipality	9	1	2	17	
Private market reliance	2		1	2	
Need for research/data	3		2	10	

Tension

"I think the fire safety regulations needs to be definitely **enforced**."
– Housing Provider

"I mean if you **crack down** too much, all you really do is drive the rooming houses off the market"
– Rooming House Resident

Discourse of Disempowerment

STORY
Slum landlord
Vulnerable tenants

Problem: Substandard conditions
Solution: **Regulatory intervention**

A simple answer to a complex problem leads to a dilemma:

"And that's the issue that we always struggled with, is it worse to be living in those situations or is it better to be living on the street?" – Housing Advocate

"We can't immediately start licencing buildings because there are major implications to doing that. We do not want to put people out on the street." – Official

Motivations Behind Intervention

Societal norms and embedded stigmas contribute to a desire to intervene and impose standards on the lives of others under the guise of **"risk"** and **"safety"** (Breckinridge & Abbott, 1910).

"They want their space, they want their **privacy**."
– Housing Provider

"Giving the occupants the **autonomy** that is needed for their **sanity**."
– Housing Provider

"We really need to listen about what is comfortable for people. Where do they want to live...Where would they feel comfortable? And it's not trying to force people into what my sort of **ideological position** or whatever it is about what I think people need." – Official

CONCLUSION

Findings

- There is disagreement on whether or not rooming houses can be an appropriate **“home”** for people.
- There is agreement that people want more **government involvement**.
- There is disagreement on whether or not **regulatory intervention** is an appropriate tool.

The way we define the problem defines the solution.

- The discourse around ‘safety issues’ leads to a prescriptive solution – regulatory intervention.

The solution can exacerbate the problem.

- Regulatory intervention does not address the social and economic issues surrounding rooming houses.
- Rooming house residents are disempowered by the discourse.

MOVING FORWARD

Moving Forward

Rooming houses have a negative perception. → How do we challenge negative perceptions of rooming houses and affordable housing?

Solutions to rooming house issues often lead to the disempowerment of their residents. → Are there solutions that empower residents?