

Affordable Housing Working Group Terms of Reference

Overview

Rapid housing price increases in the last few years have raised concerns that Bowen Island is in danger of losing its valued social diversity and becoming an island paradise accessible only to high-income groups. Long-time residents and newcomers alike are having difficulty finding housing at a price that they can afford. In addition, the business community is challenged to find and keep employees as a result of high housing costs. Many communities like Bowen find themselves in similar circumstances and are taking action to respond to this crisis.

The Bowen Community Housing Association, a community non-profit society, with municipal support, has steered the completion of a professionally-directed Housing Needs Assessment and a Draft Affordable Housing Strategy, including recommended goals and actions. The Draft Strategy was presented to Council on September 17th, together with recommendations. Council received the report and passed a motion referring the Strategy to staff for review, to the Director of Finance for inclusion in the 2008 budget planning process, and to Council's strategic planning process on September 20th.

In further discussions, Council acknowledged the seriousness and urgency of the affordable housing supply issue, and is committed to adopting a proactive, ongoing affordable housing agenda. In order to secure the range of affordable housing needed in the community, the municipality will need to develop and acquire the necessary capacity and tools, on a scale that is in balance with its resources and other critical priorities.

A number of planned developments on Bowen offer the potential for providing much-needed rental and ownership affordable housing units that will be perpetually affordable. It is important for Council to act quickly to put in place the resources, capacity and organizational structure to empower the municipality to ensure that these opportunities are realized in the most beneficial way possible.

Approach:

Currently, working groups comprised of experienced and skilled community members are making significant contributions in planning for civic facilities, surplus lands, transportation, and for Snug Cove and a sustainability framework for Bowen. Council believes that a similar approach, consisting of the establishment of an Affordable Housing Working Group, will build the community's capacity for catalyzing the delivery of needed perpetually affordable housing by integrating this initiative into the municipal planning framework.

Purpose:

To provide Council and staff with:

- the tools and capacity to proactively pursue the production of affordable housing that meets the housing needs identified in the Housing Needs Assessment and begins the implementation of the Affordable Housing Strategy, and
- information needed to assist with planning financial support for the launch of the affordable housing initiative, to aid in the 2008 budget process.

Objectives

1. *Draft an interim Affordable Housing Policy* for BIM to guide negotiations with developers during rezonings, with specific focus on developments which are in the early stages of planning and provide opportunities for perpetually affordable housing, such as the Cape Roger Curtis, Belterra, Surplus Lands, and the Snug Cove Master Plan. The policy will clarify the applicability of tools and issues including:
 - a. Inclusionary zoning
 - b. Density bonus
 - c. Basis for minimum affordability requirements – units per acre, floor space ratio
 - d. Prioritization of developer contribution (housing, land, cash-in-lieu)

- e. Location of Bowen's affordable housing
 - f. Prioritization of types of housing in relation to needs and opportunities.
2. *Begin the work of the municipal housing organization.* As outlined in the Draft Affordable Housing Strategy, the mandate of this organization - a small, effective arm's-length municipal agency - includes the following:
- a. to facilitate and/or develop affordable rental housing and entry-level ownership housing by leveraging housing units through the development process or with community partners,
 - b. to manage a waiting list of qualified prospective tenants or buyers,
 - c. to hold title to the units (and land, as appropriate),
 - d. to manage the units as perpetually affordable housing, and
 - e. to develop and enforce the necessary legal agreements.

The steps that can be taken immediately include:

- a. Establish criteria and policies to qualify individuals and families for affordable housing opportunities,
- b. Draft covenants to be registered on title of any lands to be zoned for affordable housing, and review these with BIM staff and legal counsel,
- c. Develop a communication plan to ensure that council and the community have a good understanding of the housing initiatives that are being undertaken.
- d. Outline timing and process for next steps.

Resources and Budget

The Working Group is authorized to hire a consultant to develop the Interim Affordable Housing Policy and to begin the work of the municipal housing organization, as described above, under the direction of the Working Group.

A budget of up to \$10,000 is assigned to the Working Group for this project. It is expected that this expense will be recovered under the municipality's planning cost recovery agreements with proponents seeking rezonings, given that the urgency to act on this matter is precipitated by the timing of specific developments currently underway.

It is recognized that completing the process of establishing the housing organization will require a further allocation of approximately \$25,000 in the 2008 budget year. The consultant will be asked to explore external sources of start-up funding to reduce the municipality's contribution.

Composition and Authority to Act

- o The Working Group reports to Council through its Chair, to be appointed by Council.
- o The Working Group has the authority to meet with Municipal staff in support of its work plan.
- o The role of the Working Group is to be an advisory body to the consultant, who reports to the CAO.
- o The Working Group will be comprised of the members of the Bowen Community Housing Association's Affordable Housing Strategy Committee.
- o Councillor Alison Morse will act as Council liaison with the Working Group.
- o The CAO will act as staff liaison, and may assign other staff in support of the work plan.
- o After this work plan is completed, this Working Group shall be disbanded, unless Council decides to extend its work.

Timeframe:

This project is to be initiated by December 1, 2007. The Working Group and Consultant will bring back a full report to Council on progress toward the objectives and on next steps at the end of February, 2008.