

## **BIM to deliver affordable housing**

It feels like a blow every time we hear that members of our community are leaving, forced out by the high cost of living. The lack of affordable housing on Bowen is an issue that has taken its toll and continues to threaten the economic and social stability of the island. That is why the municipally-appointed Affordable Housing Working Group (AHWG) is moving quickly to address the issue.

Headed by Elizabeth Ballantyne, the group first came together in February of this year. It evolved from the Affordable Housing Strategy committee mobilized by the Bowen Community Housing Association (BCHA). BCHA raised awareness and spotlighted concerns about the impact of an inflated real estate market and the unavailability of suitable long-term accommodation. The association raised funds for a Housing Needs Assessment and developed an affordable housing strategy, which was presented to municipal council one year ago.

Council responded by embracing a number of the strategy's recommendations. With a budget of \$10,000, Council established the working group and tasked them with the job of developing an affordable housing policy and beginning to undertake the work of a municipal housing organization. The AHWG, with the help of consultant Tim Wake, delivered the policy earlier this summer.

The document, which Council passed unanimously, is a tool for the municipality to be applied when negotiating development proposals and considering rezoning applications. It provides clear objectives and targets for the delivery of a mix of housing types and sizes, including both potential rental and ownership units.

The working group has also made considerable progress in laying the groundwork for a municipal housing organization. This week, the AHWG presented to Council a timeline and budget covering Phase II of its mandate. It would like to see the municipal housing organization up and running by the end of the year. It also has plans to launch an affordable housing waitlist for rental and ownership housing this fall.

The municipality has taken other steps towards implementing an effective affordable housing strategy. It passed a bylaw legalizing secondary suites earlier this year, and is considering the sale of community lands to attract developments that feature affordable housing. So there seems to be a real reason to hope that the tide will turn for those in our community who have struggled to find an affordable place to call home on Bowen.

To ensure the public is kept abreast of its activities and progress, the AHWG will run a series of short articles over the next few weeks. The intent of the articles is

to explain various policies and strategies and clarify processes and procedures for those who are interested in securing affordable housing. The working group will also host two public meetings in October and November to answer questions and hear comments. For more information, please visit the Bowen Island Municipality (BIM) website at [www.bimbc.ca](http://www.bimbc.ca).

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