News Release

Edmonton calls for federal leadership on housing

Mayor Don Iveson said Monday that the City of Edmonton's efforts to keep pace with significant population growth and economic activity are not sustainable in the absence of a national housing plan.

"Edmonton has seen considerable success with its initiatives at all points along the housing spectrum, through partnerships with community organizations, industry and other orders of government," the Mayor said after a Roundtable on Housing with three dozen multi-sectoral representatives.

"However, without the support of the federal government and a national housing plan, we cannot keep pace with the housing needs of our rapidly growing population. And that has economic and social implications for the entire country."

Speakers at the roundtable reinforced Edmonton's support for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) call for federal engagement in housing solutions. In 2013 the FCM launched a campaign called "Fixing Canada's Housing Crunch," arguing the high cost of housing is the most urgent financial issue facing Canadians. Major cities across the country, including Edmonton, passed resolutions to support the FCM's call for all orders of government to develop a long-term plan to relieve the housing crunch by addressing the rising cost of housing, the scarcity of rental accommodation and the impending expiration of federal funding supports. But the 2014 federal budget fell far short of committing the investment necessary to sustain long-term housing objectives.

"Today's conversation really sharpened the focus on the urgency of Edmonton's housing outlook," said Mayor Iveson. "We are a key driver of the Canadian economy, and that's drawing more and more people to move here and enjoy the security and quality of life Edmonton has to offer. At the same time, a strong economy is jeopardized if people on average wages can't find a rental unit or buy a house. We want Edmonton to be a great place to live, work, play and raise a family, but that's not possible for those who don't have secure, affordable housing."

Housing and the economy are intimately linked. At a basic level, a person can't hold down a job if there's nowhere to live, and can't afford a place to live without a job. At Edmonton's average rental rates, a single parent on minimum wage would have to spend 70% of their income on housing each month, leaving little for the family's food, health and education needs. Edmonton is also a destination of choice for immigrants, about half of whom work in hospitality, health services and construction sectors. The City will welcome 20,000 immigrants in 2014. Businesses here need workers - but the rising cost of housing and rental rates can soon become a constraint to economic sustainabilty.

At another level, the health of Edmonton's economy affects the whole country. In the past year, for example, 20% of Canada's net new jobs were created in Edmonton.

The roundtable closed with general agreement on a number of points:

- This is an important dialogue that should continue locally beyond Monday's event;
- Edmonton strongly urges the federal government to join the conversation about ways to continue financial support for housing and associated social programs;
- Edmonton has its own unique story of housing need that adds urgency to the call for a national plan;
- Edmonton has learned from numerous successes in the housing area, and seeks a flexible, collaborative approach to new programs and strategies so that local knowledge and capability can be fully leveraged.

For more information:

Visit edmonton.ca/housing.

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THE CITY OF Edmonton