

Mayor's Message – December 2017

As most people who are lucky enough to do so will attest, there's no place better to reside than the Sunshine Coast. From our stunning ocean views and varied beaches, to our verdant, trail-laced forests and our generous, engaged and creative communities, the Coast is truly a wonderful place to live.

Unfortunately, that opportunity is increasingly out of reach for more and more people. In recent years, the price of homes across the Sunshine Coast has increased dramatically, both for owners and tenants. As a result, many local residents currently pay far more than 30% of their gross monthly income for housing – the measure normally used to define affordability.

For renters in particular, the past few years have been extremely challenging. Anecdotally, we hear of scores of people chasing single rental units and of bidding wars that drive up already high rents. We also hear of families crammed into small spaces and other tenants living in unacceptable, and even unsafe, conditions.

This should concern us all, as a lack of affordable housing affects our entire community – negatively impacting diversity, forcing some of our neighbours to forgo life essentials such as food, heating, healthcare and dentistry, and creating employee shortages for local businesses.

To help address the recent (and growing) housing crunch, Gibsons' Council has implemented, or is reviewing, several options. In 2015, for example, we introduced the Garden Suite program, which uses existing infrastructure to provide a sustainable and economical way to increase and diversify our local rental housing stock.

We have also started the road closure process for four road-end dedications in Lower Gibsons. One of these locations, at Franklin Road and Harmony Lane, has been selected as the site of a small-scale Affordable Housing pilot project, which will be led by the Sunshine Coast Housing Society. The future of the other three sites is under discussion.

The old RCMP site on School Road also represents an opportunity to create more affordable housing, as it is available from the federal government under the *Surplus Real Property for Homelessness Initiative*. We hope to take advantage of this program, likely in partnership with an appropriate non-profit organization.

Financial assistance for affordable housing initiatives has also been made available by the provincial government, which has committed \$355 million over the next five years to create more than 2,000 affordable housing units.

With this funding in mind, we recently designated a 3-acre parcel of the 20-acre Charman Creek Lands (at the foot of Shaw Road) as the prospective site for a 40-unit rental housing campus. The proposed designs envision a four-building complex with 10 units each, ranging in size from one bedroom to three bedrooms. Community consultation regarding the precise form of this housing complex will begin in 2018.

In short, Gibsons' Council believes it's essential to our Town's social and economic health that we do what we can to ensure that those who want to, may join our community. Because, as a genial sign spotted outside a local resident's home reads, "*If you're lucky enough to live on the Sunshine Coast, you're lucky enough.*"