

# Housing Strategies for Immigrants in Rural Southern Manitoba

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The *Housing Strategies for Immigrants in Rural Southern Manitoba* report focuses on the need for housing for immigrants settling in small rural centres and options small centres can pursue to provide this housing.

Between the years 2000-2009 approximately 19,000 immigrants and refugees arriving in Manitoba settled initially in centres outside of Winnipeg. Some centres have also been the destination of temporary foreign workers who fill jobs in meat processing plants and other industries. These new arrivals help revitalize local communities, fill labour force shortages and bring new investment to communities. They also generate a demand for housing. The housing options they need are not always available in small rural centres. Adequate, affordable housing is essential to their successful settlement, integration, and retention.

Most of the immigrants who settle in rural Manitoba arrive under the Provincial Nominee Program. Many are families with children. These newcomers have good education and skill levels, most have full time jobs and earn reasonable incomes. In the first couple of years they often look for rental housing as they get settled and established. The objective of most immigrants over the long term, however, is to own a home. In most small centres rental vacancy rates are very low and there are few three bedroom rental units available that the large families need. There are often very few modestly priced homes for sale.

Rural centres have to find ways to provide housing for the new arrivals. The study suggests two broad strategies are required:

- Larger rural centres that are the destination of significant numbers of immigrants and have a long term sustainable demand (Winkler, Steinbach, and Morden, for example) need to add new units. Some of these units have to be rental projects but affordable ownership units are also required.
- Smaller rural communities with lower levels of demand that may not be sustainable over long periods of time should work to repair and rehabilitate existing units or convert existing commercial and institutional buildings to residential units. Rental projects, if they are developed, should be small projects, perhaps ten units or less.

The study provides information on a range of housing approaches and activities that both larger and smaller rural centres can consider in their efforts to meet the housing needs of immigrants arriving in the community. Some of the general approaches the report covers include the following:

- Repair of older homes;
- Conversion of commercial or institutional buildings to residential units;
- Development of secondary suites and accessory apartments;
- Zoning changes to facilitate the development of housing;
- Development of new affordable rental and ownership housing;



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- Production of modular housing;
- Tax incentives;
- Trust funds;
- Exploring alternate development standards;
- Development of housing and community development strategies; and,
- Housing information and educational programs.

The report highlights the various roles that communities, other levels of government, the private sector, and local citizens can play. It also provides case studies from selected communities.

The report emphasizes the importance for all centres to assess needs and develop a housing strategy. This requires a committee to play a leadership role, develop partnerships with relevant organizations, various levels of government, builders and developers, conduct community consultations, and determine the type of housing needs and set priorities. Often the housing demand in some centres is generated by jobs and investment in nearby communities. This necessitates the need for regional strategies. All centres should also work to ensure that the housing provided for immigrants is flexible enough to meet local needs. Immigrant housing demand is not always permanent demand, particularly for rental housing.

Communities have to assess their needs and develop options that best suit these needs. There is no “one size fits all” approach.

For more information:

[www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/HousingStrategiesForImmigrantsInRuralMB.pdf](http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/HousingStrategiesForImmigrantsInRuralMB.pdf)

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