HELIO
URBAN DEVELOPMENT

2026 EDITION

Municipal Affordable Housing Strategy Guide

A data-driven framework for Nova Scotia communities planning, financing, and delivering affordable rental housing.

Prepared by **Helio Urban Development**

heliourbandevelopment.com

Version 2026-01 · Nova Scotia, Canada

About This Guide

This guide is designed for **municipal CAOs, councillors, planners, and housing authorities** across Nova Scotia who are working to address the affordable housing shortage in their communities. Whether you lead a town of 2,000 or a regional municipality of 400,000, the economics of affordable housing follow the same logic — only the scale changes.

How to Use This Guide

Read sequentially for a complete understanding, or jump to specific chapters using the table of contents. Each chapter builds on previous concepts.

Data Currency

All figures current as of January 2026. Sources include Statistics Canada Census 2021, CMHC reports (2024–2025), and Nova Scotia provincial program guidelines.

Interactive Companion

Use the **Housing Navigator** tool at heliourbandevelopment.com/housing-navigator for site-specific calculations using your community's data.

Need Help?

Helio offers free initial project assessments for Nova Scotia municipalities. Contact us to discuss your community's specific housing needs.

Table of Contents

PART V — PUTTING IT TOGETHER

BACK MATTER

PART I

The Landscape

Understanding Nova Scotia's housing crisis through data, economics, and jurisdictional frameworks.

CHAPTER 1

Nova Scotia's Housing Inflection Point

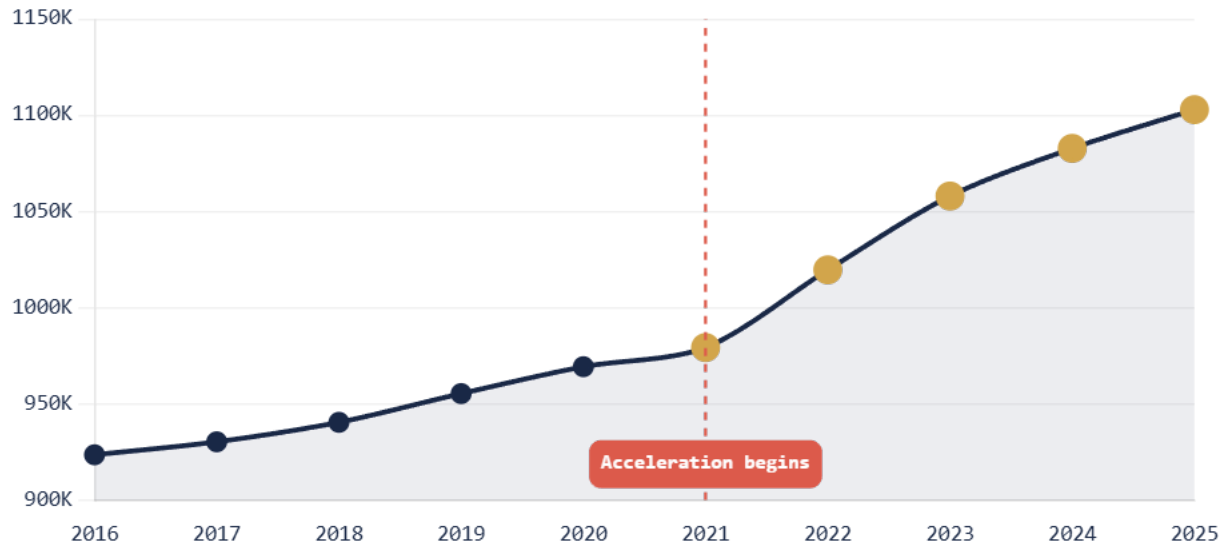
Nova Scotia is experiencing an unprecedented demographic transformation. After decades of modest growth, the province has entered an era of rapid population expansion that has fundamentally altered the housing landscape. This is not a temporary surge — it represents a structural shift that demands a strategic, data-driven response from every level of government.

12,500	12%+	2.1%	41,200
Housing starts needed per year through 2035	Population growth since 2021 Census	Halifax vacancy rate (3% is healthy)	Units needed over the next 5 years

A Province Transformed

Between 2016 and 2021, Nova Scotia grew at a measured pace, adding roughly 10,000 residents per year. Beginning in 2021, that trajectory changed dramatically. Immigration policy shifts, interprovincial migration driven by remote work, and international student enrolment surged simultaneously. The result: Nova Scotia's population has grown by more than 12% since the 2021 Census, reaching an estimated 1.1 million residents by 2025.

Exhibit 1.1 **Nova Scotia Population Growth, 2016–2025**



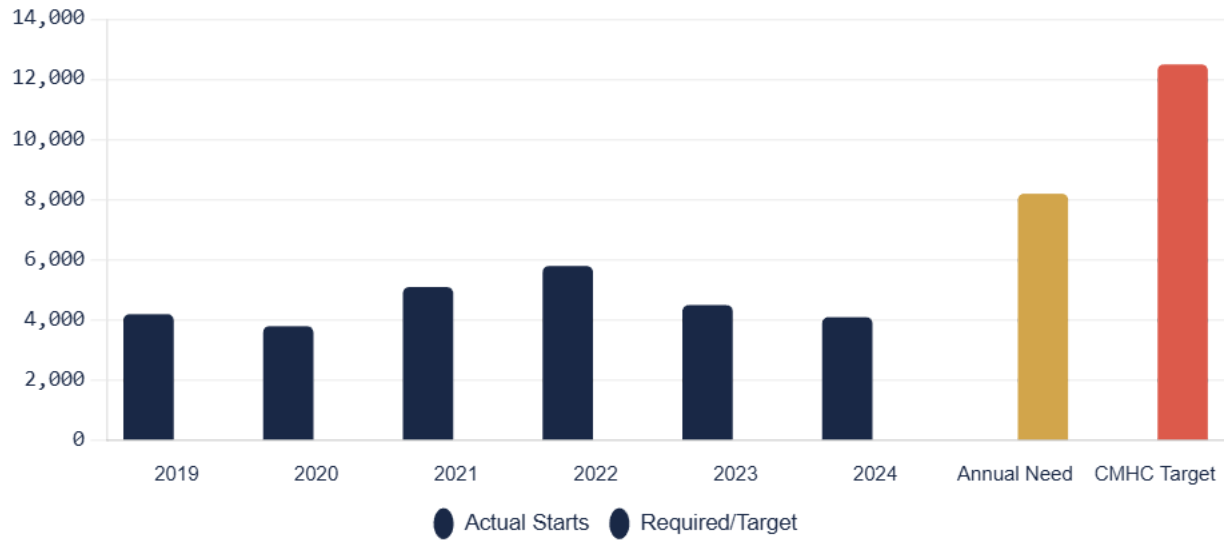
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021; NS Department of Finance population estimates 2022–2025

This growth is welcome — it reverses decades of out-migration and an aging demographic profile. But it has collided with a housing construction industry that was calibrated for a smaller, slower-growing province. The result is a supply gap that widens every year.

The Supply Gap

Nova Scotia's historical construction output ranges from 3,500 to 5,800 housing starts per year. Even the peak years fall dramatically short of what is now required. CMHC's June 2025 Housing Supply Gaps Report identifies a target of **12,500 starts per year through 2035** to restore affordability — more than double the province's best-ever performance.

Exhibit 1.2 **Housing Starts vs. Annual Need**



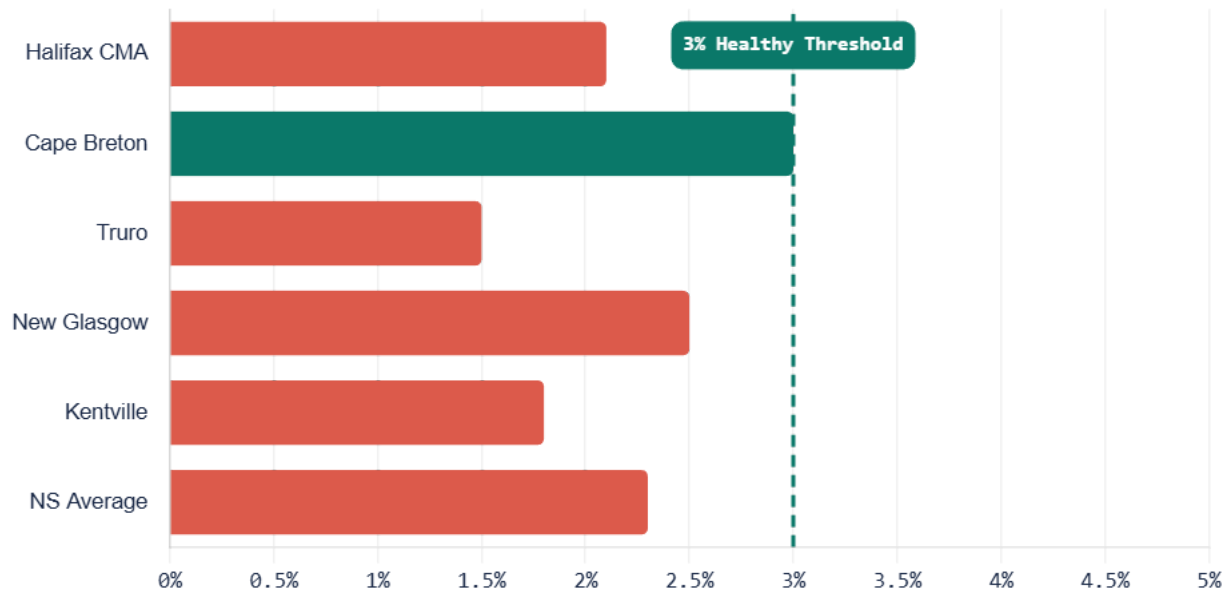
Source: CMHC Housing Supply Gaps Report, June 2025; CMHC Housing Starts data 2019–2024

The gap is not merely a Halifax problem. While Halifax accounts for approximately 45% of provincial housing demand, every region faces its own version of the shortage. Rural municipalities often confront even steeper challenges: smaller tax bases, fewer construction firms, limited infrastructure capacity, and less access to development expertise.

Vacancy and Rental Pressure

Vacancy rates tell the story of supply-demand imbalance in real time. A healthy rental market typically operates at a 3% vacancy rate — enough to give tenants meaningful choice and prevent excessive rent escalation. Most Nova Scotia markets fall well below this threshold.

Exhibit 1.3 **Vacancy Rates by Region (October 2024)**



Source: CMHC Rental Market Report, October 2024

The Cost Burden

When supply is constrained and vacancy rates are critically low, rents rise — and the burden falls disproportionately on those least able to absorb it. Across Nova Scotia, a growing share of households spend more than 30% of their gross income on shelter costs, the internationally recognized threshold for housing affordability.

> ### Who Is Affected?
>
> The housing shortage is not abstract. It affects **nurses** who can't find an apartment near their hospital. **Teachers** who commute 90 minutes because they can't afford to live where they work. **Tradespeople** needed for construction who can't find housing in the communities building that construction. **Seniors on fixed incomes** who face rent increases that consume their entire pension growth.
>
> These are the workers every community needs to function. When housing fails them, entire service systems begin to strain.

Why Every Municipality Is Affected

It is tempting to view the housing crisis as a Halifax problem that will eventually ripple outward. The data tells a different story. Rural Nova Scotia communities face their own acute challenges:

- **Limited construction capacity:** Fewer contractors, longer timelines, higher mobilization costs
- **Smaller tax bases:** Less fiscal room for incentives and infrastructure investment
- **Aging housing stock:** Much of the existing rental inventory requires significant reinvestment

- **Staff constraints:** Many municipalities have 0–2 planning staff, with no dedicated housing expertise
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Unserviced land limits density options and increases per-unit costs

Yet rural communities also hold advantages: lower land costs, simpler approval processes, and strong community support for development that serves local needs. The economics of affordable housing can work in rural Nova Scotia — but only with the right building types, the right funding stack, and the right delivery model.

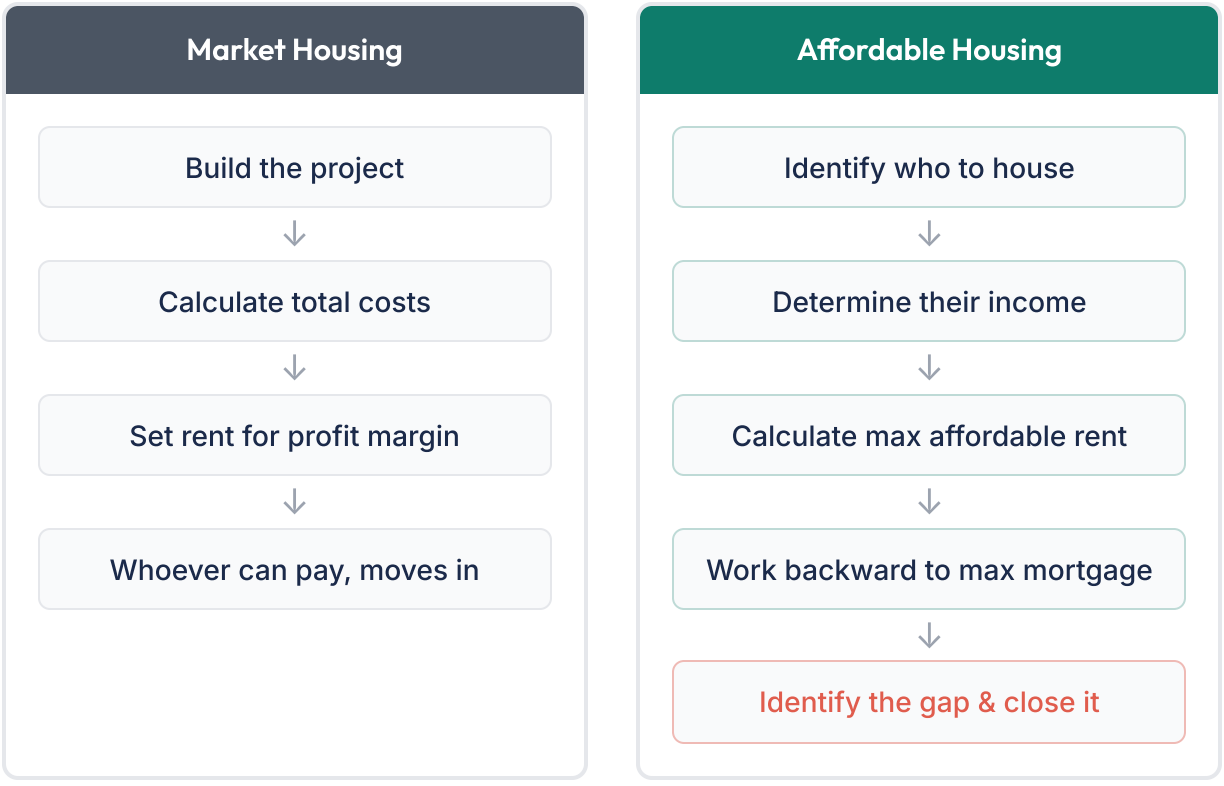
CHAPTER 2

What Makes Affordable Housing Different

The single most important concept in affordable housing economics is deceptively simple: **the equation runs backward.** Understanding this inversion is the key to understanding why affordable housing requires a fundamentally different approach than market-rate development — and why the resulting "viability gap" is a feature of the model, not a failure.

The Backward Equation

Exhibit 2.1 **Market Housing vs. Affordable Housing Logic**



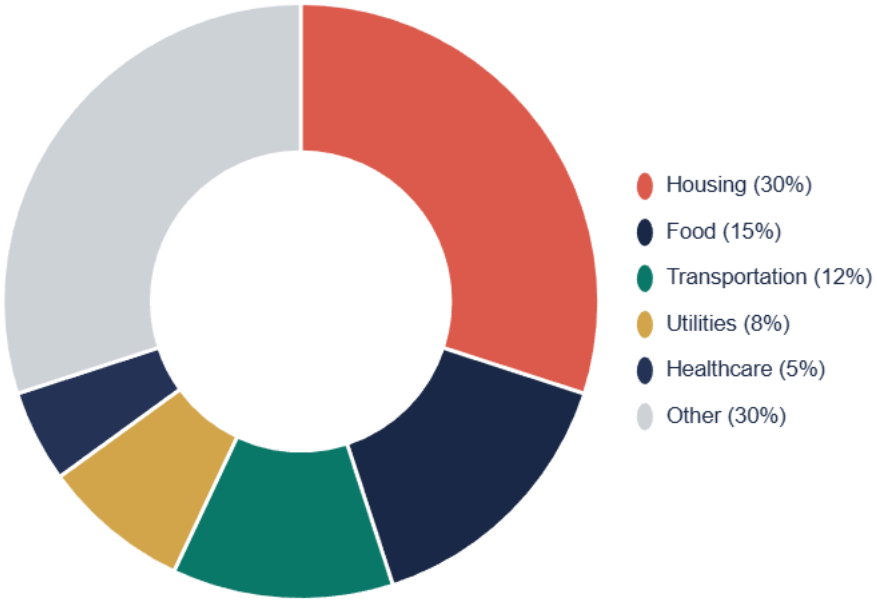
In market housing, the developer starts with costs and sets rent high enough to generate an acceptable return. In affordable housing, **rent is fixed first** — determined by the income of the people you intend to house. Everything else flows backward from that ceiling.

This creates a structural constraint. Construction costs don't care whether a project is market-rate or affordable — lumber, labour, and concrete cost the same either way. But affordable rents generate less revenue, which supports a smaller mortgage, which leaves a gap between what the project costs and what it can borrow. That gap must be closed with grants, subsidies, land contributions, and other non-debt sources.

The 30% Rule

The foundation of affordable rent calculation is a standard adopted worldwide and embedded in CMHC's programs: **a household should spend no more than 30% of gross income on shelter costs.** This is not arbitrary — it reflects decades of research on the income threshold beyond which housing costs begin to crowd out other essential needs.

Exhibit 2.2 **Household Budget at 60% AMI — The 30% Rule Illustrated**



At 60% AMI in Halifax ($49,200/yr), the maximum affordable rent is $1,230/month — exactly 30% of gross income.

When households exceed the 30% threshold, they enter what CMHC defines as **"core housing need."** They begin making trade-offs — skipping meals, deferring medical care, foregoing transportation — that compound over time and place increasing strain on municipal services.

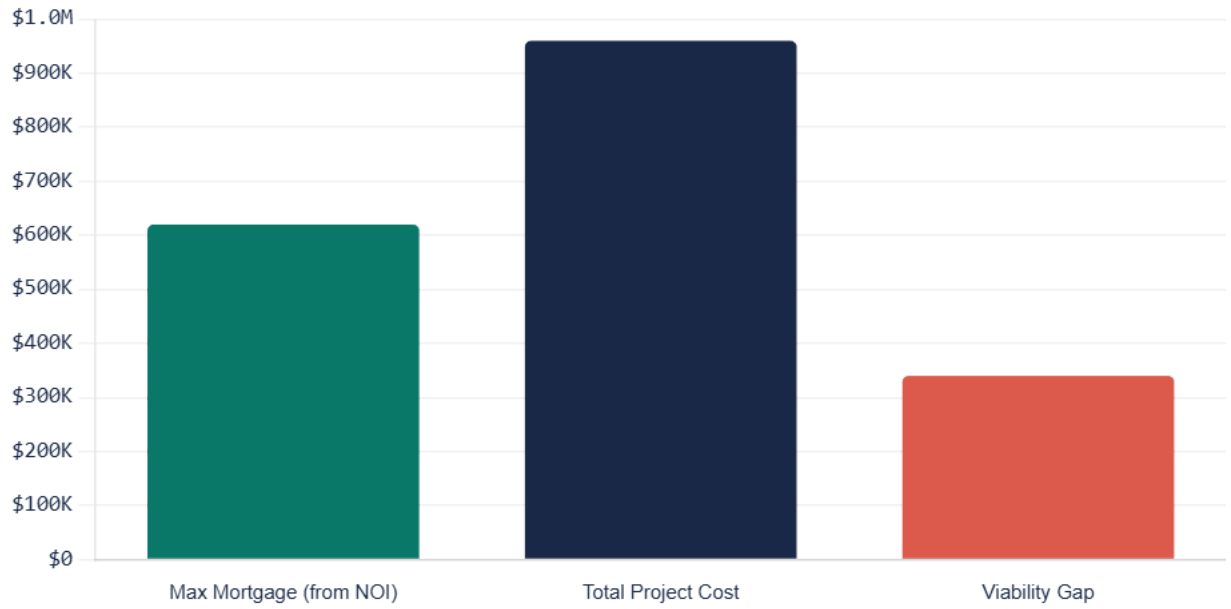
The Viability Gap

The backward equation inevitably produces a gap. The math is straightforward:

1. **Revenue ceiling:** Affordable rents generate a fixed annual income
2. **Operating costs:** Property tax, insurance, maintenance, and management consume a portion
3. **Net Operating Income (NOI):** What remains supports debt service
4. **Maximum mortgage:** NOI, divided by a debt coverage ratio, determines borrowing capacity
5. **Project cost:** Construction, soft costs, and land value set the total investment needed

6. **The gap:** Project cost minus maximum mortgage equals the viability gap

Exhibit 2.3 The Viability Gap — Revenue Ceiling vs. Cost Floor



Illustrative example: 6-unit project at 60% AMI in Halifax. The gap between borrowing capacity and project cost must be closed through grants and contributions.

> **The Gap Is a Feature, Not a Failure**
>
> Every successful affordable housing project in Canada closes a viability gap. The gap exists because affordable rents are set below market — that's the point. The question is never "does a gap exist?" but rather "how do we close it?" Federal, provincial, and municipal programs exist specifically to fill this gap through a layered "funding stack."

The Funding Stack Concept

Closing the viability gap requires assembling multiple funding sources into a layered structure — the **funding stack**. Each layer reduces the remaining gap:

- **Layer 1 — Mortgage financing:** The largest single source, maximized through CMHC's ACLP program
- **Layer 2 — Federal grants:** Build Canada Homes (BCH) provides $40K–$70K per unit
- **Layer 3 — Provincial grants:** NS AHDP provides up to $55K per unit as forgivable loans
- **Layer 4 — Municipal contributions:** Land, tax exemptions, fee waivers, service connections
- **Layer 5 — Other sources:** Green Municipal Fund, charitable donations, organizational equity

The order matters. ACLP financing should be calculated first because its favourable terms (50-year amortization, 5.5% interest) dramatically expand borrowing capacity, reducing the gap that remaining layers need to close. Chapters 4–6 walk through each calculation in detail, and Chapter 11 demonstrates complete funding stack assembly.

CHAPTER 3

The Federal-Provincial-Municipal Framework

Affordable housing in Canada operates within a three-tier jurisdictional framework. Each level of government controls different levers, and successful projects require coordination across all three. Understanding who does what — and where the leverage points are — is essential for any municipal leader seeking to advance housing in their community.

Exhibit 3.1 **Three-Tier Responsibility Matrix**

Responsibility	Federal	Provincial	Municipal
Land for housing	Surplus federal lands	Provincial land inventory	**Primary: municipal land disposition**
Zoning & land use	—	Enabling legislation (MGA)	**Primary: zoning bylaws, development agreements**
Mortgage financing	**Primary: CMHC ACLP, mortgage insurance**	—	—
Capital grants	**BCH: $40K–$70K/unit**	**AHDP: up to $55K/unit**	Land, fee waivers, tax relief
Operating subsidies	Limited (legacy programs)	**Rent supplements, operating funding**	Property tax exemptions
Infrastructure	Investing in Canada (ICIP)	Cost-sharing programs	**Primary: water, sewer, roads**
Regulatory reform	HAF incentive conditions	MGA amendments, building code	**Primary: approvals process, permits**
Community engagement	—	Strategic direction	**Primary: public consultation, political will**

Federal: The Financing Engine

The federal government, primarily through CMHC, provides the financing architecture that makes affordable housing viable. The Apartment Construction Loan Program (ACLP) is the single most impactful tool available — offering 50-year amortization at below-market rates, which can increase borrowing capacity by 60% or more compared to conventional financing. Build Canada Homes (BCH) provides direct capital grants, and the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) incentivizes municipal regulatory reform.

Provincial: Strategy and Subsidies

Nova Scotia's role centers on the Affordable Housing Development Program (AHDP), which provides forgivable loans of up to $55,000 per unit for qualifying projects. The province also sets the regulatory framework through the Municipal Government Act, establishes building code requirements, and coordinates the NS Action for Housing strategy. Provincial rent supplement programs provide ongoing operating support for deeply affordable units.

Municipal: Land, Zoning, and Political Will

Municipalities hold the most direct levers for enabling or blocking affordable housing. Zoning bylaws determine what can be built and where. Municipal land can be the single largest non-cash contribution to a project. Tax exemptions, fee waivers, and expedited approvals reduce costs and timelines. And municipal council approval is often the gateway to provincial and federal funding.

> **How HAF Changed the Game**
>
> The Housing Accelerator Fund created something new: direct federal-municipal agreements with specific housing targets and regulatory reform commitments. Halifax committed to 2,600 new units with $79.3M in federal funding. Pictou County's five-municipality consortium secured $5.6M for 190 units. These agreements make municipal obligations explicit — and funded.

Exhibit 3.2 **Nova Scotia HAF Agreements**

Municipality	Federal Funding	Unit Target	Timeline	Key Commitments
Halifax Regional Municipality	$79.3M	2,600	2024–2027	Eliminate single-family-only zoning, allow 4 units as-of-right, streamline approvals, reduce parking minimums
Pictou County (5 towns)	$5.6M	190	2024–2027	Multi-municipality joint planning
West Hants Regional Municipality	—	560	2024–2027	Housing Action Plan, zoning amendments, municipal land inventory
Town of Antigonish	$1.3M	—	2024–2027	Student housing focus, R-3/R-4 zone expansion

Source: Infrastructure Canada HAF agreements database, 2024

PART II

The Economics Engine

How income determines rent, rent determines borrowing, and borrowing reveals the gap.

CHAPTER 4

Income, Rent, and the Affordability Ceiling

Every affordable housing project begins with a single question: **who are we housing?** The answer determines the maximum rent, which determines every subsequent financial calculation. This chapter walks through the Area Median Income (AMI) system, the affordability bands used by federal and provincial programs, and the math that converts income to rent.

Area Median Income (AMI) by Region

AMI represents the midpoint of household incomes in a defined area — half of households earn more, half earn less. CMHC and provincial programs use AMI as the reference point for setting affordability targets.

Exhibit 4.1 **Area Median Income by Region**

Region	Area Median Income	Average Market Rent (2BR)	Key Characteristic
Halifax Regional Municipality	$82,000	$1,739	Provincial capital, highest demand, most infrastructure
Cape Breton Regional Municipality	$58,000	$990	Industrial transition, lower costs, aging population
Other Nova Scotia	$55,000	$1,100	Towns and rural municipalities, varied infrastructure

Source: Statistics Canada Census 2021 (adjusted to 2024 dollars); CMHC Rental Market Report Oct 2024

AMI Bands: The Affordability Spectrum

Programs target different segments of the income spectrum using "AMI bands" — percentages of the area median income. Each band represents a different population with different needs, different funding challenges, and different program eligibility.

Exhibit 4.2 **AMI Band Calculator — From Income to Maximum Affordable Rent**

AMI Band	Label	Halifax Income	Halifax Max Rent	Cape Breton Incom
30%	Deep Affordability	$24,600	$615	$17,40
50%	Core Need	$41,000	$1,025	$29,00
60%	Affordable (Default)	$49,200	$1,230	$34,80
80%	Workforce Housing	$65,600	$1,640	$46,40

Formula: AMI × Band % × 30% ÷ 12 = Maximum Monthly Rent (2BR baseline)

Worked Example: 60% AMI in Halifax

$82,000 (AMI) × 60% = **$49,200** (target income)

$49,200 × 30% = **$14,760** (annual housing budget)

$14,760 ÷ 12 = **$1,230/month** (maximum affordable rent for a 2BR unit)

Who Are We Housing? AMI Band Profiles

Exhibit 4.3 **AMI Band Profiles — Who Lives at Each Level**

Band	Typical Profile	Halifax Income	Funding Challenge
30% AMI	Person on income assistance, disability support, part-time minimum wage	$24,600/yr	Very High
50% AMI	Full-time minimum wage worker, senior on OAS/GIS, single parent	$41,000/yr	High
60% AMI	Retail worker, administrative assistant, early-career professional	$49,200/yr	Moderate
80% AMI	Teacher, nurse, experienced tradesperson, dual-income household	$65,600/yr	Low

The 60% AMI band is the **most common target** for affordable housing programs in Nova Scotia. It represents the largest population segment that is underserved by the private market yet generates enough rent to make projects financially achievable with standard funding programs.

Bedroom Rent Factors

Not all units generate the same rent. CMHC's Rental Market Survey establishes relative rent factors by bedroom count, benchmarked against the 2-bedroom unit as the baseline (1.00×).

Exhibit 4.4 **Bedroom Rent Factors (Relative to 2BR Base)**

Unit Type	Rent Factor	At 60% AMI Halifax ($1,230 base)	At 60% AMI Cape
Studio	0.72×	$886	
1-Bedroom	0.85×	$1,046	
2-Bedroom	1.00×	$1,230	
3-Bedroom	1.15×	$1,415	

Source: CMHC Rental Market Survey methodology; bedroom factors derived from NS market data

Blended Rent

Most projects contain a mix of unit sizes. The **blended rent** is the weighted average across all unit types, accounting for bedroom factors.

> **Worked Example: Sixplex Blended Rent at 60% AMI, Halifax**
>
> **Unit mix:** 2 × 1BR + 4 × 2BR
>
> 1BR rent: $1,230 × 0.85 = $1,046 × 2 units = $2,091
>
> 2BR rent: $1,230 × 1.00 = $1,230 × 4 units = $4,920
>
> **Blended average:** ($2,091 + $4,920) ÷ 6 = **$1,169/month per unit**

CHAPTER 5

Operating Economics and Net Operating Income

Gross rent is not income. Between what tenants pay and what a project can use to service debt lies a series of unavoidable operating costs. Understanding these costs — and their regional variations — is essential for accurate project modelling.

Operating Cost Breakdown

Exhibit 5.1 **Annual Operating Costs per Unit**

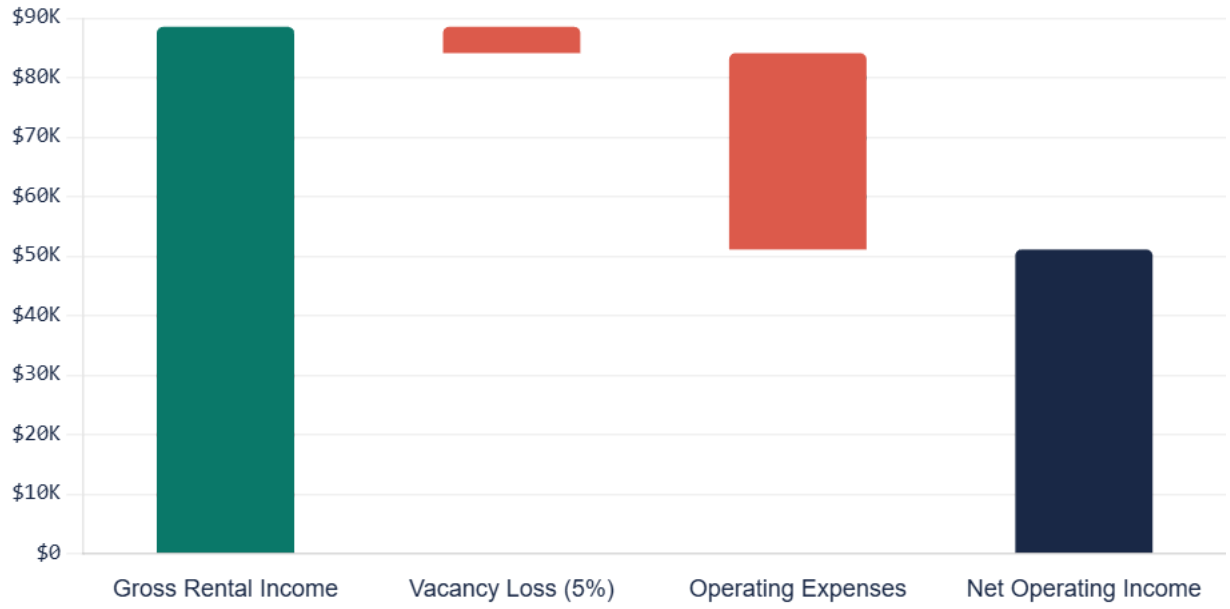
Category	Default	Minimum	Maximum	Notes
Property Tax	$1,200	$600	$2,500	Varies by municipality; Halifax highest, rural lowest
Insurance	$600	$300	$1,200	Property + liability; larger buildings reduce per-unit
Utilities	$800	$400	$1,500	Heat, water, common area electric; Cape Breton highest
Maintenance	$1,200	$500	$2,500	Routine repairs, landscaping, snow removal, cleaning
Management	$1,100	$0	$2,400	$0 if self-managed; professional management ~5–8% of gross
Replacement Reserves	$600	$200	$1,500	Capital reserve for roof, HVAC, appliance replacement
Total Operating Costs	$5,500	$2,000	$11,600	

Source: Helio Urban Development operating cost database; CMHC property management benchmarks

From Gross Rent to Net Operating Income

The journey from gross potential rent to NOI follows a well-defined waterfall. Each step reduces the available income, and the result — NOI — is the single number that determines how much the project can borrow.

Exhibit 5.2 NOI Waterfall — Gross Rent to Net Operating Income



Illustrative: 6-unit project, $1,230/unit/month blended rent, 5% vacancy, $5,500/unit operating costs.

Worked Example: 6-Unit NOI Calculation

Gross Annual Rent: 6 units × $1,230/mo × 12 = **$88,560**

Vacancy Loss (5%): $88,560 × 0.05 = −$4,428

Effective Gross Income: $88,560 − $4,428 = **$84,132**

Operating Expenses: 6 units × $5,500 = −$33,000

Net Operating Income: $84,132 − $33,000 = **$51,132**

NOI Sensitivity

NOI is sensitive to both the AMI band and the number of units. The following table shows how NOI varies across common project configurations, assuming default operating costs and 5% vacancy.

Exhibit 5.3 **NOI Sensitivity — AMI Band × Unit Count (Halifax Region)**

Units	30% AMI	50% AMI	60% AMI	80% AMI
4 units	$5,988	$16,940	$22,388	$33,296
6 units	$8,982	$25,410	$33,582	$49,944
10 units	$14,970	$42,350	$55,970	$83,240
24 units	$35,928	$101,640	$134,328	$199,776

All figures assume 2BR-equivalent rent, 5% vacancy, $5,500/unit/year operating costs. NOI = (Rent × Units × 12 × 0.95) − (OpEx × Units).

Regional Cost Variations

Operating costs are not uniform across Nova Scotia. Key regional differences include:

- **Property tax:** Halifax rates are highest ($1,200–$2,500/unit); Cape Breton is moderate ($1,400 average despite lower assessment); rural NS is lowest ($1,000 average)
- **Utilities:** Cape Breton faces the highest heating costs ($900/unit) due to older building stock and climate exposure; Halifax benefits from natural gas availability ($800/unit)
- **Insurance:** Coastal communities may face higher premiums; Halifax has the most competitive insurance market ($650/unit average)
- **Management:** Self-management ($0) is more common in smaller rural projects; professional management ($1,100+/unit) becomes essential above 8–10 units

CHAPTER 6

The Mortgage Ceiling and Debt Capacity

Net Operating Income is the bridge between rental revenue and borrowing capacity. This chapter explains how NOI translates to a maximum mortgage — and why CMHC's Apartment Construction Loan Program fundamentally changes the equation for affordable housing projects.

Mortgage Mechanics

Lenders evaluate a project's ability to service debt using the **Debt Coverage Ratio (DCR)** — the ratio of NOI to annual debt service. A DCR of 1.20 means the project generates 20% more income than it needs to cover loan payments, providing a cushion against revenue fluctuations.

> **The Mortgage Calculation Chain**
>
> **Step 1:** Maximum annual debt service = NOI ÷ DCR
>
> **Step 2:** Monthly payment = Annual debt service ÷ 12
>
> **Step 3:** Maximum mortgage = Present Value of annuity at given rate and amortization
>
> The present value of annuity formula: $PV = PMT \times [(1 - (1 + r)^{-n}) \div r]$, where r = monthly rate, n = months

Conventional vs. ACLP Terms

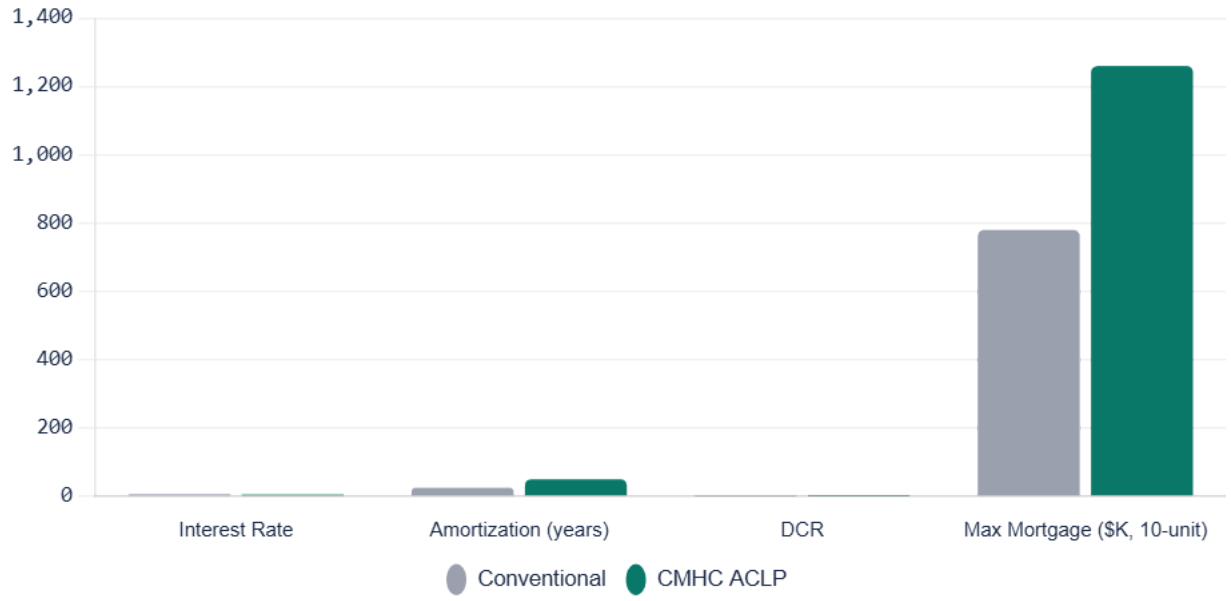
Exhibit 6.1 **Conventional Financing vs. CMHC ACLP**

Parameter	Conventional	CMHC ACLP	Impact
Interest Rate	6.5%	5.5%	Lower rate → more of each payment goes to principal
Amortization	25 years	50 years	Longest available → dramatically lower monthly payments
Debt Coverage Ratio	1.20	1.10	More NOI available for debt service
Max Loan-to-Cost (Non-profit)	75%	95%	Less equity required from sponsor

The ACLP Multiplier Effect

The combined effect of lower interest rate, longer amortization, and reduced DCR requirement is dramatic. For the same NOI, ACLP can increase borrowing capacity by approximately **60% or more** compared to conventional financing.

Exhibit 6.2 The ACLP Multiplier — Same NOI, Different Borrowing Capacity



Source: CMHC ACLP program terms; Helio mortgage capacity calculations

Worked Example: 10-Unit Project at 60% AMI, Halifax

NOI: $55,970/year (from Exhibit 5.3)

Conventional: $55,970 ÷ 1.20 = $46,642 annual debt service → 25yr @ 6.5% → **Max mortgage ~$580K**

ACLP: $55,970 ÷ 1.10 = $50,882 annual debt service → 50yr @ 5.5% → **Max mortgage ~$940K**

ACLP advantage: +$360K borrowing capacity (+62%) from the same income stream

This is why ACLP is often called the "single biggest viability lever" in affordable housing. Before considering any grants or subsidies, ACLP alone can close a significant portion of the viability gap simply by maximizing how much the project's own revenue can support.

Mortgage Capacity by Region and AMI Band

Exhibit 6.3 **ACLP Mortgage Capacity per Unit by Region and AMI Band**

Region	30% AMI	50% AMI	60% AMI	80% AMI
Halifax	$38K	$72K	$94K	$138K
Cape Breton	$18K	$44K	$60K	$96K
Other NS	$15K	$40K	$56K	$90K

Approximate per-unit ACLP mortgage capacity assuming 2BR-equivalent rent, 5% vacancy, $5,500/unit OpEx, ACLP terms (5.5%, 50yr, 1.10 DCR). Actual amounts depend on specific unit mix, costs, and lender assessment.

The pattern is clear: at 60% AMI in Halifax, ACLP financing covers roughly $94K of a $160K per-unit project cost — leaving a gap of approximately $66K per unit to close through grants and contributions. In Cape Breton and rural NS, lower rents mean smaller mortgages and larger gaps, which is why grant programs and municipal contributions become proportionally more important outside Halifax.

PART III

Building Typology Guide

Nine building forms calibrated for Nova Scotia communities, from duplexes to mid-rise apartments.

CHAPTER 7

Nine Building Forms for Nova Scotia

Not every community needs the same building type. A town of 2,000 residents has different land availability, infrastructure capacity, and market dynamics than Halifax. This chapter presents nine building forms that span the full range of Nova Scotia contexts — from a single laneway ADU to a 24-unit mid-rise apartment. Each product is presented as a two-page data sheet with specifications, economics, and program eligibility.

How to Read the Product Sheets

Tier availability indicates which municipality sizes are appropriate: Tier 0 = major metro (Halifax), Tier 1 = regional centres (10K+ pop.), Tier 2 = towns (2K–10K), Tier 3 = small towns (<2K). **Base cost** is Helio's fixed-price starting point; actual costs vary with unit mix and site conditions. **Program eligibility** shows which federal/provincial programs the building type qualifies for.

2U

Duplex

2 Units · Entry-Level Housing

Units 2 | Storeys 2 | Sqft/Unit 1,000 | Total 2,000 sqft | Tier 3

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 2 × 2BR/1BA
- 1,000 sqft per unit

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 5,000–7,500 sqft
- Min width: 40 ft
- Suitable for standard residential lots

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-1, ER-2, ER-3, R-2, R-3
- Often as-of-right in residential zones

BEST FIT

- Small towns with limited demand
- Infill on existing residential lots
- Lowest complexity, fastest approvals

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Cost range	$140,000–$210,000
Total project cost (est.)	$320,000–$420,000
Expected rent range	$1,400–$2,000/mo
Timeline	6–9 months construction
Soft costs	8% of hard costs

ACLP (min 5 units) | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF (min 5 units)

3U

Triplex

3 Units · Heritage-Compatible Infill

Units 3 | Storeys 2 | Sqft/Unit 850 | Total 2,550 sqft | Tiers 0–2

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 2 × 2BR + 1 × 1BR
- 850 sqft average per unit
- Blended rent: $1,600–$1,800/mo

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 4,000–6,000 sqft
- Min width: 35 ft
- Heritage conversion potential

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-2, ER-3, HR-1, MU-1, CEN
- Fits narrower urban lots

BEST FIT

- Urban infill in established neighbourhoods
- Heritage district compatible form factor
- Moderate density without rezoning in many zones

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Cost range	$140,000–$210,000
Total project cost (est.)	$480,000–$630,000
Expected rent range	$1,400–$2,000/mo
Timeline	16–32 weeks construction

ACLP (min 5 units) | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF (min 5 units)

4U

Fourplex

4 Units · Most Common Entry Product

Units 4 | Storeys 2 | Sqft/Unit 950 | Total 3,800 sqft | Tiers 0–2

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 4 × 2BR
- 950 sqft per unit

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 6,000–8,000 sqft
- Min width: 40 ft

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-3, HR-1, R-3, R-4
- As-of-right in many HAF-reformed zones

BEST FIT

- First affordable project for small municipalities
- Suburban infill with standard lot sizes
- Good balance of scale and simplicity

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Total project cost (est.)	$640,000–$840,000
Expected rent range	$1,400–$2,200/mo
Timeline	8–12 months construction

ACLP (min 5 units) | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF (min 5 units)

5U

Townhouse

4–6 Units · Family-Oriented

Units 4–6 (typ. 5) | Storeys 2 | Sqft/Unit 1,200 | Total 6,000 sqft | Tiers 1-3

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 3 × 2BR + 2 × 3BR
- 1,200 sqft per unit — family-sized
- Individual entries, private yards

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 8,000–12,000 sqft
- Min width: 80 ft
- Wider lots preferred for row layout

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-3, HR-1, R-3, R-4, MU-1

BEST FIT

- Family housing in suburban/rural settings
- Communities seeking ground-oriented density
- Lower resident turnover than apartments

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Total project cost (est.)	$800,000–$1.05M
Expected rent range	$2,000–$2,800/mo
Timeline	8–12 months construction

ACLP ✓ (5+ units) | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF ✓

6U

Sixplex

6 Units · CMHC MLI Select Eligible

Units 6 | Storeys 3 | Sqft/Unit 900 | Total 6,500 sqft | Tiers 0–1

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 4 × 2BR + 2 × 1BR
- 900 sqft average per unit

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 7,500–10,000 sqft
- Min width: 50 ft

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-3, HR-1, R-4

BEST FIT

- Regional centres with moderate demand
- First ACLP-eligible product size
- Efficient balance of units per site area

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Total project cost (est.)	$960,000–$1.26M
Expected rent range	$1,600–$2,200/mo
Timeline	12–16 months construction

ACLP ✓ | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF ✓

8U

Eightplex

8 Units · Max ER-3 As-of-Right Density

Units 8 | Storeys 3 | Sqft/Unit 900 | Total 8,500 sqft | Tiers 0–1

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 6 × 2BR + 2 × 1BR
- 900 sqft average per unit

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 10,000–12,000 sqft
- Min width: 60 ft

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-3, HR-1, HR-2, COR
- No rezoning needed in ER-3/HR-1

BEST FIT

- Maximum density without rezoning
- Urban and suburban sites with services
- Strong economics with ACLP eligibility

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Total project cost (est.)	$1.28M–$1.68M
Expected rent range	$1,600–$2,200/mo
Timeline	12–16 months construction

ACLP ✓ | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF ✓

10U

Small Apartment

8–12 Units · Interior Corridor

Units 8-12 (typ. 10) | Storeys 4 | Sqft/Unit 800 | Total 9,000 sqft | Tiers 1-2

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 4 × 1BR + 6 × 2BR
- 800 sqft average per unit
- Interior corridor access

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 10,000–15,000 sqft
- Min width: 75 ft

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- HR-1, HR-2, ER-3, CEN, COR

BEST FIT

- Regional centres with demonstrated demand
- Sites near services and transit
- Optimal ACLP economics

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Total project cost (est.)	$1.6M–$2.1M
Expected rent range	$1,600–$2,400/mo
Timeline	12–16 months construction

ACLP ✓ | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF ✓

18U

Mid-Size Apartment

12–24 Units · Elevator Building

Units 12–24 (typ. 18) | Storeys 5 | Sqft/Unit 850 | Total 18,000 sqft | Tier 1

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 2 studio + 6 × 1BR + 8 × 2BR + 2 × 3BR
- 850 sqft average per unit
- Elevator required at this scale

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 18,000–25,000 sqft
- Min width: 80 ft

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- HR-1, HR-2

BEST FIT

- Regional centres with strong housing demand
- Sites with full municipal services
- Maximum economies of scale
- Best funding stack economics

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$160,000
Total project cost (est.)	$2.88M–$4.32M
Expected rent range	$1,400–$2,400/mo
Timeline	14–20 months construction

ACLP ✓ | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF ✓

1U

Laneway ADU

1–2 Units · Backyard Infill

Units 1–2 | Storeys 1 | Sqft/Unit 650 | Total 650 sqft | Tiers 1–2

UNIT MIX

- Typical: 1 × 1BR (studio/2BR variants)
- 650 sqft compact floor plan

SITE REQUIREMENTS

- Lot size: 4,000–6,000 sqft (with existing home)
- Min width: 30 ft
- Backyard access required

COMPATIBLE ZONING

- ER-1, ER-2, ER-3, R-1, R-2
- Rarely requires rezoning

BEST FIT

- Incremental density on existing properties
- Homeowner-initiated housing supply
- Senior downsizing / family caregiver suites

Economic Parameter	Value
Base cost per unit	$140,000
Total project cost (est.)	$140,000–$200,000
Expected rent range	$1,200–$2,000/mo
Timeline	16–24 weeks construction

ACLP (min 5 units) | BCH ✓ | AHDP ✓ | GMF (min 5 units)

PART IV

Programs & Funding

Federal, provincial, and municipal programs that close the viability gap.

CHAPTER 8

Federal Programs

The federal government, through CMHC and Infrastructure Canada, operates four major programs relevant to affordable housing in Nova Scotia. Each serves a distinct purpose in the funding stack, and understanding their terms, eligibility criteria, and interactions is essential for project planning.

CMHC Apartment Construction Loan Program (ACLP)

Program at a Glance

Type: Low-interest construction and permanent financing

Terms: 5.5% interest, 50-year amortization, 1.10 DCR

Eligibility: Minimum 5 units, minimum 20% of units at ≤30% AMI

Max LTC: 95% (non-profit), 75% (for-profit)

Intake: Rolling (continuous application)

ACLP is the cornerstone of affordable housing finance in Canada. Its combination of below-market interest rate, 50-year amortization, and reduced debt coverage ratio creates a compounding advantage that dramatically increases borrowing capacity. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, ACLP can increase mortgage capacity by approximately 60% compared to conventional financing.

Eligibility Requirements

- Minimum 5 residential units (excludes duplex, triplex, fourplex, and ADU)
- Minimum 20% of units at rents affordable to households at 30% AMI
- Energy efficiency: minimum 25% reduction over NECB 2017 (new construction)
- Accessibility: minimum 10% of units must be barrier-free
- Demonstrated project viability with complete pro forma

Application Complexity

ACLP applications require detailed project documentation including architectural drawings, environmental assessments, financial pro formas, and construction cost estimates. The application process typically takes 8–16 weeks from submission to conditional commitment. Projects with non-profit sponsors and strong municipal support receive priority consideration.

Build Canada Homes (BCH)

Program at a Glance

Type: Capital grants for new construction

Amount: $40,000–$70,000 per unit (typical $55,000)

Eligibility: New construction, affordable rents, non-profit or municipal sponsor preferred

Intake: Rolling

BCH provides direct capital grants that reduce the total cost of a project. Unlike loans, grants do not need to be repaid and do not generate debt service obligations. This makes BCH particularly valuable for projects targeting deeper affordability levels (30–50% AMI) where rent revenue is most constrained.

Exhibit 8.1 **BCH Funding Scenarios by Project Scale**

Project Size	Min BCH ($40K/unit)	Typical ($55K/unit)	Max BCH ($70K/unit)
6 units (Sixplex)	$240,000	$330,000	$420,000
10 units (Small Apt)	$400,000	$550,000	$700,000
24 units (Mid Apt)	$960,000	$1,320,000	$1,680,000
54 units	$2,160,000	$2,970,000	$3,780,000

Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF)

HAF represents a new model of federal-municipal partnership. Rather than funding individual projects, HAF provides funding to municipalities that commit to systemic reforms — zoning changes, approval process improvements, and housing supply targets. Four Nova Scotia municipalities have active HAF agreements.

Exhibit 8.2 **Nova Scotia HAF Agreements — Commitments and Targets**

Municipality	Funding	Units	Key Reform Actions
Halifax Regional Municipality	$79.3M	2,600	Eliminate single-family-only zoning; allow 4 units as-of-right; streamline approvals; reduce parking minimums
Pictou County (5 towns)	$5.6M	190	Multi-municipality joint planning; shared housing coordinator
West Hants Regional Municipality	—	560	Housing Action Plan adopted; zoning amendments; municipal land inventory
Town of Antigonish	$1.3M	—	Student housing focus; R-3/R-4 zone expansion

Source: Infrastructure Canada HAF agreements, 2024

Green Municipal Fund (GMF)

> **Program at a Glance**
>
> **Type:** Loans (up to $10M) and grants (up to $1M) for sustainable municipal projects
>
> **Eligibility:** Municipal or municipal-affiliated sponsor; sustainability criteria
>
> **Focus:** Energy-efficient buildings, climate resilience, environmental assessment
>
> **Note:** GMF is administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

GMF can complement other funding sources, particularly for projects that incorporate energy-efficient design (Passive House, Net Zero Ready) or innovative sustainability features. The grant component ($1M max) is most valuable; the loan component offers below-market rates but adds to the project's debt burden.

CHAPTER 9

Provincial Programs

NS Affordable Housing Development Program (AHDP)

Program at a Glance

Type: Forgivable loans for affordable housing construction

Amount: Up to $55,000 per unit

Equity: 5% required for non-profit sponsors

Affordability period: Minimum 15 years

Administered by: NS Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

AHDP is Nova Scotia's primary provincial capital program for affordable housing. The forgivable loan structure means the funding effectively becomes a grant if the project maintains affordability for the required period — a powerful incentive for long-term affordable operation.

Exhibit 9.1 **AHDP Eligibility Checklist**

- ☐ Project located in Nova Scotia
- ☐ New construction or major renovation
- ☐ Rents at or below 80% of average market rent (AMR) for the area
- ☐ Sponsor is a non-profit, co-operative, or municipal entity (preferred) or for-profit with affordability commitment
- ☐ 5% equity contribution from sponsor (non-profit); higher for for-profit
- ☐ 15-year minimum affordability commitment (registered on title)
- ☐ Complete project pro forma with construction cost estimates
- ☐ Evidence of municipal support (council resolution, land contribution, or letter of support)
- ☐ Environmental assessment (if applicable)
- ☐ Demonstrated community housing need

NS Action for Housing

The provincial government's overarching housing strategy, NS Action for Housing, provides the policy framework within which AHDP and other programs operate. Key elements include targets for new affordable unit creation, regulatory modernization, and coordination with federal programs. Municipalities should reference this strategy when building their business case for provincial support.

Provincial Regulatory Framework

Nova Scotia's Municipal Government Act (MGA) sets the rules within which municipalities regulate land use. Recent amendments have expanded municipal authority to create affordable housing policies, including:

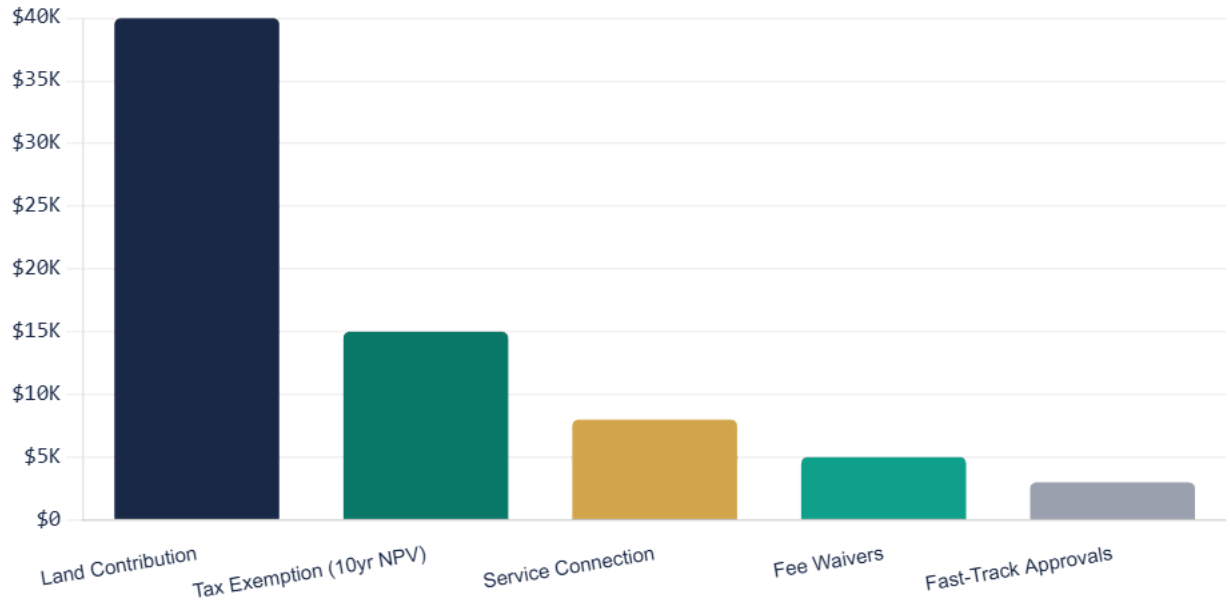
- Inclusionary zoning provisions (allowing municipalities to require affordable units in new developments)
- Density bonusing (allowing additional density in exchange for affordable units or contributions)
- Community benefit agreements for larger developments
- Streamlined development agreement processes

CHAPTER 10

The Municipal Toolkit

Municipalities are not passive recipients in the affordable housing equation. They control several powerful levers that can significantly reduce project costs and improve viability. This chapter quantifies the impact of each tool and provides guidance on which to deploy for different project types.

Exhibit 10.1 **Municipal Contribution Menu — Tools and Financial Impact**



Tool	Impact per Unit	% of Project Cost	Implementation
Land contribution	$12,000–$40,000	10–20%	Below-market sale or long-term lease of municipal land
Tax exemption (10yr NPV)	$8,000–$15,000	5–10%	Property tax exemption or reduction for affordability period
Service connection subsidy	$3,000–$8,000	2–5%	Waived or reduced water/sewer connection charges
Fee waivers	$2,000–$5,000	1–3%	Development permit fees, building permit fees
Fast-track approvals	Indirect	—	Priority processing, reduced timeline → lower carrying costs

Exhibit 10.2 **Which Tools for Which Projects?**

Project Type	Land	Tax Exemption	Fee Waivers	Service Subsidy	Fast-Track
Small (2–4 units, rural)	✓ Critical	✓ Helpful	✓	—	✓
Medium (6–10 units, town)	✓ Critical	✓ Important	✓	✓	✓
Large (12–24 units, urban)	✓ Important	✓ Critical	✓	✓	✓
Deep affordability (≤50% AMI)	Essential	Essential	✓	✓	✓

Structuring Municipal Contributions for Maximum Leverage

Municipal contributions serve double duty: they directly reduce project costs *and* they strengthen applications to federal and provincial programs. CMHC and provincial assessors view municipal support as evidence of community commitment and project viability. A municipality that contributes land, provides a tax exemption, and passes a council resolution of support dramatically improves a project's competitiveness for ACLP and BCH funding.

> **The HAF Compliance Angle**
>
> Municipalities with active HAF agreements have **already committed** to many of these actions. Deploying the municipal toolkit on affordable housing projects helps fulfill HAF obligations while delivering concrete housing outcomes. It's alignment, not additional burden.

PART V

Putting It Together

Assembling the funding stack, learning from real projects, and charting your implementation path.

CHAPTER 11

Funding Stack Assembly

The viability gap identified in Part II is closed by layering multiple funding sources into a coordinated **funding stack**. The assembly sequence matters — applying programs in the right order maximizes their collective impact and avoids common mistakes that leave money on the table.

The Stacking Sequence

1. **ACLP first:** Calculate ACLP mortgage capacity. This recalculates the baseline — a larger mortgage means a smaller gap for everything else to close.
2. **BCH + AHDP next:** Apply the largest grant programs. These are the highest-impact, dollar-for-dollar gap reducers.
3. **Municipal contributions:** Land, tax exemptions, fee waivers. Often the decisive factor for viability.
4. **GMF and other sources:** Green Municipal Fund, charitable contributions, organizational equity.
5. **Assess remaining gap:** If a gap remains, evaluate whether adjustments (unit count, AMI band, building type) can close it.

Worked Examples

The following three examples illustrate funding stack assembly at different scales and in different Nova Scotia contexts. All use ACLP financing where eligible and layer additional programs to close the gap.

Exhibit 11.1 **Funding Stack — Small Project: 4-Unit Fourplex, Antigonish (60% AMI)**

Component	Amount	Per Unit	Notes
Total Project Cost	$720,000	$180,000	4 units × $160K + 8% soft costs + land
Conventional Mortgage	$310,000	$77,500	Not ACLP eligible (<5 units)
BCH Grant	$220,000	$55,000	$55K/unit standard
AHDP Forgivable Loan	$140,000	$35,000	$35K/unit
Municipal Land	$50,000	$12,500	Below-market land transfer
Remaining Gap	$0	$0	Viable

Exhibit 11.2 **Funding Stack — Medium Project: 10-Unit Small Apartment, New Glasgow (60% AMI)**

Component	Amount	Per Unit	Notes
Total Project Cost	$1,900,000	$190,000	10 units, Other NS costs + soft costs + land
ACLP Mortgage	$560,000	$56,000	50yr, 5.5%, 1.10 DCR
BCH Grant	$550,000	$55,000	$55K/unit
AHDP Forgivable Loan	$350,000	$35,000	$35K/unit
HAF Contribution	$200,000	$20,000	Pictou County HAF allocation
Municipal (Land + Tax)	$150,000	$15,000	Land $10K + tax exemption NPV $5K
Remaining Gap	$90,000	$9,000	Viable **(covered by sponsor equity)**

Exhibit 11.3 **Funding Stack — Large Project: 24-Unit Mid-Apartment, Halifax (50% AMI)**

Component	Amount	Per Unit	Notes
Total Project Cost	$5,520,000	$230,000	24 units, Halifax costs, elevator building
ACLP Mortgage	$1,728,000	$72,000	50% AMI rents, ACLP terms
BCH Grant	$1,440,000	$60,000	$60K/unit (deeper affordability premium)
AHDP Forgivable Loan	$840,000	$35,000	$35K/unit
HAF Contribution	$480,000	$20,000	Halifax HAF allocation
HRM Tax Exemption (10yr NPV)	$288,000	$12,000	10-year property tax exemption
GMF Grant	$240,000	$10,000	Sustainability features
Remaining Gap	$504,000	$21,000	Challenging

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Calculating conventional mortgage first:** Always calculate ACLP capacity first if eligible. The difference is substantial.

2. **Overlooking municipal tools:** Land and tax exemptions can be worth $20K–$55K per unit combined.

3. **Targeting too-deep affordability without sufficient grants:** 30% AMI projects require the maximum available grant stack. Build the funding stack before committing to an AMI band.

4. **Ignoring soft costs:** Architecture, permits, legal, and consulting fees add 8–12.5% to hard construction costs.

Exhibit 11.4 **Viability Threshold Reference**

Status	Gap per Unit	Interpretation
Viable	≤ $0	Project fully funded; proceed to implementation
Nearly Viable	≤ $20,000	Close — additional municipal support or cost optimization may close gap
Challenging	$20K–$50K	Requires creative solutions, additional funding sources, or scope adjustment
Difficult	> $50,000	Fundamental restructuring needed — different AMI band, building type, or location

CHAPTER 12

Three Case Studies

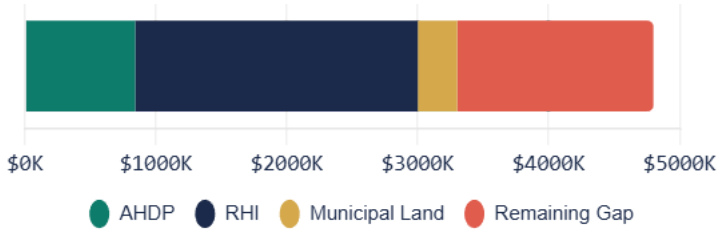
The following case studies draw from verified Nova Scotia affordable housing projects. Each demonstrates how the funding stack operates in practice, with real numbers and real lessons.

Case Study A: Antigonish — Hawthorne Street (2023)

24	$200K	$4.8M	60%
Units	Cost per unit	Total project cost	AMI Target

This 24-unit small apartment project in the university town of Antigonish demonstrated that affordable housing can achieve rapid absorption in communities with strong underlying demand. The project reached **full occupancy within 30 days** of completion, confirming the depth of unmet housing need.

Exhibit 12.1 **Funding Waterfall — Antigonish**



Source	Amount	Per Unit
AHDP	$840,000	$35,000
Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI)	$2,160,000	$90,000
Municipal Land Contribution	$300,000	$12,500
Other / Sponsor Equity	$1,500,000	$62,500
Total	$4,800,000	$200,000

Timeline: 20 months total (8 months planning & approvals + 12 months construction)

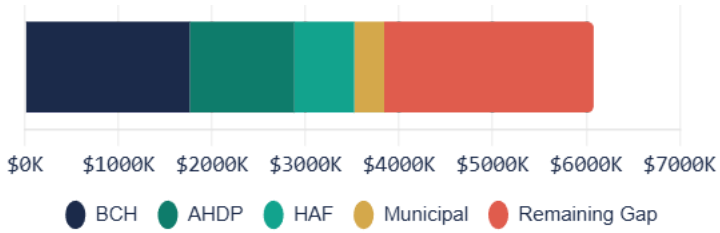
> **Key Lesson**
>
> University towns have exceptionally strong latent demand for affordable housing. Antigonish's rapid lease-up validated the approach and provided evidence that other municipalities can reference when presenting housing proposals to council.

Case Study B: New Glasgow — River West (2024)

32	$190K	$6.08M	60%
Units	Cost per unit	Total project cost	AMI Target

The River West project in New Glasgow broke new ground with a **multi-municipality HAF agreement** involving five Pictou County towns. This consortium approach allowed smaller municipalities to pool resources and achieve the scale needed for federal program eligibility.

Exhibit 12.2 **Funding Waterfall — New Glasgow**



Source	Amount	Per Unit
Build Canada Homes (BCH)	$1,760,000	$55,000
AHDP	$1,120,000	$35,000
HAF	$640,000	$20,000
Municipal Contributions	$320,000	$10,000
Other / Sponsor Equity	$2,240,000	$70,000
Total	$6,080,000	$190,000

Timeline: 16 months total (6 months planning + 10 months construction)

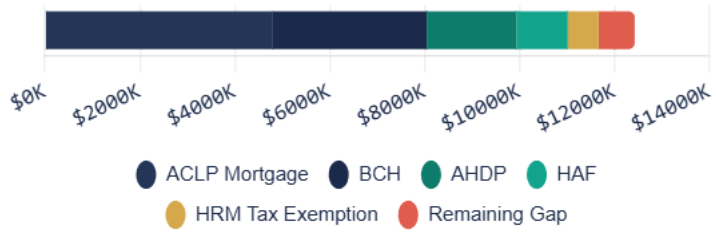
> **Key Lesson**
>
> The multi-municipality consortium model is powerful for smaller communities. By pooling HAF obligations and sharing a housing coordinator, five towns achieved what none could have done alone. This model is directly replicable in other Nova Scotia regions.

Case Study C: Halifax — North End (2024)

54	$230K	$12.42M	50%
Units	Cost per unit	Total project cost	AMI Target (deeper)

This 54-unit project in Halifax's North End targeted **deeper affordability at 50% AMI**, making it more challenging to finance but serving households in the most acute need. ACLP financing was the critical enabler — without the 50-year amortization, the project would not have been viable at this affordability level.

Exhibit 12.3 **Funding Waterfall — Halifax**



Source	Amount	Per Unit
ACLP Mortgage (50yr)	$4,800,000	$88,889
Build Canada Homes (BCH)	$3,240,000	$60,000
AHDP	$1,890,000	$35,000
HAF	$1,080,000	$20,000
HRM Tax Exemption (10yr NPV)	$648,000	$12,000
Other / Sponsor Equity	$762,000	$14,111
Total	$12,420,000	$230,000

Timeline: 24 months total (10 months planning & approvals + 14 months construction)

Key Lesson

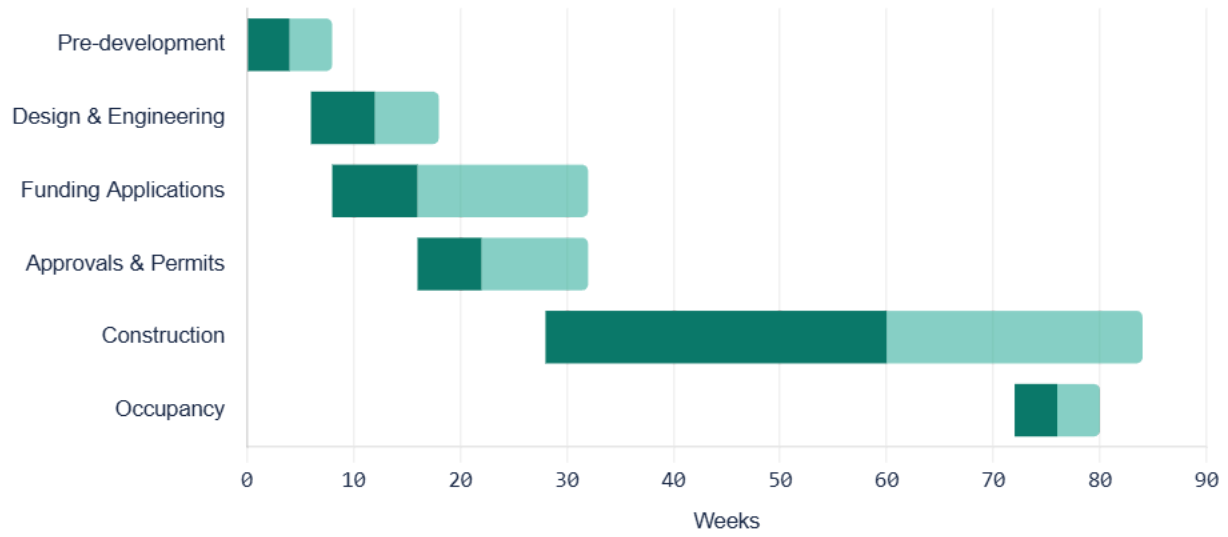
ACLP's 50-year amortization was the single biggest viability lever. Without ACLP, this project would have required an additional $2M+ in grants to achieve viability at 50% AMI. This case study demonstrates why maximizing ACLP financing should always be the first step in funding stack assembly.

CHAPTER 13

Implementation Roadmap

Affordable housing projects follow a well-defined development sequence. Understanding the phases, their durations, and their interdependencies allows municipalities to set realistic expectations and identify opportunities for parallel processing that can reduce overall timelines.

Exhibit 13.1 **Six-Phase Project Timeline**



Phase	Duration	Key Activities
1. Pre-development	4–8 weeks	Site identification, feasibility assessment, community engagement
2. Design & Engineering	6–12 weeks	Architectural design, engineering, cost estimation
3. Funding Applications	8–24 weeks	ACLP, BCH, AHDP applications (can run in parallel with design)
4. Approvals & Permits	6–16 weeks	Municipal development permit, building permit, site plan approval
5. Construction	32–56 weeks	Site preparation, foundation, framing, finishing, landscaping
6. Occupancy	4–8 weeks	Final inspections, tenant selection, lease-up
Total Project Duration	14–29 months	**60–124 weeks including overlaps**

Exhibit 13.2 **Municipal Readiness Checklist**

- ☐ Council resolution supporting affordable housing development
- ☐ Identified municipal land suitable for housing (or active land search underway)
- ☐ Zoning review completed — identified zones permitting target building types
- ☐ Infrastructure capacity confirmed (water, sewer, road access) for target sites
- ☐ Housing needs assessment completed or commissioned
- ☐ Non-profit housing partner identified (or willingness to partner established)
- ☐ Municipal contribution framework defined (land, tax, fees)
- ☐ Staff capacity assigned to housing file (dedicated or shared)
- ☐ HAF obligations reviewed and alignment opportunities identified
- ☐ Community engagement strategy prepared
- ☐ Budget allocation for pre-development costs
- ☐ Contact established with CMHC regional office and NS Department of Housing

Next Steps

This guide provides the analytical framework. Turning analysis into action requires site-specific assessment using your community's actual data — population, income, land availability, infrastructure capacity, and local costs.

Start Your Project Assessment

Use the **Housing Navigator** at heliourbandevelopment.com/housing-navigator to model specific scenarios for your municipality. The tool uses the same data, calculations, and programs described in this guide, customized for 57 Nova Scotia communities.

Helio Urban Development offers complimentary initial project assessments for Nova Scotia municipalities considering affordable housing. Contact us to discuss your community's needs.

APPENDIX A

Regional Data Tables

A.1 Income, Rent, and Cost Data by Region

Parameter	Halifax	Cape Breton	Other NS
Area Median Income (AMI)	$82,000	$58,000	$55,000
Average Market Rent (2BR)	$1,739	$990	$1,100
Max Rent @ 30% AMI	$615	$435	$413
Max Rent @ 50% AMI	$1,025	$725	$688
Max Rent @ 60% AMI	$1,230	$870	$825
Max Rent @ 80% AMI	$1,640	$1,160	$1,100
Construction Cost Range	$180K–$250K	$160K–$220K	$165K–$230K
Property Tax / unit / year	$1,200	$1,400	$1,000
Insurance / unit / year	$650	$600	$550
Utilities / unit / year	$800	$900	$850

A.2 Operating Cost Defaults with Ranges

Category	Default	Min	Max	Typical Range
Property Tax	$1,200	$600	$2,500	Highly variable by municipality
Insurance	$600	$300	$1,200	Decreasing per-unit with scale
Utilities	$800	$400	$1,500	Climate and efficiency dependent
Maintenance	$1,200	$500	$2,500	New construction at lower end
Management	$1,100	$0	$2,400	$0 if owner-managed
Reserves	$600	$200	$1,500	CMHC may require specific amount
Total	$5,500	$2,000	$11,600	

APPENDIX B

Program Eligibility Quick Reference

B.1 **Federal & Provincial Programs — Eligibility Matrix**

Criteria	ACLP	BCH	AHDP	GMF
Administering Body	CMHC	Federal	NS Prov.	FCM
Type	Low-interest loan	Capital grant	Forgivable loan	Loan + grant
Amount	Up to 95% LTC	$40K–$70K/unit	Up to $55K/unit	Loan $10M / Grant $1M
Min Units	5	None	None	5
Interest Rate	5.5%	N/A (grant)	0% (forgivable)	Below market
Amortization	50 years	N/A	N/A	Up to 20 years
DCR	1.10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Affordability Period	Loan term	20 years min	15 years min	Varies
Sponsor Type	Any (non-profit preferred)	Non-profit, muni, Indigenous	Non-profit preferred	Municipal
Energy Requirements	25% below NECB 2017	Varies	NBC compliance	Sustainability criteria
Accessibility	10% barrier-free	Encouraged	Encouraged	N/A
Intake	Rolling	Rolling	Call for proposals	Rolling

APPENDIX C

Glossary of Terms

ACLP
Apartment Construction Loan Program. CMHC program providing low-interest, long-amortization construction and permanent financing for rental housing.

AHDP
Affordable Housing Development Program. Nova Scotia provincial program providing forgivable loans for affordable housing construction.

AMI
Area Median Income. The midpoint of household incomes in a geographic area, used as the baseline for affordability calculations.

AMR
Average Market Rent. The average rent for a given unit type in a given market, as surveyed by CMHC.

As-of-Right
Development that is permitted under existing zoning without requiring a variance, rezoning, or development agreement.

BCH
Build Canada Homes. Federal capital grant program for new affordable housing construction.

Blended Rent
Weighted average rent across all unit types in a project, accounting for bedroom-specific rent factors.

CMHC
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Federal Crown corporation responsible for housing policy and programs.

Core Housing Need
CMHC definition: a household spending 30%+ of income on shelter that cannot find adequate, suitable, affordable housing in their market.

DCR
Debt Coverage Ratio. Ratio of NOI to annual debt service, measuring a project's ability to cover loan payments. Higher DCR = more cushion.

Funding Stack
The layered combination of financing, grants, and contributions that collectively fund an affordable housing project.

GMF
Green Municipal Fund. FCM-administered program providing loans and grants for sustainable municipal projects.

HAF

Housing Accelerator Fund. Federal program providing funding to municipalities that commit to zoning reform and housing supply targets.

LTC

Loan-to-Cost. The ratio of a mortgage to total project cost. ACLP allows up to 95% LTC for non-profit sponsors.

MGA

Municipal Government Act. Nova Scotia legislation governing municipal powers, including land use planning and zoning.

NOI

Net Operating Income. Gross rental income minus vacancy loss and operating expenses. The key determinant of borrowing capacity.

Soft Costs

Non-construction project costs including architecture, engineering, permits, legal fees, consulting, and contingency. Typically 8–12.5% of hard costs.

Viability Gap

The difference between total project cost and maximum mortgage capacity. Must be closed through grants and non-debt contributions.

APPENDIX D

Data Sources & Methodology

Primary Data Sources

Source	Data Used	Currency
Statistics Canada, Census 2021	Population, household income, demographics	2021 (adjusted to 2024$)
CMHC Housing Supply Gaps Report	Annual housing starts target (12,500/yr)	June 2025
CMHC Rental Market Report	Vacancy rates, average market rents by region	October 2024
CMHC Rental Market Survey	Bedroom rent factors, rent trends	2024
CMHC ACLP Program Terms	Interest rates, amortization, DCR, LTC limits	2025
Infrastructure Canada	HAF agreements, BCH program parameters	2024
NS Dept. of Municipal Affairs and Housing	AHDP program terms, provincial housing strategy	2024–2025
NS Department of Finance	Population estimates (post-Census)	2022–2025
Helio Urban Development	Construction costs, operating benchmarks, project case studies	2023–2025

Methodology Notes

- **AMI Adjustment:** Census 2021 household income data has been adjusted to 2024 dollars using Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index for Nova Scotia.
- **Rent Calculations:** Maximum affordable rent = AMI × AMI Band % × 30% ÷ 12. This follows CMHC's standard methodology for affordability assessment.

- **Bedroom Factors:** Relative to 2BR baseline (1.00×): Studio 0.72×, 1BR 0.85×, 3BR 1.15×. Derived from CMHC Rental Market Survey data for Nova Scotia.
- **Mortgage Calculations:** Present value of annuity formula with monthly compounding. ACLP terms: 5.5% annual rate (0.4583% monthly), 600 months (50 years), 1.10 DCR.
- **Operating Costs:** Defaults represent provincial averages for new construction. Regional variations are documented in Appendix A. Figures are annual per-unit costs.
- **Construction Costs:** Base cost of $160,000/unit reflects Helio's fixed-price model for standard configurations. Actual costs vary by unit mix, site conditions, and regional factors.
- **Case Studies:** Based on verified project data. Funding amounts have been rounded for presentation clarity. Some funding sources may have been consolidated for simplicity.

Data Currency Statement

This guide was prepared in January 2026 using the most recent available data from each source as noted above. Program terms and amounts are subject to change. Users should verify current program availability and terms before making project decisions. The Housing Navigator tool at heliourbandevelopment.com/housing-navigator is updated regularly to reflect current program parameters.

HELIO
URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Ready to Build?

Start your project assessment with the Housing Navigator — site-specific calculations for 57 Nova Scotia communities.

heliourbandevelopment.com/housing-navigator

Fixed-price rental housing at $160K/unit
130+ units delivered across Nova Scotia

Version 2026-01