

Office of the Chair

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File: 230-20/AVICC

January 17, 2024

Sent via email only: ggarbutt@courtenay.ca

Mayor and Council
City of Courtenay
830 Cliffe Avenue
Courtenay, BC V9N 2J7

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities Resolutions

I am writing to seek City of Courtenay support in respect of two resolutions for the 2024 Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities Annual General Meeting and Convention. I propose a collaborative approach that ensures our submissions are not only impactful but also representative of the collective concerns and priorities of the Comox Valley.

Therefore, I suggest that the Comox Valley Regional District, City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland to independently approve and submit the attached two resolutions prior to the February 8, 2024 deadline:

- Housing Authority Feasibility Study Work (Appendix A);
- Extreme Weather Response Shelter System (Appendix B).

By adopting this approach all our local governments will be noted as sponsors, underscoring the importance of these issues and demonstrating a cohesive commitment to addressing them. It also allows us to present a united front while respecting the autonomy of each jurisdiction.

I also want to note that in drafting the resolutions, I sought feedback from the Comox Valley Mayors and also consulted with, and incorporated feedback from, the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness leadership team on the extreme weather response resolution.

This collaborative approach is very much appreciated and we look forward to working together to make a meaningful impact at the upcoming Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities convention.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Cole-Hamilton', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Will Cole-Hamilton
Chair

Enclosures: Appendix A - Housing Authority Feasibility Study Work
Appendix B - Extreme Weather Response Shelter System

cc: Adriana Proton, Manager of Legislative Services, City of Courtenay

The Comox Valley Regional District respectfully acknowledges the land on which it operates is on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

AVICC HOUSING AUTHORITY FEASIBILITY STUDY WORK RESOLUTION

WHEREAS non-market housing is in critical need throughout the province, and the provision of such housing is currently severely challenged by supply conditions, lack of adequate funding, and lack of capacity by local governments to support the provision and management of such housing;

AND WHEREAS some municipalities and regional districts in British Columbia have created entities, such as housing authorities, which successfully increase the supply of non-market housing by providing and managing such housing, the process of planning and then creating these entities involves significant staff time and other costs;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities and the Union of BC Municipalities petition the Province of BC to provide grant funding for municipalities and regional districts to plan and create entities that provide and manage non-market housing in their communities.

Background

- Housing affordability and homelessness are significant challenges across the province with the situation worsening considerably in recent years. A growing number of residents are experiencing homelessness and having difficulty securing suitable housing that is affordable relative to their household's income, impacting the economic and social wellbeing of communities large and small.
- The Government of BC has made affordable housing a key focus, launching a variety of initiatives and measures to increase the supply of all housing types, including non-market housing. This type of housing is government subsidized and is typically owned and/or operated by either a government or a non-profit housing provider.
- Through BC Housing, the Province partners with local governments, non-profits and co-ops by providing capital and operational grants for non-market housing.
- Local governments are recognized as a key partner in supporting affordable housing in BC, employing an array of tools including regulations, policies and plans, land and financing and capacity building.

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- The scale and complexity of the housing affordability crisis requires additional, sustained efforts by all orders of government. In response, many local governments are exploring new tools and considering new roles that have traditionally been held by senior government agencies. Such activities include the development and operation of affordable housing units as well as land banking and financing for local projects.
- Through arms-length corporations, societies and authorities, a small number of resort communities and large urban centers have made significant strides in the creation of new affordable housing. Such entities, many of which are now self-sustaining, serve as examples of the positive outcomes that can be achieved in the creation of affordable housing in cooperation with the local non-profit and co-op providers.
- Properly considering these types of activities in the context of the needs and attributes of each community requires housing sector expertise through a variety of lenses, including development, construction, operations, finance and legal. As this is not commonly an internal capacity held by local governments, analysis by third-party consultants is required to assist in such reviews and provide critical information and advice regarding the potential role, structure and operations. Depending on the scale and scope of the review, the costs for such work can range from \$15,000 - \$100,000.
- The creation of a new line of business for local governments is recognized as a significant undertaking and one that may take many years to reach maturity. Due to this complexity and the required assessments and feasibility studies, gaining public support for such expenditures can be challenge.
- Grant funding opportunities specific to this type of exploration and assessment would enable and facilitate more communities to consider these tools and approaches to help to build more vibrant and affordable communities throughout BC.

AVICC EXTREME WEATHER RESPONSE SHELTER SYSTEM

WHEREAS the Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelter system was developed more than a decade ago to support community organizations in providing life-saving warm, safe places for unhoused community members to sleep in cold and wet weather, the EWR model does not provide any funding for facility rental costs, security, equipment or resource purchases, nor does it provide any funds for these community organizations to plan for, develop, and deliver EWR shelters in their communities;

AND WHEREAS since the EWR program was developed the number of community members experiencing homelessness has grown substantially, and the needs of those community members have, often due to addiction and mental health challenges, become increasingly complex, community organizations in many communities have been unable to provide life-saving EWR shelters with the limited resources available;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities and Union of BC Municipalities petition the Province of British Columbia to recognize that the EWR program is insufficient to address current social challenges and community capacity to meet those challenges; and that a Provincially driven solution be determined in collaboration with community leaders to ensure that;

- service delivery by existing provincial agencies that are tasked with providing social service supports, including shelter spaces and wrap-around services, is strengthened and
- adequate funds are available to rent facilities, provide security and necessary equipment such that the community organizations that are tasked to deliver this program are appropriately resourced.

Background

- Since October 2023, Comox Valley local and provincial government representatives, K'ómoks First Nation, Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, local non-profit and public organizations and community members, have been working together to find a suitable location for an Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Shelter for at least 100 unhoused community members.
- Available locations, both publicly and privately owned, have been explored and assessed based on considerations such as the number of people the site can support to sleep, existing use, ease and safety of access, security, proximity to services such as washrooms, and potential impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods. Despite best efforts, including calls to action through public communications and media coverage, no suitable location is available in the community for an EWR Shelter for this winter.
- Barriers to securing an appropriate location in the Comox Valley have been cost of leasing a space, cost and time to mobilize and service temporary structures such as mobile trailers, meeting fire code requirement for sleeping, limitations of organizations that have historically provided space (such as faith-based organizations) who are already at capacity or are concerned about security and safety, lack of mental health supports, compassion fatigue and stigma in the community.
- Comox Valley has warming centres coordinated by emergency management services during extreme cold. However, the local and provincial jurisdiction of the warming centre activation, mandate and resource allocation is different than an EWR, which poses difficulty for coordination to minimize gaps in needed services during potentially harmful weather events.