

Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan

What is in our future, that is, are we considering and planning, so we will **know who we are, where we are** and **where we are going** as we approach the end of our mortgage contract. ***CHAS was very present at the beginning and plans to be present and actively engaged as we go through the process into healthy housing co-operatives long after the mortgage contract is finished.***

Following is a brief history of the Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan, our goals and current status.

The Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan was incorporated more than 34 years ago on July 21, 1981 and was the engine in the development and building most of the co-operative housing projects in Saskatchewan.

They were instrumental in the planning, organizing and developing the plans for the construction of most of the Housing Co-ops that were built in Saskatoon (4), Moose Jaw (4), Prince Albert (1), Moosomin (1) and Regina (7).

There is a mix of Family and Senior projects in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Regina, while the Moosomin and Prince Albert housing co-ops are seniors' projects.

These housing co-ops were all constructed during the 80's and early 90's. Since then no new co-operative housing projects have been started, which is really too bad, because for as long as I have been associated with co-op housing, about 23 years, there has always been more demand than availability. Today there seems to be a larger file of applicants than ever.

As I read through some of the minutes of our Co-op's beginning and listen to the stories from those that were involved in the early stages, I cannot help but feel proud to be part of this association and my housing co-operative.

The association set up meetings with potential co-op housing members. People like Judy Gayton and Judy Cavanagh were very instrumental in getting all the paperwork done and there seemed to be a lot. It appears that there were road blocks and red tape at every turn. It seems it was often difficult to meet deadlines, but CHAS with the boards of directors plowed through these difficulties and made it happen. They were always there Intervening for the board of directors with all levels of government and giving vital direction and training in the early stages of the projects. I find when I talk with some of the

originals that the Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan was very involved in giving direction and training for new boards of directors.

So the current housing co-ops owe a lot to those early members of CHAS and the respective boards of directors, who worked so tirelessly to bring about our successful housing co-operatives. But as the housing co-ops became self-reliant and more independent the association found itself less and less relevant. We take my hat off to the few that kept CHAS going over the lean years, It must have been very discouraging for the members to see so little interest, yet they kept it going and sent out information they thought would be of interest to the various housing co-ops, who often did not respond to this information or invitations to the AGM's and quarterly meetings.

It has been a struggle for CHAS to try and revive this valuable association. It seemed for many, CHAS was a dirty word. Those of us on the board of directors in 2006-07 saw CHAS's potential and were excited about our future relevance to co-op housing, but we were unsure as to how to proceed.

Realizing that we were in need of some help, we turned to CHF Canada and they responded with offering to help us define our goals.

On October 25th 2007, a Friday evening, a group of CHAS board members met with David Spackman, CHF Canada, with his guidance we worked together and established 7 important goals and their order of priority.

Following are the seven goals and their priority one through seven. With each goal we have included what we are working on and doing, but we humbly admit that we would have liked to accomplish more.

1. Communications: Our first goal, appears to be the hardest to achieve. We are still working on it and making progress. One of the communication tools is the quarterly newsletter, The CHAS website is helping us reach more on a timely basis, although we need more participation from members. The more effective means of communication recently have been phone calls and email. Calling and/or emailing your housing co-operative to share and/or gather information. We can credit a lot of our recent success to this. But, let me be quick to acknowledge that without your response we would not have this success. Our Motto – **Let's join and work together** – is certainly true here.

2. Partnerships: Developing links with other co-ops in Saskatchewan, such as Saskatchewan Co-operative Association (SCA), from which we have already received some valuable assistance. More interaction needed here.

3. CHAS Identity: Our “Logo”, “Mission Statement” and “Vision Statement” are part of it but it also includes, who we are, what we stand for, what we hope to achieve and much more. And have you noticed, CHAS is not a dirty word anymore. **CHAS is accepted and relevant, sixteen of seventeen housing co-ops are members of this association, that’s great. How can we add value to this linking and association with each other?**

4. Research: Although we have already done some of this and passed some of our findings along to the interested housing co-ops, our plan is to look into various ways that our housing co-ops can collectively and separately save money and achieve efficiencies in their maintenance and operation. We started well on this file but I think we may have dropped the ball on this one. We need to revisit this and decide where we go from here on this.

5. Education: When our housing co-operatives were first started, CHAS was very much involved in the education process, teaching board members the ins and outs of co-operative living, operation and maintenance of the facilities. In other words, building the co-operative model into their community lives.

As we can see now thirty some years later, this was a very valuable experience for the original members. There is a real need for re-establishing the co-operative model in our housing co-operatives. In many of our housing co-ops new members are not shown what it means to be a member, yet they would gladly participate in a process where the history of their co-op and the co-operative model is presented. **This is probably the principal and most urgent of the seven items listed. We have a proud heritage, our history and the Co-operative Model must be promoted.**

6. Membership: Currently, as mentioned above all but one housing co-op are members. Membership is based on a very simple and affordable plan. This could be adjusted as we develop programs such as education specific to Saskatchewan housing co-operatives’ needs and interests.

7. Advocacy: It is well known that it is much more difficult for one to win than it is for many standing together. We hope to advocate collectively for all the housing co-operatives in situations where there is a need to intercede with the different levels of government. The Government Relations Committee has and will continue to work on behalf of all the housing co-operatives.

These **goals** will **work only** as well as there is **participation**, that is, housing co-operatives **sharing** their successes and disappointments in the operation,

maintenance and social aspects of their co-ops. We are happy to report that this is happening more and more.

All in all, we can be **proud** of the results of the **hard work** the board has put into CHAS, along with the **efforts** of the housing co-operatives. Co-operation between us is **essential** and within the next short period of time we will see ourselves striking out into more areas of importance and relevance **together**.

This is what the co-operative model is all about. Working together to find better and more efficient ways to improve our housing co-operatives.

The question for us today as the Board of Directors and members of our respective housing co-operatives is:

Are we satisfied with where we are at? Yes, we are proud of our accomplishments and we should be, but

What is our individual (CHAS), (Housing Co-operative) and collective “VISION” as we look to the future? It is never too soon to start Visualizing and planning for that Future.

Co-operatively,

Henry Schellenberg, Vice-President
Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan