

**SPEAKING NOTES — MAYOR STEPHEN MANDEL
STANDING POLICY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS
AUGUST 21, 2006**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us this afternoon. We are pleased to be here with such a broad-based group, demonstrating how broadly these issues exist across Alberta.

We are seeing serious homelessness and affordable housing challenges, and as your partners we are here to talk about concrete ways we can address these issues.

We all know the stats ... we all know that the numbers are growing. We have an opportunity today to take meaningful action.

Homelessness is an issue that defies our Alberta picture of prosperity.

While growth has brought so many positives, it is magnifying the intensity of these issues.

In Edmonton, our apartment vacancy rate has fallen to 1.5% from 4.5% from this time last year and rental rates are rising. Housing prices have risen close to 30% in the last year and the market is not keeping pace with demand.

Rising construction costs affects our ability to address this issue, as does the fact that dollars available to solve issues are not enough.

And to solve the problem there is not a simple one-size-fits-all solution.

The people we need to help add to the complexity of the problem.

We have a desperate need for in-migration, but having new Albertans unable to find or afford a home is a growing problem.

On top of this is homeless people with a range of social, cultural, medical or emotional challenges that impede their ability to tackle this issue independently.

It's not a pretty picture.

The Community Groups here today have put together some specific recommendations which I and my municipal colleagues fully support.

They are asking the Province to initiate Project Innovation Funding of \$20 million – as new, additional money toward this urgent issue.

They are asking that Alberta make a five-year commitment to continue Homelessness Initiative funding and Affordable Housing Initiatives, and that you also support us in lobbying our Federal partners to recommit to the National Homelessness Initiative.

And they are asking that we establish a formal mechanism to bring together all orders of Government, including all relevant ministries, together more effectively.

I and my municipal colleagues support all of these initiatives and any effort that will streamline processes to ensure money and support gets to where it is most needed – into our communities.

We are here today as your on-the-ground partners, who need to be actively at the table with you in solving these issues.

Funding has to be flexible to not just build the projects but to provide ongoing support.

Homelessness is not just a bricks and mortar issue. There must be links to social, economic and health supports for those who need them.

We are here today talking about taking action. We know what models work. There are lots of examples we can draw upon to prove the merits of this investment.

In Edmonton, our CBOs have taken the housing + support approach and funding from all orders of government, as well as the non-profit and private sectors, to bring new innovative projects on-stream.

For example,

- **Grand Manor** is a 56 suite apartment hotel that provides long-term supportive housing for low-income individuals with mental health challenges.
- **Trinity Manor** hosts 40 residential units – 20 transitional and 20 long-term – for refugees and immigrants and their families to provide needed supports to gain employment and adjust to living in Canada.
- And just three weeks ago, the **Umisk and Amisk Affordable Housing Societies** – in cooperation with Concept Homes – gave keys to 16 homeless families. These long-term supportive housing units for large Aboriginal families offer a range of support services, from regular visits and supports by Amisk, to links to other community services such as drug and alcohol treatment, education, and physical or mental abuse counselling.

But these projects are just the tip of what's needed.

And as cities, we are ready to play our part.

Cornerstones is Edmonton's affordable housing project. We will invest significantly and creatively to build 2500 additional housing units within the next five years.

And I do want to say that I am personally pleased with how receptive Minister Fritz has been to the ideas we have brought to her, associated with this program.

Today you will hear more about the role your Government can play to begin solving our homelessness issues.

I urge you to hear and respond positively to what is being outlined today.

Thank you for your time.