



## TOWN OF GIBSONS

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### **Talk of the Town: February 2018 by Councillor Silas White**

A couple weeks ago, an Insights West poll showed 50% of British Columbians identified “housing, homelessness and poverty” as their top concern. This was a 15% leap from May, and the highest support for any issue since the economic crisis in 2008. The “housing” part of the equation is more acute than ever, but is not a new concern compared to six months or even a few years ago. The related issues of homelessness and poverty, however, are suddenly hitting us more than since perhaps the Great Depression.

This seems to make us all uncomfortable in different ways. It exposes all our vulnerabilities—as individuals, families, or as a community. The redeeming part about facing this vulnerability head on is that we can do something about it, and bring our community together while doing so. If we ignore it, or demand that it disappears into the trees, the problem will only get uglier, perhaps to the point of no return. We are seeing this play out in other communities.

In Gibsons, Christ the King Church has generously taken leadership to offer a temporary nightly shelter on Gower Point Road until the end of March, to be funded by BC Housing and operated by Raincity Housing. The volunteer sign-up so far indicates tremendous interest in ensuring the program represents an enhancement to the neighbourhood and community: a nurturing and supportive place in contrast to the vulnerable and insecure housing and social conditions that are driving our neighbours from safety, employment and good health.

Still, no one wants to live in a shelter. No one wants to be homeless, or unemployed. As the Town of Gibsons’ representative on the Sunshine Coast Homeless Advisory Committee, I’ve been exposed to the caring professional supports on the Sunshine Coast for people challenged by homelessness. It’s no silver bullet, but getting our residents access to these supports is a crucial start.

And the most important solution is housing, of course, which is currently being pursued by the Town in three different affordable housing projects. Whether you’ve been sensitive to this previously hidden challenge for a long time, or you are more suddenly, alarmingly realizing it as a top concern, let’s work together to eliminate shelters by eliminating homelessness.

