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Heartening comments from all of you, the participants. Many of you declared you don't want this gathering to be another slam bam, thank you Ma'am, Viagra enhanced rabbit population. You want something to follow this convergence of knowledgeable, dedicated and troubled people. If you'll forgive an ovarian metaphor, you want the child to be born. But in this case the child you want is a structure that will be charged with carrying out a mandate for helping people afford existing housing, and for a program of housing starts for the hard-to-house, the frail, the elders, single-parent families, homeless youth, lost aboriginals, people with addictions and mental illnesses, newcomers, whose job skills are non-existent or whose skills don't happen to fit Alberta's needs. These people are not faceless annoyances, they are real human beings and they could be you tomorrow. You don't want to go home in two days with the feeling that nothing has been accomplished by this exercise. You should not allow yourself to feel futile, it's bad for your character.

This symposium should lead somewhere, not only because so many people need good housing, that doesn't yet exist or that they can't afford, but because you need to feel effective. This should not be a waste of your time. You're living the only life you're going to get, or me for sure, I mean there's speculation but I don't know. You will perceive from this plenary to learn from one another, to enjoy and respect one another, and to firm up your resolve to be advocates, which is the responsibility of the informed. You will figure out what good accommodation for needy Alberta should look like, that's the fun part of the exercise. And how to get it, which is vastly more difficult.

Let me tell you what I hope will have happened. Please do not build affordable housing for the poor. Please build affordable homes. Here is what affordable housing is: cheap, cookie-cutter, high density eyesores on undesirable land located out of the view of the middle-class. Here is what affordable homes are: good quality construction, low-density, in neighbourhoods with gracious amenities. You can build housing with roughly the shelf life of a tent, if you like, and you've done that. Every city in Canada has done something like that. Shacks are a dirty solution to a vexation, but they have the admirable quality of being quick and cheap. Tacky housing is the good housekeeping approach to addressing social problems. Put the dirt under the rug where visitors can't see it.

You can, and you have, shoveled into cardboard constructions and group homes, teeming with frustrations, the people whose lives don't appear to be productive by ruthless, marketplace standards. They are unworthy of decent shelter. This is not a very elevated view for a society to have. Worse, it's not even smart. Clean-up costs in human as well as economic terms are enormous. The experiment in quickie social housing has been tested in every province in this country and

everywhere has proved to be too expensive. In a short time the buildings are beyond repair and the people require desperate expenditures in remedial education, nursing homes, prisons, detox centres. When people live in dreadful housing, it is difficult for them to respect themselves, or one another, and it's very difficult for them to respect the buildings they inhabit.

Here are some analogies. Canadians don't litter, not because we're Canadians, but because municipalities install disposal boxes on street corners and they employ street cleaners. If a sidewalk is covered with gum wrappers and empty Coke cans people will add their discards to the debris. If the sidewalk is clean, people will walk a considerable distance to find a trash barrel rather than offend the scenery.

And also this, in one week I happened to be in two women's shelters. One was in Toronto and the other was in Cape Breton. The one in Toronto was furnished with hand-me-downs, with donations from people replacing their sofas that had springs coming through the upholstery, and lamps with shades that won't fit straight, and tables scarred by cigarette burns. That hostel was a mess. Despite efforts of a very fine staff to keep up with the rubbish, there were wet tap towels on the living room floor, coffee stains on the rugs, and dirty dishes on every level surface. The women's shelter in Cape Breton, despite the poverty of that community, had invested in new, tasteful furniture, well chosen for colour and comfort. Fresh flowers on the dining room table, and a kitchen full of home-made touches. Everything there was sparkling clean. When women finished a cup of coffee they took the cup to the kitchen and washed it. More significantly, the women in the Toronto shelter had despairing expressions on their faces, and their children were showing the signs of childhood distress, some of them withdrawn, which is what children do when they are hurting, and some of them wild and out of control, which is the other behaviour. The women in the Cape Breton shelter were in exactly the same plight, homeless, battered, desperately poor, but their children were calm, and the women had dignity. And that dignity gave them hope for themselves and their children. They lived in a beautiful shelter that felt like a home, and that straightened their spines.

That shelter started, which is off topic, but I love this story. I was working a shift in a shelter in a shelter called Nellies in Toronto which I helped start one time, and every now and then I worked a shift. And I was cleaning a room, cleaning under the bed, and a woman was leaning against the doorway watching me do this, and she said "haven't I seen you on television?" And I said yes, and she said, "and it's come to this." What I like about that story was the friendship, was the identifying, that she thought, and I think she's right, that a woman can be reduced in circumstances overnight.

In New York a sensational urban renewal program started in an abandoned slum, beyond our imagination of horror. Broken windows were replaced, shattered doors were re-hung, new appliances arrived, inside and outside was bright, clean paint. People moved in and they treasured their good luck to live in such a pretty place.

They planted flowers and they put up curtains and the slum disappeared. My point, obviously, is that the immediate environment matters to all of us, and influences our behaviour. Few people can do good deeds, and contribute to their neighbourhood if they live in miserable housing, just as few people can do good work if their work place is a miserable place. The decent housing, that matters to each of us, that we treasure for ourselves, a place where we restore and consolidate ourselves, matters even more to people living on the margins. The message that they are trash, or that they have dignity, is conveyed by the quality of the living space that a community provides.

Constructions for the poor can not be tacky. However appealing that might be to politicians and many voters. The exterior should not give a message "abandon hope all ye who enter here." It should be handsome. The contagious message being that worthwhile people live here.

Architects need to meet with the people who will be using the space, just as they do with wealthy clients. For instance, those tiny kitchens, so common in the apartments of the upperly mobile singles, are not appropriate for a mom with three children. Also, people who have lived on the streets want privacy. And they need to feel safe. They should be asked how that translates into a floor plan. And you can't house aboriginals without sitting down with them, for as long as it takes, to learn how they use a living space. I'm reminded of some advice a very wise friend gave me, his name is Hans Borne, he was a professor of sociology at a law school in Toronto, he said "help has to be defined by the person who gets it, not the person who gives it."

The Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Honourable Iris Evans, using the words 'safe and adequate' to describe the social housing she has in mind, with respect to this extremely worthy woman, and she is; I don't think the word 'adequate' is appropriate. I think it sets the bar too low. That's not housing, that's warehousing. Is it your dream to warehouse defenseless people, most certainly not. And again the words like 'temporary housing' are an evasion. First of all what purports in the beginning to be temporary housing usually becomes permanent until the retched thing burns down. And the philosophy behind the construction of temporary housing is never kind.

It is also Iris Evans' dream that the private-sector, needing no government support at all, will build affordable homes for low-income and no-income people. This wonder may occur, but only when pigs fly. And so to conclude, I have to explain that, so to conclude. Some years ago, I addressed the annual meeting of some social workers, and they were very well organized as social workers sometimes are. They gave a lot of advice to the speakers. One of the bits of advice I thought was very cogent was "do speak into the microphone." Ah, what an idea, what a concept. And then we were also informed that if we inserted into our speeches a sentence beginning with "and so to conclude" we would gain back our audiences attention. I always found that very good advice, unless you say it too soon.

Some years ago metro Toronto hired me to write a report based on a few months of meetings that they had with focus groups. There were a half dozen town-hall kinds of meetings and other samplings, in order to get the demographics right. The exercise was to ask people what kind of community they wanted to be living in, in the next century. It was a tedious job at first for me, there were hundreds upon hundreds of pages; questionnaires, transcripts, reports, but I started to get very excited. Whatever the neighbourhood where the study occurred, whether it was an enclave of mansions or a run-down neighbourhood full of derelicts, people were saying the same thing. What they wanted was to live in a village. They wanted the village to be inside the city. They wanted a park near by, they wanted open spaces, within walking distance. They would like a policeman to pedal by on a bike. Very many of them described what was essentially store-front police stations. They wanted good public transit so that everything in Toronto would be reachable. They'd like a walk-in medical clinic, also close at hand, shops and restaurants, day care, they wanted the sidewalks to be busy and safe, they wanted to know their neighbours' names. Which brings me to an important point, important to me, and I hope you feel the same. It's true that people make their homes their headquarters, but they live their lives in a neighbourhood. When housing is isolated and in an unpleasant neighbourhood, the ghettoizing that all of you deplore, residents stay inside. I have been watching this in high-rise ghettos all over Toronto. They become a little paranoid, and then a lot paranoid; they become depressed and crabby. They don't make good company when they do venture forth, which of course increases their isolation and depends their rage and loneliness.

Homes for low-income people have to be integrated into functioning communities, such as the Toronto survey discovered that everyone wants. Location, location, location, the mantra of realtors. I once strolled the streets of downtown Calgary on a Sunday evening looking for a restaurant, now granted I was probably looking in the wrong place, the reason I wasn't directed to the right place was that there wasn't anyone on the streets. There was nobody, it seemed, living in downtown Calgary. But there were lots of parking lots. Parking lots galore. It looked to me like terrific places to build attractive housing, in-fill housing, town houses, get people moving around the downtown after office hours and on week-ends, and so I could find a restaurant. Does your community have commercial buildings with vacant floors, could some of the buildings be converted to living spaces, say for young office workers. Any old warehouses around, they make great loft spaces for artists, and to have live-in studios, once you fixed the zoning regulations. Could you take over some big houses in settled neighbourhoods, break them into charming self-contained units. Seedy hotels, every city has some of those, with imagination even old motels can be made into attractive housing, providing they're not situated on the edge of a highway between the donut shop and a gas station. Can you legislate for granny flats, basement apartments and a good word that I found in your literature, intensification.

You're natural partners are religious groups, who have been prominent in housing development for a long time in this country. Maybe you should consider the other front-line people who have a handle on the needs of homeless people. Such as those who run detox centres, such as women's shelters, programs for street youth, aboriginal leaders, seniors drop-in places, children's protection services, I hope there are representatives of such front-line services here, because they know what housing their clients need, and it isn't egg cartons.

Of necessity you've given some thought to NIMBY, and I thought Bruce West's summary of what to do, what you know to do to avoid NIMBY, Not In My Back Yard; was excellent, and indeed it was exactly what I was going to say, I'm in very good company here. I don't think you can dismiss protectors as being uncaring people if your plan is to stick a shabby high-rise into their neighbourhood. But what if the housing you build is classy, or at least classy enough to be compatible with the neighbourhood look. And what if it's mixed-income housing, with rent geared to income, and maybe some plan whereby people can slowly buy their apartments, a hot new idea that is catching on, I hope. Because many people will never get a down-payment. And what if you prepared the neighbourhood for this housing instead of dropping your plan on people's heads.

When we wanted to build a hospice for AIDS in Toronto, which is now known as Casey House hospice, and we opened 10 years ago, and 1,000 people have died of AIDS in that 1 2-bed hospice in 10 years, so I have a whole other speech about condoms that I'll be very glad to give you. When we wanted to open Casey House, it was in a residential neighbourhood with an elementary school half a block away. We went to what's called the Toronto Supportive Housing Coalition, which knew a lot about NIMBY and said "what should we do?" They said, be ready, on the day the location is announced, to go door to door and answer, tell people what you are doing and answer their questions, before panic and rage can build, because you'll never turn it around once that happens. You have to get ahead of it. And we even did role playing, the people from Supportive Housing brought in video cameras, and they said "now knock on the door," because we were going to go in pairs and answer questions, "we'll show you the kind of reaction you might get from a tenant and what you should do." So I went first, knocked on the door, the role-playing person opened the door and said "what kind of a fag lover are you?" Well I had to think, how many kinds are there? The right answer is, you don't answer it, you say I'm here to tell you about Casey House, precautions were taken. You just move on on the positive stuff, you don't answer that kind of nonsense.

In truth, low-income people have greater need for a friendly neighbourhood, and for a healthy community's rich resources than do the rest of us. Survival's very different for marginalized people if they're planted in very small communities where there hasn't been a critical mass of needy people to dry the social supports that they require. Seniors, as we know, must have dependable home care, and help with home maintenance and transportation, all these are things that you put

in your responses. Disabled people need appropriate transit, and there should be more concern about attendant care for disabled people, our son is very disabled and I'm keen on attendant care. People struggling with the trinity of mental illness, addiction and poverty need a lot of social outlets and transportation to get to the awesome number of appointments that they have. They also need institutionalized kindness. I love that Edmonton's mayor declares a Random Acts of Kindness Week, and gets out a list, for those who are challenged, what constitutes acts of kindness. Haven't you seen it? It's a very long list of things you can do to be kind, in case, you know, that you're busy. It's time to be kind to one another and spread the word is a challenge enough in this country, I think it's a splendid idea. But institutionalized kindness, I mean that there are gathering places, and that there are parks, that the space looks kind.

And children need all of the above. Plus a safe place to play. Before I leave that point, how come we have municipal by-laws to determine how many parking places that a new building must provide, but we're silent on the subject of mandating places for children? Are cars more important to us than children? That's a rhetorical question. When I was a child, and maybe when you were a child, children would say to their parents can we go out and play, and the grateful parents said of course. Now only prosperous neighbourhoods hear the sound of children playing. Neighbourhoods dominated by subsidized housing are silent. There you will find the universal token of children's existence, which is usually a dusty lot that has been furnished with a sad set of swings and one small slide, both not quite erect and not a child in sight. The children are inside, in cramped rooms, driving their mothers batty, and going more than a little batty themselves. The London School of Economics did a survey of low-income mothers and asked what they wanted most. Top of the list was play rooms or supervised playgrounds and a nursery school.

And what does your community do for restless teens? Other than arrest them, I mean. Housing rarely considers their needs. A place to do homework, for privacy, for a place to congregate. How about working in the malls, which is where the teens go, I think there are some malls that have done this in Alberta, and there are a few in Ontario, you put programs there, that's where the people are, why aren't there more social programs in malls? With the climate controls they have people there winter and summer. How about tutoring, mass tutoring for teens in the malls? Or a bicycle club, you'll have to figure it out, we're talking prevention here. If those teens can be reattached to society you'll cut down significantly on homeless youth. You don't want a few hundred teenagers standing at intersections with squeegees as Toronto has, as Montreal has. Teenagers who pierce their noses with safety pins, sleep under bridges and have babies. I'm hoping that your imperative, should you decide to establish priorities, would be to stabilize the lives of children. The high mobility of one-parent low-income families is destructive to children since their well-being; it simply is too expensive for society to allow children to be dragged from one poor housing situation to

another, trying to make friends the first few times, but eventually giving up. Their hearts break, and it should be a mortal sin to break a child's heart.

We're all products, not only of our gene pools, but of the kind of care we received at the critical years from birth to age six. The most effective and cheapest way to break the circle of poverty is help newborns. If you wish to argue in economic terms I'm ready for you, there are good statistics out there to prove that the biggest bang for your buck is to invest in zero to six. If there is sympathetic support for high-risk parents, and the respect becomes high quality daycare, kindergartens for, you're not going to have the proportion of social disasters that we see now. Look in the neighbourhoods where these supports for little people do not exist, look at the teens in that neighbourhoods, count the school drop-outs, the early pregnancies, the low birth rate babies, the addictions, the crime, the casual violence, the suicides, the mental illness.

When you talk about housing please do not concentrate only on keeping the elderly in their homes, important as I think that is; or providing homes for people with disabilities, also a key issue; or ending homelessness, that's to be desired; think about children too. Let's see if we could make this a child-centered society, just for one generation, you wouldn't have to do it again, because one generation of children raised properly would raise their children properly. Just take the next 20 years, do it, and reap the benefits forever more. The payoff would be glorious. All those councillors and social workers out of work. All those prisons smaller.

You are the experts, and so you appreciate the need for communities to take a holistic approach to housing. Housing needs are not solved merely by building affordable homes. Part of the answer is taking into serious consideration the unconscionable high child poverty rate in this country. How come that dropped off our agenda? Where did it go? The steepest rise in the country happens to be Ontario. Ninety-nine percent rise in child poverty in the last four years. Don't try and compete. Is the community going to be able to help these children? You're going to need parks and recreation, it takes a neighbourhood, it takes a village. Schools have to have sufficient resources, access to public transit, health services, home care supports, places where people can meet. You can't pick at one piece of the social fabric, whether it is affordable housing, which is a good piece to be picking at, without looking at affordable daycare, with which it's interconnected. Without taking out all the others factors that make the community and it's inhabitants coherent, cooperative, healthy, whole.

And as an aside, isn't your extremely low minimum wage in Alberta responsible, at least in part, for your housing problems? I don't know, just a thought? And it seems to me, from a report that was issued today by the Alberta Family and Social Services, the Edmonton Social Planning Council, the Edmonton Food Bank, that a major cause of the housing crisis in this province isn't the absence of affordable housing, it's the appallingly low, mean-minded shelter allowances and welfare rates.

Allen Wolf wrote a book called "Whose Keeper", and he writes of the individual's personal stake in the fate of others, of the obligation we all have to others, not only because they're human beings like ourselves but because our own happiness is woven, inexorably, with the happiness of others. Joseph Conrad said the same thing, "we exist only in so far as we hang together." Alberta could set a standard of quality of life for the whole country. Your scale is exactly right. You don't have 60,000 homeless as Toronto has, 5,000 of them children. We're told that 12% of Canadians are poorly housed or have no housing at all, that's one in 10. But the ratio in Alberta is not nearly so high. Your income, your economy is booming, you've all got more money in your pockets, I'm told, than anybody else after taxes, than anybody else in the country. People are moving here at the rate of about 30,000 a year. That's not an unmanageable influx.

But here you are this morning because you know time is running out for this lucky province. Your population is aging, like all of Canada's, more and more of your young people are damaged. You must face the carnage among the young, right across the country, because of our neglect of young families. Lots of unskilled workers are looking for jobs in vain, single-parent families are in the most desperate state. Newcomers are being offered fewer supports to help them get started. This is a country which used to give free farms to every newcomer. And aboriginals are either in despair or fury. You see trouble ahead if you don't solve this affordable homes issue, and so you're buckling down today and tomorrow to give it your best, that's a good idea.

And so to conclude, now I can give you one. I'm going to read to you from a dirty book. This book is the most banned book in North America. Since it was written in 1951, it's been banned more than any other, most frequently, of course, in this province. The voice of the book is that of a teenager who's on the existential quest for the meaning of life. The book, which is so often banned, is essentially a work of profound theology. The young man's name is Holden Caulfield. He finds the answer to the question "Why am I on earth?" in a dream that he has over and over again until he gets it. And this has become a mantra for me. Here's his dream, as Holden Caulfield describes it in *Catcher in the Rye* "Anyway, I keep picturing these little kids playing some games in this big field of rye, and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around. Nobody big, I mean, except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff. I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going, I have to catch them. That's all I do all day, I just be the catcher in the rye, and all." In my view, that's your job, that's all our job, all of us. We've got to catch people so they don't go over the cliff. We are all the catcher in the rye. Thank you.