

north shore news

District of North Vancouver seeks non-profit affordable housing partner

District-owned land near Phibbs Exchange earmarked for rental units

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file photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

The District of North Vancouver is looking to turn a non-profit this fall.

Council voted unanimously Monday to scour Canada's non-profit sector for a partner that could collaborate with the district in building and running family-oriented affordable rental housing on the 1500-block of Oxford Street.

The \$2.45-million site – comprised of five lots on Oxford and Orwell streets – is owned by the district but could provide a “meaningful step” to offering affordable housing for North Vancouver families, according to Coun. Jim Hanson.

The district is aiming to capitalize on the provincial government's plan to allocate \$355 million toward affordable housing over the next five years. If the district-owned land were rezoned, it could accommodate 126 units, split fairly evenly between two- and three-bedroom rentals.

While the vote was unanimous, Coun. Robin Hicks had a few misgivings about how council will move forward.

“We are disposing of an asset that belongs to our residents,” he said.

But while the district might cede some control of the land, they could retain ownership of the property through a 60-year ground lease.

60 years seems too long - being nearly half the lifetime of the 125 years that the DNV has existed. Alternatively a 33/33/33 contribution by DNV/BC/CANADA to the \$2.45million is more appropriate- cjk

Besides the parcel, Hicks was also worried about how the non-profit partner will choose tenants.

"I just have some concerns about somebody acting as Solomon and deciding who gets it and who doesn't."

Coun. Lisa Muri expressed similar concerns, declaring the units should be earmarked "in perpetuity" for District of North Vancouver residents.

Couns. Roger Bassam and Mathew Bond differed on whether the housing mix should include a four-bedroom unit.

Bassam said a four-bedroom unit should be required, given their looming scarcity in the municipality, while Bond suggested it shouldn't be a "hard requirement."

The plan received praise from Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn, who lauded the "excellent" location, due in part to its proximity to a town centre.

The site is also adjacent to Phibbs Exchange.

The district would likely provide the land for a nominal price and waive certain municipal fees to "leverage the provincial dollars," according to a staff report.

The plan would follow the model used at district-owned sites including Hollyburn's youth safe house as well as the Turning Point alcohol treatment centres.

Staff is expected to report back to council with possible partners in November.