

DATE: November 30, 2023**FILE:** 400-70/KFN
5040-01**TO:** Chair and Directors
Regional District Board**FROM:** James Warren
Chief Administrative OfficerSupported by James Warren,
Chief Administrative Officer*J. Warren***RE: Elected Officials Forum Summary**

Purpose

To provide an overview of the October 24, 2023 Elected Officials Forum (EOF) and a summary of feedback received during the roundtable session on affordable housing supports and the development of a Housing Action Plan.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

None. This report is for information only.

Executive Summary

- On October 24, 2023, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) hosted an EOF focused on the following topics:
 - Reconciliation Advisory Table's report entitled "Laying the Foundation for Our Work"
 - Affordable housing
- The EOF was attended by elected officials and senior staff from the CVRD, City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, Comox Valley Schools and Islands Trust. Also, in attendance were members of the CVRD's Reconciliation Advisory Table and the leadership team from the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (CVCEH).
- Nick Chowdhury of Wi'la'mola Consulting provided a presentation on the first report of the Reconciliation Advisory Table entitled "Laying the Foundation for Our Work".
- The affordable housing topic was first introduced through a presentation by Angela Fletcher of CVCEH. As part of the presentation, Ms. Fletcher outlined the following requests and proposed actions:
 - Collaborative action: We urge all elected officials to commit to a coordinated and multi-agency approach to address homelessness. The

- Coalition should be an essential source of agency engagement in these efforts.
- Speaking on behalf of the Collective: Building capacity within all organizations is crucial to our success. Approaching the CVCEH with housing questions and information can help centralize information and break down silos.
 - Transparency and public engagement: Increased transparency and public knowledge will foster more engagement and understanding of our collective efforts.
 - Establish regular regional housing meetings to facilitate communication and coordination.
 - Ensure that decisions are made in consultation with people with lived experiences and that their input is considered before any final decisions are reached.
 - Include the CVCEH as an essential partner in all discussions related to housing right from the beginning.
 - Recognize the CVCEH as a valuable conduit for information and solutions
- CVRD staff then provided presentations on affordable housing supports and the development of a Housing Action Plan and a Homelessness Needs Assessment and Community Plan.
 - Following the presentations, small group discussions were held focused on four questions related to the above-referenced initiatives.
 - A summary of the feedback and themes from the discussions are outlined in Appendix A to this report. This summary will be shared with the consultants engaged with these projects.
 - Further information concerning the housing initiatives presented and discussed during this session will be brought forward to the Board in due course. At current, engagement is planned for winter of 2023/2024 with the results presented in the spring of 2024.

Prepared by:

J. Martens

Jake Martens
General Manager of Corporate Services

Roundtable Discussion

Question 1: What are the key ingredients necessary to develop and execute a regional Housing Action Plan?

Feedback and key themes:

- Engagement of people with lived experience, indigenous and housing experts who have experience housing people
- Senior government support to assist with general implementation and funding supports
- Partners with ability to be open and nimble in their service provision and plans
- Ensuring that the urgency is operationalized – working with non-profits – prioritize in staff work plans, re-prioritizing
- Prioritize needs to support focusing limited resources
- Gap analysis and data to back up goals – metrics (i.e. number of units)
- Ensure a process for review, revision and reporting out
- Incorporate relationship building to assist with collaboration
- Courage to be bold and innovative
- Include a robust communications plan that includes myth busting

Question 2: What are three actions that you expect to (or would like to) see in a Comox Valley Housing Action Plan?

Feedback and key themes:

- Investigate housing organizations to increase non-market housing
- Completed land inventory for the region
- Consistency (shared vision) for affordable housing and roles across the four local government jurisdictions.
- Goals that are aligned with updated housing needs assessment
- Local government coordination with CVCEH – regular meetings/forums of key personnel with dedicated resources
- A clear articulation of key provincial and federal government supports to assist with advocacy
- Team approach i.e. church liaison
- Buy-in and action by all local governments to support and incentivize non-market housing
- Identify what doesn't work
- Set regional housing targets for percentage of affordable housing units to ensure a level playing field

Question 3: What are the affordable housing tools/tactics that you feel local governments should focus on to realize additional non-market rental housing?

Feedback and key themes:

- New provincial regulations of short-term rentals will assist with further local government action
- Local governments don't generally have a large inventory of lands but could acquire lands for affordable housing. Strategic partnerships for land acquisition
- Local government housing authority/corporation
- Increase funding to the existing affordable housing services
- Coordinate municipal efforts with non-profit efforts to attract provincial/federal funding
- More money from senior governments – provincial and federal
- Financial incentives, including: tax incentives for developers at all levels for non-market housing, property tax breaks for non-market and density, Fund Development Cost Charges for 100 per cent of non-market housing
- Incentivizing conversion of single-family dwellings to multi-units and proactive re-zoning
- Expert team needed to coordinate the creation of affordable housing projects
- Density bonusing in exchange for donating "airspace"
- Shift the entrenched power imbalance of land ownership
- More land, more money, more energy and effort
- Housing agreements – rent increases etc.
- Spot zone developments – to remain as rentals
- Multi-use buildings – add housing on new public facilities
- Implement empty homes tax

Question 4: The CVRD requisitions ~ \$475,000 each year for affordable housing (~\$15 average property owner). How should the proposed tools/tactics for non-market rental housing be funded?

- a) Increase the level of public investment.**
- b) Keep the level of public investment the same by re-directing existing funds and/or find new sources of revenue.**

Feedback and key themes:

- All municipalities should contribute to the CVRD's Homelessness Supports Service
- Increase the requisition with it being leveraged to higher governments – intentional and organized. Senior governments agencies like BC Housing should be present and active within the Comox Valley
- \$15 is not enough but the financial need is so great that it could exceed our resources. As a result, we need to be prudent and strategic
- Put aside question of funding until we figure out plan. Public is likely to support increased taxes to address affordability but there needs to be plan
- Need to consider the trade-offs with other local government services and infrastructure i.e. new hockey rink/swimming pools
- Important to continue partnership with coalition during transition as affordable housing projects need to ramp up
- Invite development community to the table
- Partnership is key as the province won't solve the problem