

Attention News Editors:

Sustainable Community Development To Help Improve Housing for Aboriginals living on reserve

VANCOUVER, BC, April 16 /CNW/ - The Seabird Island First Nation today celebrated the official opening of the Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community Development Project in Agassiz. This unique development, a partnership between the Government of Canada, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Seabird Island First Nation, demonstrates an innovative approach to improving housing and community development for Aboriginals living on reserve in Canada.

The Honourable Stephen Owen, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, announced the federal contributions. "Working in partnership with First Nations communities is a priority of the new government. This project will provide individual First Nations people with improved quality, energy efficient housing by integrating renewable energy sources while remaining affordable," said Minister Owen. "This initiative also works toward meeting Canada's commitment to the Kyoto Accord."

For the first time, renewable technologies including wind generation, solar and geo-thermal heating, Healthy Housing,™ FlexHousing,™ rainscreen technology and sustainable community planning have been brought together to create housing that is cutting edge and sustainable. The homes are expected to last 100 years. Reduced maintenance, lower heating and electricity cost savings can be realized over the lifetime of the project because of the advanced technology.

"We have - like many other First Nation communities - experienced numerous challenges to providing healthy, affordable and durable housing for our members. This project has provided us with a unique opportunity to incorporate our traditions but in a modern way to meet our housing needs," said Marcie Peters, Seabird Island First Nation Council, Housing Portfolio. "For example, the flexibility of the design reflects the traditional way we lived, it allows for our families to be unified within one structure yet provides independence and private living space. The earth tubes and radiant floor heating and cooling system is far from new technology; in fact, our ancestors knew this and built their pit homes in-ground where it was cool in the summer and warm in the winter," she added.

There are 629 First Nation communities across Canada, with 198 located in British Columbia. First Nations people are the fastest growing segment of Canada's population and INAC forecasts First Nations community populations could grow three per cent annually to almost 509,000 by 2008, creating greater demands for new housing.

Seabird Island First Nation, a member of the Sto:lo Nation, is one of the largest First Nation in the Fraser Valley. Since 1975, the registered membership of the band has more than doubled from 316 to 720 members. The band was selected for this project because of site accessibility to major transportation routes, their commitment to sustainable development and their in-house construction capabilities (all seven units were built by the band).

The Government of Canada, through CMHC and INAC, will be contributing more than \$1.1 million towards this sustainable development partnership. Of this amount, CMHC, through its On-Reserve Housing Program, will be contributing \$667,175 in lifetime subsidies over the project's 25-year mortgage to keep the housing affordable. This program, which helps First Nations construct, purchase, rehabilitate and administer affordable housing on reserve, has a portfolio of more than 23,000 homes on-reserve across Canada of which 5,200 are in BC. CMHC also provided a direct loan of \$624,097 to the Seabird Island First Nation as well as an additional \$200,000 in funding for the demonstration component of the project.

In addition, INAC contributed \$280,000 towards this project which included \$2,000 through the Aboriginal and Northern Climate Change Program, jointly administered by INAC and Natural Resources Canada. The demonstration unit was also funded through the generous contribution of over 20 private sector companies and other government agencies who contributed over \$170,000 by reducing the costs of products and services or donating them in full (see attached list for details).

Backgrounder follows.

BACKGROUND

The Seabird Island Project is part of the Seabird Island First Nation's Sustainable Community Plan. The idea behind sustainable community planning is to use land and design neighbourhoods in a way that reduces costs and minimizes environmental impacts, while creating a liveable community - both now and well into the future. The basic features to a sustainable community development were met by using CMHC's FlexHousing(TM) and Healthy Housing(TM) design concepts. In Canada, CMHC is the leading researcher in Healthy Housing(TM) and FlexHousing(TM) and we used our research and expertise to help Seabird Island First Nation and Broadway Architects create a sustainable design. In summary, the Seabird Island homes are designed to be:

- Affordable - affordable to build, operate and maintain (base unit cost of these homes is approximately \$75.00/sq. foot). The homes were also built within the guidelines of CMHC's On Reserve Non-Profit Housing Program which is designed to provide for affordable housing.
- Durable - they use high quality materials with a long lifespan and construction techniques that will reduce future maintenance and repair problems. For example, the project uses mold resistant drywall, Tvek's Supro roofing membrane (used for the first time in North America) and other weatherization products for weather resistant buildings, a metal roof (also collects solar heat) and a rainscreen wall system to keep water out. The homes are forecast to last 100 years.
- Energy efficient - their design integrates renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and earth energy to save on heating and lighting

costs. The high performance building envelope, combined with renewable energy systems, is expected to reduce energy usage by 75% from a typical home. The three wind generators (of which one is being use for the first time in the world) provide about 15% of the total energy required for the homes.

- Flexible - they use flexible floor plans and barrier-free designs to accommodate the changing needs of families, Elders and persons with disabilities. For example, if the need arises each unit in the triplex, and each single detached home, can be easily converted into two self-contained suites to create more housing as needed. The main floor of the demonstration unit has a large wheelchair-accessible shower, lower light switches and wider doorways for barrier-free access.
- Healthy - they use healthy building materials, have superior indoor air quality and are more comfortable to live in. For example, the project uses include formaldehyde free insulation and kitchen cabinets and countertops, concrete and hardwood flooring and ultra low VOC paints.
- Environmentally responsible - they conserve resources, use recycled materials and have a low environmental impact. For example, the project uses Altwood Synthetic Lumber (made from recycled plastic), BC Hydro and Telus recycled power poles for use in the structural elements inside and outside the homes, compact florescents and low-e argon windows, water efficient plumbing, a rain water collection system and a high efficiency hot water heating system.
- Community oriented - they reflect the preferences, culture and needs of the community. For example, the seven homes in the project were built in a semi-circular pattern surrounding a healing herb garden, which features locally carved totem poles and a wind turbine representing the colours of the medicine wheel and the Sto:lo Nation. All seven units were also built by the Seabird Island Band's own construction crew.

FUNDING CONTRIBUTORS

The Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community Demonstration Project demonstrates how the public and private sectors are working together to improve housing for Aboriginal people.

Partners

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Seabird Island First Nation

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For further information: Photographs of the project will be posted on our website at www.cmhc.ca. For more information, contact: Val Rosenthal, Marketing and Communications Consultant, CMHC BC and Yukon Region, Tel: 604-737-4123 or Cel: 604-202-2609; Wendy Phair, Capital Housing Manager, Seabird Island Band, Tel: (604) 796-6818



Panoramic view of the seven new homes in the Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community Demonstration Project. (CANADA NEWSWIRE PHOTO/Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation)
