

## Forum Report: Seniors Housing on the Westside of Vancouver

The Westside Seniors Hub, through the Jewish Family Services Agency, received a grant from Vancouver Coastal Health to research seniors housing on the Westside of Vancouver. A researcher interviewed more than forty stakeholders, from housing experts to seniors with housing issues. The report *Seniors Housing on the Westside of Vancouver* is based on these interviews and available on the Westside Seniors Website at:

[http://westsideseniorshub.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Seniors-Housing-on-the-Westside-of-Vancouver\\_Final-report\\_April-2017.pdf](http://westsideseniorshub.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Seniors-Housing-on-the-Westside-of-Vancouver_Final-report_April-2017.pdf)

The Hub then organized a half-day Housing Forum on April 26, 2017. The purpose of the Forum was to further explore housing issues with those interviewed and with representatives from organizations that the Hub saw as important stakeholders. The report was distributed in advance as a springboard to the discussion at the event.

The Forum began with panel presentations on housing innovation by leaders from Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, the United Way of the Lower Mainland, LaneFab and Calling Ministries. Thirty-six (36) participants then joined two consecutive groups to explore key issues and formulate recommendations.

### Summary of Recommendations

#### 1. Retention of Existing Stock

- Discussion focused on how single-family dwellings might be repurposed to address senior housing issues
- Need to engage and educate seniors on “shared housing” as an adaption of co-housing model
- Share prototypes and stories of successful shared housing models with potential partners, including resident associations, Seniors Advisory Committee of the City of Vancouver, universities and students
- Access funds to adapt homes through the Home Adaption for Independence program of BC Housing and consider new tax incentives to move to shared housing models
- Identify barriers to co-living, e.g. social barriers are likely an impediment
- Explore a volunteer buddy system to support seniors searching for housing
- More facts and data are needed to assess seniors’ interest in shared housing initiative

#### 2. How to increase housing stock

- Create a housing option where students and seniors share a dwelling, offering affordable housing to students in return for a commitment to volunteer time assisting seniors
- Create housing options with varying levels of support for seniors with mental health issues to avoid eviction from subsidized housing, use of shelters, or homelessness

- Use proceeds from 15% foreign buyer tax to buy land to be offered to organizations to build subsidized housing
- Revive the co-op model and encourage collective housing (common kitchen & living room; separate bedroom and bath)
- Allow conversions from single-family dwellings (SFD) to collective dwellings held in a lease bank. Offer long term leases in Common Land Trusts
- Have various levels of government create standards for Tiny Houses, and have them available for lease. Enable single family homes to have Tiny Houses on properties to house seniors
- Engage in City Housing Reset process, need more representation from seniors
- Link concerned organizations to Abundant Housing Vancouver or Dynamic Cities Project that are looking at the future of single family zoning
- Advocate for a review of all zoning bylaws, e.g. not allowing more than 5 unrelated people to reside in SFD
- Create neighbourhood planning groups on the West Side to discuss how to increase density without building towers
- Encourage graduate students to research housing models, explore examples from other municipalities and how different levels of government can support options
- Engage groups such as the UBC Centre of Community Engaged Learning, Gerontology Research Centre at SFU, and City Studio

### **3. Duplication and Partnering Across Agencies**

- Look at successful partnerships such as Ridge Meadows in the Fraser Valley, PAL in Coal Harbour, Catalyst, a community development society, City of Vancouver Restart
- Replicate programs such as RayCam, NICES, South Vancouver Peer Support program, drop in centres, At Risk Housing outreach and Multicultural outreach, and intergenerational program in Chinatown
- Look at ways food and housing are connected i.e. West Side Planning Table
- Consider opportunities, e.g. the new community centre at 19<sup>th</sup>/Fraser
- Consider small grants through Vancity, Vancouver Foundation, and VCH, e.g., to assist with neighbourhood initiatives and advance recommendations from this Housing Forum

### **4. Advocacy and Systemic Changes**

- Organize a campaign to change public perception and attitude about density
- Rezone to prevent extensive condo buildings
- Rezone to allow “tiny” houses on single family properties
- Return federal land to City for rental housing
- Create a Vancouver Rent Bank with services to assist seniors
- Develop a National Housing strategy which addresses affordability
- Create more supportive housing units

The Westside Seniors Hub is proud to have facilitated these discussions and remains committed to working with other community partners to advance recommendations from the Housing Forum.