

Presentation to Council 2012 February 27, AHWG

Good afternoon, Mayor and Council

Thank you, on behalf of the Affordable Housing Working Group, for this opportunity to present our final report to Council.

Our report makes eight specific recommendations.

However, they are interconnected and presuppose a commitment by the Municipality to acquire a tool to enable it to create, or cause to be created, a range of affordable and diverse housing types. Without a tool, the Municipality is powerless.

This tool that has been proposed is a municipal housing organization, specifically the Bowen Island Housing Corporation, and that will be the focus of our presentation today.

The core recommendation we are making today is that Council authorize the next step towards establishing this corporation. This is still only ONE MORE step towards that goal, beyond what has been done so far. Council will continue to be involved at key decision-points along the way, and will remain in control of the process at all times, including, finally, as the sole shareholder of the corporation.

In a moment, Tim Wake, the affordable housing consultant who has been working with our group from the beginning, will talk about the corporation itself – how it will work and why it's the best model for Bowen.

There are important conceptual, technical and bureaucratic themes that he will speak to, but before getting too involved in those trees, I would like to take a moment to look at the forest, to review how we got here, because at the heart of this process there has been a core idea and value which we hold as a community and which has continued to be re-affirmed at every step.

That core idea is that, here on Bowen, we see ourselves as a “a welcoming home to residents of varying incomes, lifestyles and ages.” We can't be that welcoming home unless we actually provide a range of housing types and tenures that make it possible for that diversity of households to find suitable homes that they can afford.

The housing needs assessment completed in 2007 provided the hard data to illustrate how UNaffordable Bowen's housing had become. The situation has only worsened, as prices continue to rise and incomes for low and middle-income groups continue to stagnate. Price, however, is not the only barrier to meeting our community housing goal. Lack of diversity in housing types is another. As the Age Friendly Community report of 2009 highlighted, the lack of housing choices for our aging population means that we will lose increasing numbers of our seniors as they seek to downsize from the large single-family detached houses that dominate our housing stock.

Our land-use framework is geared to continue to produce primarily single-family, detached dwellings. We are not going to change that legacy. What we can do is make small creative interventions, as development opportunities arise, to produce a small number of diverse and affordable units that are in harmony with the full range of our community values. And, if the community will were there, we could even set out to produce specialty housing to meet a range of special needs.

However, none of this is simple. It requires expertise, creativity and partnerships. It cannot happen spontaneously out of grassroots goodwill and good intentions. It requires a municipally-supported organization dedicated to this purpose that can identify opportunities, facilitate partnerships, and be the community's champion for affordable and diverse housing.

The Bowen Community Housing Association requested Council to form this organization in 2007, when presenting the outcomes of the Affordable Housing Needs Assessment and the Affordable Housing Strategy. Following informal subsequent discussions, it became clear that this was too big a leap for Council at the time, and so, in collaboration with Council, our Affordable Housing Working Group was created with a two-fold mandate:

1. To begin the work of the housing organization, focusing on the 'low hanging fruit' identified in the housing strategy, including the AH policy and associated covenants and waitlist. This work was completed on schedule and on budget and reported on to Council in 2008 and 2009.

And

2. To develop the organizational framework for the creation and operation of the housing organization.

The AHWG provided its report on the organizational framework for the housing organization in July 2009. Council at that time was not ready to approve the creation of the BIHC, but it did endorse the concept of the creation of a Bowen Island Housing Corporation and requested staff to provide a more detailed report.

Due to staffing challenges, and the concentration of resources on the OCP update and other major community issues, there have been delays. However, working with our affordable housing consultant, and our Council liaison, we have completed that report and we believe that we have addressed all the questions and concerns that have been raised by Council.

Tim Wake will now talk about the housing corporation.

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To conclude, we are asking that Council approve our recommendations. In combination they enable Council's AHWG to morph into a small, nimble, flexible yet robust and fully accountable municipal organization dedicated to creating diverse and affordable units compatible with our community's vision and values.

One of these recommendations is that Council re-instate affordable housing as a priority in the strategic plan. To do so would strengthen the alignment of Council's strategic plan with the goals of the updated OCP, where affordable housing now has considerably more prominence in statements of vision, goals and policies. The BIHC would be Council's strategic tool for taking action on that priority.

I'd like to emphasize that there is no notable downside to establishing the BIHC. Council controls the level of financial exposure and the scope of the work. There is an expectation of annual funding, but it is a relatively small amount, in comparison to the what other strategies in support of affordable housing objectives might entail.

At this time, the extent of municipal commitment requested is limited to the formation of the group of founding directors of the BIHC, to carry out a specific set of tasks. These directors will have to return to Council for authorization at all key decision-making points, including the initial pre-incorporation work plan and budget, the application to the provincial registrar and the inspector of municipalities relating to the incorporation, and the articles of incorporation themselves. This is another small, safe step.

We are ready to proceed, on your command, and happy to answer any of your questions.