



CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

PROJECT PROFILE

Stony Mountain Plaza

Wood Buffalo, Alberta



Stony Mountain Plaza opened in 2011 with 125 affordable housing units in Fort McMurray, in a municipality that has the highest rents and the second highest real estate prices in Canada. Developed by Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation (WBHDC), the new housing features innovative modular

Highlights

Located in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in northern Alberta, Stony Mountain Plaza's 125 housing units rent for about 20 per cent less than the market rate. Its innovative modular construction and heating systems helped to address some of the challenges of building in a remote community.

Client group: Lower-income singles, families

Developer: Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation

Number of units: 125

Tenure: Rental

Who was involved? Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation, Province of Alberta, CMHC

construction and a geothermal heating system that helped address some of the challenges of building in a northern community.

The Affordable Housing Solution

At over 68,000 square kilometres, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is the second largest municipality in Canada. It is also growing at more than 7 per cent a year, with the 2011

population of 103,000 expected to triple by 2030. Such growth is due to the oil industry, which is attracting workers in unprecedented numbers to this northeastern corner of Alberta. But while jobs are plentiful, affordable housing is in short supply.

"The oil industry will fly workers in and out of Wood Buffalo from all over the world because there's a shortage of available housing in the region," said

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Bryan Lutes, president of WBHDC, a subsidiary of the municipality. “We think it’s important to build affordable housing here, so that we can create a community rather than have this fly-in, fly-out scenario.”

Wood Buffalo is made up of the urban centre of Fort McMurray and nine rural communities and has the highest rents and the second highest real estate prices in Canada. According to a CMHC market report, a one-bedroom apartment in Fort McMurray rented for \$2,150 a month in 2011, while a semi-detached house in Fort McMurray sold for \$605,251 in 2010. Homeowners and tenants also have higher heating costs because of the colder temperatures and longer winters.

WBHDC is a subsidiary corporation of the Regional Municipality with a mandate to provide affordable housing alternatives in the region. It has provided affordable housing for more than 5,200 families since 2001. This includes rental units, seniors’ housing, rural housing, emergency shelter and a homeownership program. About 15 per cent of the region’s population are in core need, that is,

CMHC Contact

Contact a representative of CMHC’s Affordable Housing Centre
www.cmhc.ca/contactahc

they earn less than the minimum income required to rent a one-bedroom apartment—\$74,500 annually—and so require affordable housing.

Housing is expensive in this northern community because of the remote location, as well as the short construction season. In the case of Stony Mountain Plaza, the project cost \$32 million. The Alberta government provided \$18.75 million plus land to the project, while CMHC provided mortgage loan insurance.

Stony Mountain Plaza consists of 75 one-bedroom, 34 two-bedroom, and 16 three-bedroom units that rent for about 20 per cent less than the market rate. In building Stony Mountain Plaza, WBHDC used modular construction and innovative heating systems to address some of the challenges of construction in a remote community. The modular units were built in

Lethbridge, Alberta, and then trucked to Fort McMurray where they were assembled. Although the material costs were about the same as regular stick-built units, the modular construction saved costs by shortening the construction time by nine months.

To reduce the building’s carbon footprint as well as long-term operating costs, a geothermal heating system was installed. This system draws heat from the surrounding ground and is supplemented by solar and natural gas backup. Stony Mountain Plaza is the largest multi-family development in Canada to have such a heating system, and it is the third time WBHDC has installed such a system in its buildings. It is expected that heating costs will be reduced by 75 per cent with this system.