

# Salt Spring Community Alliance Meeting Notes\* <sup>1</sup>

## Balancing Affordable Housing and Environmental Sustainability

Lions Hall, April 29th, 2019

On Monday evening, April 29, 2019, over 30 community members gathered to discuss the topic of balancing affordable housing with environmental sustainability.

Before the meeting, participants received a summary of some of the current successes and potential solutions to Salt Spring's affordable housing challenges (see Appendix 1, attached).

### How to Take Action on Affordable Housing

Join **Salt Spring Solutions** to advocate for more affordable housing on Salt Spring:  
[www.saltspringsolutions.com](http://www.saltspringsolutions.com)

The community meeting format was a circle process in which everyone had an opportunity to speak their mind in a safe, respectful environment. As one appreciative participant noted at the conclusion of the evening: "This meeting is the best one yet!"

### ***Question 1: What value is important to you when considering the issue of affordable and sustainable housing on Salt Spring?***

#### **Dignity/Justice**

Many comments referred to key elements of community wellbeing such as:

- dignity for all,
- embracing those differences that make us stronger,
- equitable opportunity,
- safety
- the human right for all to be warm and dry,
- accessibility and access for all, even those with multiple barriers and those who are vulnerable, and
- need to address the fact that many are feeling helpless.

With these elements, a community is fuelled by cooperation, respect, belonging, responsibility for one another, and a deep caring for those we do not even know.

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<sup>1</sup> \*These notes are intended to reflect the major themes that emerged rather than direct quotes of every comment, nor do they necessarily reflect positions supported by the Community Alliance.

The commitment for sustainable housing solutions for all is a haven for the soul, one important element of community. Unfortunately, Salt Spring is in a state of denial, and there is injustice.

### **How much affordable housing is enough?**

Serenity, peace, and beauty in our surroundings help create our quality of life. Is there a limit to how much new housing can be built before this is threatened?

Can materials needed for more housing be provided without threatening the environment?

Culture change that has to happen here, to integrate justice into our own Sustainability thinking. It's not a green paradise when the working and middle class suffer like they do.

The problem seems to be one of conflicting values – privacy/autonomy vs. collective ownership. We do not do collective ownership well. For collective ownership to succeed, a massive investment is needed. The Housing Trust needed \$200,000 to \$300,000 of capital to get it done.

There is a way to balance community values, ecology, and a sustainable economy, but our planning model does not reflect this. Market forces are pushing everyone out of affordability. There is an incredible imbalance; this is a crisis. We are facing a collapse with no housing for working people and businesses closing and essential services suffering.

### **There is a need for creativity**

The summary sheet is the baseline for what needs to happen now- so that we can really start to think and act outside the box.

Things are in flux everywhere. In northern Europe, where almost everyone rents, there is insecurity in the rental situation. One can only hope that the situation is evolving and not devolving.

To sustain a quality of life for all, creativity and flexibility are needed with lots of different approaches and thinking outside the box.

Home prices must be protected to sustain affordability, and ecological realities must be recognized with innovative ideas that also address climate issues.

Time is of the essence – enforce B&B limitations now.

## **Question 2 – What innovative and creative ideas or examples of affordable and sustainable housing can you share?**

### **As individuals , there is a lot we can accomplish:**

We must be bold and courageous. We must address and understand NIMBY-ism and a concern for overpopulation.

When we build, we can use local, recyclable materials and passive solar designs. We can buy purpose-built metal and modular housing.

We can do better sharing with what we have: landowners can share their land. What about co-housing? We can encourage intentional communities (rather than senior residences) where seniors share homes and support each other. What about co-op housing for seniors and workers?

What about a non-profit Land Bank in which groupings of privately owned affordable dwelling units pay for shared infrastructure and services? This would be a community run dwelling by owners in conjunction with the Land Bank's onsite grounds representative.

What about employers buying houses for their employees?

We have to do better at protecting the people who are providing rentals. Hornby is facing the same issues - How do you engage the end users in this process so that the people who need the housing are involved in creating the solutions?

### **We can encourage our government to take an even more active role:**

The climate emergency declaration allows CRD and Islands Trust to think out of the box. First deal with the **current crisis** – tent living and “How can I find a washroom?”

Tourism is only 8% of the economy here despite the rhetoric that we need it to survive.

**Long term solutions needed:** The Federal government could take responsibility for affordable housing infrastructure. We need to study eco-sustainability successes in other places. In Quebec, housing is a right. In Leeds, natural materials are used in inner-city building (LILAC). In Wales, using a one planet ecological footprint, land is available for those who can demonstrate sustainability. In Chile, land is made available and basic housing provided. People own their house and can build onto it over time.

We have to find solutions. We need to address Ganges sewage and water. The North Salt Spring Waterworks District (NSSWD) moratorium is real. There will be no new hookups. An Island-wide water district is key. The Province owns water in all the creeks and in the ground, giving licenses for domestic and groundwater use. We need to manage our water systems, and places like Dragonfly and Croftonbrook need to be models for changing the

legislation. There is a need for collective efforts toward solutions to harvest and store and manage water that are neighbourhood-based. Can NSSWD provide expertise to help others?

### **What can Islands Trust do?**

A senior planner dedicated to affordable housing would help immensely!

Make it legal to use what already exists for housing, like accessory buildings.

What about dividing land and home ownership?

Temporary use permits could be more fully-utilized.

Some effort has to be made to address the carrying capacity of the land: If you are one person on the land, you should be allowed to accommodate more people on your land. Currently, one can have a 10,000 square foot home but not multiple small homes. Eco-village zoning needs to be developed to be offered as a possibility.

Islands Trust could more-fully utilize the options already in the Official Community Plan. It is already possible to build a flexible unit dwelling – with up to 3 units in it. (Size would have to be specified.) Also, Nurses’ residences are already allowed. Schools could have “teacher-ages.”

We need active enforcement of Short Term Vacation Rental bylaws. We might also look at Air B&Bs. Vancouver just entered into an agreement where units had to be registered in order to advertise with Air B&Bs.

There is a parcel of land zoned for affordable housing near the hospital.

### **What can CRD do?**

CRD could consider community-owned assets. CRD is already providing gas tax funding for affordable housing use of alternative water supplies and energy efficiency measures.

Building codes need to change to support sustainable water usage and catchment. (Certain sizes of water tanks do not need a building permit.) What about promoting the fact that composting toilets are recently legal?

What about CRD exemptions from building code for units under a minimum number of square feet or with liability waivers for home owners or self builders?

If CRD allowed building to lock-up and then letting owners finish their homes at their leisure, it would open the door for more affordability.

There is a model for tiny homes on Salt Spring - for under \$1,000. Building codes should be modified to make them legal.

Salt Spring is going to receive a 3% tourism accommodation tax. Could this be made available for affordable housing?

A CRD bathroom in the park for \$600,000? Are we getting value for our money?

## **Appendix 1: Community Discussion on Affordable Housing (Summary of Issues Presented Before the Meeting)**

### **Balancing Affordable Housing and Environmental Sustainability**

**Monday April 29, 2019**

**(7:00 p.m., Lions Hall – everyone welcome!)**

***Are Salt Spring's affordable housing projects are being stalled by the challenge of complying with bylaws enacted to ensure environmental sustainability?***

***What can we as a community do to support environmentally sustainable affordable housing?***

#### **The Good News**

Planning for 6 affordable housing projects is already underway: Croftonbrook, Dragonfly, Community Services' SSI Commons, Drake Road CRD project, MeadowLane Senior's Housing, and Norton Road. Land has already been secured for all of these projects.

These projects could create over 250 affordable housing units, addressing a wide range of needs. Protected by housing agreements, they will add to a permanent stock of affordable housing protected from market pressure to escalate in value. They are likely to also free up private rental housing for other renters.

Only SSI Commons has resolved their servicing issues. The other 5 projects are all affected by the North Salt Spring Waterworks District's moratorium on new water connections, forcing them to develop alternative water supplies, including drilled wells and rainwater catchment, in order to move forward.

Water challenges have spurred an impressive array of environmentally responsible measures. Croftonbrook, designed to provide 54 additional rental units (for individuals, couples, seniors, those currently experiencing homelessness, and small families who have low to moderate incomes) is leading the way by obtaining Island Health and CRD permission to use rain catchment for irrigation and grey water for toilet flushing. MeadowLane, the proposed facility for 36 senior residences, plans to be a leader in environmental innovations through rainwater collection from its 35,000 square foot roof, on-site water storage vaults, a potable water treatment plant on site, and its own on-site sewage treatment plant.

In addition to these affordable housing projects, a bylaw that was discussed at the March 29, 2019 Community Alliance meeting is under development to allow full-time rental of some current and future cottages in specific zones. (Cottages Bylaw 512)

**Some Creative Solutions for sustainable housing solutions that minimize impact on the environment.**

- Adopt strategies from the report *Affordable Housing in the Trust Area: Strategic Actions for Islands Trust* into the local Land Use Bylaw #355 and the Official Community Plan (OCP). ([http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/347400/a1\\_2019-01-24\\_affordablehousingstrategicactions\\_final.pdf](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/347400/a1_2019-01-24_affordablehousingstrategicactions_final.pdf)).

***Below are a few examples of how this could be done:***

- a) **Eco-Village Zoning**: Use total floor area as a density metric by allowing homes to accommodate multiple dwelling units within a set square metre limit. This could be done in exchange for amenities such as placing a large portion of the property under covenant (80-90%), an affordable housing agreement (resale 20% below market value), ecological building/permaculture land management plan, sustainable water supply, and/or safe waste management. This would create a legal pathway for clusters of small, low-impact homes.
  - b) **Conservation Density Bonus**: Create a viable system where bonus densities can be granted to a property owner in exchange for conservation of ecologically sensitive areas, such as mature forests. Offering a financial incentive for conservation, it would allow more density in identified areas than can be obtained through traditional subdivision. In addition to conserving ecologically sensitive land, these new bonus densities would be kept affordable by housing agreements.
  - c) **Accessory Buildings**: Revise Islands Trust Land Use Bylaws, OCP, CRD, and Island Health regulations to allow spaces in existing buildings, such as suites above garages, shops, and commercial spaces, to be rented for full-time occupancy.
  - d) **Create a singular, island-wide water district** to own, plan and manage all water resources on Salt Spring Island. Activities could include creation of a fact-based, island-wide water plan that prioritizes water resources for sustainable, affordable housing (including traditional and alternative sources) and watershed protection.
- Call for a **revision of the North Salt Spring Waterworks District Moratorium on new water hook-ups**, and revise Trust Land Use Bylaws, OCP, CRD, and Island Health regulations to clearly allow alternative water sources for all secondary and multi-family dwellings.
  - Support the Community Alliance's Governance Working Group recommendation for an **Interagency Working Group** (including all governmental agencies and Improvement Districts) tasked with working together to advocate for affordable/available housing projects. Perhaps identify funding for a paid coordinator. How would we do this?

- Create a **landlord-tenant matching** process to encourage property owners to rent their available spaces. Who would be the best agency to take responsibility for this initiative?
- Lobby the Islands Trust to allow all cottages to be rented year-round, and **end illegal, non-resident investor-owned Short Term Vacation Rentals**. Provide clear and inclusive rules for legal B&B businesses and vacation rentals.
- Dedicate a senior **Islands Trust planner** with more discretionary power to prioritize affordable housing applications and bylaws. Can a **CRD staff person** be dedicated to affordable housing? How could we make this happen?