

CVRD Housing and Homelessness Standing Committee Priority Setting

At its December 16, 2010 meeting the CVRD Housing and Homelessness Standing Committee participated in a priority setting exercise which continued, and was completed, at its January 26th and February 24th meetings. This exercise focused on:

- in the context of the housing continuum, establish the priority target groups in the Comox Valley whose housing needs should be addressed in the next 3 to 5 years;
- what housing form is best suited to meet those needs;
- what support services are required;
- which organizations could become partners in providing services; and,
- what opportunities exist for financial partnerships in addition to BC Housing and VIHA.

A. Who are the target groups?

In terms of addressing housing needs in the Comox Valley, the following groups were identified as the top priorities:

1. Mentally ill & addicted, including those individuals who cannot remain substance-free
2. Women who have left abusive relationships
3. Families, including those who want to remain together
4. Youth who have left foster care (especially those 15 years of age and up)
5. Seniors, particularly lower income seniors who may live alone and as well, requiring special assistance, e.g., dementia.

Committee members agreed that all of the identified groups included First Nations people, similar to other communities on Vancouver Island.

B. What are the specific needs for each of the target groups?

The committee members were unanimous that it was important to plug the gaps and do so strategically and opportunistically.

C. What housing type (on the housing continuum), is suited for each of the identified target groups?

It is clear that housing on the dependent side of the continuum, with support services and partnerships, are best suited to meet the housing needs of the groups identified. In particular, longer stay housing to meet the needs of some groups is needed such as transitional housing, second stage housing and supportive housing. Key to this housing is that it be affordable as housing affordability was characterized as high on the list of gaps in the Comox Valley.

Gaps specific to the needs of the groups identified included:

- Place to go during the day &/or when time runs out at the shelter
- Transportation limits where services can be located
- Helping to connect to medical/dental/health
- System managing – access on-line
- Clearinghouse for coordination

D. What housing form is best suited to each target group? What tenure?

The housing forms identified by committee members that best meet the needs of women who have left abusive relationships and families who want to remain together are apartments and /or townhouses with communal gathering space, e.g. kitchen and/or lounge, office and meeting space included onsite.

Apartments are the housing form better suited for addressing the needs of mentally ill and addicted individuals, with either studio or one-bedroom units to address/minimize the staff time requirements for managing program participants. Communal gathering space is also important for this target group.

Similarly, apartments, designed to be accessible and barrier-free, would be a suitable form of housing for seniors, especially for those who may live alone. Communal gathering space would also be important to include. The Abbeyfield model of housing, also accessible and barrier-free, accommodating 8-12 people would be another form to consider.

Security is important for all the target groups, especially for women leaving abusive relationships, in which case the committee believes the housing should not be at ground level, but located on the second floor so access can be better controlled. Elevators are necessary and essential to address the physical health needs of residents across all the target groups.

Projects should be large enough to be financially viable, e.g., a minimum of 20 units for second stage housing in order to incorporate families, and as well cover the cost of required support services. A mix of unit types and sizes is required, ranging from studio to 3 bedrooms units. Smaller sized projects for youth are preferred, ranging from 6 to 8 units.

As for tenure, rental would be the most appropriate for the priority target groups identified.

E. What supports does each target group need?

The support services identified as being important for all the target groups included:

- Housing support to landlords
- Literacy (reading, writing and computer)
- Access to services 24/7
- A place for people to go during the day, with programs
- Appropriately trained program staff, i.e., mental health, addictions, violence, abuse, dementia, youth and culturally sensitive
- Onsite caretaker, at a minimum
- System navigation
- Programs including life skills, relationship building, financial management
- Housing charges/payments that include heat & lights
- Cooking - meal preparation - shopping
- Financial assistance for rent payments & ownership assistance
- Hygiene facilities
- Public washrooms & adequate washroom facilities in services
- Accessing medical & dental care, i.e., connecting to a doctor/dentist

- Sunday meals
- Improved community kitchen access
- Access to childcare (safe & affordable) that is part-time
- A ready-to-rent program

Note: The committee members identified existing housing programs and projects that are good examples of models:

- Dawn-to-Dawn has an independence-training program
- John Howard Society youth housing in Campbell River
- The Salvation Army projects in lower mainland
- Comox Valley Transition Society
- Harrison House, Women’s Transition House, Victoria
- Marion Gardens & Shannon Oaks, Baptist Housing Society, Victoria

F. What partner(ship) might provide these supports?

The committee addressed each target group separately to identify possible program partners, noting that this is an initial list that could be added to as partners are identified.

- Mentally Ill & Addicted – VIHA; Dawn to Dawn; Salvation Army; Eureka; Comox Valley Transition Society; Understanding Men Society (Jonathon Buchanan); Community Access Program (Catherine Holt); Comox Valley Recovery Centre

In addition to possible housing partners, the committee noted the need to and importance of connecting with employment services to ensure access, especially as people become more stable.

- Women Leaving Abusive Relationships – Comox Valley Transition Society; Women of Native Ancestry, M’AKOLA Housing; Immigrant & Multicultural
- Families Staying Together – Wachiay Friendship Centre; Habitat for Humanity; M’AKOLA Housing (existing rental project has vacancies)
- Youth – John Howard Society; MCFD; VIHA; United Way Central & North Vancouver Island; BC Housing
- Seniors - Glacier View Lodge; VIHA; D’Esterre Gardens

G. Where would potential projects be located?

The committee indentified a number of possible project locations and sites, primarily in Courtenay and Comox, including:

- Glacier View Lodge – seniors
- Northgate 4 Square Church – families
- Washington Inn – single women and men aged 20-45 – transitional housing
- Airspace usage of Legion property on Balmoral in Comox
- Laurel Lodge (22 units)
- Arbutus Hotel – needs major reno and needs to be evaluated
- Cliffe Avenue - 24/7 emergency shelter and supportive housing

May need some negotiating

- Comox Valley Recovery Centre – 20 transitional beds to be built
- Comox lands – independent housing – secure for affordable housing
- John Howard Society’s previous plans for youth housing
- Dawn to Dawn – additional rental units from landlords but would need subsidy from the community, not necessarily from BC Housing

Committee members recognized that other possibilities may arise but this initial list could serve as the basis for discussion and, as well, future partnerships.

H. What is the timeline for the projects – by year and by target group?

The committee stated that housing for the priority target groups should be pursued over the next 3 to 5 years, strategically and opportunistically, including approaching private developers to be partners. Critical to this work is speaking with one voice and ensuring community concurrence with the committee’s recommendations.

I. How will potential projects be funded and financed?

The committee identified the following organizations, in addition to traditional sources such as CMHC, BC Housing, MCFD, VIHA, the CVRD and municipalities, which could be a source of funding assistance for the development of housing for the key target groups, as well as other housing projects that meet the funding criteria:

- Coastal Communities Credit Union
- Comox Valley Foundation
- Vancouver Foundation
- BC Real Estate Foundation
- BC Real Estate Association
- Land Trust Alliance of BC
- Comox Valley Land Trust

The Committee noted that the Municipalities of Courtenay and Comox already have tools and mechanisms in place to assist, such as affordable housing and amenity funds, but emphasized the importance for all local governments to consider negotiating density bonus in development applications, i.e., rezoning applications, and securing affordable housing units through a housing agreement.