

PANEL: Considerations for Housing – May 1, 2025

Welcome everyone and thank you for attending today's session on 'Considerations for Housing.' During the panel, we will focus on the key questions that homeowners and income property owners can consider when either renting out a home, a portion of their homes or room, or adding a secondary suite or rental unit to their property.

We are lucky to have a well-rounded panel consisting of several folks familiar with the different elements of renting planning, housing development, financing, and town bylaw considerations:

Martin Beck – Town Planner, Yarmouth

Murielle Toole - Secondary & Backyard Suite Program/RRAP – NS Growth & Development

Daniel VanderKruk - 468 Main Street Jail conversion to 8 apts

Serge McCauley – Maltais Homes

Kevin Russell – Executive Director – RHPNS

To kick things off, we have some prepared questions for each panel member, though I will invite *anyone on the panel* to join in if they have something to add. I'll ask that everyone hold their questions until the end as we have additional time during the Q&A or you can chat with the folks here on the panel in the room afterwards.

So, let's get started. We know that housing is a community issue. How do we know that? I can say from personal experience that it is affecting my family, friends, colleagues and with three teenagers graduating high school in the next 3 years, certainly our children. This session is aimed at folks interested in adding housing to their community, whether in your home or as an additional unit on your property, so let's get started. s

Before we even think about any financial considerations, it's important to know what you can do with what you have! So, our first question is going to **Martin**, Town Planner here in Yarmouth:

- 1) **Martin**, what are the Town Land Use Bylaw, Building Code and Permits to consider for addition of a secondary suite in your home, backyard suite or additional dwelling units?
 - a. Additional units in existing homes:
 - i. Speak to your consultant/professional or reach out to TOY building officials regarding building code. Top items:
 - ii. Speak about TOY regulations on additional units in existing homes
 - iii. Regulation allows for up to 2 units per building
 - b. Backyard suites:
 - i. Limitations on size, mechanicals, egress

2) What about safety?

- a. The existing building condition is often subject to interpretation. Compliance with building and fire code is critical to consider before getting started.

Next, we will move to financial considerations as that tends to be the number one question we hear, so the second question will go to **Murielle**:

- 1) This area has several large homes with additional space and rooms and there is certainly demand. **Murielle**: What programs does the province offer that homeowners can consider before deciding to rent out their property?

Rental Repair Rehabilitation Assistance Program

- a) Answer – Rental RRAP is a forgivable loan program offered to landlords renting to nonrelatives to repair an existing rental unit. It provides up to \$24,000.00 per unit towards repairs identified by the DGD inspector.
- b) Successful applicants must be renting or planning to rent to tenants with incomes within our program requirements and not charge over median market rent; see chart below.
- c) **Income** levels per occupied bedroom

Regions	1 Bedroom	2 Bedrooms	3 Bedrooms	
Western	\$62,500	\$73,000	\$84,500	

- d) **Rent** maximums per occupied bedrooms (includes utility costs)

Regions	1 Bedroom	2 Bedrooms	3 Bedrooms	
Western Region	\$1,312.5	\$1,500	\$1,762.5	

- e) Additional assistance is also available for tenants with disabilities. Modification must be related to housing and reasonably related to the occupant's current disability.
- f) The landlord must agree to the terms above for 15 years before funding is approved.
- g) If the forgivable loan exceeds \$25,000.00, a lean will be registered against the property. Otherwise, if the loan is less than \$25,000.00 only a promissory note will be required.

What about adding a secondary suite?

Secondary & Backyard Suites

- a) The Secondary & Backyard Suite Incentive Program is available to eligible homeowners who plan to build a housing unit within their primary residence or on the property of their primary residence. Homeowners may receive up to 50% of the eligible project costs, to a maximum of \$40,000. Homeowners that continue to live in their primary residence and meet the tenant eligibility requirements over the 5-year term of the loan do not need to repay the loan.
 - b) There are two different streams on who can live in the suit. There is the Supportive Stream where a related senior or disabled person can live in the suit and an Affordable Stream, renting to tenants with incomes within our program requirements and charging rent within our program requirements.
- 2) **What about renting a bedroom out in my house? Can I do it? Also, can I put a kitchen in it?**
- a) **Murielle:** if you want to convert a home into a rooming house, we do have some funding for that. The funding is based on renovating or repairing an existing home and should have 3 or more bedrooms to qualify. The funding is a maximum of \$16,000 per bedroom; covers the same thing as RRAP regarding structural, electrical, plumbing, OH&S.
 - b) Rooming houses generally have a shared kitchen and that could be considered as a part of the project.
 - c) **Martin:** by-law martin to send answer.
- 3) **Murielle: What about considerations on what should be included in rent?**
- a) For the DGD programs the rent plus utilities cannot surpass the program maximums. Rent maximums differ per program. The utilities include water, power and heat, the utilities can be included in the rent, but it is not necessary if the rent plus the utilities do not exceed the program maximums.

Renter Needs, Rent Levels

So now we know some of the considerations for your property before you get started. We know there is a ton of demand in this space – from folks renting seasonally to year-round and from renting single rooms to multi-generational living needing several bedrooms. For this next question, we will turn to **Kevin Russell** from the Rental Housing Providers Association of NS. I have a few questions for Kevin on what it means to be a successful landlord and how to protect yourself:

1) Let's say folks here are interested in providing rental housing, either in their homes or via a backyard suite... what are the top considerations when thinking about becoming a landlord?

a) Speak to the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA):

- A thorough understanding of the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) is essential to becoming a successful rental housing provider.
- Once money is exchanged for accommodations — whether someone is renting a couch, a room, a backyard suite, or a basement apartment — you are legally considered a landlord,

and the individual becomes a tenant protected under the RTA, even if they are a family member.

b) Insurance (Owner/Tenant):

- Property owners must notify their insurance provider of the change in use of their property. Failure to do so could void existing residential coverage, as rental activity increases risk exposure.
- Tenant insurance is strongly recommended — and often required by insurers — as it can help cover damages caused by tenant negligence, which could otherwise result in costly repairs for the landlord.

c) Rental Agreements:

- A written rental agreement is highly recommended. However, even without a written agreement, accepting payment for accommodations constitutes a legal rental agreement under the RTA.
- The Residential Tenancies Standard Lease is available on the Residential Tenancies website and should be used as the basis for all tenancy agreements.

d) Vacant Possession

- The vacant possession process under the RTA begins with submitting the appropriate application (commonly a “Form J”) to the Director of Residential Tenancies.
- The landlord must serve the application using an approved method of delivery, request a mediation hearing, and submit all supporting evidence related to the statutory condition that was breached.
- A Residential Tenancies Officer (RTO) will issue a decision within approximately two weeks following the hearing.
- Either party has 10 days to appeal the decision to the Nova Scotia Small Claims Court, which will hold a new hearing and issue its decision within two weeks.
- If the tenant does not vacate after a lawful vacant possession order is issued, a sheriff must be contacted to enforce the order. The entire process can take 6 to 9 months from start to finish.

2) How can property owners effectively screen tenants to ensure they select reliable renters?

- Conduct landlord and employment reference checks, obtain a credit report, and consider reviewing public social media profiles to get a fuller picture of the applicant.
- Keep in mind that certain personal questions are prohibited under human rights legislation — you may not ask about age, gender identity, health status, or hobbies.
- Tenant selection must be based on the applicant’s ability to pay rent and the results of reference and credit checks.

3) What should property owners do to set clear and fair rental agreements that protect both themselves and their tenants?

- In addition to the Standard Lease, landlords should attach completed Schedule C and D forms. These schedules outline “Landlord Rules” and list applicable “Amenities.”
- All rules must be fair, reasonable, and applied consistently to all tenants if multiple units are being rented. It is not permissible to apply different rules to different tenants within the same property.

Examples:

- **Permitted Rules:** No smoking of tobacco, cannabis, or vaping on the premises. Tenant Insurance upon signing and provide the insurance renewal on the lease's anniversary date.
- **Prohibited Rule:** Assigning scheduled use times for kitchens or laundry facilities.

4) Do I have to set up a business to be a landlord?

- No, setting up a formal business is not required to become a landlord.
- However, all rental income must be reported to the Canada Revenue Agency using **CRA Form T776: Statement of Real Estate Rentals**.

5) How can I determine the right rent pricing to maximize income while remaining competitive in the market?

- a) Who is your targeted tenant?
- b) Market survey.
- c) Determine Costs.
- d) Determine cost increases/rent control and any funding agreements.

Contractor & Quote Considerations

Alright, that was a lot of information. Now that we have an idea about what we can do, how we can finance it and what folks are looking for, let's consider this from a builder's perspective. Joining us today, we have **Serge McCauley**, next questions are to you:

1. For folks who are interested in backyard suites, what provides the best return on investment for rental properties in terms of what you offer?

- a) In terms of return on investment, the ability of the property owner to leverage existing services from the main suite can greatly reduce the total required investment.
- b) Selecting a modular/prefabricated home can also eliminate some of the costs related to design and planning compared to a traditional on-site build as structural plans and floor plans have already been designed to meet the national building code as well as all mechanical and electrical codes. All our models also include engineered concrete foundation plans that the customer can provide directly to their concrete contractor. Choosing a modular home also eliminates any potential surprises or cost increases throughout the build process as the designs and plans are not new. It can also reduce any timeline delays such as weather.
- c) The quality of materials used in the construction of the unit are also a key component that can ensure that the investment provides a long-term return by avoiding costly repairs and maintenance.
- d) We currently have 3 Models available including a Bachelor, 1-Bedroom and a 2-Bedroom. 1 of the 3 modules will typically meet the demands of most investors looking at backyard suites as they can be suitable for single tenants, elderly singles or couples, young couples and small families.

e) For investors who are looking to maximize their return on investment, our 2-bedroom model would provide a higher rental income and a lower cost per sq.ft.

2. If someone is interested in building a backyard suite, where can they get started?

a) The first step would be to contact the Town of Yarmouth in order to determine things such as the required lot size, the current zoning and existing services capacity.

b) Another step would be to determine the goal of the build. Who is the target tenant and what are their needs. It is also important to consider what the future use of the unit may be. A 2-bedroom unit can expand the market size of potential renters compared to a 1-bedroom or bachelor unit in the future.

c) Once the goals have been determined, a budget should be outlined. Investors should then work with their bank to determine if they have availability to access equity in the main home, how they can fund the downpayment and the timing of when funds will be required to get the project to completion.

d) Quotes should be requested for all aspects of the project.

e) Investors should also contact grant providers to determine if they can qualify for any grants or interest-free loans.

f) The final steps include determining project timelines for each step such as site work, utility services, foundation, construction and delivery of the unit.

3. How long does it take you to build one of these homes once the permitting and specifications have been determined?

a) It typically takes 4-6 weeks to fully complete the unit once the customer has determined their desired finishes and specifications.

4. How have you or your clients incorporated energy efficiency programing, grants and rebates into your builds?

a) Backyard suite grant program – A few customers awaiting delivery this summer that have leveraged the backyard suites program for family members.

b) Energy Forward New Homes – 2 bedroom model would qualify based on sq.ft. Currently in the process of energy modeling to meet requirements.

Building Conversions

Something that I've been seeing more and more in the affordable housing space is the conversion of existing properties into housing; from municipal properties such as schools and community

centres to faith buildings and even large Victorian houses. Someone here who is familiar with that space is **Daniel VanderKruk**, who has acquired and plans to convert the old main street jail into housing, among other things.

1. Daniel: Do you believe that retrofitting older buildings is a viable solution for meeting modern energy efficiency standards, or should we focus on new builds?

- a) I absolutely believe that retrofitting older buildings is not only viable but incredibly important when it comes to meeting today's energy efficiency standards.
- b) In the past, we've often torn down existing structures without recognizing the historical significance or architectural value they hold. So many of these buildings have been part of the community for decades; they tell stories, hold memories, and reflect craftsmanship that's hard to replicate.
- c) There's also real material and design worth in these older buildings. With a growing focus on sustainability, I see immense value in reusing and repurposing what we already have. It's both environmentally responsible and deeply respectful to the communities these buildings belong to.
- d) For me, the opportunity to inject new efficiency technologies into existing infrastructure is really exciting. It's a way to bring innovation and tradition together in a way that feels both modern and meaningful.
- e) I truly believe that blending the old with the new creates something special, something that adds depth, character, and lasting value to our communities.

2. What about backyard suites? We have seen a lot of movement towards modular housing for this type of rental unit. Daniel, from an infrastructure, cost, and timing perspective, what does that look like for you?

- a) I'm a big supporter of modular housing, especially when it comes to backyard suites. These types of units offer a smart, flexible way to create more housing options spaces where people can live independently while still feeling connected to the community.
- b) I see it as a form of living with purpose. Not only do these suites create opportunities for multigenerational living or community-based rentals, but they also empower homeowners. For many, it's a way to offset mortgage costs or take their first step into the real estate market as landlords. For new homeowners, it can be a meaningful part of achieving their financial goals.
- c) Of course, there are some key considerations like connecting the suite to existing septic and water systems, which can impact both cost and timing. But overall, modular backyard units are a powerful solution to help meet growing housing needs in a way that's both efficient and community-focused.
- d) I believe this approach should be encouraged not just by community leaders and policymakers, but also by homeowners themselves. It's a practical and forward-thinking way to contribute to the housing landscape.

Local Policy & Incentives

What is the good news from Yarmouth? We'll go back to **Martin Beck**, Yarmouth Town planner for this one:

1. **Martin:** What is the Town of Yarmouth doing to make this process easier to navigate?
 1. **Zoning** Not just about the building, also water/sewer/electrical. TOY in process of rewriting land use bylaw and making it easier, also simplify requirements like height and setbacks. Get in touch with NSP as soon as possible, especially with things like solar.
 2. **Permitting** with the right zoning, you need dev & building permit, also final inspection and issuance of occupancy permits. **Serge speak about how prefabricated homes can help since all the inspections are done.**
 3. **Resources** information on townofyarmouth.ca but to obtain context specific information, it's easier to call our office or any office in the area.
 2. **Are you aware of any other incentives, financial or otherwise for homeowners or property owners to help incentivize affordable housing?**
 1. Efficiency NS
 2. Provincial – backyard suites
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Conclusion

I'd love to thank everyone on the panel today for their thoughts. Before we go, I'd like to open up the floor for 5-10 minutes for those burning questions that the audience might have.

- Time for questions

And that's all the time we have for today. Let's give a big round of applause for our panel who has come here today give you their insightful considerations on how to build a more vibrant Yarmouth!