Reception House Information

Background

In 1984, with the financial support of the Canadian Progress Club Regina Wascana and the program delivery authorization of the then Employment and Immigration Canada, RODS purchased and established the first Reception House in Canada. Located at 2024 Toronto Street, across from the then designated ESL school, Thompson School, the Reception House provided a warm home like atmosphere for arriving refugee families.

In 1988 the Board of Directors of RODS purchased a second reception house, the current Reception House located at 1610 Toronto Street. This new facility would provide 5 separately demised suites and accommodate greater numbers of government assisted refugees within a home like setting.

The initial Reception House at 2024 Toronto Street then shifted into the role as a client drop in centre, but that centre was shut down due to low uptake. RODS rented out the home for several months but did not have a great experience as a landlord.

The Board expressed a desire to sell the house but a sale would be challenging. The rear addition to the house had major engineering issues, with the addition and main home separating. After unsuccessful attempts to sell the home, the former owner Adolph Howorko, (to whom RODS still owed money to for the home) agreed to take back ownership of the home and assume the main mortgage with the then Bank of Nova Scotia.

Funding Model

The funding model for the Reception House up to 2001 was based on the number of clients living in a suite at a set daily rate (increasing based on number of clients), with a flat monthly fee kicking in after the first 30 days. IRCC was invoiced based on these rates with the understanding that clients would be moved into permanent accommodation as soon as possible.

RODS furnished the suites and did at times receive special allocations from IRCC to replace damaged furniture or make repairs for unanticipated damages to the suites. All renovations, repairs and utilities were paid out of the revenue that was accrued from the daily rate per client model. Under this model the Reception House generated significant income for the organization, allowing it to manage the maintenance and liability of ownership.

At some point between 2001 and 2018, IRCC changed the funding model of the Reception House. The previous billing model based on client number and days of occupancy in a suite was replaced with a monthly flat fee with IRCC paying for utilities. The current monthly flat fee is $2,200.00 per month, totalling $26,400 annually. This monthly rate is not based on occupancy. IRCC will provide special funding for furniture replacement. Property taxes for 1610 Toronto Street are currently $4,000.00 per year.

Since the opening of the current Reception House, there has been an arrangement to have a member of staff reside permanently in the house, providing security, cleaning and routine maintenance. Getachew Woldeyesus has lived in a basement suite of the house for 32 years. He no longer provides maintenance or cleaning but provides onsite security and lives there rent free in exchange for his presence in the facility.

Maintenance and Renovations

With up to 200 clients living in the facility within a 12 month period, the suites and building experience accelerated wear and tear. This, combined with the age of the home, necessitates ongoing maintenance and repair.

Currently, the annual flat fee received from IRCC has been used to take care of essential repairs and maintenance, but it is insufficient to fund major renovations.

In 2018, I assisted Settlement in the renovation of the small suites at the back of the house, the flat fee was used to renovate the 2 suites. There were additional costs incurred when asbestos was found in testing the ceiling materials prior to demolition.

Currently, the 2 large suites at the front of the home require extensive renovations including new kitchens, flooring, bathrooms, ceilings, light fixtures and paint. In addition, the rear stairwell of the Reception House is very steep with short stairs and should be replaced.

In addition, the 2 basement suites and shared bathroom are in need of some repair, with one suite currently in need of repairs from a non-insurable 2nd floor bathroom water leak.

The exterior of the house requires major patching of the stucco and repainting, as well as painting/repairs of the window frames and possible replacement of the aluminium windows.

While we would need to receive 3 quotes for the work, based on previous work done the cost to get the interior work done on the 2 larger suites would well exceed $50,000.00.

The house had a large backyard with playground equipment for children but this has since been converted to an enclosed gated parking compound for Settlement's vehicles.

In 2018 RODS was asked to identify any capital needs it may have by the congregation of Whitmore Park United Church given the pending sale of the property. RODS did submit a detailed request of capital needs for both the Reception House and 1855 Smith Street and received a non-designated general donation of approximately $50,000. Based on discussions with Darcy and the Settlement Team it was proposed that this donation, subject to Board approval, be used for some of the repairs and renovations to the Reception House.

A detailed analysis of the operating costs for the Reception House will need to be done along with detailed estimates of costs to complete repairs and renovations to the facility.

Update – February 2022

Since the November Board meeting efforts have been focussed on the required repairs and reopening of the Reception House based on the expectations outlined in the contract with IRCC.

As mentioned in January, we determined that the repairs from the 2nd floor leak were minimal and undertook to have those repairs completed. When the house re-opens a staff person will reside in one of the smaller main or second floor suites given that basement suite usually occupied by Getachew is still in need of repair from water damage and is not ready for occupancy. We are in the process of reviewing and updating all of the smoke detectors and installing Carbon Monoxide detectors in the facility. We will need to continue to operate the Reception House pending a final decision on the future of the facility.

I have requested estimates on the cost to complete the outstanding renovations to the house and anticipate having one estimate in time for the board meeting in February.

In discussions with the Director and Senior Manager in Settlement, we have learned that other RAP agencies in Saskatchewan, with the exception of unanticipated large numbers of GAR arrivals, have moved away from commercial/hotel accommodation for their GAR arrivals and are leasing homes in the community. This lease of homes in the community is paid for within their existing RAP agreements.

In those same discussions with the Settlement team, I requested a meeting with the IRCC RAP Program Officer to discuss the current situation with the Reception House. We do not have a date set yet for this meeting. The goal of this meeting will be to determine IRCCs possible position on the following:

- RODS ceasing operation of the current Reception House and exploring other possible owned alternatives.
- RODS ceasing operation and moving to exclusively utilize leased residential accommodation similar to other RAP providers in the province.

As mentioned previously, RODS source of revenue for the Reception House is a contribution that comes from IRCC in the RAP contract, $2,200 a month totalling $26,400 a year. These funds are transferred into the Sundry account and are to be used to cover the cost of renovations and repairs.

Monthly operating costs (utilities), cleaning and basic maintenance and client related occupancy items are paid for by the IRCC RAP contract directly regardless of client occupancy. In the 2020/21 fiscal year $60,000 was provided through the RAP agreement for these operating costs (utilities), cleaning and basic maintenance and client related occupancy. Year to date $38,000 has been provided through the RAP agreement and expensed for above same operating and basic costs.

In 2020/21 there were no planned renovations or repairs made to the Reception House, and in the current fiscal year, year to date, approximately $8,500 has been spent on repairs to the Reception House.