



## REGROUPEMENT DES OFFICES D'HABITATION DU QUÉBEC

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DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE OFFICE D'HABITATION ABORDABLE FORCE SOLIDARITÉ REGROUPEMENT

# REGROUPEMENT

# FORCE SOLIDARITÉ

Brief presented by Le Regroupement des offices d'habitation du Québec to the House of Commons  
Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with  
Disabilities



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*To lighten the text and facilitate reading, the masculine gender is used as a neutral gender. The term housing offices (HO) in the text includes housing offices, municipal housing offices (MHO) and regional housing offices (RHO).*



**REGROUPEMENT DES OFFICES  
D'HABITATION DU QUÉBEC**

Le Regroupement des offices d'habitation du Québec (ROHQ) is pleased to present its brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities as part of its study of options for the design and implementation of a fund to accelerate housing construction, as well as the federal lands initiative.

Known through the acronym ROHQ, the Regroupement is a non-profit organization founded in 1972 that represents and supports the 158 housing offices located throughout Quebec. The network of housing offices brings together more than 1,600 administrators and 2,000 employees. Housing offices are thus responsible for more than 52% of all social, community and affordable housing in Quebec.

Housing offices (HO) help more than 150,000 low- and modest-income citizens. Agents and partners of the Société d'habitation du Québec and agents of the municipalities of Quebec, the housing offices have been responsible for some 106,000 housing units, including 65,000 low-cost housing units (HLM) for more than 50 years, and 41,000 social, community and affordable housing units under the Logement Abordable Québec and AccèsLogis programs as well as under the Rent Supplement program.

It is as a major player in social housing, for 50 years, that the ROHQ presents this brief to express its comments and recommendations, mainly on the initiative targeting buildings and land belonging to the federal government.

## Strengths & Expertise of Quebec Housing Offices

Working in a business environment that is standardized and governed by the application of various laws and regulations, and given the public nature of housing offices, the Quebec Housing Offices are subject to strict management and reporting rules based on the principles of accountability and transparency regarding the allocation of housing services for the community: compliance with laws, regulations, standards and directives issued by the housing in Quebec is at the core of our mandate. In addition, each housing office is governed by a board of directors made up of administrators appointed by the municipality, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as tenant representatives. Governance is carried out in accordance with the Code of ethics for officers and directors of housing bureaus.

As a result, HOs actively contribute to the economic and social development of the urban and rural areas where they operate, with the necessary experience and expertise required in governance and management of public funds. As owners and managers, they have a sustainable and long-term vision to meet the major challenges in housing renovation and development. They know how to produce added value by giving their community the benefit of a collaborative and integrated approach, which is based on rigour and accountability.

The ROHQ thanks the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for their interest in the comments and recommendations presented.

## Urgent Needs of Households: A Solution

The very low vacancy rate for housing units, the increase in rental costs and the significant number of households in core housing need (nearly 350,000 Quebec households according to CMHC data), must have a solution. The inventory of federally owned buildings would be a relevant approach for identifying and targeting opportunities for the transformation and construction of social and affordable housing to maintain the existing social safety net.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only greatly changed the labour market but has also revealed the tremendous importance of housing, and more particularly that of social and affordable housing.

Identifying federal properties in Quebec and facilitating their change of use into social and affordable housing would have the advantage of responding quickly and efficiently

to the crying needs of low-income households who are in urgent housing needs, as well as to the middle class who are increasingly affected by the housing shortage.

Favourable conditions related to the transfer of federal properties, when met, encourage the acquisition of these buildings by social promoters. To optimize the use of public funds from the various levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal), it should be possible to transfer federal property based on success factors such as a free transfer or a discounted sale to social, community and affordable housing developers.

Historically, developers and managers of social and community housing have not had easy access to conditions allowing the acquisition of buildings for transformation or development of social and community housing. However, housing authorities (HO) have been working on projects to transform and energize buildings in recent years, including some that were federally owned. These projects have fostered the creation of social and community housing, in collaboration with the various levels of government and community organizations. These are inspiring examples.

Transformation or construction projects resulting from federally owned buildings should be part of an approach that includes, among other things, the following elements:

- Sustainable use of existing buildings.
- Ecological contribution by avoiding new construction in cases where transformation is possible.
- Development of land available in spaces with a healthy and safe living environment.
- Mitigation, or significant reduction, of the housing shortage.

## **Renewed Approach in Social & Community Housing**

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Social and community housing makes it possible to fight poverty and promote the integration of vulnerable people. It is also a factor in improving health conditions and a vector of residential stability which improves the continued education process of the youngest and fosters a stronger sense of belonging of households to their environment. Social and community housing is collective ownership with a social mission, non-profit and outside the private market.

These features not only ensure long-term affordability, but also help maintain an accessible and fair rental real estate market for all. By implementing favourable conditions for the acquisition of federal buildings for the benefit of social and community promoters, the government would fully fulfill its ambitions of diversity within the population, and this, in an integrated approach.

The needs of citizens are important and varied according to the different regions of Quebec, and the diversification of the supply in terms of development can therefore only be beneficial to the social housing sector, which is facing significant challenges. With nearly 40,000 households on the waiting lists for social housing and considering the worrying vacancy rates in the private rental market sector, the current economic and social situation calls for a review of the current development model, in social, community and affordable housing.

The network of housing offices has been expressing for many years the importance of their social role in their communities. Recognizing the important contribution of several partners in the development of community housing since the beginning of the 1980s and in a context where the intervention model is evolving and changing, the housing offices wish to have all the tools and funding mechanisms available to them to be efficient in their mandate.

The government's financial involvement and budgetary choices, through the transfer free of charge or the sale at a discount of buildings to housing offices, would make it possible to ensure the sustainability of social, community and affordable housing, as well as current issues and challenges they face in terms of development, management and operation.

It is necessary to maintain a housing offer that considers the social and affordable component for the benefit of the most vulnerable citizens and low-income households. Organizations promoting social and community housing are not subject to the laws of the private market, which generate a need for growth and immediate profitability.

The needs of citizens are important and varied in the different regions of Quebec and the diversity of the supply in terms of development can therefore only be beneficial to the social and community housing sector, which is facing significant challenges.

We respectfully submit the following recommendations.

#### Recommendation 1

Identify federally owned buildings that can be redeveloped into social and community housing, thus enabling social housing organizations with the expertise to create accessible, affordable, mixed and inclusive living environments.

#### Recommendation 2

Establish favourable acquisition conditions for social and community housing organizations to ensure fairness in the rental real estate market and contribute to the implementation of innovative planning tools for the development of social and collective projects.

### **Acknowledgments**

Finally, we extend our thanks once again to the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for its study of options for the design and the implementation of a fund to accelerate housing construction, as well as the federal lands initiative.



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