



**MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE**

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**23 avril 2026**

**FILE NUMBER: ACS2026-SI-HSI-0009**

**SUBJECT: Public Developer Options – Precedent Review**

**OBJET : Possibilités de promoteurs publics – Examen des précédents**

**PURPOSE**

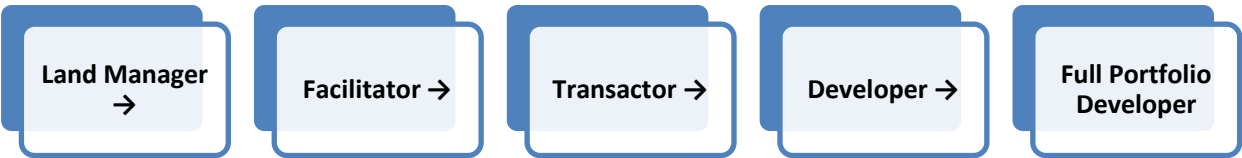
The purpose of this IPD is to provide an update on the first step taken on Housing Acceleration Plan (HAP) Action 32 to investigate options for a Public Developer Model for the City of Ottawa, being a precedent review of existing public developer models

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Staff have begun the work of investigating options for the City to establish a Public Developer Model as directed by HAP Action 32. To date, a high-level scan of existing municipal development agencies was done and is summarized in this report. This public developer precedent review examines how public developers across Canada and internationally are structured, governed, funded, and empowered, offering insights to inform Ottawa’s strategy under new housing mandates. The analysis identifies a broad spectrum of public developer models, ranging from light touch land facilitators to fully integrated development corporations that own, finance, and deliver large-scale housing portfolios. This precedent review suggests the following key takeaways:

**1. Public developer models operate along a spectrum of roles.**

A public developer is a public entity that uses public lands and funds to accelerate the development of affordable and supportive housing. Public developers vary widely – from land managers to full development corporations – depending on the jurisdiction’s needs and the mandate assigned to the entity. Examples of public developers include Toronto Housing Development Office, Build Canada Homes, and Ottawa Community Housing Corporation.



**2. Arm's length governance enables faster, more strategic delivery.**

Most public developers are structured as separate entities from government to depoliticize decisions, enable faster response to market conditions, and access different legislation and financial tools than municipal departments.

### **3. Public land is the most powerful lever for delivering affordable housing.**

Successful public developers leverage publicly owned land, often retaining ownership through long-term leases, which lowers development costs, preserves public control, and captures land value appreciation over time.

### **4. Partnerships are essential to achieving scale.**

Public developers rarely build or operate housing alone; instead, they rely on private builders, non-profit and Indigenous housing providers, and community partners to deliver construction, financing, and long-term operations.

### **5. Sustainable public funding is critical for long-term affordability.**

Even well-established public developers require significant and predictable public funding for capital costs, operating subsidies, and ongoing maintenance, especially for deeply affordable and supportive housing.

### **6. Innovative financial tools help reduce reliance on subsidies.**

Public developers use instruments such as mixed income rent models, revolving loans, portfolio level borrowing, and low-cost financing to stretch public dollars and maintain affordability over time.

### **7. Public developers deliver broader social and economic benefits.**

Beyond affordable housing, these entities often integrate environmental standards, community amenities, modern construction approaches, and market stabilizing functions into their development activities.

### **8. Large scale delivery brings efficiencies but also significant risks.**

Developing at scale requires sophisticated expertise and exposes public entities to financial, market, and operational risks, including cost volatility, slow procurement processes, and challenges in attracting specialized talent.

### **9. Public developers cannot address housing needs alone.**

Jurisdictions with public developer models continue to support non-profits and private partners through incentives, funding programs, and regulatory tools to ensure a diverse and resilient housing.

## **10. Public developers raise important trade-offs that must be weighed.**

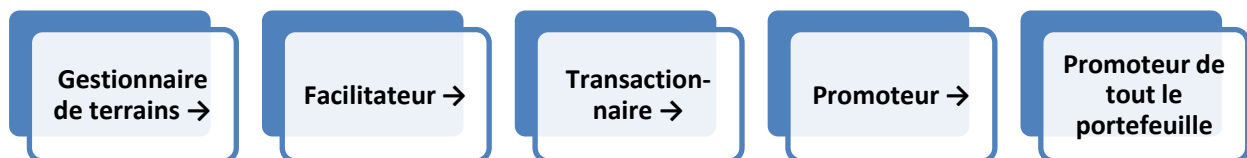
While they can accelerate delivery and preserve public value, public developers also demand sustained funding, huge operational budgets, careful risk management, and a clear mandate to avoid duplication or inefficiencies within the broader housing system.

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Le personnel a commencé à analyser les possibilités pour la Ville d'instaurer un modèle de promoteurs publics, comme le suggère la mesure 32 du Plan d'accélération de la création de logements. Jusqu'à présent, un examen à haut niveau des agences de développement municipal a eu lieu, et les conclusions sont résumées dans le présent rapport. Cet examen des précédents en matière de promoteur public porte sur la façon dont les promoteurs publics d'un bout à l'autre du Canada et à l'étranger sont structurés, gouvernés, financés et outillés; les données recueillies serviront à définir la stratégie d'Ottawa dans le cadre de nouveaux mandats de logement. L'analyse met en évidence un large éventail de modèles de promoteurs publics, allant des facilitateurs de l'aménagement du territoire qui interviennent peu aux sociétés de développement entièrement intégré qui possèdent, financent et réalisent des portefeuilles de logement à grande échelle. Selon cet examen des précédents, voici les éléments clés à retenir :

### **1. Les modèles de promoteurs publics s'appuient sur un éventail de rôles.**

Un promoteur public est une entité publique qui utilise des terrains et des fonds publics pour accélérer l'aménagement de logements abordables ou avec services de soutien. Les promoteurs publics varient grandement – des gestionnaires de terrains aux sociétés de développement entièrement intégré – selon les besoins du territoire et le mandat confié à l'entité. Parmi les exemples de promoteurs publics, notons le Housing Development Office de Toronto, Maisons Canada et la Société de logement communautaire d'Ottawa.



## **2. Une gouvernance indépendante favorise une livraison plus rapide et plus stratégique.**

La plupart des promoteurs publics sont structurés en entités distinctes des gouvernements afin de dépolitiser les décisions, de réagir plus rapidement aux conditions du marché et d'accéder à des outils législatifs et financiers différents de ceux des directions générales des municipalités.

## **3. Les terrains publics constituent le levier le plus puissant pour livrer des logements abordables.**

Les promoteurs publics prospères exploitent les terrains publics, souvent en conservant la propriété de ceux-ci au moyen de baux à long terme; ainsi, ils réduisent les coûts d'aménagement, maintiennent le contrôle public et profitent de l'appréciation de la valeur du terrain au fil du temps.

## **4. Les partenariats sont essentiels pour réaliser des projets d'envergure.**

Les promoteurs publics construisent ou exploitent rarement seuls des logements. Ils confient plutôt la construction, le financement et l'exploitation à long terme à des constructeurs privés, à des organismes sans but lucratif et à des fournisseurs de logement autochtones, ainsi qu'à des partenaires communautaires.

## **5. Un financement public durable est crucial pour obtenir l'abordabilité à long terme.**

Même des promoteurs publics bien établis doivent compter sur un financement public important et prévisible pour régler les dépenses en immobilisations et les frais d'entretien continu, ainsi que sur les subventions de fonctionnement, surtout lorsqu'ils construisent des logements très abordables ou avec services de soutien.

## **6. Des outils financiers novateurs aident à réduire la dépendance aux subventions.**

Les promoteurs publics utilisent des instruments financiers, comme des modèles de location à revenus mixtes, le crédit renouvelable, des emprunts à l'échelle du portefeuille et le financement à faible coût pour tirer le maximum des dollars publics et maintenir l'abordabilité au fil du temps.

## **7. Les promoteurs publics apportent des avantages sociaux et économiques plus grands.**

Au-delà de la construction de logements abordables, de telles entités intègrent souvent des normes environnementales, des commodités communautaires et des approches de construction modernes, ainsi que des fonctions de stabilisation du marché, à leurs projets.

## **8. La livraison à grande échelle procure des gains d'efficacité, mais comporte des risques majeurs.**

Réaliser des aménagements à grande échelle exige une expertise pointue et expose les entités publiques à des risques liés aux finances, au marché et à l'exploitation, notamment la volatilité des coûts, la lenteur des processus d'approvisionnement et les difficultés à attirer des spécialistes.

## **9. Les promoteurs publics ne peuvent pas répondre seuls aux besoins en logement.**

Les territoires dotés de modèles de promoteurs publics continuent d'appuyer des organismes sans but lucratif et des partenaires privés au moyen d'incitatifs, de programmes de financement et d'outils réglementaires, afin de garantir une offre de logements diversifiée et résiliente.

## **10. Les promoteurs publics comportent des désavantages importants qui doivent être soupesés.**

Même s'ils peuvent accélérer la livraison de logements et préserver la valeur publique, le recours à des promoteurs publics nécessite un financement soutenu, d'énormes budgets de fonctionnement, une gestion prudente des risques et l'attribution de mandats clairs pour éviter la duplication ou les manques d'efficacité au sein du système global de logement.

## **BACKGROUND**

On October 8, 2025, Ottawa City Council approved the Housing Innovation Task Force report and Housing Acceleration Plan (ACS2025-SI-SPO-0002). The Housing Acceleration Plan (HAP) includes 58 actions organized under five key objectives. Objective four of HAP is to: consolidate and strengthen capacity for Affordable Housing Development. Under this objective, Action 32 directs Staff to "Undertake an analysis of public developer options to determine the most efficient model to leverage the strengths

of the City, Build Ottawa and Ottawa Community Housing to address existing challenges to developing affordable housing.”

In addition, prior to approval of the Housing Acceleration Plan, in November 2024 Councillor Menard provided the following direction to staff through a motion:

“That staff be directed to explore the ‘public builder model’ of affordable housing provision alongside other alternative approaches to accelerating and making more efficient the production of affordable housing, including through new partnership models, innovative building techniques and financing approaches, and in consideration of a potential role for the City, Build Ottawa and OCHC, and report back by Q4 2025.”

Staff’s work related to Action 32 of the Housing Acceleration Plan also responds to the above motion.

## **DISCUSSION**

For the purpose of this discussion, the term “public developer” is used as opposed to ‘public builder’. Public development is an approach to land development where the public entity may be engaged with all aspects of the development pipeline such as real-estate transactions, procuring building contracts, as well as operation and management of the land use.

Whereas the term ‘builder’ is limiting, only describing the physical construction aspects of land development.

### ***The Ottawa Context***

The City of Ottawa has two existing entities that are considered to be public developers.

Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) is a not-for-profit affordable housing agency where the City is the sole shareholder. It owns, develops, and operates affordable housing. Its portfolio consists of approximately 15,500 residential units, making up approximately two-thirds of Ottawa’s affordable housing stock. While OCH primarily focuses on the development and operation of affordable housing with some supportive housing under their banner, in 2025, OCH announced their role in the BumbleBee Initiative, a partnership with other experienced supportive housing providers to deliver housing with support services by acting as the developer of the project, which upon completion would be turned over to a partner agency for operation.

Build Ottawa is the second entity that the City has which oversees its development interests. It is a single purpose vehicle (SPV), created in 2007 and incorporated in 2009, with the goal of maximizing financial, social, and environmental sustainability, through directing development of the City's land portfolio, while segregating the interests of the development corporation from the approval authority. Development and Real-Estate transactions under the umbrella of Build Ottawa are not limited to residential uses although affordable housing is a priority. Build Ottawa also does not manage or operate properties in its portfolio. Additional details on its structure are identified in Document 1.

### ***Housing Innovation Task Force Survey***

Through the Housing Innovation Task Force survey of local community housing providers, several consistent barriers emerged, underscoring the need for a more coordinated, delivery-focused approach to affordable housing. Respondents pointed to fragmented municipal processes, limited interdepartmental coordination, and the absence of a single point of contact, resulting in conflicting guidance, delays, and inefficiencies. They also identified the need for greater financial flexibility, particularly in pre-development funding, more viable mixed-income models, and better alignment between municipal requirements and external programs such as CMHC. Access to city-owned land remains a key constraint, with calls for clearer, faster, and more transparent processes to bring public land into development. Several respondents also expressed a desire for additional support through the development process, noting that project development falls outside of their core competencies.

Taken together, these challenges highlight the need for a centralized entity to streamline approvals, coordinate across departments and partners, unlock public land, and take accountability for advancing projects, core functions of a public developer model designed to accelerate housing delivery at scale. While many community housing providers are ready to expand to meet growing demand, not all have the development capacity or expertise to do so efficiently, further reinforcing the need for a dedicated delivery arm.

### ***The Need to Deliver at Scale***

The City of Ottawa already has a strong suite of tools to support affordable housing, such as the capital strategy for affordable housing, the municipal land strategy, the pre-development grant, and the affordable housing Community Improvement Plan (CIP). However, these programs were largely designed within a traditional municipal funding framework, aimed at enabling a range of smaller-scale affordable housing providers.

Today, Ottawa faces a significant affordability and housing supply crisis, with demand far outpacing the availability of homes, especially affordable rentals. In response, City Council has set ambitious targets to deliver a substantial number of new affordable homes by 2030, requiring a more active, coordinated, and execution-focused role from government. Historically, housing delivery was fragmented across multiple divisions and initiatives, resulting in slower approvals, unclear accountability, and inconsistent outcomes.

The establishment of a public developer function reflects a clear shift in approach: policy alone does not build homes; delivery requires a dedicated entity with end-to-end responsibility. With oversight of dozens of sites, a public developer can focus on speed, scale, and accountability. It can leverage public land for housing, create mixed-income communities, and guarantee long-term affordability, while managing projects from concept through to construction. By coordinating with non-profits, private developers, and other partners, and by advancing business cases for surplus land, the public developer ensures projects move forward efficiently and at greater scale. Ultimately, this model enables the City to accelerate construction timelines, increase the number of homes delivered, and establish a single point of accountability for results, with the goal of building more housing, faster.

The study of Public Developer Models will include an analysis of the existing City's development framework to leverage its strengths and inform areas of opportunities to create a new model or support existing ones.

### ***Precedent Analysis***

Historically, many jurisdictions globally invested in publicly built, owned, or operated housing to address the pressures of rapid urbanization and population growth. In Canada, however, economic downturns in the late 1980s and 1990s, combined with reduced government spending, led to a shift from government-owned affordable housing to a focus on non-profit affordable housing.

Across Canada, some municipalities have implemented a range of public developer models – some with decades of experience, others more recent – with varying degrees of success.

The analytical framework used for this initial scan included structure, governance, staffing, role of the organization, transaction autonomy, and funding. This scan included Canadian municipalities of similar size to Ottawa and some international examples for

comparison. A summary of selected examples is provided in Document 1: Canadian and International Development Corporations (Tables 1 and 2).

### ***Emerging themes***

From preliminary research of existing municipal models, the following emerging themes can be seen. Public developer models:

- Exist on a spectrum, with a variety of different combinations of constructing, owning, and operating roles, depending on the mandate of the public entity and the needs of the jurisdiction.
- Are typically corporations where municipalities are their sole shareholders. The separation of these entities helps to manage risk, de-politicize developments, separate development functions from the jurisdiction of planning authorities, be nimble in rapidly changing market conditions, and manage public expectations.
- Are ideally structured to fill gaps in the housing market such as providing housing typologies or built forms that are needed, deeply affordable rental rates, or for underserved demographics.
- Maintain the municipality's role in establishing housing targets, priorities, policies, and by-laws, regulate and monitor affordable housing operators, and provide capital and operating financing or funding.
- Allow for the diversification of housing supply by supporting not-for-profit housing providers and private partners to develop, own and operate housing through various programs and incentives.

### ***Partnerships and Roles***

Research shows that public developers generally rely on partnerships with private sector and not-for-profit housing providers to deliver affordable housing, rather than the public entity acting alone.

Construction is almost always done by private companies, with public developers procuring and managing contracts.

Emerging models appear to focus on aligning and coordinating the core expertise of each partner (public entity, private sector, and not-for-profits) to take advantage and make more efficient use of their respective capacities, experience, and mandates.

### ***Funding, Financial Tools and Affordability***

The intention of most public developers is to ensure long-term housing affordability. Many public developers are focusing on unlocking publicly owned land for housing, adding land to the public portfolio, and/or utilizing long-term leases instead of disposing of land for development. This allows the entity to maintain some control of the development asset, benefit from land value uplift over time, and reduce development costs.

To reduce the need for public subsidies, public developers employ a range of financial tools, including mixed-income rental models, either within each building or across the portfolio, revolving loans, borrowing against assets to reinvest in the housing system, and/or accessing low-cost or preferential loans from financial institutions or other levels of government.

Some public developers play a role in financing new development by not-for-profits or private housing providers, offering bridge loans, low-cost borrowing or bonds, sometimes in exchange for an equity stake in the development.

### ***Risks and Concerns for Public Developer Models***

The preliminary scan also yielded criticism of these models which include that:

- Public developers rely on funding for construction and operations, regardless of access to alternate forms of financing. Public funding is subject to government approval and public scrutiny which presents a risk to an entity to sustain its operation in the long-term or maintain buildings over their lifespan.
- Developing housing at-scale involves a significant amount of risk and can be subject to volatile market shifts. Although most public developers are separate from government, this risk may still impact the government as the sole-shareholder.
- Public developers can sometimes face increased costs or timelines compared to private entities due to labour requirements, governance and approval structures and procurement policies. Requiring additional public benefits, such as higher environmental standards or provision of community space, may also increase the relative costs of projects developed through public entities.

- Public Developers need large operational budgets in order to be successful and depend on funding and co-operation of other levels of government, which could be in the form of funds and/or the provision of land.

A deeper analysis of the benefits and risks of establishing a public developer model for Ottawa will be conducted at a later phase of this study to make recommendations on potential approaches the City could take to establish its own development model.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### ***Engagement with interested parties***

In March 2026, Staff began preparing for engagement activities with interested parties as the next phase of the exploration into public developer options. This includes hiring Stantec Consultants Ltd. to carry out the engagement and consultation process. A consultation strategy is being developed which includes investigative questions to gather input from those who have expertise or interest in the City's approach to public housing development. These include but are not limited to the City's Senior Staff, Board Members of Build Ottawa, Ottawa Community Housing Corporation (OCHC), other not-for-profit housing providers, and the development industry.

The focus of the engagement and consultation will be to gain insights they may have into the City's interest in pursuing a public developer model. Key themes such as governance structure, land management strategies, partnership models, and approaches to accelerating affordable housing development will be explored. Stantec Consultants will also provide background material to frame the work that has been undertaken in the form of a webinar as well as other engagement meetings and activities. This approach will provide consistency in information gathering and help manage expectations among participants of the engagement process. This work is projected to be completed in Q3 2026.

### ***Options Analysis and Recommendation***

Following the precedent analysis and input from interested parties, staff will conduct a comparative analysis and identify the challenges and opportunities for the City to take on a public development model approach before developing a recommendation to Committee and Council. A report to Committee and Council on Staff's recommended approach as well as summary of the work undertaken, including stakeholder consultation, and options analysis is targeted for Q2 2027.

Should you have any questions, please contact Peter Radke at 613-809-2495 or Peter.Radke@ottawa.ca.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this memo at this time. Any costs related to engagement and consultation will be funded through the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) or from within current resources.

## **ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The IPD outlines a range of public developer models and recommends further exploration of a public builder model alongside alternative delivery, partnership, and financing approaches. The City of Ottawa currently operates two public developer entities: Ottawa Community Housing, which owns, develops, and operates affordable housing, and Build Ottawa, which acquires, disposes of, conveys, and develops land within its portfolio, with limited involvement from Asset Management under the current models.

While there are no immediate Asset Management Implications arising from this IPD, potential impacts will be contingent on the model selected and may include expansion of the City's asset portfolio. Clearer definition of ownership, roles, and lifecycle accountability, and increased requirements for condition assessment, maintenance, and operations is required where assets are retained by the City, transferred back to the City at the end of operations, or managed by third-party operators under City oversight.

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## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

- Document 1 – Canadian and International Development Corporations

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**Table 1 – Canadian Municipalities**

	<b>Toronto, ON</b>	<b>Calgary, AB</b>	<b>Surrey, BC</b>	<b>Ottawa, ON</b>
	<b>Toronto Housing Development Office</b>	<b>Calgary Municipal Land Corporation</b>	<b>Surrey City Development Corporation</b>	<b>Build Ottawa (BO)</b>
<b>Population</b>	3.0 M	1.3 M	663 K	1.2 M
<b>Structure/ Governance</b>	within the City's organizational structure under the Housing Secretariat Division. It has an Executive Director and 7 staff.	subsidiary of the City of Calgary; 12- member Board of Directors elected by City Council	wholly owned, for-profit subsidiary of the City of Surrey; 9-member Board of Directors appointed by City Council	Municipal services corporation with the City as the sole Shareholder, 6-member Board of Directors, appointed by City Council.
<b>Portfolio Size</b>	Does not hold a specific portfolio.	Plans for \$700M in major capital projects planned for 2026, including approximately 700 residential units.	4 priority areas - City Centre Newton Town Centre, Cloverdale Fairgrounds, Campbell Heights. Developments range from residential to commercial, institutional, mixed use.	Does not hold a specific portfolio. Lands are transferred from City to BO to direct development
<b>Budget, Financing</b>	Is funded by the City's operating budget.	Funded by Community Revitalization Levy (CRL) – first funding approach of its kind in Canada.	Shareholder loans, third-party financing, income from projects, dividend	Primarily funded through revenue from sales,
<b>Strategic Direction</b>	As part of the Housing Secretariat, it is directed by the goals and objectives of the City's housing plan, 'Housing TO 2020-2030'.	Focus on revitalization and management of infrastructure for long term social and environmental resilience	Area specific directions and priority projects identified for areas listed above.	No single centralized strategic plan document; guided by goal of prioritizing the sale and/or redevelopment of lands for affordable and attainable housing, but may include other non-residential projects and transactions.
<b>Role, Responsibility</b>	Development of affordable housing units initiated by the City and to support partner AH agencies.	Sales and Leasing	Value added real-estate, sale and lease, acquisition of capital assets.	Acquire, dispose, convey, and develop land in its portfolio

**Table 2 – International Municipalities**

	<b>New York City, USA</b> <b>NYC Economic Development Corporation (NYC/EDC)</b>	<b>Philadelphia, USA</b> <b>Philadelphia Land Bank (PLB)</b>	<b>Austin, USA</b> <b>Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)</b>	<b>London, UK</b> <b>Greater London Authority Land and Property (GLAP)</b>
<b>Population</b>	8.48M	1.6M	993K	8.95M
<b>Structure/ Governance</b>	<p>Non-profit organization</p> <p>24-member Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor;</p> <p>Board made up of professionals from real estate, urban planning, non-profits, philanthropy, tech, business, law, health, and civil service.</p> <p>Independently staffed</p>	<p>Independent non-profit organization within the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation (PHDC)</p> <p>11-member board of directors appointed by the Mayor (5), the City Council by majority vote (5), and by the rest of the board (1)</p> <p>Board made up of city council members, civil servants, and local business people</p> <p>Staffed by employees of the PHDC</p>	<p>Non-profit corporation and entity of the City of Austin</p> <p>11-member board of directors</p> <p>All directors are members of the Austin City Council</p> <p>Mayor as President</p> <p>Staffed by employees of the City of Austin</p>	<p>Commercial subsidiary of Greater London Authority (GLA)</p> <p>Directly controlled by the Mayor of London</p> <p>The London Assembly provides oversight</p> <p>Staffed by employees of the GLA</p>
<b>Portfolio Size</b>	60M sq. ft of City property; predominantly non-residential (commercial and industrial)	Manages 8,155 properties on behalf of other city entities; predominantly residential, along with commercial and industrial properties	~1100 + housing units	68.3M sq ft of residential land holdings and 2M sq. ft. of non-residential space
<b>Budget, Financing</b>	Self-funded through revenue from sales and leases	City-backed bonds and tax revenue	Bonds issued by AHFC, federal and state grants, tax credits, local funds and income from sales and leases	Capital borrowed by the Greater London Authority (GLA) on behalf of the GLAP; Operating expenses funded by commercial revenues
<b>Strategic Direction</b>	No centralized strategic plan published by NYC/EDC; neighborhood/area specific plans focused on economic growth sectors	Strategic Plan (2019) includes goals for acquisitions and dispositions, along with discussion of constraints based on budget, time, and legal processes.	Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint (2017); a 10-year plan outlining housing needs and goals	Property Asset Strategy (2019); detailing the portfolio, strategy and development and disposal principles
<b>Role, Responsibility</b>	Acquire, dispose, convey, and develop land in its portfolio	Acquire, dispose, and convey land in its portfolio	Primary purpose is to fund housing development. The AHFC also acquires, disposes, and develops land in its portfolio	Acquire, dispose, convey and develop land in its portfolio