

Kirsten Rawkins,
Town of Gibsons
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via email: krawkins@gibsons.ca

Mar 7, 2024

RE: Development Variance Permit for 718 North Road

Dear Ms. Kirsten Rawkins,

The Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) would like to express appreciation for the opportunity to provide input on the development variance permit for 718 North Road. The proposed application was reviewed by the Healthy Public Policy Unit, local Tobacco and Vapour Reduction Coordinator, local licensing officer, Healthy Environments & Climate Change team, and Manager (VCH Coastal Rural).

Healthy communities prioritize the physical, mental, and social well-being of residents by promoting access to safe and affordable housing, nutritious foods, nature, and active transportation opportunities. Creating healthy communities also requires addressing climate change by finding sustainable ways to prepare and adapt.

The proposed development at 718 North Road in Upper Gibsons supports the creation of complete, connected, and compact communities, as the proposal includes a childcare facility, and the area is within walking distance to essential services in nearby plazas and schools. It is also located on a bike and bus route that allows ease of access to Lower Gibsons and the ferry terminal through modes of active transportation. Increasing the residential density in this area allows more individuals to perform day-to-day activities while being less reliant on single-occupancy vehicles, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and helping to improve overall air quality.

Access to different housing forms and tenures is also essential in creating a healthy, sustainable, and vibrant community. The housing indicators in the Sunshine Coast Housing Needs Assessment Report shows that affordability has been the most significant issue in Gibsons due to a high demand for rental housing not being met with the necessary supply of rental options.¹ We commend the application for dedicating units to achieving affordable rental, ownership, and accessible housing solutions in the Town of Gibsons. This allows residents to stay within the community, strengthening sense of belonging and local social connections.

In addition to the positive contributions of this proposal identified above, we offer the following comments for consideration to strengthen the development's contribution to a healthier community:

Social Connection

People who live in socially connected neighbourhoods have better physical, mental, and social well-being.² Multi-unit housing, like the proposed residential building, are becoming more common in densifying communities, but have often shown lower levels of social connection between neighbours.³ Evidence shows that intentionally

¹ Urban Matters. (2020). *Sunshine Coast Housing Needs Report*. https://gibsons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-11-17_SUNSHINECOAST_HNR-FINAL.pdf

² Sones, M. (2022). *How does social connectedness between neighbours support health and well-being?* Hey Neighbour Collective. <https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/HNC-Evidence-Backgrounder-01.pdf>

³ Hey Neighbour Collective. (2023). *Practice Guide #4: Roles for local government in strengthening social connectedness and resilience activities in multi-unit housing*. <https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Practice-Guide-4-v2.1.pdf>

incorporating design strategies that foster social connections in multi-housing units can improve residents' well-being. Social connectedness also plays an important role in individual and community resilience for climate change adaptation and other emergencies.⁴ Shared amenity areas, such as those proposed on the first and sixth floor of the residential building, is one design strategy to encourage social interaction. In addition to dedicated shared space, activating spaces that are already communal, such as parking, lobbies, and hallways, can also improve social connectedness.⁵ More design strategies can be found in [this report](#) that showcases a series of multi-unit building case studies for sociable design.⁶

Climate Change

The proposed development considers various measures to ensure a resilient development in a changing climate. It includes a focus on sustainability, which includes mitigation measures such as lowering parking ratios to reduce reliance on personal vehicles, retaining existing trees, implementing a car share program, and constructing North America's first underground mass timber parkade to reduce emissions related to the construction process.

However, as the climate changes, we anticipate a need to adapt to the increasing frequency of heat and wildfire smoke events. As seen in the [VCH's Climate Vulnerability Index](#), the maps show that the proposed development area has high vulnerability to extreme heat and smoke exposure. This development may mitigate health risks related to these exposures through the provision of mechanical and passive cooling measures, along with air filtration to address periods of extreme heat and poor air quality from wildfire smoke:

- We recommend that mechanical air conditioning systems be equipped with at least MERV 13 filters (ideally MERV 16+) to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke indoors. Note that air filtration can also be effective in reducing exposure to traffic related air pollution that may infiltrate the buildings from arterial roads and truck routes like North Road/Hwy 101.
- Passive measures like increasing shade and tree canopy coverage are strongly recommended, and can also provide residents with places of refuge, especially during extreme heat events. Increasing tree canopy coverage has additional health co-benefits, as exposure to natural environments and green space can also reduce stress, improve mental health, encourage physical activity, and foster social connections.²

Childcare facility

The Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan shows that Town of Gibsons is experiencing an extreme shortage of childcare facilities, where less than one in five families can secure licensed childcare.⁷ Provision of a childcare facility in a residential development contributes to a much-needed amenity for growing families in the area.

As infants and young children are more vulnerable to the health effects of heat and poor air quality from wildfire smoke and [traffic-related air pollution \(TRAP\)](#), we recommend including all the mechanical and passive measures

⁴ Hey Neighbour Collective. (2020). Developing Truly Complete Communities: Social equity, social connectedness, and multi-unit housing in an age of public health and climate crises. https://catalystcommdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/HNC-discussion-paper_150ppi1.pdf

⁵ Avery, M. (2024, January 25). Can our homes make us less lonely? *Happy Cities*. <https://happycities.com/blog/can-our-homes-make-us-less-lonely>

⁶ Happy Cities. (2023). Building social connections: Case studies to inspire socially connected multi-unit housing. <https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Case-studies-HNC-HC-2023-10-30.pdf>

⁷ District of Sechelt. (2020). Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan. <https://www.sechelt.ca/en/PublicDocumentLibrary/CommunityPlans/Sunshine-Coast-Child-Care-Action-Plan.pdf>

mentioned above in the Climate Change section for the childcare facility. Additional considerations include the following:

- The outdoor play spaces are adjacent to the rear parking lot, which can increase children's exposure to TRAP. We suggest using solid glass barriers or solid vegetative barriers to buffer and reduce potential exposure to TRAP. Increasing the height of these barriers can also mitigate any noise concerns that may result from the parking lot. To reduce TRAP exposure indoors for not only the childcare facility, but also the residential buildings, we advise placing building air intakes as far away as possible from high-traffic areas (e.g. roadways, drop-off zones, and parking lots) such as the roof top.
- We suggest providing all-weather protection and tree canopy in the outdoor play spaces to provide shade during periods of extreme heat and for improved usability throughout the year.
- We are aware that the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care is currently developing the ChildCareBC Design Guidelines to support the development of high-quality inclusive childcare centres in BC. Once released, there may be additional factors that may be applicable to the childcare facility to consider.

Smoke-Free housing

We recommend designating all buildings in this application as smoke and vape-free to protect the health of residents and reduce the risk of residential fires.⁸ Per Health Canada, there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke and up to 65% of the air in multi-unit housing is shared, coming from other units, hallways, or the building exterior. Second hand smoke puts everyone at higher risk of serious health conditions like lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, but infants, children, pregnant people and people with existing lung conditions experience more serious risks.⁹ Growing scientific evidence shows third-hand smoke, the chemical residue found on surfaces in homes from tobacco smoke, contains toxic chemicals that is very difficult and costly to remove from an environment.¹⁰ Over 90% of British Columbians do not smoke, are used to smoke-free policies at work and in public places and expect the same protection in their homes. It is legal, favourable, and easy to adopt a [smoke and vape-free policy](#).

In conclusion, we support the rezoning application of 718 North Road and appreciate the opportunity to provide a population and public health perspective to this process.

Regards,



Mark Lysyshyn MD MPH FRCPC
Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer
Vancouver Coastal Health

⁸ Smoke-Free Housing BC. (2023, November 20). *Why Go Smoke-Free*. <https://www.smokefreehousingbc.ca/why-smoke-free#healthandsafety>

⁹ Health Canada. (2023, June 21). *Health effects of smoking and second-hand smoke*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/health-effects-smoking-second-hand-smoke.html>

¹⁰ Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center (2024, February 24). *What is thirdhand smoke?* <https://thirdhandsmoke.org/>