



Wheatland Housing Management Body

“Ensuring Everyone Has a Place to Call Home”

Governance Review

Final Report
September 2023



Report Prepared By:



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I. Letter of Transmittal

September 22nd, 2023

Vickey Cook
Wheatland Housing Management Body
76, 2nd Street
Strathmore, AB
T1P 1J8

Re: Wheatland Housing Management Body Governance Review

Dear Ms. Cook,

We are pleased to present Wheatland Housing Management Body with the Governance Review draft report.

Over the past months, we have reviewed, assessed, and developed a series of recommendations for the Wheatland Housing Management Body (WHMB). Our goal through the review was to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of WHMB, improve relationships among partners and identify any gaps in services both now and moving forward.

Should you have any questions or require further clarification regarding our recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact us or request a meeting to review the report.

We feel we have captured the intent and the objectives of your original request for proposal and invite any comments on the attached draft report.

Respectfully,



Erica Thomas
Chief Executive Officer, Transitional Solutions Inc.

II. Background

Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI) was engaged in June 2023 by the Wheatland Housing Management Body (WHMB) to undertake a governance review and develop a report with recommendations to guide WHMB moving forward.

The Wheatland Housing Management Body was established as a management body by provincial ministerial order and is governed by the Alberta Housing Act and its regulations. The management body is a registered Canadian charitable organization operating senior and social housing. The first Ministerial Order was issued in 1961, and operations commenced in 1963. WHMB just celebrated its 60th Anniversary.

The existing lodge has 95 rooms and WHMB manages another 64 units on behalf of the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. This arrangement has a huge benefit for WHMB in that it provides the opportunity to recoup a percentage of the CAO's salary and some staff salary and benefits, thus lowering the operating costs of the lodge.

As of the writing of this report, there are approximately 20 names on the waiting list for accommodation at the lodge, and there has always been a waiting list.

III. Engagement

All board members, the CAO and the Wheatland County CAO were interviewed. TSI also interviewed the Executive Director of Meridian Housing Foundation located in Spruce Grove, an almost identical seniors housing foundation embarking on a new build as well. Municipal alternates were not interviewed as the municipalities are not entitled to have alternates on the Board.

All policies, Strategic Plans, Committee Terms of Reference, Board Manual, and minutes of past board meetings were also reviewed.

IV. Analysis & Findings

It became apparent throughout the interviews that the fractured relationship between the urban municipalities and Wheatland County has been carried over to WHMB. There is a lack of trust between the parties, and everyone is suspicious. The responsibility for this conflict lies with all parties in that everyone needs to approach the table with a view of collaboration.

In addition, it does not help when Wheatland County representatives publicly criticize the WHMB (July 4th County Council meeting) and correspond with the Ministry responsible regarding their dissatisfaction with the operations of WHMB. This action was inappropriate and even more so, when you consider that Wheatland County has three representatives at the board table. There are actually four Wheatland County representatives at the table when you take into consideration that Glenn Koester, who represents the Wheatland Area Hospice Society, is also a County Councillor. Not one of the Wheatland County representatives has raised concerns about governance at the WHMB board table. Actions such as the recent Wheatland County letter and the Tom Ikert incident (more on this later) do nothing to build a cohesive board.

The County representatives should be bringing their concerns to the WHMB Board, and yet this didn't happen. The WHMB is an autonomous body governed by the Alberta Housing Act and must be respected. Ironically, the letter to the Minister by Wheatland County did not contain specifics, and the County was aware that a third party had already been engaged to undertake a governance review. It doesn't matter whether it is Wheatland County or any other municipality, they need to understand that they do not have an oversight role of the WHMB.

“Adversity is a crossroads that makes a person choose one or two paths: character or compromise. Every time a person chooses character, he/she becomes stronger, even when that choice brings negative consequences.”

John Maxwell, the 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader

The lodge is well-operated and managed. Residents are happy in this environment, and the atmosphere within the lodge is always congenial. Staff are excellent at their jobs, there is a low turnover in staff, and there is a good relationship between management and the union.

Concerns have been raised over the relationship between the CAO and the Board Chair, Glenn Koester. The concerns are unfounded in the view of TSI as there are no pecuniary interest. The Chair is only one person on a committee for the performance review of the CAO, and the entire Board reviews the CAO's salary. This concern needs to be set aside permanently.

After reviewing all the input, the main roadblock for WHMB is the relationship at the board table; this is caused by the failure of board members to learn, understand, and adhere to their roles and responsibilities. Board members must understand their roles and respect that their fiduciary role is to WHMB, not the organization that appointed them. WHMB is an entirely autonomous board with requisitioning powers and is accountable to the Ministry.

All board members should keep to the moral/ethical high ground. Make sure you are true to your oath of office.

Board Structure

The board structure is established through a Ministerial Order. The Board is currently structured with eleven positions, although there is one vacancy because there is no member at large.

Membership:

- Wheatland County (3 representatives)
- Town of Strathmore (2 representatives)
- Village of Hussar (1 representative)
- Village of Rockyford (1 representative)
- Village of Standard (1 representative)
- Strathmore Lions Club (1 representative)
- Wheatland & Area Hospice Society (1 representative)
- Member at large (1 representative - currently vacant)

While the structure of the Board may favour Wheatland County, it is reasonable when considering the equalized assessment for all the municipalities.

Competency Framework

Strategic Plan Priority 1. Leadership Excellence

Objective: WHMB will attract individuals to create a diverse and inclusive board to effectively communicate and create a fiscally responsible organization to positively impact the communities we serve and further the organizational mandate.

As per Sec. 5.01(2), Management Body Operations and Administration Regulation, a housing management body (HMB) Board must determine the competencies required for the board members and develop a process for appointing those board members.

The regulation sets out five categories for skill requirements, and the Board can add to the skill requirements that they feel are necessary to fulfill their mandate best. The Board should review the skill requirements on an annual basis and review the competency level of the current members. Unfortunately, the core competencies as drafted do not address integrity nor the understanding and support of social housing.

Recommend that the Board undertake an annual review of the competency level requirements for board members and adjust as necessary.

While the Board has no control over the municipal appointees, the Board needs to collaborate with the municipalities to ensure that their appointees have the skill requirements that will best meet the needs of the Board.

ASHA put on two webinars, and only two board representatives attended the seminars; this is a missed opportunity for everyone to benefit from this professional development. There needs to be a commitment from board members to take advantage of all opportunities for professional development whenever possible.

Recommend that the core competencies should be expanded to include the following:

- 1. Integrity*
- 2. Strong supporter of social housing*
- 3. Commitment to participate in professional development opportunities*

Stakeholder Engagement

The Board has done an excellent job engaging with the local stakeholders to date. There was extensive consultation on the site location for the new build. The Board has had regional meetings across Wheatland County on the new build. While this is all positive, there is still room for improvement. The Building Committee, through the Board, needs to provide monthly updates on the status of the new build, even if there is nothing new to report. Some municipalities feel that they haven't been kept informed, yet their representatives at the board table have not raised any concerns or questions.

Recommend that the Building Committee provide monthly updates through the Board on the status of the new build.

Some municipalities didn't feel they were well informed on the ongoing activities of the WHMB. The best resolution for this shortcoming would be a quarterly newsletter, probably one page would be sufficient, on the status of the new build and any other pertinent information on WHMB activities.

The Board should have an overall communication strategy; if outside resources are needed, some individuals/firms could be contracted to assist with this task. The better informed everyone is, the easier the job will be for the Board. It is imperative that WHMB and the Wheatland Hospice Society are communicating the same message at all times. This will help in alleviating rumours and false information.

Recommend that WHMB commence with a quarterly newsletter to the municipalities and other relevant stakeholders.

Recommend that WHMB publish an annual report.

Recommend that WHMB develop a communication strategy and ensure that the strategy is fully funded.

Strategic Plan

In November 2022, WHMB engaged Community Futures to work with the Board to undertake a strategic planning process. The Board members spoke positively about the process and were pleased with the result.

The adopted Strategic Plan is a good document; however, it needs more detail in some instances and contains the work plan for the implementation. There are gaps in the work plan, especially concerning the funding required for some tasks, and this needs to be completed. At this point, some tasks should have been completed, and the work plan needs to be updated.

The Board should review the Strategic Plan with the CAO every quarter, as this is one of the principle measuring tools for the performance of the CAO. In addition, the Strategic Plan needs to be updated annually.

Recommend that the Strategic Plan and work plan be fully completed.

Recommend that the Strategic Plan be reviewed by the Board every quarter.

Recommend that the Board review and update the Strategic Plan annually.

Policies

WHMB engaged a third party to assist with policy review and update; however, a decision has now been made to continue reviewing policies in-house. Policy review is a continuous process and should be included on the agenda for every board meeting. Currently, there are several gaps in policy.

Recommend allocating time at every board meeting for a report from the Policy Review Committee.

It is essential that policies be adhered to at all times. There was an instance where email voting was requested, yet this is contrary to policy. This action brings into question the validity of the motion. If it is necessary to deal with a matter via email voting, there should be a motion to vary from the policy for this particular instance. The CAO's role is to guide and advise the Board on all matters relating to policy. Policies should be followed; transparency is the key.

Recommend that the CAO advise the Board if they are attempting to take any action contrary to policy.

For example, board members often use their cell phones to text during board meetings; this should not be allowed and is disrespectful to the Chair and other board members. Cell phones should be turned off and put away when the person enters the meeting room.

Recommend that a policy be developed regarding the use of cell phones during board and committee meetings.

Having observed two board meetings during this review, it became evident that the Chair is not always respected. Questions and comments must be through the Chair and only after being recognized. Sometimes, so many members are talking making it difficult to follow the conversation. There needs to be a procedural policy developed for board and committee meetings.

Another example is that no one should take notes during an in-camera session, and this needs to be addressed in a procedural policy. While there are references to some proceedings at board meetings, there needs to be one comprehensive policy that addresses the procedures for board and committee meetings.

Currently, it doesn't appear that committee meeting minutes are provided to the Board. When the Chair of a committee reports to the Board, the minutes of the committee meeting should be attached to the agenda. From my review, it appears that minutes are only being recorded for some committee meetings. There needs to be a record of all proceedings at committee meetings.

Recommend that a procedural policy be developed for board and committee meetings.

In reviewing minutes of past meetings, there are tasks that were to be completed, but there is nothing

recorded in a subsequent meeting that would indicate that the task was ever completed. Developing an action list for all board directions would be beneficial. The CAO would then review this during the board meeting so that everyone is aware that all directives are being completed. The responsibility for preparing, maintaining and updating the action list would be the CAO. A performance management program should be in place to ensure that policies, board goals and directions are monitored and completed; this is another benefit of an action list.

Recommend that a policy be developed that addresses an action list for all board directives (this could be included in the procedural policy).

Upon reviewing the Financial Administration Policy that is currently pending approval, it is evident that more work is required before adopting the policy. For example, there is nothing in the policy that addresses spending limits. The CAO has a limit of \$ 5,000 for her credit card; this needs to be increased and addressed in the policy. Municipalities typically have very comprehensive financial administration policies, which may be an excellent source of information for the Policy Review Committee. A strong Financial Administration Policy protects staff and the board members.

Another example is that the policy should address posting audited financial statements on the website.

Recommend that priority be given to finalizing the Financial Administration Policy and adopting it by the Board.

Recommend that the audited financial statements be posted on the website.

With the plans for the new building underway, there is always a need for additional funding. Many individuals within the region want to contribute financially, often through a memorial or an estate. An opportunity exists for WHMB in the forming of a foundation. There is evidence in board minutes and the Strategic Plan that this has been discussed but never seriously pursued.

Recommend that WHMB pursue the formation of a foundation for ongoing funding opportunities.

Governance & Board Performance

As stated previously, the fractured relationship between the urban municipalities and Wheatland County has carried over to WHMB. There is no question that everyone wants what is best for the lodge's residents. It is time to put this animosity aside and work collaboratively to better WHMB. People expect personal behaviour to be at a higher standard than the life of a private person. All board members are co-equals; no member is entitled to more extraordinary privilege or respect because of tenure.

The incident with Tom Ikert publicly speaking to the health record of the CAO of the WHMB further impacted this fractured relationship. The Board needs to move past this unfortunate incident. It has placed the CAO in a very awkward position because she is now caught in the center of this conflict. The CAO is not a pawn, and this ongoing conflict will impact her relationship with the Board if there is no closure. There needs to be closure, and as soon as the following recommendations have been implemented, all discussions on this incident need to cease.

Recommend that Tom Ikert publicly apologize to all concerned at an upcoming Board meeting.

Recommend that WHMB cease all legal action against Tom Ikert immediately.

Once this incident has been put behind the Board, it would be in everyone's best interests to consider third-party mediation to build a better and stronger working relationship at the board level.

Recommend that WHMB engage a third party to mediate the ongoing conflict between the Board and the municipalities.

A Code of Conduct would have been beneficial in resolving this matter before it reached the level that it has; however, the current Code of Conduct does not address how a board member should treat staff and other board members.

Recommend that WHMB revise the Code of Conduct to address how all board members are expected to treat staff and other board members.

All board members must understand and respect that the WHMB is an autonomous organization governed by the Alberta Housing Act and regulations. Members' fiduciary responsibilities are to WHMB, not the party that appointed them; this is paramount and fundamental. If the party that appointed you has a concern, bring their concern to the table but do so respectfully, always remembering that the WHMB is an autonomous body. Set aside your personal feelings and egos; there is no place at the table for them.

When a decision is made at the board table, everyone must respect that decision no matter what side you voted for. Respect the democratic process and adhere to the process.

Recommend revising the Code of Conduct to include a clause that addresses fiduciary responsibilities.

Questions and comments regarding the new build have been made at the board table. One individual commented about the location of an office; this is not governance. There is an architect involved with this project, an architect who has designed most senior lodge facilities in Alberta and has extensive experience in developing these facilities. Staff in these facilities review the drawings with a view from their onsite experience and provide their comments to the architect. There is no need for a board member to be involved in the location of offices in the new build. Stick to the governance role.

The same could be said about the location of the new building. Board members need to understand that a very open public process was provided for the new build's site location. The decision has been made, and the Board needs to move on. The Town of Strathmore has committed to doing any required remedial work, and if, at that time, it turns out that the site is not suitable for the new build, then that is the time to reconsider the location.

There have been incidents where the agenda package for a board meeting does not contain all the material. The Tom Ikert letter was one incident, but this was not the only one. It is not reasonable or acceptable to expect board members to deal with matters before the Board without having all the material and information available. If material will be received at the last minute then note on the agenda that the material will be distributed at the board meeting; this should be a rare incident.

Further to this, board meeting procedures must adhere to policies. When a board member points out that the Board is not adhering to policy, board members should not be offended. Policies need to be followed. There was a COVID policy amendment vote by email, which is contrary to policy. The CAO must advise the Board when they are not following or straying from policy.

While WHMB has a good onboarding process, some board members have failed to take the time to meet with the CAO and go through the onboarding process. The Board Manual is an excellent document, and each member needs to review this document periodically. Review should happen before any board member participates in their first board meeting. There is a huge learning curve to becoming a board member, and the onboarding process will be the first step in becoming orientated to the workings of the WHMB. The onboarding process should be expanded to include education on the governing legislation and requisitioning authority.

Recommend that all board members confirm they have had an onboarding with the CAO.

Recommend that all new board members attend an onboarding session before their first board meeting.

Recommend that WHMB engage legal counsel to provide a legal overview of the legislation governing the Board and the responsibilities of the board members.

Recommend that WHMB have the auditor provide an information session on the requisitioning authority of the housing body at the same time as the audited financial statements are presented to the Board.

The new build overshadows all other responsibilities and work of the Board. For instance, there has not been any discussion on the other social housing operations at the last two board meetings. Why is no one raising this at the board meeting? The Board must remain focused on the total operation of WHMB.

Recommend that there be an update of social housing facilities managed by WHMB on behalf of the province at every board meeting.

The Chair of the Board is the spokesperson for the Board and Organization. This appointment needs to be done by resolution of the Board and should be done annually. At the organizational meeting of November 21, 2022, there was a reference to the Board Chair being the spokesperson and there was a resolution confirming the appointment.

Recommend that the Board appoint the spokesperson for the Board and Organization annually by resolution.

Some sound governance principles for the Board to adhere to:

1. Have a good understanding of roles and respect for each other.
2. Leave personal feelings and egos at the door.
3. Have an appreciation that we are all quite different.
4. Have an appreciation of our policies and procedures.
5. Respect the role of the CAO.
6. Abide by our Code of Conduct.
7. Acceptance that WHMB is an autonomous organization.

Building Committee Terms of Reference

The Building Committee was formed to oversee and lead the new build on behalf of the Board. Overall, the Terms of Reference cover the committee's responsibilities; however, there are gaps need to be

addressed. For instance, the Board has authorized the Committee some financial responsibilities (resolution # 43-02-130. This needs to be added to the Terms of Reference as an appendix.

Recommend that the Terms of Reference for the Building Committee be amended to include:

- 1. The attachment of the financial responsibilities of the Committee.*
- 2. A Communication Strategy be developed for the committee.*
- 3. Minutes of all committee meetings be brought to the Board at the appropriate time.*

The construction of the new build is a massive project. While the Board has done an excellent job of bringing consultants on board to assist with advice on the new build, it would be beneficial to have a committee member with extensive construction experience. It would be in everyone's best interest to appoint a public member with extensive construction experience to the Building Committee.

Recommend that the Board appoint a public member with extensive construction experience to the Building Committee.

Standing Committee Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for all the standing committees of the Board were reviewed and outlined the committee's responsibilities. There is no reference to membership, and this needs to be addressed. Typically, a committee should consist of three members and be supported by Administration. Minutes of all committee meetings should be brought to the Board, and this does not appear to be the current practice.

Recommend that the Terms of Reference for all Standing Committees be amended to address the members of the committees.

Recommend that the minutes of all committee meetings be brought to the Board.

V. Risk Management

Many risks are associated with operating a seniors lodge, varying from security to violence to the recent COVID pandemic. WHMB has done an outstanding job in managing the risks and should be commended for its response to the COVID pandemic. WHMB was a leader in dealing with safety precautions and implemented policies quickly to protect their residents and staff. The move to implement a policy requiring that all board members be fully vaccinated was a good position for the Board to take. It set a good example for residents and staff and provided a higher level of protection for everyone. Decisions like this are often hard to make, but the Board was quick to act and that demonstrated leadership.

The WHMB has an excellent Risk Ranking Matrix, copy is attached as Appendix A.

The more significant risks facing WHMB right now are associated with the new build. Therefore, it is imperative that all board members have the same information and communicate the same message when speaking with local residents. Board members should not make frivolous comments that are negative to the new build. All decisions are being made democratically by the Board, and this process must be respected and adhered to. Once a decision is made, everyone is on board and in agreement regardless of how you voted. There is no room for negativity in this process.

Some of the risks are:

- Possible lack of provincial funding for new build;
- A lot of funds are being spent on prep plans for the new build (while this is a risk, it is necessary for provincial funding);
- Lack of funding from the Town of Strathmore and Wheatland County; and
- Impact if all the rooms don't fill in the new build.

All of these risks will be addressed as the process moves forward and decisions are made. In the meantime, the Board must do a better job of communicating with all parties. All the negativity and rumors add stress to everyone's life. However, it impacts the lodge's residents more than anyone, bringing uncertainty to their lives, additional stress and could affect their health.

I want to thank Vickey Cook, the CAO and her staff for all their assistance. All of my inquiries were answered in a timely manner.

VI. Summary of Recommendations

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

1. Recommend that the Board undertake an annual review of the competency level requirements for board members and adjust as necessary.
2. Recommend that the core competencies should be expanded to include the following:
 1. Integrity
 2. Strong supporter of social housing
 3. Commitment to participate in professional development opportunities

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

3. Recommend that the Building Committee provide monthly updates through the Board on the status of the new build.
4. Recommend that WHMB commence with a quarterly newsletter to the municipalities and other relevant stakeholders.
5. Recommend that WHMB publish an annual report.
6. Recommend that WHMB develop a communication strategy and ensure that the strategy is fully funded.

STRATEGIC PLAN

7. Recommend that the Strategic Plan and work plan be fully completed.
8. Recommend that the Strategic Plan be reviewed by the Board every quarter.
9. Recommend that the Board review and update the Strategic Plan annually.

POLICIES

10. Recommend allocating time at every board meeting for a report from the Policy Review Committee.
11. Recommend that the CAO advise the Board if they are attempting to take any action contrary to policy.
12. Recommend that a policy be developed regarding the use of cell phones during board and committee meetings.
13. Recommend that a procedural policy be developed for board and committee meetings.
14. Recommend that a policy be developed that addresses an action list for all board directives (this could be included in the procedural policy).
15. Recommend that priority be given to finalizing the Financial Administration Policy and adopting it by the Board.
16. Recommend that the audited financial statements be posted on the website.

17. Recommend that WHMB pursue the formation of a foundation for ongoing funding opportunities.

GOVERNANCE & BOARD PERFORMANCE

18. Recommend that Tom Ikert publicly apologize to all concerned at an upcoming Board meeting.
19. Recommend that WHMB cease all legal action against Tom Ikert immediately.
20. Recommend that WHMB engage a third party to mediate the ongoing conflict between the Board and the municipalities.
21. Recommend that WHMB revise the Code of Conduct to address how all board members are expected to treat staff and other board members.
22. Recommend revising the Code of Conduct to include a clause that addresses fiduciary responsibilities.
23. Recommend that all board members confirm they have had an onboarding with the CAO.
24. Recommend that all new board members attend an onboarding session before their first board meeting.
25. Recommend that WHMB engage legal counsel to provide a legal overview of the legislation governing the Board and the responsibilities of the board members.
26. Recommend that WHMB have the auditor provide an information session on the requisitioning authority of the housing body at the same time as the audited financial statements are presented to the Board.
27. Recommend that there be an update of social housing facilities managed by WHMB on behalf of the province at every board meeting.
28. Recommend that the Board appoint the spokesperson for the Board and Organization annually by resolution.

BUILDING COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

29. Recommend that the Terms of Reference for the Building Committee be amended to include:
 1. The attachment of the financial responsibilities of the committee.
 2. A Communication Strategy be developed for the committee.
 3. Minutes of all committee meetings be brought to the Board at the appropriate time.
30. Recommend that the Board appoint a public member with extensive construction experience to the Building Committee.

STANDING COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

31. Recommend that the Terms of Reference for all Standing Committees be amended to address the members of the committees.
32. Recommend that the minutes of all committee meetings be brought to the Board.

VII. Appendix A – WHMB Risk Ranking Matrix

WHMB Risk Ranking Matrix

Likelihood of Occurrence	5 – Frequent "Occurs in many cases" "Happens more than once per year"	5 (Medium)	10 (High)	15 (Extreme)	20 (Extreme)
	4 – Probable "Likely to occur" "One in ten"	4 (Low)	8 (Moderate)	12 (High)	16 (Extreme)
	3 – Occasional "Will occur irregularly" "One in twenty"	3 (Low)	6 (Medium)	9 (Moderate)	12 (High)
	2 – Remote "Unlikely to occur" "One in a hundred"	2 (Low)	4 (Low)	6 (Medium)	8 (Moderate)
	1 – Improbable "Not ever likely to happen" "One in a million"	1 (Low)	2 (Low)	3 (Low)	4 (Low)
Risk Value = Severity x Likelihood		1 – Minor "First Aid Injury" "Less than 10K Damage or loss" No Business Interruption	2 – Moderate "Medical Aid Injury" "More than 100K Damage or loss" Business Interruption	3 – Serious "Restricted Work Injury" "More than 500K Damage or loss" Business Interruption more than one week	4 – Catastrophic "Fatality" "More than 2MM Damage or loss" Business Interruption more than 1 month
Severity of Occurrence					

Approval Guidelines Required at Risk Ranking Levels

<u>Risk Ranking Level</u>	<u>Required Approval for Work to Continue at that Risk Level</u>
Extreme (15 -20)	WHMB scheduled meeting
High (10 – 12)	WHMB special meeting
Moderate (8 – 9)	Working committee
Medium (5 – 6)	CAO
Low (1 – 4)	No Approval Required

Notes:

1. Every attempt should be made to lower the risk to as low a value as possible before proceeding with work.
2. In cases where risk levels cannot be lowered any further, work parties must obtain written approval from the appropriate level within the company (see chart above) before proceeding with work at that level.

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