

## **Meeting offers solutions**

At the close of the affordable housing open house last week, a sense of hope was palpable. An end to the drain of residents who no longer find Bowen a viable place to call home, and relief for commercial enterprises who struggle to find employees who can afford to live here appears to be in sight.

"Good things are coming. I think that's exciting," Mayor Bob Turner had stated earlier in the evening. The mayor was referring to the next steps planned by the Affordable Housing Working Group (AHWG), host of the assembly that attracted approximately 40 people to the Gallery at Artisan Square.

A mixed crowd of both new and long-term residents, representatives from the development community, housing activists, and a number of candidates for the next municipal election came out to listen and ask questions about the creation of affordable housing on Bowen. The public wanted to know whether it could truly be built, when it would be available, what it would look like and whom it would serve.

And Tim Wake, a housing consultant who has been working with the municipal AHWG, adeptly addressed all the questions. Wake, who has an impressive track record of helping communities solve their housing needs, has introduced a novel approach to ensuring Bowen's diversity is retained. It's what Elizabeth Ballantyne, the chair of the AHWG called "a radically new concept in North America." That is, housing which is not subsidized but price controlled.

Ballantyne underlined the steps that Bowen has moved through – from the eruption of a grassroots initiative concerned about loss of its community members, the establishment of the Bowen Community Housing Association, the raising of significant funds for a needs assessment and the development of a housing strategy. These achievements, gained over a short two-year period are remarkable, noted Ballantyne. They, along with the municipality's decision to legalize secondary suites, adopt an affordable housing policy, provide seed money of \$35,000 and assign the AHWG to begin the work of a housing corporation have created the conditions that will guarantee that a mixed community can thrive on these shores.

We all recognize that Bowen needs a housing continuum, said Ballantyne at the meeting. That includes housing of all sizes and shapes that will offer primary shelter to those with special needs, seniors, young families and everyone else "who wants to belong here."

And though no one would argue that it's not a minute too soon to move decisively to create affordable housing, Bowen may be more fortunate than some.

"Compared to other communities we have gone at lightening speed," Sara Baker, the founder and current chair of the community housing association noted. "We have been spurred on by the vision and the tremendous commitment and love of Bowen that

everyone has. We realize there's a bit more process to get through, but hang on, we're going to bring back that diversity that is so important to Bowen."

Wake agreed with Baker, who commended community members and a supportive local government. "You're doing well. It takes time. You are showing diligence and great leadership."

Nearing the completion of its mandate, the AHWG is currently working with municipal council to ensure the approval of covenants that will regulate the purchase and sale of affordable housing units obtained through re-zonings. The working group has developed waiting list guidelines, and applications for those seeking to be added to the waitlist will be available on 22 November, at the next affordable housing public meeting at Cates Hill Chapel, beginning at 10 a.m.

Meanwhile, Wake is developing a business plan, a sustainable financing model, and governance structure for the soon-to-be established community housing corporation. The small arms-length organization will "champion the development of housing" without burdening the taxpayer.

This report, and other articles concerning efforts and actions of the AFWG and others can be viewed on the website of the Bowen Island Municipality. Please visit [www.bimbc.ca](http://www.bimbc.ca), and click on Affordable Housing under the Current Topic menus. The articles are also available on the Bowen Community Housing Association's website at <http://bowenhousing.org/>. Watch for the launch of the official website of the AHWG at <http://bihousing.org/> later this month. Articles, key documents and other resources, and a downloadable Waitlist application form will be available at the site.

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