

Defining Affordable Housing

Many share a vision for Bowen that includes a socially and economically diverse community supported by the provision of diverse and affordable housing. But what is affordable housing exactly?

How one community defines this may be quite different from another. In many jurisdictions, affordable housing is described as housing, whether rented or owned, that does not exceed 30% of a household's income.

According to the Bowen Island Needs Assessment, in 2006 an annual income of \$85,000 - \$100,000 was needed to purchase an entry level home on Bowen, based on the median price of \$613,000. But according to surveys, the median household income was only \$74,000. This leaves a significant gap in housing for those who cannot afford to purchase a home at market prices.

Lack of housing options is another component contributing to the housing crisis. On Bowen, 95% of the housing stock is single-family dwellings. Medium density housing, such as townhouses or row housing, doesn't exist to any great extent. And rental housing is also limited, though secondary suites provide some relief for singles, or small families who can fit into a one- or two-bedroom living space.

According to the new Affordable Housing Policy passed by the Bowen Island Municipality (BIM) affordable housing is defined as non-market residential dwelling units that may only be owned or rented under the terms of housing covenants registered on title in favour of BIM. In simple terms, this means housing that is created affordably, and kept affordable through some restrictions on price. The objective is to keep it as affordable for future renters or purchasers as it is for those who first occupy it.

It's important to note that affordable housing is not the same as *social housing*, which is housing that is subsidized, usually by government income support programs. Affordable housing is non-market housing that is built either privately or through a non-profit organization, is more affordable than market housing, but does not receive ongoing government funding. The creation of affordable housing can be achieved by securing land at little or no cost and producing housing efficiently and then renting or re-selling that housing to recover the cost of production. That's the direction that BIM is taking in attempting to address the need for affordable housing.

This is the second in a series of articles presented by the municipally appointed, Affordable Housing Working Group. In the next article, we'll focus on Bowen's Affordable Housing Policy and how it will help create new homes for island residents. For more information, please visit the Bowen Island Municipality (BIM)

website at www.bimbc.ca.