



Investigating the feasibility of co-op housing in the current housing landscape

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Rising Stars
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Contents

- Executive Summary 2
- Introduction 4
 - Background 4
 - Purpose 4
 - Report structure..... 5
- Methods and Limitations 5
 - Recruitment 5
 - Data collection 5
 - Data analysis..... 6
 - Limitations 6
- Findings 7
 - Description of interviewees 7
 - Challenges in development of co-ops 7
 - 1. Funding..... 8
 - 2. Co-op leadership and member education 8
 - 3. Member engagement 9
 - Factors supporting successful development of co-ops 9
 - 1. Funding..... 10
 - 2. Strong leadership and governance..... 10
 - 3. Responsible members 10
 - Co-ops in the current landscape, feasibility, and future considerations 11
- Discussion and future research questions 12
- Bibliography 14
- Appendix A: Email Template 15
- Appendix B: Interview Guide 16
- Appendix C: Codebook..... 21

Executive Summary

This research report investigates the current landscape and challenges associated with the development and sustainability of housing co-operatives (co-ops). The purpose of the research is to inform Rising Stars, a project aimed at creating consumer-owned housing for individuals with mental health challenges in Hamilton, Ontario. The report explores the factors that have enabled and hindered the development of co-ops in the last 15 years and assesses the feasibility of the co-op housing model in the present context.

The research employed key informant interviews with housing co-operative representatives and professionals involved in the field. Findings related to the challenges in co-op development include:

1. **Funding:** Co-ops often face financial constraints and must operate within allocated budgets, which limits their ability to save for unforeseen expenses.
2. **Co-op Leadership and Member Education:** Leadership is required to make difficult decisions, manage rent rates, and ensure fair application of rules. Member education is vital to help co-op members understand their responsibilities and ensure a smooth operation.
3. **Member Engagement:** External commitments and limited time can hinder members from participating in meetings and committees, affecting the co-op's community and philosophy.

Factors supporting co-op development include: 1) Adequate funding from government sources and partnerships with external organizations; 2) Strong leadership and governance, including the use of training boards and federations to support member training; 3) Responsible and engaged co-op members who understand their roles and contribute to the co-op's well-being.

Overall, our interview findings suggest challenges for co-op development, particularly due to increasing costs of housing. Co-ops need to address long-term financial sustainability and physical maintenance concerns. Some informants suggested considering alternative housing models, such as not-for-profit organizations, which may offer more financial flexibility and access to government grants. However, member control may be impacted in this scenario, potentially involving external boards and management. Regardless of the model chosen, the research underscores the inherent challenges in managing and governing co-operatives, spanning financial planning, member engagement, and adherence to bylaws, necessitating strong leadership and training.

Key questions for future exploration include:

1. The feasibility of setting up a not-for-profit housing operation with member investment in all aspects of the co-op.

2. Identifying public funding opportunities for both not-for-profit and private co-ops.
3. Effective co-op governance and member engagement strategies.
4. The content and providers of co-op board and membership training.
5. Strategies for financial forecasting and reserve fund management.
6. Potential partnerships to support co-op development through capacity-building.

These questions should be addressed with the input of co-operative and social housing experts to inform the successful development of co-op housing models that meet the needs of specific communities, such as individuals living with mental health and addiction conditions.

Introduction

Background

Housing co-operatives (or co-ops) are a form of housing where members share responsibility in its operations.¹ Housing co-operatives are often guided by municipal or provincial governments, or federations such as the Golden Horseshoe Co-operative Housing Federation and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. Co-ops are either non-equity or equity. Co-ops which are non-equity are affordable in nature and offer below market-rate or rent-geared-to-income options usually financed by governmental organizations.² Equity co-ops do not have an affordability requirement and they normally do not seek government funding.³ Co-operatives can be social in nature and cater to certain demographics or marginalized groups.

Rising Stars is a co-operative housing project in the ideation and development stage. The housing project aims to develop a consumer-controlled housing co-operative for those living with mental health challenges in Hamilton. Lance's vision, specifically, is for Rising Stars members to have shared ownership of the co-op. We understand ownership in the context of housing co-ops as legal stake (i.e., equity) in the co-op corporation *and/or* the shared investment and responsibility in the development and operation of the co-op.

The Rising Stars idea was first explored in 2006 by a feasibility study conducted by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services alongside the Hamilton Addiction and Mental Health Network. The feasibility study assessed and clarified the concept and its implementation, which led to the conclusion that consumer-run co-ops are an innovative way to support consumers. The Rising Stars vision unfortunately did not come into fruition due to lack of funding and staff transitions, though Lance Dingman hopes to revive the project idea and explore implementation. Since political and social conditions are perceived to have changed significantly since 2006, Lance and his stakeholders are seeking a report on how the housing landscape has changed since then, and how a co-operative housing model for those with lived experience of addiction and mental health might fit into that landscape.

Purpose

This research project aimed to continue with the work initiated in 2006 to assess the current housing landscape. It assessed factors that enabled successful development of social housing co-operatives in the last 15 years and factors to consider such as municipal stakeholder buy-in, navigating community 'not in my backyard-ism' (NIMBYism), and cost effectiveness of the co-operative model.

The primary research questions were:

- 1) What factors have enabled the successful development of housing co-ops in the last ~15 years? What were their challenges?
- 2) What factors led to the *unsuccessful* development of housing co-ops in the last ~15 years?
- 3) Where does co-op fit into the current housing landscape? What's the feasibility of co-op housing in general- why/why aren't they being built?

Report structure

First, we describe our qualitative key informant interview process below, followed by our findings and key takeaways. Our report findings follow the research questions set out by community partners Lance Digman (residential care facilities advocate), Jen Chivers (Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction), and James Kemp (Hamilton accessibility advocate).

Methods and Limitations

To answer our research questions, we conducted key informant interviews with housing co-operative representatives, as well as those that work in the field, to answer our research questions. We describe the process below.

Recruitment

We recruited key informants and representatives from co-operative housing organizations or associations representing housing co-ops within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. The research team identified 69 potential contacts through web searches and compiled emails, phone numbers, and addresses, as available, on an Excel spreadsheet. 47 participants had emails listed which were used to make initial contact (See Appendix B for email template), while phone calling was used for the other 22 contacts on our list. Participants who agreed to participate in an interview were sent a follow-up email with scheduling details. All participants included provided informed consent either verbally or electronically and all recordings were obtained with permission. All participants had the option to withdraw at any point in the research process. In total, we conducted six interviews.

Data collection

We aimed to understand participants' perspectives on what challenges or factors are important to consider when developing and maintaining a housing co-operative. We designed a semi-structured interview guide that covered questions on each participant's role, a description of the organization they work for, factors they believe lead to successful and unsuccessful housing co-operatives, and differences between housing co-operatives and social housing co-operatives. This interview guide was developed using research questions and feedback from the community partner. The guide consisted of twelve main

questions with optional follow-up questions that might prompt more thorough discussion. Once an interview was scheduled, a researcher would meet with the participant over Zoom to facilitate the interview. We recorded interviews with participant consent and transcribed all recorded interviews for later analysis over Microsoft Teams. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the interview guide.

Data analysis

We analyzed the data using content analysis whereby we broke data down into smaller pieces and found key themes to answer the research questions. This was guided by a code book identifying major themes to consider. A researcher read each transcript and highlighted important sentences according to the code book. The research team then met to discuss and review highlighted themes to reach a consensus on which themes were most appropriate for labelling. A table was created to identify how many times a topic or label was discussed in each interview, and this was updated throughout analysis by each researcher. The quantified data was analyzed with descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts or means, to organize and interpret the data.

Limitations

We identified several limitations in our research during the recruitment and data collection stage. When exploring possible housing co-operatives to contact, we contacted various co-operatives in comparative municipalities across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area (GTHA). This approach allowed us to gather information from a variety of provincially and federally funded co-operatives.

We initially contacted 69 co-operatives to invite them to an interview. Despite cold-calling and emailing efforts, the Research Shop associates were only able to gauge interest from seven interviewees and completed six interviews. Three of the interviewees were from Hamilton. Two are knowledgeable of the Golden Horseshoe area and have experience in the area through research or working with co-operatives, while one interviewee is from a comparative municipality.

Finally, our research team members lacked expertise in co-operative housing, which imposed limitations on our understanding of the current housing landscape and fundamental concepts related to co-operative housing. Specifically, we recognized two primary forms of co-ops: equity-coops and non-equity co-ops, the latter functioning as not-for-profit organizations. During our key informant interviews, it was sometimes challenging to discern which model was being discussed. Furthermore, the term “board” featured prominently in the interviews, yet we struggled to definitively distinguish between whether it referred to a board of directors for a co-op corporation (or not-for-profit) or a co-op board responsible for managing and conducting the daily operations of the co-op.

This lack of clarity occasionally led to confusion when interpreting our findings, particularly concerning the concepts of ownership and accountability within co-ops.

Findings

Description of interviewees

The research project explored diverse perspectives on co-op housing. Furthermore, of the six people we interviewed:

- Several interviewees had experience working for and/or with local/regional co-ops.
- Several interviewees had experience working on federal or provincial co-op housing projects.
- Many of the interviewees relayed information through the lens of being tenants and board members themselves, in addition to the knowledge they gained as members of the administration team.
- One interviewee specifically worked as a manager for a current co-op, which was previously non-profit housing.
- Another individual worked at a co-op for Indigenous people living in London, Ontario. Their role consisted of overseeing the board members and taking care of the bookkeeping regarding the co-op.
- Another interviewee provided their insight through their previous work as a manager for a co-op in the Mississauga region, their present work with a non-profit housing provider in Hamilton, and their current consultant work within the co-op sector. Their day-to-day work consists of leading meetings and workshops regarding their past co-op work.
- Another individual had worked within the co-op landscape for forty years as a project manager for different co-ops in Vancouver and is currently a researcher involved with the National Housing Strategy (which includes research on co-ops).
- Some interviewees have worked and/or are currently working for the City of Hamilton. One interviewee strictly worked with the financial aspect of funding both new and old co-op projects within the city. Their role mainly consisted of finding the funding opportunities that would be available for a certain co-op project.
- Another interviewee is a current housing administrator for the City of Hamilton; thus, they focus mainly on reviewing the performance of certain co-ops in the region.

Challenges in development of co-ops

There are several challenges interviewees reported that co-ops face in their development, including funding challenges, challenges with leadership and member engagement, and discrimination.

1. Funding

All six interviewees discussed funding as a major challenge in the development of co-ops (discussed a total of 48 times across the interviews), including the lack of funding opportunities for co-operative housing agencies in face of overwhelming need for funds to hire appropriate staff, perform building maintenance, and pay taxes and external fees. When the budgets are decided for the year, the co-ops must strictly operate within those ranges. One interviewee shared “so because of the way our operating agreements work...we're kind of stuck with what we're provided in terms of financial funding. So, the benchmark numbers and the revenues that we're told we have we can only use is what determines...our feasibility. We can't take out second mortgages or anything like that”. It is important for co-ops then to apply for specific funding opportunities based on their needs (e.g., sustainability, neighbourhood development, etc.) and to align themselves with other organizations to garner additional support: “we're connected with the Union Gas, Enbridge and Electra for insulation in our units...in terms of receiving funding, we don't really get a lot of funding from outside organizations, but we partner to get products or things that that they're able to support us with”. A co-op that aims to support members with mental health challenges should identify specific granting opportunities based on needs of those members, along with the needs of their property. Building strong relationships with other organizations, for example those providing mental health support, would help the co-op provide its members secure additional resources not covered by their funding.

Another related challenge discussed by the interviewees was having to constantly operate on a ‘break-even’ basis where all allocated funding for the year must be used or the surplus returned. Trying to ‘save up’ for the any unanticipated challenges is difficult under these conditions. Interviewees also discussed that receiving governmental funding from the federal, provincial, and municipal government for continued operation in general is a constant challenge as the funding amounts are limited.

2. Co-op leadership and member education

All six interviewees discussed poor co-op leadership and education of the members as another major challenge to its successful development. Without a competent leader who can maintain order to ensure members aware of their responsibilities, the underlying development seems to falter. Important roles for co-op leadership include being able to regulate rent when facing financial droughts or adjusting rules to better fit the overall progression of the co-op. One interviewee shared, “without really strong leadership. It's easy to sort of fall into certain traps...you make easy decisions because they're not going to upset anybody and one of those is often not raising the rent, which means, if you don't raise the rent, you don't have enough money to manage your property.” In addition, leadership should ensure the rules are applied fairly to all co-op members, and not give certain members exemption due to their position.

In alignment with financial challenges, one interviewee also shared that there is a need for the government to prioritize co-op funding and education related to co-op development: “So the Government has to start recognizing the fact that we need more housing and co-op is a viable, a model to use and invest in that education...definitely education and finding resources is one of the challenges that I think co-ops have.” The development of future co-ops, including those aiming to support members with mental health challenges would likely benefit from more accessible resources and education.

3. Member engagement

Five out of six interviewees mentioned it can be difficult to maintain member engagement and commitment to the co-op governance, which is a core aspect of the co-op “philosophy” but difficult to enforce in practice. One interviewee shared: “we’re finding that because of external outside pressures, including financial pressures...there’s so many commitments that they already have to do for their own family. They’re finding the time that they have available is very limited, and then they have to focus on other things to be able to, you know, take the children to activities, physical activities and things like that. They’re not finding that they still have time available to give, to attend meetings or be part of a committee”. Lack of engagement from members when it comes to attending meetings and volunteering on committees is harmful for maintaining a co-op community, but difficult to resolve or often not mandated. When discussing co-op member meetings, for example, one interviewee stated, “[members who] don’t show up at any membership meeting for the you know, for 5 years...to co-ops that’s an egregious breach of your occupancy...board will not evict for those kinds of things, so it’s difficult to maintain the co-op philosophy.” In face of lack of engagement, it would be important for co-op leadership to find alternative ways of accommodating members. One interviewee for example adapted their general member meetings to be hybrid: “one of the good things that has come out of COVID that I found with, especially with the hybrid version, is families that do have children, and can’t meet at 7 o’clock at night, because they need to put their children to bed, or whatever – they’re able to get on the Zoom Meeting with me”. In the context of a mental health co-op, the administrative staff and board may face similar challenges with member engagement as it might be difficult for some members to balance their co-op engagement commitment with their other commitments.

Factors supporting successful development of co-ops

Factors that support successful development of co-ops were often directly in line with opposing the challenges associated with the development of co-ops. We identified three factors: funding, strong leadership and governance, and responsible members.

1. Funding

A critical factor supporting the successful development of co-ops discussed by several interviewees was funding. Funding options for co-ops include federal, provincial, and municipal support from governmental organizations such as the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Co-ops can offer affordable units to members, and governments will provide subsidies to offset costs through funding. This model is known as rent-geared-to-income. This model helps co-operatives to fulfill their affordable housing mission without extreme loss. Interviewees mentioned the importance of ensuring funding, with one mentioning that “if [someone is] talking about creating affordability, then [they] need to have a lot of support from government agencies in the form of grants”. One form of this is through rent-geared-to-income, which another interviewee also mentioned.

2. Strong leadership and governance

Another factor supporting the successful development of co-ops is strong leadership and governance. While a consumer-led co-operative is the goal, effective management and strong governance were stressed by three interviewees. One interviewee mentioned they “think it's critically important that they find a technical assistance...to basically do ...work for them to avoid ...roadblocks that would otherwise be in their way, because [some co-operative members] just don't have the right skill sets and expertise”. Co-operatives normally do not allow non-members to be on their co-operative board, though it is difficult to find members who are experienced in administration or finance. Though, external expertise in the form of training boards were recommended to assist and train the members of the co-operative to be on the Board of Directors. A co-operative's board can be trained by co-operative federations, who aim to create a coalition of co-ops to support the co-op in need of leadership guidance. Municipalities such as the City of Hamilton also support training initiatives. Co-operative federations that assist in training include the Golden Horseshoe Co-operative Housing Federation and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada.

3. Responsible members

The final important factor supporting the development of co-operatives are members being responsible neighbours themselves. Co-operative members are generally diverse, though co-operatives whether consumer-led or not, all rely on members to lead the board, assist in by-law creation through voting, and commit financially. One interviewee mentions they believe that “because the members here know and understand their roles, that they know that they have a voice...that's one of the things that is always been the reason why co-ops are successful because if things aren't working well for us, then we can sit back and look at how can we improve them”. Though another interviewee stated one challenge of co-operatives is member obedience to bylaws, specifically with new members. When moving from other types of housing, new members may not be aware, or may not agree with the by-laws in place. If this occurs, it may put a strain on the member's relationship

with the co-operative. Another issue mentioned that may occur is member disapproval of new by-laws or initiatives that may benefit the co-operative, through vote or as a board member. Being a responsible neighbour or member through various ways, including paying rent every month, and maintaining the unit well helps the successful development of a co-op.

Co-ops in the current landscape, feasibility, and future considerations

Co-ops in the current economic and social landscape are important, given the affordability crisis, though there are considerations to keep in mind with feasibility and the co-op's future. New build co-operatives are expensive to build given the continuously increasing cost of housing. There was a great emphasis among several interviewees on the need to sustain the co-operative financially in the future, and the importance of “financially forecasting twenty years down the road” to account for capital repairs. Co-op housing according to an interviewee “is even more challenging [than other forms of housing] because of the lack of equity”. Most interviewees agreed access to capital is important to sustain the cooperative model as the model does not generate any profits.

To ensure a co-operative remains successful, one important factor in the current landscape is the cost of maintaining the co-op's infrastructure and the physical maintenance of the co-operative units. Two interviewees mentioned that co-operatives, whether brand new or a co-operative that repurposes an existing building, will face challenges with aging. One of these interviewees mentioned the co-operative they are involved with faced issues with parking space and garbage and mentioned the importance of hygiene in a co-operative and unit maintenance after damages. Another interviewee who manages their co-operative mentioned capital repairs assisted them with replacing appliances that were almost 30 years old in their co-operative. With building a new co-operative, aging or damage to the co-op's physical integrity will be a concern in the future, and the two interviewees cited that is the largest concern with a housing model like a co-operative, and should heavily be considered when exploring the option.

Due to issues such as physical maintenance and financial considerations, it may be important to consider other options. Two interviewees mentioned that, in the current landscape, it is important to consider other forms of housing. One mentioned “[they] don't think a housing co-op is the vehicle [to use]...but there is nothing that says that you cannot have a mix of income, and there is nothing that says that you cannot have a mix of ages within that complex, and I would strongly recommend that that's what you do”. Another interviewee mentioned a similar thought, stating it is important to evaluate what is unique with a co-op that one wouldn't gain with other structures of housing, and to evaluate how it can sustain itself. Both mentioned an alternative to the co-op could be non-profit, and partnering with an existing organization would be useful to investigate, with one interviewee “strongly recommending [non-profit]”.

One interviewee cited that “most non-profit housing providers have at least some forms of equity somewhere that they can contribute”, which can help alleviate any financial concerns that accompany the development of a cooperative. Rebranding the mental health co-op to a non-profit organization (charity) and acting as a non-profit charity would also allow for the organization to apply for several government funding grants, which are not accessible to co-op housing. One interviewee stated, “incorporate as a non-profit charitable institution... they can apply to the municipality for relief on municipal taxes.” However, if branded as a non-profit organization, the organization would likely have a board with external members, stakeholders and management that can regulate the housing structure, whereas in the consumer-led co-op housing structure there would be a board of co-op members themselves. For example, another interviewee said they “recommend moving to a non-profit model where you can have outside board, outside stakeholders, outside management.” Whether the financial benefits of establishing the housing structure as a non-profit outweigh the benefits that come with a consumer-led housing structure should be further evaluated in the context of a mental health co-op.

Discussion and future research questions

This research was one step in understanding the opportunities and challenges with developing and sustaining co-operative housing in the current housing landscape. When we discussed our findings with our community partners, we realized that they raised at least as many questions as they answered. Additionally, they highlighted some fundamental challenges regarding Lance’s original vision of a co-op housing model where consumers would hold ownership.

If we define ownership as members having legal stake, such as equity, in the co-op, it appears that a consumer-owned co-op model may not be financially feasible for individuals living with mental health conditions. Our interviews revealed a lack of government funding opportunities for private housing co-ops and difficulties obtaining financing from banks. As such, establishing a private consumer-owned housing co-op would likely require a substantial upfront cash investment. Investigating alternative sources of funding, such as private donations or non-governmental grants, was not within the scope of this research but is worth considering. Beyond startup capital costs, Lance must also assess whether co-op members can afford monthly fees to cover ongoing maintenance expenses, including staffing, repairs, and programming, as well as contribute to capital budgets.

Another model discussed in our interviews is the establishment of a co-op as a not-for-profit organization. In this scenario, government grants could finance the development of affordable housing units, which could be made financially accessible through programs like rent-geared-to-income. In this model, consumers would not be legal owners of the co-op but would function as contributing members of the organization. If ownership is redefined as members’ investment in the physical, social, and managerial aspects of the housing community, this model might be feasible. However, questions arise about how not-for-profit incorporation might affect members’ control over day-to-day aspects of the

co-op as it may necessitate the formation of “a board with external members, stakeholders and management.”

In either model, the interviews highlighted the inherent challenges of managing and governing a co-op, which could explain their relative scarcity in the current housing landscape. Financial planning involves accounting for staffing, maintenance, taxes, external fees, and long-term considerations like capital repair budgets. Additional considerations include membership engagement and enforcing/adhering to bylaws, which likely require strong leadership as well as board and membership training and education. Although we didn't identify specific strategies from the interviews for effective co-op management and governance, interviewees suggested that co-operative housing federations like the Golden Horseshoe Co-operative Housing Federation or the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada can provide training to co-op boards and members. It's reasonable to assume that other partnerships, such as collaborating with existing social housing providers, might offer external guidance and expertise for starting up and managing the co-op while maintaining member involvement.

With these findings in mind and input from our community partners, we developed questions for further exploration:

- How, if at all, can a non-profit housing operation be set up *like* a private housing co-op by ensuring members are invested in the physical, social, and managerial aspects of the co-op? Can a not-for-profit co-op have a traditional board *and* a co-op board?
- What public funding opportunities exist for co-op not-for-profits? What about funding opportunities for private co-ops?
- What constitutes effective co-op governance? What proven practices and strategies enhance member engagement and bylaw adherence/enforcement?
- What does co-op board and membership training entail? Which organizations offer such training, and what are the associated costs?
- What strategies support effective co-op financial forecasting? For example, how is a reserve fund established and maintained?
- What potential partnerships could offer capacity-building support (e.g., board/membership education and training, financial forecasting, and maintenance strategies) for co-op development?

These questions may best be addressed by consulting co-operative and social housing experts. The 2006 feasibility report should continue to serve as a valuable resource for key implementation features and considerations, especially considering the needs of individuals living with mental health and addiction conditions, which must be factored into operational requirements and costs.

Bibliography

¹ “Developing a Consumer-Run Housing Co-op in Hamilton: A Feasibility Study,” Centre for Research and Education in Human Services. 2006; pg 14-15.

² “Housing co-operatives”, Ontario Co-operative Association,
https://ontario.coop/sites/default/files/SS03_Housing%20Co-operatives%202020.pdf.

Appendix A: Email Template

Subject: Feasibility of housing co-ops

Dear [Name of Contact Person],

I am a representative of the McMaster University Research Shop and we are currently conducting research to assess the feasibility of developing a housing co-op for individuals living with mental health challenges in Hamilton. Through qualitative interviews with individuals knowledgeable on the housing landscape and representatives from successful and unsuccessful co-op housing projects, we hope to better understand the factors that lead to successful or unsuccessful development of housing co-ops. **As [position/role that makes them an informant or representative], we are hoping to learn more about your thoughts on this topic.**

We are working in partnership with Rising Stars, which is led by Lance Dingman, a board member of the Mental Health Rights Coalition of Hamilton, and other stakeholders. Rising Stars has a vision of creating a safe, supportive, consumer-controlled living environment for people with mental health challenges, and would be using the information from these interviews to determine if a co-operative living model is feasible (or ideal). We hope you can support our research by participating in a short (e.g., 30 minute) interview. We would like to hear your perspective on the current co-op housing landscape, the opportunities and challenges with co-op housing models, and your experiences as [position/role that makes them an informant or representative] so far. In return for your participation, we'd be happy to share a copy of our report with you.

If you are willing and able to participate in an interview, please let us know by replying to this email. We will then follow up with you to provide more details and to schedule an interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Research Associate, McMaster Research Shop

Rising Star Project

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Hello, my name is _____. I am a student volunteer with McMaster University's Research Shop. We are working with Lance Dingman from Rising Star, and project supporters Jenn Chivers, and James Kemp to evaluate the feasibility of a housing co-op in Hamilton for people living with mental health challenges.

Before we begin, I want to thank you for making time for this interview!

The purpose of this interview is to better understand the success factors and challenges with developing housing co-ops. We're interested in learning from your insights and experiences as [position/role that makes them an informant or representative]. The information gathered will help guide the Rising Star team and local stakeholders to evaluate the feasibility of starting a co-op for mental health consumers in Hamilton

Before we get any further, do you have any questions about the project or this interview?
[Pause]

Confidentiality: Before we begin our discussion, I want to spend a few minutes going over some basic ground rules for today. [Copy and paste the following bullet points into the Zoom chat]

- Your participation is voluntary. You can leave or stop participating in this interview at any moment with no repercussions.
- You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.
- The information which we collect from these interviews will not be associated with you.
- I will strive to protect the confidentiality of our discussion but please keep in mind that you or your business could be identified based on the stories or experiences you disclose.

Use of Zoom Recording: With your permission, this interview will be recorded to increase accuracy and reduce the chance of misinterpreting what you say. [Copy and paste the following bullet points into the Zoom chat]

- All audio files and transcripts will be securely stored in a Microsoft OneDrive folder that only the Research Team can access.
- I may take notes throughout the discussion for future reference.
- Only the research team will have access to transcripts from this discussion.
- The recording and transcripts will only be used for this project and will be destroyed once the research report is complete.

Also, we ask that you say the full name at least once when using abbreviations or acronyms to aid transcription.

If at any point you feel fatigued, please let us know, and we can take a short break.

Do you have any questions before we begin? [Pause]

Do you give your consent to participate in this interview? [Pause]

Reminder: START ZOOM CLOUD RECORDING!

Q1: To start, can you tell us about the co-op housing project you are involved with or were previously involved with?

Follow-up questions, as needed:

- a. When did the project start?
- b. What was your role/position within the team?
- c. Were you involved with the project from start to finish, or only at certain phases?
- d. Can you describe the structure of the co-op housing model to us?
 - i. Prompts:
 - ii. What are the prerequisites and/or general requirements needed to become a member of your co-op housing unit?
 - iii. Are there established rules that would make someone no longer eligible to continue to stay at your co-op?
 - iv. Is there a term-limit on the length of stay for individuals in your co-op housing units?
 - v. How often are units available at your co-op?
 - vi. Who manages the day-to-day needs of the co-op housing? How is leadership managed in this co-op? For example, is leadership elected through a ballot system where every member gets one vote?
 - vii. How do issues get resolved within the units (communities meeting etc.)?
 - viii. How important is shared living space within your co-op and how is it managed? Is there a shared cleaning schedule? Are there community activities organized by someone?
- e. Can you tell us a bit about the residents of the housing? (i.e., were the residents older adults, families - or a mix/diverse resident demographics)
 - i. Beyond sharing the building facility and finances, are there shared values or a mission in the community?

Q6B: If you were involved with developing the co-op/during its early stages, what were the different housing models/structures compared? What were the reasons for deciding to pursue a co-op model of housing?

Q2: How long have you been involved with this co-op and/or the co-op housing landscape? Have you noticed any changes to co-op housing during your time?

Section A: Unsuccessful co-ops

If you were previously involved in a co-op housing project which failed:

Q3A: What do you think were the major causes for its decline?

As needed:

- a. Was it due to environmental factors or issues with the co-op house structure itself?
- b. Did you encounter challenges getting buy-in from municipal stakeholders? What about other stakeholders?
- c. What did the support from your local neighborhood look like? Were they supportive of the housing project in their neighborhood?
- d. Did you or your team ever consider changing aspects of your co-op housing model?
 - i. Note for facilitator:
 1. For example, how leadership is elected; membership eligibility; sharing of expenses such as food or utilities; how equity (the value that accumulates in the property) is distributed.
 2. Have you adjusted the requirements needed for a resident to qualify for your co-op housing or make the process easier for residents to apply?
 3. Have the building rules ever been changed?
- e. Was cost-effectiveness ever a challenge for you and your team?

Q4A: Was there any insight you gained from this experience that supported your next position/venture?

Section B: Successful Co-ops:

If you are involved/were previously involved in a co-op housing project that is currently operating (has been successful):

Q3B: My understanding is that (housing project) was successful. Walk me through, from your perspective, the factors that were most critical to its success.

As needed:

- a. How, if at all, did the structure of your co-op housing model contribute to your success or challenges?
- b. How, if at all, did the nature of the co-op housing residents contribute to your success or challenges?
- c. How would characterize the role of the City/Region of _____ when looking to create the co-operative? What ultimately led to the co-op's success in this regard?

Q4B: What do you think are/were major challenges facing co-op housing projects these days? Or your housing project specifically.

- a. Did you ever encounter challenges getting buy-in from municipal stakeholders? What about other stakeholders? How did your team navigate these challenges?
- b. Had you or your team ever considered a different co-op housing model? Why, or why not?
- c. Was cost-effectiveness ever a challenge for you and your team?
- d. Do individuals share daily costs of living in any way such as food, utilities? Are there any challenges related to that?

Q5B: Within your time working with co-ops are you aware of any that have terminated (including ones you were and/or were not involved with)? If so, do you know what led to their decline or what challenges they faced during their course?

Q7B: Since we would also like to assess the feasibility of running a co-op housing program in the current housing landscape, do you mind sharing how your co-op housing project garners financial support, if you are aware of this information?

- a. Are there resources, stakeholder groups, or others that are most important to rely on when securing funding?

Q8B: What's your perspective on the long-term sustainability of the co-op? Have there been any emergent challenges? If so, how have co-op stakeholders responded to these challenges?

Let's now discuss about other co-op programs...

Ask all (those involved with failed and successful co-ops)

Q10: Has your housing co-op ever implemented any accessibility or social support considerations? If so, how did you organize them and make sure they met the needs of residents?

- a. How were the residents made aware of these supports?
- b. How were they accessed? Approximately, how often?
- c. Did you implement them independently as a co-op housing unit, or was there collaboration with external organizations?
- d. Were there any financial concerns when trying to implement these considerations?
- e. Did you ever receive any feedback regarding the implemented supports? If so, what was it?

Q11: Based on your experience/perspective, what advice would you give others hoping to develop a co-op housing project? (I.e., what are the most important "wins"?)

Q12: Do you have any questions for us or anything you would like to add to your responses?

Additional questions: if knowledgeable about social housing co-ops specifically

Q9: To your knowledge, do the obstacles in developing a housing co-op program differ from those of a social housing co-op in general?

- a. Have you in the past been involved with other housing co-op programs and did they require vastly different expertise compared to a social based program?
- b. What are the most critical factors that influence the decision of the type of co-op housing one will build?
- c. Is it difficult to find funding dependent on the type of housing co-op program one is trying to develop?

Appendix C: Codebook

Code							
Challenges in development of Co-ops	15	37	16	21	14	9	
Structure challenges	3	11	3	6	2	3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with the building itself 	0	2	0	3		1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and Governance • Education of members 	1	3	1	3	2	2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Involvement and Rules 	2	5	2	0	0	0	
Discrimination	9	0	1	0	0	0	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Against indigenous people 	2	0	0	0	0	0	
Pushback from neighbourhood	5	0	1	0	0	1	
Co-op considered troublesome	2	0	5	0	0	1	
Funding challenges	7	20	3	6			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of supplies and building 				1	1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding opportunities while needed • overwhelming amount of funding 	2	20	2	1	5	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of subsidies 	3	0	1	0		1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding sensitive to government changes 	2	0	1	0		1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating on a 'break-even' basis 	2	0	0	0	1	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not increasing rent as needed 						1	
Requirement from members	1	5	1	2			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time commitment and dedication needed 	1	5	1	2	5		
Irresponsible neighbours	3	1	2	0			

• Behaviour issues	1	1	0	0			
• Not paying rent on time	1	0	1	1			
• Poor maintenance of unit	1	0	1	4			
Challenges in maintaining co-op philosophy	6	0	4				
• No consequences for breaches of bylaw	3	0	2	0			
• Long lag times for hearing back from landlord tenant board	3	0	1	0			
Supporting successful development of Co-ops	1	10	19	9	8		
Funding	2	2	10	0	2		
• via CMHC, ~40 years ago	1	0	1	1			
• Via Municipality				1	1		
• Open communication with the city/funding agencies				0	1		
Training board				2			
planning for capital repairs/financial forecasting w money)				1			
• Canada mortgage and Housing corporation. • Municipal Support	1	2		4			
• Property management firm often needed (cause members don't have skills for that)						1	
Co-op housing philosophy	2	0	4	0	1		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'indigenous-by-indigenous philosophy (i.e., created for indigenous people, by indigenous people, managed by indigenous people) • Members having a voice 	1	0	0	0	2		
Responsible neighbours	3	0	4	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying rent on time 	1	0	1	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good maintenance of unit 	2	0	3	0			
What would happen if the co-op was not supported	1	1	1	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private market issue 	0	1	0	0			
Strong Nucleus	2	7	2	0	1	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development consultant type firm 						1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong leadership, building standards, and plan for the long run. • Committed leadership 	2	7	2	1	1		
Co-op description	18	13	37	1	9	7	
Reason for starting	1	1	1				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous people, difficult to find affordable housing 	1	0	0	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked on a co-op for women over 40 and ones grounded in different ethnic communities. • Some general-purpose ones. 	0	1	0	0			

Design of the co-op	1	2	1	1			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The co-op that would be formed around a building Ownership element People come together and collectively decide to create a co-op 	1	2	1	0	1	1	
Role of the interviewee	3	5	8	2			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admin work, supporting the board 	2		7	1	1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership role in the co-op sector 				1	3		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance and Funding 	1	5	1	0	1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research 				0		1	
Requirements	7	2	3	1			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban indigenous people, residency in London 	2	0	0	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamilton Nonprofit or co-op housing 	1	2	1	0	1		
Factors that would make someone ineligible for housing	4	0	4	1		2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizenship and age 				1			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not paying housing charges on time 	1	0	1	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being disruptive 	1	0	2	0		1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not taking good care of unit 	1	0	1	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend general members meeting, vote for budget, elections, etc 	1	0	1	0		1	
Resolving issues	3	0	2	0			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbours expected to resolve small issues amongst themselves 	1	0	1	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can send written formal complaint to board of directors 	2	0	1	0			
Housing setup	1	2	3	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single family houses scattered 	1	0	2	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These co-ops were created by provincial programs. • Small co-ops 	0	2	1	0			
Demographics	1	1	3	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older adults, families, very diverse – usually couples or families 	1	0	3	0	1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly general, women in their 40s, and minorities. 	0	1	0	0			
Changes over time	1	0	2	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to have strict requirements for volunteer work, less prominent now • Changes in member engagement 	1	0	2	0	1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of activism and development of co-ops in the past → now little activity in terms of new co-op development 				0		1	
Application for joining co-op	1	0	2	1			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple process, fill out application, put on waitlist, interview with committee 	1	0	2	0			

Co-ops in the current landscape	8	6	11	6			
Recommendations	2	0	2	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate as a non-profit with charitable status 	2	0	2	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find appropriate resources 				1	1	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase rent as needed 				0		1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For mental health co-op – contract with community social service agencies 				1		1	
Views	7	0	10	2			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong city support in Hamilton 						1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-op housing superior than social housing model 	1	0	2	0			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More similar to a community 	1	0	1	1	1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure affordability, need funding support from government agencies 	2	0	3	1			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommends non-profit instead of housing co-op 	2	0	3	0			
Current Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity versus non-profit Why traditional co-ops may not work in the future vs why non-profit work better 	1 (included in other sections)	6	1 (included in other sections)	0			
Much less co-op development after 1994						1	
Feasibility	11		20	8			
Type of housing unit	5	7	7	0			

• Co-op vs non-profit	3	6	5	0			
• Mixed Income	3	0	2	0			
External Financial support	5	1	5	5	1		
Future Considerations	1	7	6	3			
• Co-op Housing	1	0	3	0			
• Structure	1	7	2	0			
• Infrastructure	0	4	1	0			
• Ministry involvement	0	3	0	0			
• Sustaining mortgage payments				1			
• governance				1			
• Hygienic concerns/unit maintenance costs				1			