

## City of North Vancouver reviews draft housing action plan

**Consultant's report addresses housing gaps, emerging needs**

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file photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

The City of North Vancouver embarked on what the mayor termed the “issue of a generation” April 18: creating affordable housing.

Could city-owned land on Alder Street, East First Street, or at Harry Jerome be turned into an affordable haven for wayward renters? Should the city offer tax breaks to developers who provide low-income housing?

The easy decisions have been made, leaving council with only controversial options of how best to accommodate an estimated 2,300 new residents over the next decade, said Mayor Darrell Mussatto.

“A lot of the easy, low-hanging fruit has been picked,” he said, reflecting that a way of life would have to change.

“We may not all be able to live in a single-family home as we grew up in,” he said. “It can be just as good or better, but it means different.”

The city’s collection of Second World War-era bungalows could be situated at the rear of lots and turned into coach houses, according to CitySpaces, a consulting firm specializing in housing.

That notion rankled Coun. Rod Clark, who said the modest homes in his Moodyville neighbourhood would “face the wrecker’s ball before we have any sort of housing plan.”

While new towers go up, rental fees tend to shoot up with them, noted Coun. Pam Bookham.

“How can we ... discourage wholesale redevelopment of our older but still viable housing stock?” Bookham asked.

There is a “potential risk” of higher prices, said Jada Basi, a social policy planner with CitySpaces. However, new developments should help alleviate the lack of rental supply elsewhere in the city, according to Basi.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Bookham responded.

Three-storey walk-ups have a limited life span, pronounced Coun. Holly Back.

"When they're done, we have to admit that they're done," she said. "What are we going to do to replace the affordable? I don't have the answer."

Parking proved a divisive issue at council, following CitySpaces' suggestion to do away with parking entirely on low-cost rental buildings near the SeaBus.

Instead of requiring the standard 1.2 parking stalls per unit, the city should only ask for 0.3 stalls per unit on rental buildings within 400 metres of transit, according to CitySpaces.

That idea may amount to discrimination against car owners, countered Coun. Don Bell.

"If I wanted to move down next to the SeaBus I can't have a car, because I'm not going to find parking anywhere, that's for damn sure," he said.

The city should explore creating a rent bank, which would offer loans to renters facing eviction or homelessness, according to Basi.

There were 119 homeless people reported in the 2014 count. That count recorded 47 homeless people in the city in 2002.

The rent bank would be overseen by the municipality and operated by a non-profit, she explained.

"There are a small amount of loans that aren't paid back, so usually the business model has a contingency built into it to cover those costs," Basi said.

CitySpaces also recommended requiring a higher percentage of three-bedroom units in new buildings to create homes for more families.

While she appreciated the goal of creating affordable housing, Bookham was concerned council might be conflating density with affordability.

"If all (the plan does) is get us additional density but they don't solve any of these housing challenges, we would be better to simply admit we're allowing market forces to basically determine who will be living here," she said.

The city needs to reach out to seniors and low-income residents to get their input on the plan, according to Coun. Linda Buchanan.

"Doing nothing is a choice, but it's not the right choice," she said.

Council paid \$50,000 to create the housing action plan to provide more homes for families, seniors, youth at risk of homelessness and low-income earners, particularly around one-parent households.