

The 2015 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

Contact Information:

Municipality: City of New Brunswick

Population: 55,000

County: Middlesex

Address: 78 Bayard Street

City: New Brunswick

Zip: 08901

Contact Name: Jennifer Bradshaw

Title: Public Information Officer

Telephone: 732-745-5004

Fax:

Email: jbradshaw@cityofnewbrunswick.org

Project Information

Initiative Title: Dina's Dwellings

Description: Supportive Housing for Domestic Violence Survivors

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort.

Project Specific Details: *(Please explain your innovation. Include up to 3 supplemental attachments if needed.)*

- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

Please Attach a Supplemental Sheet(s) Noting the Details of Your Initiative.

(Supplemental Attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)

Application Deadline: Applications must be received no later than Thursday, October 1, 2015. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Government 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608 or send by email to JMoran@njslom.org

*If you have any questions, please contact Jon Moran at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext 121 or JMoran@njslom.org*



Cross Section of Dina's Dwellings, showing the reconfigured sanctuary space, apartments on the first and second stories and multipurpose space on the third floor. Image used with permission from Jeff Venezia of Design Ideas Group.

Dina's Dwellings

New Brunswick, NJ

Approximately 2,000 people are homeless in Middlesex County over the course of a year, including those in transitional housing. The City of New Brunswick and Coming Home Middlesex subscribe to the National "Housing First" model, which emphasizes the importance of permanent, supportive housing for homeless residents. By meeting this basic human need first, homeless residents have the foundation they need to successfully address other parts of their lives, such as addiction, education, employment, mental health and other obstacles that are difficult to tackle without safe, consistent shelter.

Many are drawn to the City of New Brunswick due to the amount of services offered through our social services agencies and houses of worship. Dina's Dwellings is a project that addresses the needs of a portion of our homeless population, and serves as a modern example of alternative uses for historic buildings in the City of New Brunswick.

The First Reformed Church is a more than 300-year-old structure with a rich history that predates the Revolutionary War. It is in the process of being permanently transformed into 10 long-term apartment units to permanently house families affected by domestic violence while providing them with support services addressing mental and physical health, as well as job placement and education.

Complimentary to the Housing First model, this \$3.4 million project will be supported by \$604,385 in HOME funds pledged by the City of New Brunswick. Additional funds have been pledged by NJ-HMFA Community Block Development Grant Disaster Relief Funds, Bergen County United Way, a Planning Grant from the NJ Historic Trust, a Johnson & Johnson Planning Grant and private donations.

Tenants will pay about a fourth of their rent, with the rest to be provided by federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing vouchers. All tenants will be referred to social service organizations throughout the area as they work toward a new life. They will be permitted to stay as long as needed.

Construction on the project began in September 2014, with tenant move-in anticipated by the end of December 2015. Tenants will be chosen and placed by the involved social services organizations that have signed on to this project.

The 300-year old church, which has seen its members number in the hundreds, now draws a small congregation of about 70 people for Sunday services, as well as smaller congregations of various faiths and followings. Despite this, it has become too large and too expensive to maintain.

Heating and electric for the sanctuary averages about \$20,000 per year, even when the congregation does not worship in the sanctuary during the coldest parts of the year. This amount does not include upkeep and repairs.

In 2008, the church embarked on a Preservation Plan that entailed several phases of repairs to be made on the building. While the congregation was able to raise \$ 500,000 in donations and a matching grant with the NJ Historic Trust, these funds were only able to repair the sanctuary's slate roof and steeple. In a second phase the floor, the joists holding the floor, and the carpeting all needed to be replaced, among other items, including all the windows. This second phase would have been a \$2 million expense, which the congregation felt was impossible.

After many meetings and emotional discussions, the congregation agreed to “give up” the large sanctuary in order to “win” the long struggle of maintaining such a structure. After researching alternative uses for the building, church leadership set their eye on the need for more permanent, supportive housing in the City of New Brunswick, especially for women and children.

The church will continue to have access to the building for worship services through the construction of a new, smaller sanctuary space in the building as well as a meeting room for community use.

Named after one of the church's strongest female leaders, Dina VanBergh, who came to New Brunswick from Amsterdam in 1786 and is buried on the church grounds, the project is overseen by Town Clock Community Development Corporation, Inc. Town

Clock CDC is a nonprofit organization lead by Susan Kramer-Mills, Associate Pastor of First Reformed Church.

Dina's Dwellings is the latest venture in the City of New Brunswick's standing commitment to supportive housing, which has entailed more than \$1.6 million in HOME funds spent on housing for New Brunswick's homeless residents. This includes the first permanent supportive housing for domestic violence survivors which opened in the City in 2013. Women Aware utilized \$114,601 in City-provided HOME funds to make that project a reality.

This permanent conversion of the First Reformed Church space is anticipated to save the church hundreds of thousands of dollars that previously went toward heating, cooling and maintaining the church's large sanctuary space. It will provide safe shelter for a population that greatly needs it, and will further the City of New Brunswick's commitment to permanent, supportive housing.