

TARTAN DOWNS DEVELOPMENT

A substantial mixed development in the central urban district of Cape Breton Regional Municipality designed to create a new, modern neighborhood with affordable and market rental housing, student housing, community inclusion features and retail/commercial opportunities.

The Urban Neighborhood Development Association (UNDA) in partnership with Cape Breton University is pleased to be the lead organization for this important urban housing development. The proposed development will be located on lands owned by Cape Breton University.

This 24-acre site, formerly known as the Tartan Downs Raceway, in the centre of Sydney, will be the location for this new, modern mixed residential, commercial and community development. It will be a multi-year phased development with upwards of 430 residential units and approximately 35,000 sq. ft. to be utilized for commercial space, tenant/public social inclusion, educational, professional and community services.

The proposed development will contribute to resolving the broader community demand for new, quality affordable housing. UNDA understands the need for affordable and accessible housing in CBRM and is focused on playing a significant role in the economic prosperity of the local Cape Breton economy by providing housing for seniors, individuals, students, families and graduate students.

Injecting a significant number of residential units into the CBRM market through this multi-million-dollar development will be a much-needed housing and economic boost for CBRM. It will greatly assist in addressing:

- high market demands for affordable/student housing
- create much needed construction sector employment
- make a substantial contribution to the municipality's tax base
- meet CBRM demands for jobs, housing and tax base revenue.

UNDA is working closely with CBU, CMHC and NS Housing and all three entities have provided SEED funding for the design, urban planning and engineering to make this development a reality.

Currently, an experienced team of architects, urban planners, engineers, traffic and signage specialists and cost analysts are working on finalizing the master plan for the Tartan Downs site. Livability, walkability, green spacing, energy efficiency and green technology will be key components in the overall planning.

Economic development and diverse community housing are key concerns for the UNDA and form the cornerstone of thinking when the Board of Directors assesses a project like Tartan Downs development. This largescale development achieves many of the community goals relating to affordable housing, social inclusion, student housing and while fostering a diverse and cultural community/neighborhood.

The UNDA undertakes this initiative with the full understanding that CBU will offer advisory and other expertise as required during the planning and startup stages of the development. These will include, but are not limited to, energy efficiency technology, student residential requirements, community space programming, engineering, community housing studies and economic development. In addition, CBU has extensive experience in housing development. The university managed and constructed four on-campus buildings.

Both Cape Breton Regional Municipality and CBU understand the need for new, quality housing stock in the urban core. The municipality in general has not seen a significant improvement in the affordable housing sector in many years. Add to that, the high volume of international university students arriving in Cape Breton in the last two years and the housing situation becomes a critical matter.

Two comprehensive studies researched/authored by Catherine Leviten-Reid, Ph.D. Cape Breton University and Bridget Horel (MBA Community Economic Development) have been conducted in 2016.

- “Rental Housing in Cape Breton Regional Municipality in the Context of Homelessness and Housing First: A Research Report”. (November 2016)
- “Living in Rental Units and Rooming Houses in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality: Tenant and Tenant Experiences”. (December 2016)

These research reports highlighted key decision-making points which should be strongly considered by those developing an affordable housing strategy in the municipality. Some highlights included:

- Affordable units need to be provided to all segments of the population.
- More needs to be done to encourage the development of accessible rental units.
- Tenants of affordable housing commonly report amenities and services that are difficult to access are; health/mental health services, recreational facilities, social programs and community agencies – proximity to transportation is important.

Current data on renter households are also revealing:

- Census data reported by CMHC (2016) show that 42% of renter households in CBRM struggle with housing affordability, meaning that over 30% of their total income before taxes is spent on shelter.
- Census data reported by CMHC (2016) shows a significant percentage of renter households in the CBRM are in core housing need, at 32%. Core housing need means that they are living in housing that is not suitable (that is, it requires major repairs, it is crowded, etc.).

There is ample evidence that individual and population health are improved when housing is affordable (i.e., costs less than 30% of before-tax household income in order for people to pay for other basic needs such as food or transportation), adequate (i.e., lacks a need for major repairs or unsafe housing conditions that could lead to injuries, respiratory infections or chronic health conditions); and suitable (i.e., enough space for all residents) (Statistics Canada, 2017g).

Health and well-being are shaped by factors and social conditions outside of the health care system. A person's health and well-being (or that of a community) is largely determined by the social conditions that they experience over their lifespan. These social conditions, commonly referred to as the 'Social Determinants of Health', are critical for enabling healthy outcomes for individuals and communities. They include access to education, housing, employment, income, safe and nutritious food, and early childhood development. Housing, as a determinant of health and a basic human right, should be safe, warm, and dry.

The Tartan Downs development will provide a safe neighborhood within a larger community. Designed to have well-lit streets, substantial green space and rest areas, proximity to a grocery store and other major amenities and easy access to public transportation.

Most housing in the CBRM is in the form of single, detached homes (73.4%) compared to apartments (15.1%) and other dwellings (11.5 %) (Statistics Canada, 2017f). Other dwellings include semi-detached homes, row houses, other single attached homes, and movable homes (Statistics Canada, 2018b). The majority of occupied private dwellings were built in 1980 or earlier, with more of these homes built in 1960 or earlier (Statistics Canada, 2017a). ***The Tartan Downs development is new, modern, quality and well-planned construction.***

Home ownership in the region has decreased over time but remains higher than the provincial and national rates (Statistics Canada, 2017c). The for-profit sector provides the majority of rental housing in the CBRM, almost equally divided among the primary market (buildings with at least three units) and the secondary market (buildings with less than three units, including single, detached homes) (Leviten-Reid & Horel, 2016b).

59-60% of units in Sydney are in the primary market compared to 40-41% in the secondary market, and the reverse is true for non-Sydney rentals. Non-profit rentals primarily contain two bedrooms (41%) or three or more bedrooms (43%), public rentals primarily contain one bedroom (59%) or three or more bedrooms (35%), while the majority of for-profit rentals (62%) contain two bedrooms.

Most rental units in the CBRM are not accessible (Leviten-Reid & Horel, 2016b). The Accessibility Act was passed in Nova Scotia in 2017, and the province has committed to strategic development to increase accessibility in the province, including in built environments (Province of Nova Scotia, 2018a).

However, the Act (Province of Nova Scotia, 2018b) and the provincial building code (Province of Nova Scotia, 2017) do not provide accessibility standards for rentals with fewer than four units, which can include homes such as duplexes, triplexes, and accessory apartments. This is particularly noteworthy as the secondary market provides about half of the rental housing in CBRM and is not subject to the accessibility standards.

When complete, the Tartan Downs development will exceed the required number of accessible units.