



Adult Independent Residence (AIR)

Background

AIR is based on needs and objectives identified by an umbrella committee of parents of ASD individuals in the Calgary area called the Aspires Housing Group. The families want an autonomous living unit with strong community and social integration and group amenities. Most of these higher functioning individuals do not qualify for provincial disability funding and their families represent a wide range of financial circumstances. A summary document with an action plan is currently being developed by a subgroup focusing solely on establishing *a sustainable independent community residence for high functioning adults with ASD*.

Description

A multi-unit residence is envisioned that will provide independent units for ASD residents, integrated with market rent units for the general population, that will provide social and community engagement for highly independent ASD individuals who might otherwise be isolated and non-social. There is a possibility of building an entirely new structure, but doing so in Calgary usually requires going out of the inner core which is where optimal services such as transit are located. It is more likely that AIR will renovate an existing structure such as motel, condo, and student dormitory or seniors residence. If an existing structure is identified, it will require evaluation by an advisory panel including a builder, architect, engineer, and property manager as needed.

To provide the weekly support required for the ASD tenants and to foster community interaction, a concierge will receive free rent in the residence. The cost of the concierge unit will be included in the capital cost of the building. The revenue from the market rental units will provide a sustainable financial basis for ongoing support to the ASD tenants. The exact expectations of the concierge will be specified in the terms of their occupancy agreement but they will include areas where ASD tenants require light support, e.g., medical, financial, vocational/employment, nutritional, social needs.

Size and Amenities

It is anticipated that a ratio of one concierge apartment to five ASD tenants will be successful but this ratio will be determined and fine-tuned in a pilot project. For example, in a pilot project of a 24 unit building, there will be 11 ASD residents and 1 concierge unit, leaving 12 for market rentals. To facilitate social interaction among all the residents it is important that plans include common facilities such as a meeting room, kitchen, and lounge area with entertainment equipment, and laundry facilities. The common area kitchen might include a dining room, for which residents could subscribe to a meal plan. A mix of bachelor, one bedroom and two bedroom units will be determined by studying market demand and the support needs of the tenants. For example, those needing more care might

require a two bedroom unit to accommodate a supportive roommate in addition to the light support provided by the concierge. The concierge unit will be a two bedroom unit to be suitable for either an individual or a family.

Location

Ideally the building will be located with access to public transportation as well as being walking distance from banking, retail, food services, library, community centre, and medical services. Although it is likely that relatively few of the ASD residents will have cars, parking spaces will be required for all the market rental units, the concierge unit, and a few of the ASD residents. While families of the ASD residents will want to be within close proximity, location should be determined by the needs and desires of the residents since the families will not be in the picture forever. Consideration can also be given for aging in place, and in fact senior's housing developments may be potential partners in the future.

Qualifications for Tenancy

A Tenancy Qualifications policy will be developed as part of the Project Concept document that will be used for financing, development, marketing, and operating the project. The Tenancy Qualifications policy will address at least the following:

1. Disability criteria which would not necessarily be exclusive to ASD;
2. Minimum and maximum dependency criteria;
3. Criteria and procedures for voluntary or obligatory withdrawal from residency;
4. Special considerations for unique needs of residents.

The market rate tenants will be expected to understand and embrace the goals and objectives of AIR so a careful screening and orientation process will be put in place.

Financing

In the absence of government rent subsidies, the rental rates for the ASD tenants will be targeted to be 30% of income to be subsidized by the market rental rates of the other tenants, as well as possible retail and commercial rental. While 50% market units would be ideal, the pilot will have to determine the feasibility of this ratio; however, it is modeled after existing low income housing developments in the Calgary market (e.g., Norfolk Housing) which use a 50% model.

Financing will be by private equity and debt financing (not government-subsidized or assisted other than conventional Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or equivalent residential mortgage insurance). But the financing will be designed to allow tenants to qualify for government rent where applicable. Seed equity capital will be provided by foundations or other Social Impact Investors supporting this project's objectives, and/or individual investors who may or may not have children or other family members who may become residents of the facility.

Life leases will be used for security of tenure and long term tenant stability. Depending on financial capability a family, using a life lease, can purchase the right to occupy an apartment at a fixed rate (not including occupancy costs) in perpetuity. Rental rates would depend on the amount of the initial investment relative to the cost of the unit with the initial portion of the life lease apportioned to a percentage of the concierge unit. Life lease units could be sublet if the individual are not able to occupy a unit but would

reserve the right to reoccupy at a later time space permitting. Life leases can be resold for the original purchase price. (The property owner would benefit from any capital gains over the time of ownership.)

Equity investors should expect a competitive return and will be free to sell their holdings on a right of first refusal to the other shareholders. Individual investors are entitled to a first right of tenancy, including a right to sublease to a qualified candidate, in each case only for their family members who otherwise qualify as tenants. There will be no direct ownership or title to specific units, as in a condominium structure, but rather equity in the entire project will be proportional to the investor's commitment. A qualifying tenant will **not** have to provide equity to participate and there could be any number of shareholders with variable financial investment.

Ownership and governance

The project will be privately owned by individual investors functioning as a not-for-profit or for-profit corporation, partnership, joint venture or other entity that meets the financing, investment, sustainability, and social objectives of the AIR Project. A for-profit structure might be preferable for tax considerations but would be controlled by the goals and objectives of the corporate charter. A small board of directors will provide oversight and a reputable property manager will be engaged who will give priority to ASD tenants for employment opportunities at the Project.

Conclusion

The Adult Independent Residence will be a stable, financially viable solution to some of the issues facing those with ASD who need only weekly support. Community integration, social interaction, independent space, communal facilities, and variable financial profiles can all be accommodated by this innovative model. To prove the efficacy, measurable criteria will be developed so that future developments can benefit from the pilot, for example;

- financial performance,
- tenant satisfaction,
- support parameters,
- sustainability,
- scale
- community integration

The AIR Model will proceed in a step-by-step manner, beginning with a pilot project of a repurposed 12-unit facility. Inevitably, some of the features of the model will change with time and experience, but the overall goal will remain the same: to provide a safe and secure community for our high functioning ASD adults to live relatively independent lives.