



IRGE Call Notes
Friday, May 8, 2020
12:00 to 1:00 p.m. ET

GoToMeeting

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- Attendees:** Alan Zais, Irma Gorham, Al Ewing, Joe Gray, Stephen Vadnais, Kerron Barnes, Jeff Mosley, Laurie Putscher, Kim Taylor, Ann McKenzie, Gary Keller, Zsa Zsa Heard, Sheldone Packer, Jerome Ryan, Jeff Du Manoir, Kia Fuller, Robin Walls, Ramsey Jay, Betsy Morris, Margaret Brammall, Lloyd Halverson, Saeed Hajarizadeh
- Guest:** Jeff Morrison, CHRA, Executive Director
- Liaison:** Jori Solomon
- Optional:** Sunny Shaw, Adrienne Todman

A. WELCOME

Alan welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. Alan thanked President Shaw and CEO Todman for their participation today.

B. REMARKS FROM NAHRO CEO

Ms. Todman began the meeting by mentioning who would have thought this past October that we'd have this moment in history globally. She expressed the importance of the work the other committees do in regard to work within the United States; however, she expressed the importance of the IRGE committee in sharing with the other committees what is happening with our partners.

C. INTRODUCTION OF CHRA'S JEFF MORRISON

Sunny introduced Jeff by reading his impressive bio of his accomplishments. Sunny thanked him for participating today and complimented him on his passion for what he does.

D. PRESENTATION FROM CHRA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JEFF MORRISON

Jeff began his presentation by discussing what he'd be presenting today, based mainly upon the questions the committee submitted to him over the past few days.

- a. Explanation of Canada's National Housing Strategy
- b. Canada's response to the Pandemic

Jeff shared that the pandemic has not influenced anything regarding the National Housing Strategy with all of the pieces mentioned before still fully in place but there have some delays. There have not been any funding

announcements for new structure like for new building projects since early March which was when the pandemic began. Some of the structures under the Right to Housing legislation they had thought would have been announced by now. But Jeff feels they need to cut the government some slack here because they are working on the response to the pandemic although at some point, they are looking to have a number of these programs back up and fully functional.

So as a segue into where they are with respect to the pandemic, it has hit Canada hard. They have been facing the same restrictions as the U.S. based on what he has seen in the media, CNN. They have not been lifting restrictions as quickly and they are still under a full lockdown. He has seen a few minor changes to the restrictions. Jeff gave an example – he lives in Ottawa and walks 10 minutes to work through downtown Ottawa where it feels like a ghost town for being in the downtown of a major city for the past 8 weeks.

In terms of what the government has done to address the pandemic, like many governments, their federal government has introduced various income support measures to affect workers that have been laid off. In comparing the U.S. and Canada unemployment rates both are somewhere around 14-15%, so we both obviously are experiencing a big disaster, economically. Canadian government has produced supports for business and that has taken the form of a wage subsidy. The process in Canada is if your business – including non-profits, has reported a 30% reduction in revenue between April 2019-April 2020, then you are eligible to get 75% of your wage bill covered for up to 3 months. Jeff mentioned that CHRA will probably apply for that support. The government has also introduced a little rent relief for landlords, especially for small business who are facing problems with their commercial rent.

c. *Canada's 2021 International Forum*

Jeff gave some details about the 2021 International Forum – Canada. He made light of the fact that Carl Richie had challenged him to have Canada to host the next forum. He took this challenge back to the CHRA board and accepted the challenge. Originally, they thought they would host the Forum someplace central – Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa; but, then the board thought that they would like to show attendees a different side of the country, so they decided that the Forum would take place the last week in April 2021 in conjunction with their national conference in St. Johns, Newfoundland and Labrador (Newfoundland and Labrador are on the easternmost land mass in North America.)

In terms of how they will prepare for the Forum, they have decided to follow the same pattern that NAHRO did leading up to the Forum in Austin so they are planning to bring together an organizing committee of international delegates to participate. Jeff thought they might try to get everyone together sometime next month whereas a group we'll look to develop some content,

themes and Forum format. One aspect we have to experience while there is the social aspect of “screeching you in,” a ceremony that non-Newfoundlanders have to go through to become an honorary Newfoundlander. In Newfoundland, the cod fish is the king so if you would like to be a Newfoundlander, you have to kiss the cod.

So, we are all wondering where the world will be in April 2021. We are hoping that travel is back on the list of permitted things we can do. So we are going to plan and assume that it will be and go from there.

d. *Additional Questions for Jeff*

Alan asked if Jeff saw the pandemic having a more profound impact moving inward to more rural areas as we are now seeing in the U.S. Alan gave an example of a news article he read about Albany, Georgia that was impacted by a funeral that folks attended that largely affected the area and attendees. Is this a concern in Canada? Are you seeing this especially with your work with indigenous populations?

Jeff responded that Canada has been seeing some regional differences. The big hot spot has been the province of Quebec and British Columbia West where they had their March break later than the rest of Canada this year. A lot of people went to the U.S. and elsewhere and tended to bring back a higher concentration of the virus. In the Maritimes, it's actually been well contained enough to announce that it is ready to move forward with its plan to re-open. British Columbia is being compared to South Korea in how the province has aggressively been tackling the virus.

From an indigenous perspective, different provinces this week have announced that they are planning to start collecting ethnicity and race-based data on the pandemic which has been an issue in the U.S. where it appears that African Americans have been suffering from the virus to a much higher proportion than other ethnicities. For us, the data is not available yet to determine the impact on indigenous Canadians in the more rural areas. This for us appears not to be a big problem because we have been closed with travel having been restricted in a lot of areas – i.e., Jeff lives in Ottawa and it is a 5-minute drive to the province of Quebec but he cannot go into Quebec at all right now because there are actually police checkpoints on the Quebec side at all bridges into the city. The lack of mobility has played a role in minimizing the impact of the virus.

In reference to Georgia and Florida opening early, **Sheldon** questioned whether Canada would allow such a thing. Jeff was surprised that they opened even though they had not met any of the government's required criteria. Canada is watching to see what the impact opening prematurely might be by looking at those states that already opened as a baseline.

Ann asked Jeff if he is seeing the same thing that she's seeing in Chicago. Chicago is using hotel rooms now to address the homelessness issue and now people actually have a place to sleep and now they are trying to figure out her agency's next steps. Is there a model that Canada is following?

Jeff answered that it has been a mixed bag, saying that there has been no one common model. There have been some cities, in which, the city, itself, has taken the lead in procuring extra hotel rooms and in other cases, it's been the non-profit housing providers who have taken that lead. The federal government has given extra money for them to do that acquisition, and to provide additional services, and there has been the outbreaks in shelters. That's a big concern because you can't really social distance in a shelter, so, the responses have all been unique to the to the cities that they're in.

So far, he's only heard of one province, British Columbia, who has started talking about what to do when this is over but all of this is still being flushed out with what the federal program could look like. He certainly sees an opportunity here.

Sheldon asked Jeff what approach Canada uses when people do not want housing?

Jeff responded that he really didn't have a good answer to this, however, he did say that they could do as much outreach as can be done which is always a challenge, especially because we now have to consider the health of our outreach workers.

Margaret explained that she works with severely mentally ill people so she asked if Canada had anything like what they have there in Washington – mitigation tent community sites where people could live with relatively little supervision?

Jeff responded that there are some tent cities in Canada, but Canada's generally are not the same model as what Margaret described. Most tent cities have been used for short-term shelter than more permanent shelter. Part of the problem in Canada is climate and this makes tent cities a challenge – it's fine living outside over the next few months but living outside in the winter is a death sentence.

E. CLOSING REMARKS

Alan opened floor for comments from Sunny and Ms. Todman. **Sunny**, thanked Jeff and IRGE for permitting her to take part in this conversation and mentioned that Jeff never disappoints and that she appreciated getting to hear him speak.

Jeff responded that not only did he want to thank all of us for taking the time to be a part of this, but more importantly, given that most of us are actually housing providers, he just want to say a massive thank you for the work we are doing.

Health care workers are getting well-deserved praise for their work during the pandemic; but as he keeps reminding people, housing providers are doing yeoman's work, and he hopes in the list of heroes that get identified when this is all over that housing providers are included in that list.

Ms. Todman also expressed her thanks to Jeff and mentioned that we have a lot to talk about when we get together in 2021. We look forward to our continued collaborations.

Finally, **Alan** expressed his appreciation for all the kind words from Ms. Todman, Sunny, and the excellent questions from the committee. Additionally, he expressed appreciation for the international community, where we learn best practices together.

Next meeting: June 12, 2020