



Eagle's Eye on Housing: Community planning materials for First Nations communities

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A charrette (design workshop), sponsored by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), was held in Gameti Ko, 240 km northwest of Yellowknife in 2004. The objective was to explore issues related to the community's traditional and indivisible ties to the land and their link to the future—the younger generation.

The Gameti Ko workshop continues to be an inspiration to communities wanting change, without sacrificing cultural values. Developing comprehensive community plans requires that dialogue be initiated by the community—particularly elders.

The elders' longer-term ambition for Gameti Ko is to design and build a contemporary housing prototype that evolves out of their traditional knowledge. They also hope that such a prototype will encourage more appropriate community planning.

However, the essence of the project, in the eyes of the elders, is to formally link a modern home, their homeland, and their traditional ways.

This project can only be fully understood in its broader context. It is a response to housing that does not reflect Tlicho culture, in day-to-day use or symbolism. Designed to replicate southern Canadian models, the existing housing stock of Gameti Ko does not provide the people with a real sense of place within their First Nations homeland. In addition, an imported design, provided without consultation, does not engender any sense of propriety.

The workshop has been a tool for developing a framework that directs the project towards realizing the community's vision of sustainable development and cultural continuity. The most practical consequence of the second workshop was a broad definition of the characteristics of a Tlicho house. In the words of the elders, this is a place that is:

- safe for elders and young people.
- where people share food, stories, knowledge, skills.
- where people can observe other people working, so they can learn.
- open enough for people to learn and share stories, languages and skills.
- where people can see and hear each other.
- where both the traditional Dogrib and modern ways can be followed and learned: "Even if young people are doing homework and studying for school—they should be able to hear the Dogrib language, stories and learn Dogrib knowledge and skill. Thus, even if youth are not actually listening to stories they can still hear them."
- peaceful and harmonious.
- comfortable enough to both talk about and solve the problems that family and community face.
- easy for people to work together, both within and around the home.
- flexible, because family is important and children come and stay for periods at a time, as do grandparents and grandchildren.



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- has outside storage, a smoke house, and a place to prepare skins.
- includes log construction and is made from local resources.
- has at least two doors, one for the meat to come through and another for menstruating women to use; this latter door should be at the back, near the bathroom and away from the meat.
- is part of the environment, with easy access between the interior and outside.

The land we live on is our home.
Madeleine Drybones, 1996

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“Processes that are driven by the community, for the community are most effective at achieving positive change. That’s why the comprehensive community planning process is inclusive and represents the perspectives of all members, whether they reside within or outside the community. All members of the community, including elders, youth, and family representatives, can offer unique and valuable perspectives on community needs, values and priorities.

A comprehensive community plan addresses key planning areas, all of which are interrelated and interdependent: governance, land and resources, health, infrastructure development, culture, social issues, and the economy. Consideration of all key planning areas through one unified process defines community planning as a holistic and integrated exercise that can lead to sustainable development.”

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