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It's been almost two weeks since Dorian made his unwelcome visit to the Halifax region, uprooting trees, cutting off power, limiting cell coverage, flooding basements, and toppling a massive downtown crane.

We take lessons from crises. They highlight our weaknesses, but they also magnify our strengths. Before, during and after Dorian, we saw a bias toward action. Our emergency operations centre swung into high gear, people put aside other priorities, marshalled crews, and coordinated an effective response to complex problems.

As is often the case in emergencies, Dorian disproportionately impacted people who could least afford it. It was a devastating blow for many who don't have the resources to live without power or phones and cannot afford to throw away spoiled food.

But, in tough times our city pulled together; residents looked out for one another and took care of their neighbours. These and so many untold examples of kindness and compassion are the hallmarks of our collective response to Dorian.

None of this comes as a surprise to anyone who knows Halifax, our remarkable historic city that is growing at a dizzying pace, with more than 8,400 new residents last year alone and almost as many in each of the two previous years. This economic growth is providing more opportunities to many citizens, but we cannot ignore that the benefits do not accrue equally. The adage that a rising tide lifts all boats is only partially true.

Indeed, growth itself can widen the gap between those doing well, and those who struggle. The housing affordability, food insecurity, and social isolation issues that were thrown into relief during Dorian are in truth their own emergency. They demand our urgent, broad and compassionate attention.

It heartens me that good work is already underway. Alongside United Way Halifax CEO Sara Napier, I co-chaired a Poverty Solutions working group, guided by stakeholders and community members. The group delivered a comprehensive Building Poverty Solutions report containing 129 ideas for action. Some are clearly within our municipal wheelhouse and others require help from our government and community partners.

We are already demonstrating what's possible. The municipality's Affordable Access Program took effect this year, offering residents in need deeply discounted or free municipal access to recreation programs and options to defer residential property tax. Low income transit passes, offered in partnership with the Department of Community Services, now allow more people to get to work, school and appointments.

Last Friday, the Halifax Food Policy Alliance hosted a tour for Council members and city staff to learn more about efforts to address food security challenges. Organizations like our libraries, Mobile Food Market, the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre, and community gardens throughout the region provide services that are critical to vulnerable residents.

In addition to providing access to healthy, affordable food these programs also help address social isolation and build community capacity.

In any city, the list of social challenges is long: accessibility, public safety, inclusion across diverse racial and cultural lines, and so on. Our city is not immune to any of them, and indeed many are intertwined. At present, affordable housing has me the most concerned, largely because it has proven to be such a puzzle.

A housing needs assessment completed in 2015 found one in four Halifax households faced housing affordability challenges — meaning they spent more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgage costs. In the face of rising home values, climbing rents and low vacancy rates, I fear this housing crunch is worsening.

We have homeless citizens who rely upon shelters and meals wherever they can find them. More often than before, we see low wage earners unable to afford to live close to their work and the amenities they need.

While strictly speaking housing is not within our municipal mandate, we must be an active partner in finding creative solutions that allow people to be able to afford safe, reliable housing. The 10-year, \$394 million bilateral agreement on affordable housing signed in August between the federal government will certainly help renew and expand options.

The entire spectrum of housing must be a priority if we are to be a city that does not leave its own citizens behind. All orders of government, our development community, and our social agencies, have a responsibility to further current efforts and find new approaches. I am pleased that through the Housing and Homelessness Partnership many of these partners are focused on collective responses to this shared issue.

I believe the municipality will require a suite of options possibly inclusive of favourable land-use zoning, density bonusing for affordable units, a development cash-in-lieu program to support an affordable housing trust, public land trusts that lessen building costs, and property tax incentives.

By all accounts Halifax is doing well, with an energy and a momentum not seen in recent decades. I am proud of how far we have come, and I am excited about what the future holds. The real measure of our success, however, will be the building of not just a bigger city, but a better one a city where more boats will benefit from a rising tide.