

BEST MUNICIPAL/CIVIC AFFAIRS STORY

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LowDownonline.com
 Feb. 25 - March 3, 2015

THE LOW DOWN

One dollar (tax included)
 TO HULL & BACK NEWS
 THE ONLY PAPER SERVING ONLY THE GATINEAU HILLS SINCE 1973

How much for Meredith?

Centre costs \$200 annually per household

By Anastasia Philopoulos

Fifty-two dollars a median tax bill.

That was the original price the Chelsea municipality told taxpayers the Meredith Centre would cost them: \$02 per household over 20 years for capital costs.

Back in 2009, the year of Chelsea's controversial referendum, a lot of attention was focused on how much debt the municipality would take on in order to construct the Meredith Centre, and not as much on how much the facility would cost the taxpayer overall.

Turns out, in 2015, the median taxpayer in Chelsea — based on a property valued at \$500,000 — will pay over \$200 per household for the Meredith Centre.

According to documents obtained by the Low Down and confirmation from the municipally capital costs for the Meredith Centre total \$60 per median household would take on in

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ANASTASIA PHILOPOULOS

The Low Down to Hull & Back News

This article is a great example of local entrepreneurial journalism where the reporter checked in on a government promise — and a controversial one at that — by seeking out the relevant documents. The writer used numbers in an effective way as well.

20 **NUNAVIK** **ᑎᓄᓐᓴᓴᓴ** **NUNATSIQ NEWS** #886/NOVEMBER 6, 2015

Nunavik homeowners are frustrated by subsidy red tape

"They might as well just close the program and build more social housing"

SARAH ROGERS

er it a major achievement, in a region where only three per cent of the population owns their own home.

To ease the housing shortage and high costs of bringing building materials into the region, the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau administers a subsidy program, through the province, to offset the cost of construction.

Simon and Fraser spent about \$300,000 on the initial cost of the home, but over the years, received roughly \$600 a month in subsidies.

Non-Navimut buyers should be able to purchase an existing home with the same subsidies made available to someone constructing a home, Fraser said.

It's a program he and Simon believed was already in place when they put their home up for sale in 2014.

Under a revised version of the home ownership program launched as part of the Quebec government's Plan Nord in 2011, the Société d'habitation Québec (SHQ) said its goal was to promote the construction of new homes in the region, as a way to create a local housing market.

But as part of that program, the SHQ could also authorize subsidies towards the purchase of a previously-owned home.

Fraser said he was told by staff at the local housing bureau office that the subsidy was indeed available to interested buyers, without it, he said, there would be little guarantee of selling your home.

"To be clear, had we been told that the house was not eligible for the subsidy, we would have decided to issue a subsidy if it so chooses."

It hasn't yet, he added.

"We're in favour of this program but it will require thought," he said. "We need to reflect on this because it could have a major impact."

The program is currently under review but Lemieux said there isn't a timeline for when the agency will decide if or how to revamp the subsidy.

And for its part, the agency doesn't see the urgency, while a number of Nunavimut have inquired about purchasing previously-owned homes, only two clients have officially applied for a subsidy to do that, he said.

A review is likely to look at the SHQ's entire home ownership program and how effective it's been at moving Nunavimut out of social housing and into the private market.

The SHQ says that 77 privately-owned homes in the region (of an estimated 95) were built or purchased with the program's subsidies.

The latest form of the home ownership program came as part of the Quebec Liberal government's Plan Nord in 2011, which included funding to help build 200 housing units under a revised home ownership program by 2016.

Jean-Guy Lemieux, the SHQ's director of Aboriginal and Intergovernmental Affairs, noted that the agency's home ownership program has no obligation to provide subsidies to Nunavimut buyers of existing homes, but could decide to issue a subsidy if it so chooses.

But the program hasn't panned out as expected. The KMH said that since 2012, only nine units have been built under the program so far, an eight-unit co-op in Puvionville built by a not-for-profit, along with a private home in Kuujuaq.

The SHQ said five more clients have been approved to build homes for 2016.

Pat York, a well-employed Kuujuaq contractor, says the inability to qualify for a subsidy to buy an existing home is a major barrier for potential buyers in Nunavik.

"A lot of people want a home, but don't want to do all the legwork required to have it built," he said.

But if York decided to build a house to put on the local market, it would become an "existing home" in the eyes of the SHQ, meaning a potential buyer couldn't access the subsidy.

"Then you're stuck with it," he said. "They just keep throwing up all these walls."

— Pat York, Kuujuaq contractor

our argument pretty clearly," Fraser said.

"The housing market has been destroyed by a bunch of inaction by different levels of government and people need to ensure they have some protection for their investments."

Since the program was revised in 2012, it has invested \$4.5 million into the region, the SHQ said \$2.8 million towards construction costs and another \$1.7 million for "occupancy assistance."

At least some of the program's budget appears to have been redirected into 70 new social housing units for the region as part of the current Liberal government's relaunched Plan Nord, announced earlier this year.

The new plan also includes subsidies for 20 privately built and owned homes that would fall under a "buy-back" program, meaning private owners are guaranteed the ability to sell their homes back to the province.

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SARAH ROGERS

Nunatsiq News

This article analyzes policy in an efficient, understandable way and draws the reader in by leading off with a compelling human example to show the implications of said policy.

HACKED!! **CHELSEA WEBSITE GOES OFFLINE** PAGE 3
 Lamenting Larry. Sad ending in loon saga. Page 10
 Birds of a feather. Annual avian census hits area. Page 18
 Trail trails. Wakefield crew seeks cash. Page 13

LowDownonline.com
 Jan. 14 - Jan. 20, 2015

THE LOW DOWN

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Close call, closed highway

A head-on collision on Hwy 105 in the Alcouve sector sent two people to hospital with non-life threatening injuries on Jan. 8. See page 3 for more details on the crash that shut down the highway for part of the afternoon.

TYLER DAWSON PHOTO

Lowites clash over tax

By Tyler Dawson

When Steve Connolly asked the people gathered at the Low Council meeting Jan. 12 whether they supported the Low budget — which includes an 8.6 per cent increase on taxes — hands in the room stayed firmly in laps.

It was near the end of what was, at times, a tense standoff between upset residents and Mayor Morris O'Connor, who folded questions and finger-pointing for more than an hour.

"We're telling you, we can't afford an increase (in taxes)," he said.

Continued on page 3

Emotions run high over proposed Chelsea project

By Anastasia Philopoulos

Before Chelsea council could even begin question period at its monthly meeting, councillors jumped right into hot debate on a newly proposed housing development planned for an area off Hwy 105.

"In light of the discomfit of at least one member of the [planning] committee, I'm wondering if we'd like the full information before the council makes a decision," said councillor Barb Martin.

At the Jan. 12 regular meeting, Chelsea council adopted the first draft of a bylaw that would change zoning in order to allow for a residential project proposed by developer Peter Markhausen.

This does not approve the project, but rather lets the plan go to public consultation.

But Martin took issue with whether the project was ready for public consideration. According to the councillor, two members of the planning committee, who had originally given their status as a licensed contractor the go-ahead on the project a week earlier, had called for public consideration.

Continued on page 4

Wakefield-owned cannabis invest firm goes public

By Anastasia Philopoulos

Ryan Brown likens Canada's current medical marijuana industry to the first years of the high tech boom — lots of interest to get in on the action, but not necessarily enough knowledge on how to do it successfully.

"You've got a transfer from what was a mom and pop unregulated industry to a fully regulated commercial industry, making it unsustainable for most people, patients, and would-be producers alike," Brown said.

Originally from Wakefield and now living in Chelsea, the 34-year-old calls the industry inaccessible due to the high overhead costs to start up and maintain a medical marijuana business, not to mention the complexity of navigating the government application process to become a licensed producer of medical cannabis.

Enter GrosPro, Brown's new publicly traded company or what he calls a diversified cannabis investment firm. GrosPro essentially helps businesses get their status as a licensed producer of medical cannabis.

Continued on page 4

Basement blaze guts Kingsmere home

By Anastasia Philopoulos

The flames that started in a Kingsmere basement grew so hot that Jennifer Crawley's possessions on the main floor started to melt, forcing firefighters to break windows in order to get the heat out.

According to Crawley's daughter, Rosemary Quipp, the Chelsea woman managed to escape with a neighbour's dog she was watching, both unscathed.

"She's fine, no injuries," Quipp said.

Continued on page 7

WORST JOKE OF THE WEEK

Q: What bird can lift the most weight?
 A: A crane.

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TYLER DAWSON

The Low Down to Hull & Back News

While the reporter didn't have to dig for this story — it was based on a public meeting — the style of coverage, with colourful language and descriptors and an efficient use of quotations, transported the reader to the council chambers.

This piece had the strongest writing of the bunch.

Judge: Natascia Lypny, City Hall Reporter, Regina Leader-Post, Regina, SK • Number of entries in the Best Municipal / Civic Affairs Story category: 28

CORRESPONDENT AWARD

QCNA recognizes the following correspondents for their faithful contribution to their newspaper:

Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph

Mary Hilton

Charles André Nadeau

Alec Roberts