

# Comox Valley Regional District Homelessness and Supports Service Review

Final Report - January 13, 2021

Prepared By:



# Executive Summary

In 2015, voters in the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) voted to establish a Homelessness and Supports service to provide funds to one or more local non-governmental organizations based on a board approved five-year action plan to address homelessness in the Comox Valley.

The Service's establishment bylaw requires a service review to be undertaken in 2020. The CVRD retained a consulting firm, Vink Consulting, to conduct the review. The following report presents the key findings of the review and recommended changes to the Service based on the review.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The Comox Valley Regional District, Comox Valley Homelessness Coalition, local municipalities/electoral areas participating in the Service, and regional voters should be commended for their ongoing efforts to reduce homelessness through the Homelessness Supports Service. Since its inception in 2016, the Service has established itself as a proven model for contributing to the creation of affordable housing. Recipients of the funding reported that the Service has led to the creation of additional units that would not have otherwise been created and has resulted in units being developed earlier than they otherwise would have been. While the amount requisitioned through property taxes for the Service is relatively small, the Service has been able to use its funds to leverage a substantial amount of other funding and resources.

Delivery of the Service through the Coalition to End Homelessness has been effective. Community organizations that have received funding through the Service reported that the process of accessing funding has met their needs.

Building on the success of the first five years of the Service, the review offers 14 recommendations to further strengthen the Service moving forward:

## Revenue Generation and Sources of Revenue

1. It is recommended that the CVRD Board consider the following options for increasing the tax requisition for the Service to further contribute to the achievement of the goals outlined in the 5 Year Plan to End Homelessness:
  - Option A: a requisition of \$10 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$1.3 million)
  - Option B: a requisition of \$3.20 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$423,000)
  - Option C: the maximum requisition under the current bylaw, a requisition of \$2.00 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$264,000).
2. It is recommended that the CVRD Board consider revising the Service or establishing another service to support borrowing by the Regional District to fund capital investments to address homelessness.
3. It is recommended the CVRD Board explore whether the Town of Comox may be interested in participating in the Service and whether the City of Courtenay and Village of Cumberland may be interested in contributing other resources they have earmarked for affordable housing, such as



affordable housing reserve funds<sup>1</sup>, to the Service to support greater collaboration and consistent prioritization of investments in housing and supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

4. It is recommended that the CVRD prepare promotional materials to raise the profile and transparency of the Service, including communicating how the funds have been used (e.g. case studies of affordable housing created with the funding) and the total value of the investments the funding has generated.

#### **Sustainability of the Service Delivery Model**

5. It is recommended the Service provide funding to the Coalition for management and administration of up to the greater of \$30,000 per year or 5% of the value of the Service.

#### **Evidenced-Based Community Planning and Funding Allocation**

6. It is recommended that the CVRD and Coalition partner in the preparation of a homelessness needs assessment and community plan to address homelessness that is based on best practices. The Coalition can then prepare its own 5 Year Plan that includes its own actions to support the achievement of the goals and actions outlined in the community plan.

In the future the homelessness needs assessment could be incorporated into the Regional Housing Needs Assessment, but given that the Regional Housing Needs Assessment was just completed, it is recommended that a homelessness needs assessment be undertaken before the Regional Housing Needs Assessment is updated in five years. However, if there are plans for a Coordinated Access system and By-Name List to be established in the next two years, the CVRD and Coalition may wish to wait to prepare the homelessness needs assessment until after data is available from the By-Name List and the 2021 Census.

7. If the tax requisition for the Service is increased based on Option A, above, (\$10 per \$100,000 of taxable property value), it is recommended that a portion of the funds be used to support a Coordinated Access system for Comox Valley. Alternatively, it is recommended that the CVRD and Coalition continue to pursue funding from other sources to support a Coordinated Access system.

#### **Evidenced-Based Funding Use and Allocations of Funding**

8. It is recommended that the Coalition prioritize funding allocations based on best practice for investments aimed at addressing homelessness, in particular, prioritizing people who experience chronic and episodic homelessness and are in need of supports, and concentrating on housing and housing-focused supports for people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness rather than complementary services. This recommendation does not preclude the funding from being used for affordable rental housing without supports, but suggests that when evaluating multiple applications, applications should be ranked as follows:
  - 1 – applications targeting individuals who are experiencing homelessness who are in need of supports
  - 2 – applications targeting individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness where no supports will be provided

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the Village of Cumberland does not currently have an affordable housing reserve fund.



- 3 – applications for affordable rental housing more generally.
9. It is recommended that as part of, and following, the creation of a community plan to end homelessness that outlines the actions and investments required to end homelessness in Comox Valley, the CVRD, in partnership with the Coalition, convene collaborative conversations with homelessness funders (e.g. the CVRD, the Community Foundation, United Way, local municipalities, and possibly SPARC, and BC Housing) to discuss and obtain support for investments based on the priorities outlined in the Plan.
  10. It is recommended that the Coalition consider increasing the maximum funding that is provided for pre-development planning costs from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

#### **Evaluation of Applications and Involvement in Developing Recommendations for Funding Allocations**

11. It is recommended that the Coalition collect additional information through the Request for Expressions of Interest process to support additional evaluation of applications for funding and implement a more formal evaluation framework to score and prioritize applications for funding.
12. It is recommended that the Coalition establish an evaluation committee with time-limited participation, for one funding cycle of the Service, to support the evaluation of applications and development of funding allocations recommendations for consideration by Coalition members.
13. It is recommended that the Coalition develop mechanisms for participation of individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service, for example, through an advisory committee or similar body and revising the eligibility criteria for membership in the Coalition and participation in the Leadership Team or in an evaluation committee.
14. It is recommended that the Service allocate funding to support the participation of individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service.



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# 1.0 Background

In 2015, the Comox Valley Regional District held a referendum seeking electoral approval to establish a new service to address homelessness in the Comox Valley. Based on the results of the referendum, the Homelessness and Supports Service was established (Bylaw No. 389) to provide funds to one or more local non-governmental organizations based on a board approved five-year action plan to address homelessness in the Comox Valley.

The Service includes the City of Courtenay, the Village of Cumberland, Vancouver Island portion of Baynes Sound – Denman / Hornby Islands (Electoral Area A), Lazo North (Electoral Area B) and Puntledge – Black Creek (Electoral Area C). The Town of Comox opted not to participate in the service and provides funds on its own accord to service providers.

The Service's main revenue source is tax requisition. The maximum amount that may be requisitioned annually for the cost of this service is the greater of \$165,000 or \$0.02 per \$1,000 applied to the net taxable value of land and improvements for regional hospital district purposes. Based on assessment values the maximum requisition was \$264,000 in 2020. Additional revenue can also be raised through grant funding and community amenity contributions.

The Service has partially funded 78 affordable housing units since it was established. This includes:

- 7 units of transitional housing for women coming out of recovery (Comox Valley Transition Society)
- 4 two-bedroom second stage housing units for women with children fleeing violence (Comox Valley Transition Society)
- 8 units affordable rental housing with supports for women-led lone parent families (Comox Valley Transition Society)
- 4 units of affordable rental housing, including two low barrier units and one family unit (Dawn to Dawn)
- 34 units of affordable rental housing (Wachiay Friendship Centre)
- 11 units of supported independent living for youth (John Howard Society of North Island)
- 10 units of affordable ownership housing (Habitat for Humanity)

Pre-construction costs have been provided for three developments still in pre-construction phases, including:

- 22 units of affordable rental housing for single parent-led families (Comox Valley Transition Society)
- 24-32 units for Indigenous elders with some supports (Wachiay Friendship Centre)
- 21 units of affordable housing for people with disabilities and seniors (L'Arche Comox Valley)

The Service has also made one contribution to homelessness supports:

- Supports at the Connect Warming Centre (Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness)

Further information on the amounts provided and locations of the housing and services can be found in Appendix A.



The Service's establishment bylaw requires a service review to be undertaken in 2020. Comox Valley Regional District retained a consulting firm, Vink Consulting, to conduct the review. The scope of work included a review of:

- Revenue relative to the goals and objectives of the Coalition to End Homelessness's 5 Year Strategic Plan;
- Long-term sustainability of the service delivery model (e.g. reliance on the Coalition's Leadership Team and coordinator);
- Contributions to project capital versus operating costs; and
- Best practices in this type of service model.

This report presents the key findings of the review and recommended changes to the service resulting from the review.

## 2.0 Review Process

The review of the Homelessness and Supports Service included:

- A review of background documents, including the service establishment By-law, the Coalition to End Homelessness's 5 Year Strategic Plan, Comox Valley Regional Housing Needs Assessment, request for Expression of Interest, Coalition meeting minutes, funding agreements, and Comox Valley Regional District staff reports.
- A review of best practices in similar models for funding housing and supports for people who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness as well as potential funding sources.
- Interviews with a range of stakeholders to identify strengths and opportunities for the service. Interview participants included:
  - The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD)
  - Local municipal staff (City of Courtenay)
  - The Coalition's Leadership Team and Coordinator
  - Each of the organizations that have received funding through the service.
- A workshop with select stakeholders, including the CVRD, local municipal staff, the Coalition's Leadership Team and coordinator to validate the preliminary findings and discuss some of the potential options for changes to the service.

Recommendations for changes to the Service were developed by the consultant following the workshop with select stakeholders.



## 3.0 Key Findings and Recommendations

The following section discusses the key findings of the review. Recommendations have also been provided throughout.

### 3.1 Contributions to Affordable Housing and Ability to Leverage Other Funding

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (Coalition), local municipalities/electoral areas participating in the Service, and regional voters should be commended for their ongoing efforts to reduce homelessness through the Homelessness Supports Service. There are limited other examples of regional districts in BC with a housing and homelessness service/fund that provide funds to address homelessness. Only the Capital Region and Cowichan Valley were found to have a similar service/fund.

Since its inception in 2016, the Service has established itself as a proven model for contributing to the creation of affordable housing; it has supported creation of 78 affordable housing units. Recipients of the funding reported that the Service has led to the creation of additional units that would not have otherwise been created and has resulted in units being developed earlier than they otherwise would have been.

While the amount requisitioned for the Service through property taxes is relatively small, (less than the capital costs of one affordable housing unit annually), the Service has been able to use its funds to leverage a substantial amount of other funding and resources. Between 2016 and 2020, the Service's contributions of approximately \$685,000 toward the capital costs of affordable housing have generated an estimated total investment in affordable housing of approximately \$14 million<sup>2</sup>. For every \$1 invested by the Service it is estimated that another \$19 has been invested from other sources.

### 3.2 Revenue Generation and Sources of Revenue

Despite the Service's ability to leverage other funding and resources, substantial additional investment is required from a range of sources to achieve the goals outlined in the Coalition's 5 Year Plan to End Homelessness. An increase to the tax requisition provides one opportunity to sustainably generate additional revenue for the Service. Contributions to the Service from community amenity agreements are less predictable<sup>3</sup>. Stakeholders suggested that other opportunities for revenue generation for the Service include revisiting whether the Town of Comox may want to participate in the Service now that it has established itself as a proven model for creating affordable housing and exploring opportunities for local municipalities to contribute other funds to the Service, such as local municipal affordable housing reserve funds.

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<sup>2</sup> Including mortgage financing obtained by the housing provider. Refer to Appendix B for assumptions on costs. This does not include investments for housing still in pre-construction stages.

<sup>3</sup> Community amenity contributions are negotiated amenity contributions agreed to be the developer and local government as part of a rezoning process initiated by the developer. Community amenity contributions typically include the provision of amenities, affordable housing and/or financial contributions towards amenities. The agreed-to contribution is obtained by the local government.





Both of the two other regional districts in BC with a service/fund also use tax requisition as their primary or sole source of revenue, but they fund the service has a higher rate than Comox Valley. Cowichan Valley funds its service at a rate of \$3.17 per \$100,000 of taxable property value and the Capital Region's requisition is \$10.70 per \$100,000. This compares to \$2.00 for Comox Valley. One of the two regional districts also has an escalation clause in its bylaw to account for annual inflationary increases.

The best practices review also identified a range of potential revenue sources. These include:

- Allocations of budget surpluses
- Proceeds from regional district/local municipal property sales<sup>4</sup>
- Regional district borrowing
- Cash-in-lieu contributions from developers as part of community amenity related density bonus contributions
- Contributions from local municipalities such as funds from utility or development cost levies on new market units built<sup>5</sup> or cash-in-lieu contributions from developers upon rezoning (ie. inclusionary zoning<sup>6</sup>)
- Gaming funds
- Donations from philanthropic residents. Administration of the service/fund by a society can help generate donations.

Stakeholders interviewed for the review noted that the existence of the Service has raised the profile of issues related to housing and homelessness in the Comox Valley as well as the profile of community groups working to address these issues. However, some interviewees also suggested that there is an opportunity to further raise the profile and transparency of the Service, how funds have been used, and the value the investments have created. It is hoped that with additional awareness there may be additional support for increases to the tax requisition or it may encourage contributions from other sources, such as funds held by local municipalities.

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<sup>4</sup> Proceeds of sales of land and improvements must be placed into a reserve fund that is dedicated to the purchase of other land, improvements or other capital assets. Therefore, this revenue source would technically work directly alongside the Service rather than as part of the Service, but for the purposes of funding allocations they could be made in conjunction with one another, but with slightly more stringent criteria for the funds that would come from the land reserve.

<sup>5</sup> The allocation of development cost levy revenues can be altered for general utilities and redirected towards utilities capital projects for affordable housing projects through the creation of a utilities reserve for affordable housing projects. The City of Vancouver is one example of a municipality that has done this.  
<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/affordable-housing-utilities-development-cost-levy-funding-program.aspx>  
Like with the proceeds of sales of land, this revenue source would technically work directly alongside the Service rather than as part of the Service, but for the purposes of funding allocations they could be made in conjunction with one another, but with more stringent criteria for the funds; specifically, these funds would be used for off-side utilities upgrades required by new affordable housing projects.

<sup>6</sup> Inclusionary zoning means zoning regulations that require an applicant to contribute to below market cost housing units, either directly through building or through funding), triggered as part of a rezoning for a development.



## Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that the CVRD Board consider the following options for increasing the tax requisition for the Service to further contribute to the achievement of the goals outlined in the 5 Year Plan to End Homelessness:
  - Option A: a requisition of \$10 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$1.3 million)
  - Option B: a requisition of \$3.20 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$423,000)
  - Option C: the maximum requisition under the current bylaw, a requisition of \$2.00 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$264,000).
2. It is recommended that the CVRD Board consider revising the Service or establishing another service to support borrowing by the Regional District to fund capital investments to address homelessness.
3. It is recommended the CVRD Board explore whether the Town of Comox may be interested in participating in the Service and whether the City of Courtenay and Village of Cumberland may be interested in contributing other resources they have earmarked for affordable housing, such as affordable housing reserve funds<sup>7</sup>, to the Service to support greater collaboration and consistent prioritization of investments in housing and supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
4. It is recommended that the CVRD prepare promotional materials to raise the profile and transparency of the Service, including communicating how the funds have been used (e.g. case studies of affordable housing created with the funding) and the total value of the investments the funding has generated.

### 3.3 Sustainability of the Service Delivery Model

Stakeholders interviewed for the review identified the stewardship of the funding by the Coalition with contract administration by the CVRD as a strength of the Service. The Coalition is seen to have strong capacity, community support, a strong understanding of housing needs, and an effective collaborative decision-making process for allocating the funding. Stakeholders noted that there is a strong working relationship between the Coalition and CVRD staff.

The Service does not provide funding to the Coalition for administration of the Service. As such, the Coalition is continually having to seek annual grant funding to fund the Homelessness Coalition's Coordinator position. It was also noted by interviewees the neither the CVRD nor local municipalities have a housing planner or social planner to support housing-related programs and initiatives. The lack of support for management and administration of the Service creates a risk related to the long-term sustainability of the Service.

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the Village of Cumberland does not currently have an affordable housing reserve fund.



Both of the other two regional districts with a housing and homelessness service/fund provide funding for service management and administration. One provides up to 5% (\$37,500) while the other provides \$112,000 (14.9% of the fund's expenditures).

#### **Recommendations:**

5. It is recommended the Service provide funding to the Coalition for management and administration of up to the greater of \$30,000 per year or 5% of the value of the Service.

### **3.4 Evidenced-Based Community Planning and Funding Allocation**

The Coalition has a 5 Year Plan to End Homelessness, which is updated annually, and includes specific actions aimed at creating additional housing and supports. The Plan is based on individual organizational plans as well as collective initiatives of the Coalition to create housing and supports. The Plan is approved by the CVRD Board and used to inform the funding allocations for the Service. The Plan represents a critical, collective effort to address homelessness.

There are, however, opportunities to strengthen the homelessness community planning process. It is considered best practice for community plans to end homelessness to include:

- A vision that focuses directly on an end to homelessness
- Guiding principles that outline the broad philosophy that guides the community's actions to end homelessness. These principles should include:
  - Using evidence-based interventions based on an individual or family's risk or duration and type of homelessness and level of need (acuity). Depending on a household's duration and type of homelessness and level of need, the most appropriate intervention may include affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, or Housing First programs such as intensive case management.
  - Guidance on investment priorities (discussed further below).
- Specific outcomes related to reducing homelessness, such as that people experiencing homelessness and at-risk of homelessness access and maintain housing.
- Actions to increase evidence-based housing and support interventions for people experiencing homelessness and at-risk of homelessness to access and maintaining housing based on their duration and type of homelessness and level of need (acuity). These actions should be informed by evidence related to need for housing and supports by different population groups.

A quantitative needs assessment should be undertaken to inform and prioritize the actions for increasing housing and supports for different population groups. Ideally, the needs assessment should be informed by homelessness service system modeling that compares available supply/caseloads of housing and supports with need for various forms of housing and supports based on data from the community's By-Name List as well as other sources. A By-Name List is a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in the community. It includes information on the profile of people experiencing homelessness and their level of need. A By-Name List is developed as part of Coordinated Access system for housing and supports for people experiencing homelessness. It relies on a Common



Assessment Tool to systematically collect information on each household's level of need and a database or spreadsheet to hold the By-Name List data.

The Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness in partnership with the CVRD has sought federal government funding for homelessness, which would include funding to support a Coordinated Access system and the development of a By-Name List, but it has not been successful to date.

#### **Recommendations:**

6. It is recommended that the CVRD and Coalition partner in the preparation of a homelessness needs assessment and community plan to address homelessness that is based on best practices. The Coalition can then prepare its own 5 Year Plan that includes its own actions to support the achievement of the goals and actions outlined in the community plan.

In the future the homelessness needs assessment could be incorporated into the Regional Housing Needs Assessment, but given that the Regional Housing Needs Assessment was just completed, it is recommended that a homelessness needs assessment be undertaken before the Regional Housing Needs Assessment is updated in five years. However, if there are plans for a Coordinated Access system and By-Name List to be established in the next two years, the CVRD and Coalition may wish to wait to prepare the homelessness needs assessment until after data is available from the By-Name List and the 2021 Census.

7. If the tax requisition for the Service is increased based on Option A, above, (\$10 per \$100,000 of taxable property value), it is recommended that a portion of the funds be used to support a Coordinated Access system for Comox Valley. Alternatively, it is recommended that the CVRD and Coalition continue to pursue funding from other sources to support a Coordinated Access system.

### **3.5 Evidenced-Based Funding Use and Allocations of Funding**

#### *Contributions to Project Capital and/or Operating Costs*

The Homelessness Supports Service bylaw states that the Service will provide funds to one or more local nongovernmental organizations based on a board approved five-year action plan to address homelessness in the Comox Valley. From 2016 to 2020, the funds were used only for capital costs. The Request for Expressions of Interest put out by the Coalition for organizations to apply for the funding stipulates that applications must be specifically for projects that increase the number of available affordable housing units on the continuum of housing targeting a full spectrum of population groups. Outside of the EOI process, the Coalition also earmarked funding for a permanent location for a drop-in for people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness. Based on the Coalition's recommendation, the CVRD board recently approved this funding to be reallocated towards operating costs of the drop-in (Connect Warming Centre). Some stakeholders have questioned whether the funds should be used only for capital costs or whether operating costs should also be eligible for funding.

It is considered best practice for investments aimed at addressing homelessness to:

- Be based on the priorities outlined in the community plan to end homelessness



- Prioritize people who experience chronic and episodic homelessness because their health and well-being suffers the most with continued homelessness and because they consume a significantly higher share of the homelessness system's resources. Once these population groups receive housing and supports, only a minimum emergency homelessness support structure will be needed to assist people who suffer from short-term homelessness.
- Concentrate on housing and housing-focused supports for people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness rather than complementary services, such as harm reduction supports, poverty reduction initiatives, or the full spectrum of non-market affordable housing. This is because the total investment required to end homelessness is significantly higher than the funding that is currently available to address homelessness, and therefore resources that do exist should be focused on key outcomes of people experiencing homelessness and at-risk of homelessness accessing and maintaining housing.

One of the regional districts with a housing and homelessness service/fund only funds capital costs while the other primarily funds capital costs, but also has specific allocations for project development; planning, research, housing development coordination and housing loss prevention; and contingency to support any emergency losses of housing due to fire, flood, or extreme weather. One of the regional districts prioritizes investments that are part of the regional Housing First program. Projects developed through the regional Housing First program typically apply a mixed-income approach, with a portion of units in each project targeted to individuals experiencing homelessness, and priority given to projects that include a portion of units that rent at provincial Income Assistance Rates. While support services are not included in these projects, proponents must demonstrate the interest and capacity to accommodate some individuals who require supports that are provided or funded by third parties.

### **Recommendations:**

8. It is recommended that the Coalition prioritize funding allocations based on best practice for investments aimed at addressing homelessness, in particular, prioritizing people who experience chronic and episodic homelessness and are in need of supports, and concentrating on housing and housing-focused supports for people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness rather than complementary services. This recommendation does not preclude the funding from being used for affordable rental housing without supports, but suggests that when evaluating multiple applications, applications should be ranked as follows:
  - 1 – applications targeting individuals who are experiencing homelessness who are in need of supports
  - 2 – applications targeting individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness where no supports will be provided
  - 3 – applications for affordable rental housing more generally.
9. It is recommended that as part of, and following, the creation of a community plan to end homelessness that outlines the actions and investments required to end homelessness in Comox Valley, the CVRD, in partnership with the Coalition, convene collaborative conversations with homelessness funders (e.g. the CVRD, the Community Foundation, United Way, local municipalities, and possibly SPARC, BC Housing) to discuss and obtain support for investments based on the priorities outlined in the Plan.



### *Pre-development Funding*

Currently, organizations can apply for up to \$5,000 for pre-development planning costs through the service. Although BC Housing and CMHC also offer funding for costs that are incurred prior to development, these are not necessarily sufficient to get a project to a “shovel-ready” stage to apply for capital funding. Stakeholders interviewed for the review believe that there continues to be a need to provide funding for pre-development planning, although consideration should be given to increasing the maximum pre-development funding to \$10,000. It should be noted that \$10,000 is still low, but would supplement BC Housing and CMHC funding.

#### **Recommendation:**

10. It is recommended that the Coalition consider increasing the maximum funding that is provided for pre-development planning costs from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

## **3.6 Evaluation of Applications and Involvement in Developing Recommendations for Funding Allocations**

### *Evaluation of Applications*

Over the past five years the number of applications and amount of funding requested through the Service has been increasing. With this increase, the Coalition has increased the information it relies on and the analysis it conducts to develop the recommended funding allocations. Nevertheless, there are further opportunities to strengthen the application and evaluation process so that funding allocation decisions are based in greater evidence. For example, a formal scoring process could be used to help evaluate applications.

#### **Recommendation:**

11. It is recommended that the Coalition collect additional information through the Request for Expressions of Interest process to support additional evaluation of applications for funding and implement a more formal evaluation framework to score and prioritize applications for funding.

### *Mechanism for Developing Recommendations for Consideration by Coalition Members*

In the past, the Coalition’s Leadership Team would review the applications and make a funding allocation recommendation to coalition members for their consideration. However, three of the organizations that applied for funding in 2021 had representatives on the Leadership Team. Because of the conflict, these representatives were unable to participate in developing a recommendation for consideration by the coalition membership, and an ad hoc group of current and past Leadership Team members developed the recommendations. With the potential for future conflicts among Leadership Team members, stakeholders identified the need to consider another mechanism to support the development of recommendations for consideration by coalition members.



**Recommendation:**

12. It is recommended that the Coalition establish an evaluation committee with time-limited participation, for one funding cycle of the Service, to support the evaluation of applications and development of funding allocations recommendations for consideration by Coalition members.

***Inclusion of Lived/Living Experience of Homelessness***

To date, individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness have had limited involvement in the Service and the homelessness coalition. Interviewees and workshop participants suggested involving individuals with a lived/living experience through an advisory committee or sharing circle. The advisory committee/sharing circle may be specifically for the Service and/or Coalition or for other initiatives/plans as well, such as the Poverty Reduction Plan. It was also suggested that the Coalition consider changing the criteria for participation in the Leadership Team to enable individuals with a lived/living experience to participate in the Leadership Team if they choose.

**Recommendations:**

13. It is recommended that the Coalition develop mechanisms for participation of individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service, for example, through an advisory committee or similar body and revising the eligibility criteria for membership in the Coalition and participation in the Leadership Team or in an evaluation committee.
14. It is recommended that the Service allocate funding to support the participation of individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service.

**3.7 Process of Accessing Funding Through the Service**

Community organizations that have received funding through the Service reported that the process of accessing funding met their needs. They found the application and contract process simple and reported timely flow of funding.

Information was not collected as part of the review from community organizations that have not submitted applications for funding to explore barriers and potential opportunities for additional service providers to submit applications for funding.





## 4.0 Conclusions and Summary of Recommendations

The Comox Valley Regional District, Comox Valley Homelessness Coalition, local municipalities/electoral areas participating in the Service, and regional voters should be commended for their ongoing efforts to reduce homelessness through the Homelessness Supports Service. Since its inception in 2016, the Service has established itself as a proven model for contributing to the creation of affordable housing. Recipients of the funding reported that the Service has led to the creation of additional units that would not have otherwise been created and has resulted in units being developed earlier than they otherwise would have been. While the amount requisitioned for the Service through property taxes is relatively small, the Service has been able to use its funds to leverage a substantial amount of other funding and resources.

Delivery of the Service through the Coalition to End Homelessness has been effective. Community organizations that have received funding through the Service reported that the process of accessing funding has met their needs.

Building on the success of the first five years of the Service, this review offers 14 recommendations to further strengthen the Service:

### Revenue Generation and Sources of Revenue

1. It is recommended that the CVRD Board consider the following options for increasing the tax requisition for the Service to further contribute to the achievement of the goals outlined in the 5 Year Plan to End Homelessness:
  - Option A: a requisition of \$10 per \$100,000 of taxable property value (which would result in an estimated requisition of approximately \$1.3 million)
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2. It is recommended that the CVRD Board consider revising the Service or establishing another service to support borrowing by the Regional District to fund capital investments to address homelessness.
3. It is recommended the CVRD Board explore whether the Town of Comox may be interested in participating in the Service and whether the City of Courtenay and Village of Cumberland may be interested in contributing other resources they have earmarked for affordable housing<sup>8</sup>, such as affordable housing reserve funds, to the Service to support greater collaboration and consistent prioritization of investments in housing and supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the Village of Cumberland does not currently have an affordable housing reserve fund.





4. It is recommended that the CVRD prepare promotional materials to raise the profile and transparency of the Service, including communicating how the funds have been used (e.g. case studies of affordable housing created with the funding) and the total value of the investments the funding has generated.

#### **Sustainability of the Service Delivery Model**

5. It is recommended the Service provide funding to the Coalition for management and administration of up to the greater of \$30,000 per year or 5% of the value of the Service.

#### **Evidenced-Based Community Planning and Funding Allocation**

6. It is recommended that the CVRD and Coalition partner in the preparation of a homelessness needs assessment and community plan to address homelessness that is based on best practices. The Coalition can then prepare its own 5 Year Plan that includes its own actions to support the achievement of the goals and actions outlined in the community plan.

In the future the homelessness needs assessment could be incorporated into the Regional Housing Needs Assessment, but given that the Regional Housing Needs Assessment was just completed, it is recommended that a homelessness needs assessment be undertaken before the Regional Housing Needs Assessment is updated in five years. However, if there are plans for a Coordinated Access system and By-Name List to be established in the next two years, the CVRD and Coalition may wish to wait to prepare the homelessness needs assessment until after data is available from the By-Name List and the 2021 Census.

7. If the tax requisition for the Service is increased based on Option A, above, (\$10 per \$100,000) of taxable property value, it is recommended that a portion of the funds be used to support a Coordinated Access system for Comox Valley. Alternatively, it is recommended that the CVRD and Coalition continue to pursue funding from other sources to support a Coordinated Access system.

#### **Evidenced-Based Funding Use and Allocations of Funding**

8. It is recommended that the Coalition prioritize funding allocations based on best practice for investments aimed at addressing homelessness, in particular, prioritizing people who experience chronic and episodic homelessness and are in need of supports, and concentrating on housing and housing-focused supports for people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness rather than complementary services. This recommendation does not preclude the funding from being used for affordable rental housing without supports, but suggests that when evaluating multiple applications, applications should be ranked as follows:
  - 1 – applications targeting individuals who are experiencing homelessness who are in need of supports
  - 2 – applications targeting individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness where no supports will be provided
  - 3 – applications for affordable rental housing more generally.
9. It is recommended that as part of, and following, the creation of a community plan to end homelessness that outlines the actions and investments required to end homelessness in Comox Valley, the CVRD in partnership with the Coalition convene collective conversations with homelessness funders (e.g. the CVRD, the Community Foundation, United Way, local municipalities,



and possibly SPARC, BC Housing) to discuss and obtain support for investments based on the priorities outlined in the Plan.

10. It is recommended that the Coalition consider increasing the maximum funding that is provided for pre-development planning costs from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

#### **Evaluation of Applications and Involvement in Developing Recommendations for Funding Allocations**

11. It is recommended that the Coalition collect additional information through the Request for Expressions of Interest process to support additional evaluation of applications for funding and implement a more formal evaluation framework to score and prioritize applications for funding.
12. It is recommended that the Coalition establish an evaluation committee with time-limited participation, for one funding cycle of the Service, to support the evaluation of applications and development of funding allocations recommendations for consideration by Coalition members.
13. It is recommended that the Coalition develop mechanisms for participation of individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service, for example, through an advisory committee or similar body and revising the eligibility criteria for membership in the Coalition and participation in the Leadership Team or in an evaluation committee.
14. It is recommended that the Service allocate funding to support the participation of individuals with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service.



## Appendix A – Housing and Support Service Contributions 2016-2020

Organization	Units	Description	Contribution	Funding Use	Municipality
Comox Valley Transition Society	7	Transitional housing for women coming out of recovery	\$80,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Dawn to Dawn	3	Low barrier affordable rental housing	\$90,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Comox Valley Transition Society	4	Two-bedroom second stage housing units for women with children fleeing violence	\$70,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Comox Valley Transition Society	8	Affordable rental housing with supports for women-led lone parent families	\$25,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Dawn to Dawn	1	Affordable rental housing for families	\$90,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Habitat for Humanity	10	Affordable ownership housing	\$70,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Wachiay Friendship Centre	34	Affordable rental housing	\$110,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
John Howard Society	11	Supported independent living for youth	\$150,000	Capital	City of Courtenay
Comox Valley Transition Society	22	Affordable rental housing for single parent-led families	\$45,000	Development costs (pre-construction)	Village of Cumberland
L'Arche Comox Valley	21	Affordable housing for people with disabilities and seniors	\$5,000	Pre-construction planning	Town of Comox
Wachiay Friendship Centre	24-32	Affordable rental housing for Indigenous elders with some supports	\$5,000	Pre-construction planning	City of Courtenay
Coalition, Connect Warming Centre	N/A	Drop-in centre	\$60,000	Operating	City of Courtenay

## Appendix B – Assumptions on Costs of Affordable Housing Developments

Organization	Units	Description	Estimated Cost	Notes on Cost Assumptions
Comox Valley Transition Society	7	Transitional housing for women coming out of recovery	\$80,000	Cost provided by CVTS
Dawn to Dawn	3	Low barrier affordable rental housing	\$570,000	Estimated cost as per 5 Year Plan for Dawn to Dawn's more recent condo purchase
Comox Valley Transition Society	4	Two-bedroom second stage housing units for women with children fleeing violence	\$731,000	Cost provided by CVTS
Comox Valley Transition Society	8	Affordable rental housing with supports for women-led lone parent families	\$2,400,000	Cost provided by CVTS
Dawn to Dawn	1	Affordable rental housing for families	\$190,000	Cost as per 5 Year Plan
Habitat for Humanity	10	Affordable ownership housing	\$2,100,000	Estimated cost of \$210,000 per unit based on cost in 5 Year Plan
Wachiay Friendship Centre	34	Affordable rental housing	\$6,268,223	Estimated cost based on cost assumptions BCNPHA used for studio units and one-bedroom units in its Affordable Housing Plan
John Howard Society	11	Supported independent living for youth	\$1,707,750	Estimated cost based on cost assumptions BCNPHA used for studio units in its Affordable Housing Plan
Comox Valley Transition Society	22	Affordable rental housing for single parent-led families	\$6,700,000	Cost provided by CVTS. Note that this project is still in pre-construction stage, and therefore has not been included in the analysis of resources that have been leveraged by the Service's contributions to affordable housing
L'Arche Comox Valley	21	Affordable housing for people with disabilities and seniors		Costs TBD, in pre-development stage
Wachiay Friendship Centre	24-32	Affordable rental housing for Indigenous elders with some supports		Costs TBD, in pre-development stage
Coalition, Connect Warming Centre	N/A	Drop-in centre		N/A

## Appendix C – Best Practices Review

The best practices review revealed that while there are several examples of local municipalities with affordable housing and/or homelessness funds, such funds/services are relatively uncommon among regional districts. Two other regional districts have housing and homelessness funds/services, the Cowichan Valley Regional District and the Capital Regional District.

The Capital Regional District's Housing Trust Fund has a maximum annual requisition of approximately \$1,000,000, with an annual increase allowed for inflation. The Fund provides funding between \$5,000 and \$15,000 per unit with a minimum five to one leveraging of funding to regional non-profit housing societies and private developers/landlords. Funds are prioritized for affordable housing units participating in the Regional Housing First Program. Decisions on allocating the funds are made through a Housing Commission that is made up of representatives from each of the participating municipalities. Up to 5% of the funds can be used for administration.

Cowichan Valley Regional District's Annual Financial Contribution Service has a maximum annual requisition of \$750,000. The fund is used primarily to support affordable housing projects with the aim of leveraging resources from other funders. Of the \$750,000, \$425,000 is allocated to rental housing capital contributions; \$65,000 is allocated to project development (pre-construction funding); \$138,000 is allocated to planning, research, housing development coordination and housing loss prevention; \$10,000 is allocated to an Emergency Contingency Fund, the purpose of which is to provide the ability to respond to an emergency situation such as loss of housing due to fire, flood, or extreme weather; and \$112,000 (14.9%) is allocated to service management and administration.

Both of these regions use tax requisition as their primary or sole source of revenue for the fund/service. However, Capital Regional District's bylaw does specify that revenue could be obtained from property taxes, fees and charges, revenues raised by other means authorized by the Local Government Act or revenues received by way of agreement, enterprises, gift, grant or otherwise. The maximum tax requisition for the two other districts is higher than Comox Valley at \$3.17 and \$10.70 per \$100,000 for Cowichan Valley and the Capital respectively, compared to \$2.00 for Comox Valley.

Local municipalities that have established housing funds include the City of Vancouver, New Westminster, Richmond, North Vancouver District, Coquitlam, Burnaby, Surrey, Abbotsford, District of Sechelt, Whistler, Town of Qualicum Beach, Victoria, Kamloops, Kelowna, Vernon, District of Sooke, Colwood, Oliver, Osoyoos, and Peachland<sup>9</sup>. However, not all of these distribute funding on an annual basis. While specific local municipal funds have not been profiled in this report, revenue typically comes from specific surcharge on new market units built, or from cash-in-lieu contributions from developers using a density bonus or rezoning agreement and sometimes includes property taxes, municipal property sales, gaming funds, and allocations of budget surpluses. Some municipalities, (eg. Surrey), have set their funds up as a society in order to receive donations. Borrowing could also be a revenue source. While it is a separate service, the Capital Regional District has a Land Assembly, Housing and Land Banking Service that permits the regional district to borrow money to support the creation of affordable housing. The Regional District has borrowed \$35-million to help achieve its goal of ending

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<sup>9</sup> Sparc BC, 2009, <https://ighhub.org/sites/default/files/municipal-strategies-to-address-homelessness-in-british-columbia.pdf>



chronic homelessness by creating 400 affordable housing units rented at the income assistance shelter rate. Of note, the cost of borrowing is relatively cheap; if the Regional District borrows \$10 million for 15 years, the impact is a cost of \$0.61 for every \$100,000 of property value.



# Appendix D – Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

The following section provides a summary of the feedback obtained through the stakeholder interviews.

## Contributions to Affordable Housing and Ability to Leverage Other Funding

### ***Strengths:***

- The existence of the Service, collaboration of local municipalities and the Coalition to address needs, and annual flow of funding
- Proven model for supporting the creation of affordable housing, which has led to creation of additional and faster creation of affordable housing
- Ability to use the funds to leverage other funding

## Revenue Generation and Sources of Revenue

### ***Strengths:***

- The existence of the Service raises the profile of issues related to housing and homelessness in the Valley and community groups working to address these issues

### ***Opportunities:***

- Increase tax requisition for the Service
- Seek participation from the Town of Comox in the Service
- Consider opportunities for local municipalities to contribute other funds to the Service
- Raise the profile and transparency of the Service, use of funds, and value created

## Sustainability of the Service Delivery Model

### ***Strengths:***

- Stewardship of the funding by the Coalition which makes recommendations to the CVRD Board
- Strength and capacity of the Coalition
- Strong understanding of housing and homelessness needs by Coalition members
- Participation of community agencies and local Councillors in Coalition, in part as a result of the Service
- Community support for the Coalition
- Opportunity for all Coalition members to voice their opinion and the collaborative decision making by Coalition members in allocating the funding
- Strong working relationship between the Coalition and CVRD staff
- Contract administration by CVRD

### ***Opportunities:***

- Provide funding through the Service for the Coalition's Coordinator position



- Consider establishing a regional housing planner/social planner position

## **Evidenced-Based Community Planning and Funding Allocation**

### ***Strengths:***

- The Coalition's Plan to End Homelessness is a detailed, "living", strategic action plan

### ***Opportunities:***

- Consider making the Plan a community plan rather than a Coalition plan
- Consider seeking funding for coordinated access
- Strengthen non-market the housing needs assessment within Regional Housing Needs Assessment to better inform the Plan
- Consider whether to use funding for services
- Consider whether to spread the money around or allocate larger amounts to prioritized projects based on a scoring process

## **Evidenced-Based Funding Use and Allocations of Funding**

### ***Opportunities:***

- Consider a smaller range of focus for the funding to homeless and at risk of homelessness rather than spectrum of non-market affordable housing
- Conduct conversation(s) between funders (CVRD, community foundation, united way, local municipalities, and possibly SPARC, BC Housing), with involvement of the Coalition
- Consider increasing the funding amount for pre-construction costs

## **Evaluation of Applications and Involvement in Developing Recommendations for Funding Allocations**

### ***Opportunities:***

- Consider requesting additional information in the EOI process to support evidence-based prioritization
- Consider establishing another mechanism to support recommendations on funding allocations developed by the Leadership Team when many applicants are members of leadership team
- Include persons with a lived/living experience of homelessness in the Service through an advisory committee or something similar and change the criteria for participation in the Leadership Team





## **Process of Accessing Funding Through the Service**

### ***Strengths:***

- The process for applying for funding through the Service is simple and there is a timely flow of funding

### ***Opportunities:***

- Consider reviewing barriers and opportunities to additional service providers submitting applications for funding

## **Municipal Involvement in the Service**

- Local municipal staff are somewhat familiar with the Service, but have played a limited role in the Service and are unclear of what has been funded
- Some developments have been able to leverage additional contributions from the local municipality. One of the participating municipalities has an affordable housing reserve fund
- In general, it was noted that there has been a lack of communication to municipalities and transparency related to the Service, and in particular related to the use of the funding

### ***Opportunities:***

- Although capacity may be limited, there may be opportunities for local municipalities to play a greater role in the Service by supporting non-profits developing affordability housing in identifying lands and proper locations and working with them through the land-use planning process
- Local municipalities also identified that hiring a housing/social planner, either at the local municipal level or regional level, could also help advance efforts to create more affordable housing

