Goldeye Conference is a collaboration between SACHA and NACHA and provides an opportunity to build the broader co-op community, to learn from each other and to learn from the sector. Again, a quote sums up my take-away best- If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the sea. Antoine de St Exupery. At the General Meeting on October 27, I would like to facilitate an interactive dialogue, using the following report as a base of shared knowledge, about what we as a community are longing for and how we can become inspired and enabled to do the work necessary to see our dreams realised.

In the opening plenary session, a rep from CHMC Edmonton office spoke directly to the programs available for co-ops for both refurbishment of existing housing stock and for rebuilding. He clarified that the co-investment fund is not intended to be the main funding arm and requires a partner, often a governmental, but could be private, partner, in the project in order to be eligible. On a provincial level, this means governmental commitment of money to your project, whereas on the municipal level, it often looks more like guaranteed expedited permitting, land security, either through a *moderate* lease or sale price or possibly a density bonus. Other requirements to be eligible for ANY money- your project must result in your buildings becoming 25% more efficient than current building code, 20% of units must be made accessible AND 30% of housing must be and remain at 80% below median rents for 20 years. These are difficult targets to meet and so he advised that as this funding program is open all year round, that we not lose hope and be willing to re-submit the application, with adaptations, every 2 months or so. Applications are accepted all year round and judged against each other. So, in one funding cycle, our project might not be the best and therefore isn’t awarded any monies; however, in the next cycle, it might be the only application submitted and therefore, has a better chance of obtaining the desired amount of funding. But even so, it’s easiest to hit these targets with a new build.

The innovation fund is intended to support projects which show a different and better way of solving a common problem.

And there is one more program which he outlined- namely one for modernising current housing stock. The requirements are similar to those of the co-investment fund with one main difference- energy efficiency must be 25% better than it is now, not necessarily better than code, but the accessibility and affordability requirements remain the same.

Brad Clute of MEC ran a workshop called Defining your Social Purpose and Theory of Change. His premise can be summed up in this quote- If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the sea. Antoine de St Exupery

He likened social purpose to the trunk of a tree, with the committees and activities which support and feed into this trunk as being the roots; iterating and reiterating that all actions must support the social purpose. The branches are then the out-workings of this purpose, the service provided to members and to society at large. His talk then led into how to take a lofty social purpose and turn it into actionable steps so that these ideals are not relegated to becoming a plaque on the wall. A theory of change is ‘a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in context.’ Basically, this involves a process which requires a community to work backwards from a goal- what problem are we trying to solve? 🡪 what’s the solution? 🡪 what conditions need to exist to make the solution work? 🡪 how do you create those conditions? 🡪 what tools do you need to create those conditions? 🡪 what first steps can you take? He also introduced a variety of logic models which further break down the steps into increasingly smaller chunks which will lead to the desired end result.

Brad spoke eloquently about process, about taking our blue sky thinking and digging down into the weeds to make it a reality, and about how to arrive at our destination. What he proposes takes time, but he also suggested using the process on smaller issues to familiarise oneself and one’s organisation with the process and then build up to take on larger tasks. Time frames and context are important at this point- the larger the problem being solved, the more time is required to plan the theory of change; patience with those developing the logic model is important, especially as we rely on volunteer efforts.

We are in the unique position of being mid-way through an attempt to take our blue sky thinking and make it a reality, so possibly inputting our current work into a logic model framework or theory of change model might make the first steps more accessible to a larger population.

In our final plenary, a recent university graduate made an enthusiastic and inspiring presentation about ACCA and their co-op leadership program offered during the summer at Goldeye. This program is open to all 11-18 year olds and is so much more than a simple summer camp; they also look for co-op members (aged 18- 65) to support the program by becoming volunteer staff and passing their knowledge to the next generation. Co-ops can send eligible youth with budgeted funds, but can also reach out to other co-op businesses for scholarships. This is one way to educate and build up the young people in a co-op to become active members of our co-op and of society at large with strong leadership skills and a clear understanding of the co-operative sector, which can only help to grow these types of businesses in the future. I would suggest that we think about the young people living in our co-op and plan in the next budget year to send at least one candidate to this program; it would also serve us well to support and recruit volunteers from our co-op.

There were also social events and networking opportunities with SACHA employees and again, the connections made will yet yield more benefits for Sunnyhill as time goes on.