



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to
Motion 57-19(2) Housing Northwest Territories Transfers to Long-term Tenants**

Motion:

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon Housing Northwest Territories (NWT) to increase efforts to transfer ownership of Housing NWT units to long-term tenants who have lived in their existing units for 20 years or more and are willing to assume ownership of their family home for a nominal fee;

AND FURTHER, that Housing NWT will work with municipal and Indigenous governments to ensure land leases or fee simple title for their units remains affordable when transferred from Housing NWT to the current tenants;

AND FURTHERMORE, that Housing NWT increase efforts to transfer unused and vacant units to interested residents in the communities throughout the territory;

AND FURTHERMORE, that efforts supporting the transfer of unused and vacant units as well as units of long-term tenants commence immediately by Housing NWT;

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this motion within the 120 days.

GNWT Response:

Housing NWT is pleased to offer the Homeownership Initiative Program (HIP) in rural and remote communities which provides an opportunity for long term tenants to own their homes. To be eligible for the initiative, applicants must have lived in their Homeownership Entry Level Program (HELP) or Public Housing unit for a minimum of 3 years. Long-term tenants who wish to participate in the Homeownership Initiative Program are encouraged to contact their relevant District Office to complete an application. Once a successful application is processed the transfer of property can occur. Assistance to purchase these units is in the form of a 3-5 year forgivable loan.

The intent of the Homeownership Initiative Program is to provide eligible public housing tenants in detached units the opportunity to purchase their units to become owners of homes in an affordable way. As part of the Renewal Strategy, Housing NWT is conducting a review of programs, including the Homeownership Initiative Program. Through the Council of Leaders, Housing NWT has engaged Indigenous Governments in the program review and are being offered the opportunity to provide feedback.

The program works to ensure that applicants are prepared for the responsibilities associated with homeownership. During the application process, the tenants are counselled on the responsibilities of owning their own homes. Those responsibilities include paying for all utilities, lease fees, property taxes and the ongoing maintenance of their unit. Housing NWT also offers the Solutions to Educate People (STEP) courses on budgeting and credit as well as the maintenance and repair course to ensure that the long-term tenants become successful homeowners. Housing NWT continues to look for ways to improve these education programs and is currently having materials reviewed by literacy experts to ensure that materials are developed with key clientele in mind.

Notices were sent out in the spring of 2021 to tenants living in detached Housing NWT owned units advising them of this new program. Housing NWT currently has approved four applicants and has over fifty applications in various stages of review and approval across the NWT. As part of this program, Housing NWT has identified that many of these older units required repairs for immediate health and safety needs. Housing NWT worked to address this issue and has identified a small budget to address these most immediate needs and allow those repairs to be completed during the forgiveness period for the purchase. From there, with the home as collateral, clients should be able to leverage additional funds for cosmetic and other improvements they may wish to have.

Housing NWT continues to work with tenants who have arrears to work towards eligibility for the program. Housing NWT also supports clients with looking at potential program support once they own their homes to address other types of repairs required to their homes. Where appropriate, Housing NWT also works with the clients to address access issues to ensure homes meet the needs of clients with accessibility needs.

In addition to HIP, which is targeted to non-market communities, Housing NWT also delivers the Home Purchase Program for clients in market centres. This program offers support to clients within a certain income threshold and provides down-payment assistance that is the form of a forgivable loan for the client to facilitate them being able to secure bank financing for a mortgage to purchase a home.

Since 2021-22, Housing NWT has completed 13 Home Purchase applications in four of the five market communities and another 19 applications in process.

As part of this conversation, Housing NWT also does have some availability of older vacant units for sale. Typically these are units that have exceeded their “useful life” and Housing NWT has chosen to replace the unit rather than continuing to invest in repairs based on the age and condition of the building. In some cases, although in poor condition, the units could still be purchased for use by clients in communities – for either homeownership or other types of community use (some communities have considered use of this type of asset for a small community shelter for example). Housing NWT has a disposal policy for these assets and makes them available to Indigenous Governments and/or individual residents in communities. Housing NWT estimates that it currently has 20 former public housing units in this category across a number of communities that are in process of being sold or are available for sale. It should be noted that not all vacant units are made available, as some have health and safety issues which make them beyond repair and Housing NWT instead makes plans to safely dispose of those particular units.

Finally, as Members are aware, Housing NWT would be remiss if it did not mention that once individuals own their homes in their community, Housing NWT does have a range of programs that assist clients in performing preventative maintenance or addressing health and safety needs in their units. As noted earlier, this suite of programs is under review as part of the Strategic Renewal. As part of those conversations, Housing NWT has engaged with stakeholders to discuss whether our programs are addressing those clients who are most in need, and if not what changes are required to existing policies or programs, or what new policies/programs should be considered for Housing NWT to be effective in delivering its mandate and vision.