

Oceanside Community Housing Forum

Tuesday, June 13th, 2023

Society of Organized Services

245 Hirst Ave, Parksville BC



Attendees:

Councillor Mary Beil, City of Parksville
Councillor Joel Grenz, City of Parksville
Councillor Sylvia Martin, City of Parksville
Councillor Sean Wood, City of Parksville
Councillor Scott Harrison, Town of Qualicum Beach
Councillor Petronella Vander Valk, Town of Qualicum Beach
Councillor Jean Young, Town of Qualicum Beach
Susanna Newton, Executive Director, Society of Organized Service
Violet Hayes, Executive Director, Island Crisis Care Society & Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness Partner (OTFH)
Elaine Young, Oceanside Health and Wellness Network (OHWN), SD 69 Trustee
Marlys Diamond, OHWN

Rebecca Ladd, MLA Adam Walker Constituency Office
Ryan Chaput, MP Gord Johns Constituency Office
Blain Sepos, Executive Director, Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism Association
Amir Tabatabaei, Executive Director, Parksville & District Chamber of Commerce
Mike Garland, Executive Director, Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce
Konrad Langenmaier, School Counsellor SD69
Lydia Wegner, Ballenas Secondary School
Grace Dyck, Ballenas Secondary School
Sabrina Blaase, Ballenas Secondary School
Christine Dao, Ballenas Secondary School
Jane Vinet – Regional Coordinator, OHWN

Executive Summary

In the spring of 2023, the Oceanside Health and Wellness Network, Society of Organized Services and the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness created a project plan to examine how we could collaboratively address the housing crisis in Oceanside.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Assess and address housing needs, and increase low-cost/affordable housing stock and availability, and/or other supports such as rent subsidies
- Engagement #1: host a meeting of key community partners, have the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness present as an example of a working task force structure.
- Engagement #2: to form a Housing Task Force
- Engagement #3: to consider successful ideas and approaches developed by other regions; consider paid consultant (funded by a grant?), and
- Engagement #4: Develop short and long-term plans to improve low-cost/affordable housing availability.

Invitations were sent to representatives from municipal, provincial and federal governments, First Nations governments, business community, tourism sector, school district, non-profit housing and service providers to join in an open conversation about creating an on-going commitment to finding solutions to address housing issues across the housing continuum. We were joined by four grade twelve students from Ballenas Secondary School in Parksville who supported note taking activities and joined the conversation to bring the perspective of youth to the table.

The first meeting to get a better understanding of our existing regional housing challenges and ways to collaboratively find solutions was held on June 13th, 2023.

THE HOUSING CONTINUUM



1) Who's in the Room?

Introductions were made and each participant was asked to either share a goal or a learning aspiration for the morning.

Below is a summary of what was shared:

- Creating a plan for workforce, supportive and market housing including affordable housing, employee and income-assisted or subsidized housing options.
- Building housing co-ops and mixed-income housing with local developers.
- Creating rent-to-purchase options, or connect new home buyers with sellers to help families set down roots?
- Understanding the needs of employers and businesses to attract new workers who need housing options.
- Improving our economic development by attracting a younger workforce into the area to ensure we are not only a retirement community.
- Understanding the struggles newly graduating students and young families are facing to find housing and develop solutions.
- Learning what are the next steps in developing a supportive housing plan?
- Housing options for those working in non-profit organizations such as Orca place to provide employee housing options.
- Understanding the impacts that a lack of housing has on our quality of life, physical and mental wellbeing, as well as all the social determinants of health.
- Learning and sharing more broadly about what housing supports are already available in Oceanside including programs like the Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism Association short term rentals for assistance programs for workers, emergency assistance regulating and enforcing short-term housing rentals and bringing more funding to the community. Parksville Lions Housing Society is a self-sustaining program funded through Easter Seals, providing three facilities in Parksville for seniors and single parents. People apply through BC Housing. Residents give one third of their income to live there. Parksville Lions Housing Society is also building mixed family housing. The biggest impact facing affordable housing options in Parkville is access to land. Currently new housing is being built in an industrial park.
- We need to be aware of environmental concerns when developing new housing options.
- Working to alleviate the bottleneck of supportive housing to unhoused people which has a neighborhood impact.
- Restoring the dignity of the unhoused by creating a healthy mix of geared to income housing.
- Acknowledging that many of our unhoused are working and are students living in vehicles or trailers due to low vacancy rates.
- Qualicum Beach has new affordable housing because they could get land, but they had help from the business community. How do we bring non-profits, government and business owners who are interested to collaborate with builders so we can be more resilient and have our own community thrive?
- How do we get out of our silos and reduce the layers of bureaucracy to improve affordable housing options?
- How do we bring builders into these conversations? We need housing needs data and realistic ideas geared to that data. We need to work with BC Housing and create a strategy.
- How do we get help from the business community?
- We need to look at a broader range of diversity in housing options to support new immigrants and other new community members to come here.
- Homelessness is not a crime.

2) Update from the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness (OTFH) – Violet Hayes, Executive Director of the Island Crisis Care Society and OTFH Partner

About the OTFH and what we have achieved together:

- The Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness has been running since 2010 and was founded by the City of Parksville. Since then, it has been building partnerships with owners and landlords as well as building Orca Place. However, after people leave Orca Place there are no next steps for them. Shelters would be an essential step before Orca Place as they allow connections and individualized care suggestions. Staff and outreach workers are becoming harder to find due to unstable funding.
- OTFH started with a \$50K grant and they created the Oceanside HOST (Homelessness Outreach Support Team) to provide outreach support to clients.
- Built relationships with local landlords. ICCS holds leases on several rental suites in the community to ensure accessibility for clients who may not have references. Clients can then have an occupancy agreement with ICCS and build a record of successful tenancy. The very first resident they placed is still there!
- Orca Place is a supportive housing development in Parksville which was an initiative of the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness. Qualicum Beach, the City of Parksville and the Regional District of Nanaimo bought the land with money from BC Housing. The land is now owned by the City of Parksville and has 52 units. All of this was achieved through collaboration. We are still promoting that there is a need for shelter in the region.
- It is hard to come from homelessness and move into supportive housing successfully. Staff must build relationships first before placing them in housing.
- A note shared from an Island Crisis Care Outreach Worker for today's forum: *"It is unfortunate out there as we don't really have services to offer...but the trends are hungry, tired and/or under the influence. In the last seven months I've integrated emotional awareness, breakfast program, *hoping soon for a dinner program and just trying to meet basic necessities. The NFA (no fixed address) individuals I see are all in need of the Housing First strategy. 25 to 40 I would say I am currently seeing on the street, 25 being the main ones and the others come and go. Then there's the individuals underhoused, RV, etc. Haven't yet reached too many but have 5 currently that I see regularly."*
- Now we can add environmental issues like smoke from large forest fires to the list of health problems unhoused people are facing.
- The National Housing Strategy in Canada says we all have a right to a place to live. To do this successfully we need staff and annual funding to ensure our staff stay with us. Our outreach workers often leave the area to work for the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction because of more stable opportunities. We as an organization have a strong need for housing for our outreach workers. What we are hearing and seeing in Oceanside is there is discouragement, absolute despair, no hope, and no opportunities. This results in an increase in drug use and social disorder. We need a plan to move forward on the housing continuum.
- Point in Time Count results for 2023 will be released in September.

3) **World Café Style Discussion #1 – The first conversation of the day focused on the left-hand side of the housing continuum.**

Participants were moved into four tables and were given 30 minutes to share what are the challenges and impacts we are seeing in Oceanside. We seeded the conversation by asking about:

- Availability of housing that is affordable to residents of Oceanside
- Concerns related to housing adequacy, suitability and accessibility
- Availability of low-income housing in the community; and
- Indigenous and equity diverse housing
- Future housing needs projections across the housing continuum.

What was shared:

- For the small portion of homeless people happy with their situation and living space, how do you help ensure they have access to essential services? How do you balance independence and individual needs while supporting them? Could 1-on-1 workers help to make personalized plans for each individual to ensure that they are getting the support they need while maintaining the trust between the worker and the homeless? These plans would require an element of trust and would work to ensure that each individual is getting the best help for them and their situation.
- Trust is essential and must be built between outreach workers/organizations and the members of the community they are working to support.
- Trust also works to maintain accurate data and help the most people possible access necessary services. However, how do you make sure that these connections last?
- Could Parkville follow Duncan's lead in starting a tiny-homes project? These tiny homes allow for independence while allowing members to access the essential services they need such as showers, employment opportunities and meals. Each unit costs \$10,000 to build. After building this tiny-home community, the crime rates in Duncan dropped and employment opportunities skyrocketed. The surrounding community, while hesitant at first, soon supported this project, allowing for connections between those living in the tiny-homes community and those living outside of it to be built and fostered. The tiny-homes project also allows those living in it access to professional help and services. Local construction companies and developers such as Walter Hoogland could be key in building these developments.
- Safety is a huge concern with those living unhoused. They are worried about others living on the streets and about the outside community attacking them or causing them harm. This leads to many people inhabiting places like ATMs, where the surrounding area is well-lit and public.
- Affordable housing could greatly decrease government costs in the Parkville-Qualicum area. Hospitalizations decrease as people are moved out of dangerous situations. The number of incidents involving the RCMP, and emergency services also decrease.
- Housing in our area is mainly built for the senior demographic. Most residences are two-bedrooms and there are not many different styles of housing. Different styles of housing could allow for students and larger families to live comfortably in our area.
- Another affordable housing method is Council Housing. This involves a city buying property and allows stable renting rates. This is a long-term investment for the city. However, how do you make this work with varying legislative policies regarding city buildings and renting?

- When it comes to affordable housing, how do you work with taxes? Do you incorporate both public and private funding and do you avoid possible tax increases at all costs?
- Another part of including diverse housing options is having a diverse group plan the next steps. Most of the political demographics in our district involve already-housed adults over 25. Other groups, like students and the unhoused, should be included in the conversation.
- A major point discussed in this first discussion was the need to build upwards instead of outwards and to encourage densification. This could be achieved by taxing landlords with single story homes higher and thus encourage them to build up.
- Another issue with building more living space is the cost of utilities and the impossibility of bringing necessary utilities to certain pieces of land that could be used to build affordable housing.
- Land is a major issue. There are concerns that the only readily available land is in the Industrial areas of Parksville. An area where it would be difficult to bring utilities (if not impossible). Also, not the most desirable of places to build a family home. There would also be issues of transportation and the residents would rely on cars. This would lead to the issue of parking.
- Another possible solution would be to cut down some of the trees. This would of course raise concerns from the environmentally minded people in the community. It would also be in direct conflict with the community's push towards the expansion of green spaces.
- A problem with affordable housing communities such as the cooperative system, is people's willingness to share. This might be counteracted by encouraging a sense of community in Parksville more so than the individualistic lifestyle.
- Addressing the 'problem' of homelessness in Parksville, it is important not to mislabel homeless people. Viewing homelessness as a symptom would help treat the real problems behind this state of living. We often find ourselves viewing the issue with a sense of entitlement. If it were approached instead with the intent to give hope and help those in need, there might be more progress made.
- Affordable housing is not affordable. Low employment rate due to the average age of community members. Need to aim "affordable" prices at the average income of a worker. We need a seniors assistance program. There is not enough subsidy. There is a reluctance to change zoning. There is a lack of public transit that impacts development of housing options.
- Seniors are getting pushed out of Oceanside due to a lack of affordable housing. We need to increase densification it is cheaper to build up than out. We need to get government permission.
- Everyone prefers to keep the area the way it is.
- Building more won't solve the problem – Europe has 30% non-market housing. Investment is needed. Look at vacant homes and short-term rentals to increase housing supplies.
- Non-profit housing could include trailers and RVs. Community needs awareness around the term Affordable Housing as incomes are not enough to pay for housing and other basic needs, also housing is taking too much of our income.
- Following Housing First Principles.

4) Whistler Employee Housing Presentation – Whistler Housing Authority Chair Jen Ford

Jen joined us via Zoom and shared a housing strategy to increase employee housing in the community of Whistler, BC including some of their valuable lessons learned and successes. This program is still ongoing. (Slides are appended.) The purpose of the presentation was to demonstrate how regions can create opportunities to address difficult housing problems. The presentation concluded with a brief question and answer session.

5) World Café Conversation #2 - What is our action plan for creating an Oceanside Housing Task Force?

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on goals and desired outcomes, sources of funding opportunities, collaborative partnerships (who needs to be at the table) and community engagement that would be required to create a successful action plan for an Oceanside Housing Task Force

Goals and desired outcomes

- To ensure that the Parksville-Qualicum area has safe and secure housing and that our community is liveable.
- More diverse housing options.
- Transparency from any groups involved in the issue as well as local government.
- Giving students and young people a voice in the discussion.
- Considering modular homes as a quick an economic solution.
- **Having an option for everyone at every stage.**
- **Establishing clear purpose for the Affordable Housing Task Force.**

Funding

- BC Housing
- Business community
- Government funding
- Fundraising and events
 - The money is not the main issue; it is the availability of land and support from the members of the community

Collaborative partners – who do we need at the table?

- Working with NGOs, specifically ones with entrepreneurial backgrounds or approaches
- Making connections with the community
- Organisations like Lions Housing, Kiwanis Housing
- School boards, universities
- Local administration rather than politicians (ensure no agendas are being pushed)
- Ballenas Housing
- Walter Hoogland in Qualicum Beach, Walter is a developer that works with non-profit organizations.
- Sandra Allison, regional Medical Health Officer with Island Health
- The RCMP and Emergency Services

At the end of the meeting the following people put their names forward to be part of a Housing Task Force:

- Sean Wood
- Konrad Langenmaier
- Petronella Vander Valk
- Scott Harrison
- Jean Young
- Joel Grenz
- Sylvia Martin
- Susanna Newton
- Violet Hayes
- Mike Garand

A small working group of the Oceanside Health and Wellness Network will meet in July to plan Engagement #2 with the intention of convening the second meeting asap.

The Oceanside Health and Wellness Network volunteered to collect any materials that could help support the creation of a housing task force and they will be shared on their [website](#). If you have material you would like to share, please email <mailto:JaneV@uwbc.ca>

Thank you to our funder for their support in convening the Oceanside Community Housing Forum.



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