

Kirsten Rawkins,  
Town of Gibsons  
474 South Fletcher Rd, Box 340, Gibsons, BC V0N 1V0  
via email: [krawkins@gibsons.ca](mailto:krawkins@gibsons.ca)

Feb 07, 2024

**RE: Rezoning Application for 1057 Gibsons Way**

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 rezoning application for 1057 Gibsons Way. The proposed application was reviewed by the Healthy Public Policy Unit, local Tobacco and Vapour Reduction Coordinator, Healthy Environments & Climate Change team, and Manager (VCH Coastal Rural).

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

The proposed development at 1057 Gibsons Way in Upper Gibsons supports the creation of complete, connected, and compact communities, as the area is within walking distance to essential services in nearby plazas, parks, 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. Lowering parking ratios on site and increasing bicycle spaces further promotes the use of the dedicated bike lanes in front of the development. 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.

We offer the following comments for consideration to strengthen the development's contribution to a healthier community:

**Affordable Housing**

Access to different housing forms and tenures is essential in creating a healthy, sustainable, and vibrant community. We are happy to see that the application includes a diversity of unit mix to meet the needs of people in varying stages of life, which adds to the much-needed housing supply in the Town of Gibsons. However, we note that the applicant expressed that they are unable to commit to a rental structure at the time of application. The housing indicators in the Sunshine Coast Housing Needs Assessment Report shows that affordability has been the most significant issue in Gibsons and that although there is a high demand for rental housing in Gibsons, the needs are not met with the supply of rental options.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing that there are economical challenges, we would support any opportunities there might be to enable mixed-income housing by dedicating several units for market rental at affordable rates.

---

<sup>1</sup> Urban Matters. (2020). *Sunshine Coast Housing Needs Report*. [https://gibsons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-11-17\\_SUNSHINECOAST\\_HNR-FINAL.pdf](https://gibsons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-11-17_SUNSHINECOAST_HNR-FINAL.pdf)

We also strongly support any work the Town of Gibsons may undertake to consider residential rental tenure zoning powers to ensure any potential rental apartment units remain rental in perpetuity. This would allow residents to stay within the community, strengthening sense of belonging and local social connections. Initiatives such as rent control measures and mixed-income housing developments can promote social equality and allow individuals and families to allocate their resources into non-housing related essentials, such as medications and nutritious food.<sup>2</sup>

### Social Connection

People who live in socially connected neighbourhoods have better physical, mental, and social well-being.<sup>3</sup> Multi-unit housing, like the proposed residential buildings A and B, are becoming more common in densifying communities, but have often shown lower levels of social connection between neighbours.<sup>4</sup> Evidence shows that intentionally 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.<sup>5</sup> Shared amenity areas, which are currently proposed in Buildings A and B, is one of the design strategies 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.<sup>6</sup> Other examples include providing large porches or balconies in lower stories of the building, so that residents can talk with people outside.<sup>7</sup> More design strategies can be found in [this report](#) that showcases a series of multi-unit building case studies for sociable design.<sup>8</sup>

### 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, using water-efficient fixtures, retaining existing trees, and planting drought tolerant plants.

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

---

<sup>2</sup> BC Centre for Disease Control. (2018). *Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit: making the links between design, planning and health, Version 2.0*. Provincial Health Services Authority. [http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/HBE\\_linkages\\_toolkit\\_2018.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/HBE_linkages_toolkit_2018.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> 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](https://catalystcommdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/HNC-discussion-paper_150ppi1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> Cleveland, T. (2024, January 17). Does density hurt happiness? *Happy Cities*. <https://happycities.com/blog/does-density-hurt-happiness>

<sup>8</sup> 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>

effective in reducing exposure to traffic related air pollution that may infiltrate the buildings from arterial roads and truck routes like Gibsons Way.

- Passive measures like increasing shade and tree canopy coverage 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.<sup>2</sup> We recommend that any planned gathering spaces are designed with tree canopy and shade coverage.

### 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 exposure is associated with increased risk of serious health conditions like lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder. Risks for infants and children can include infant death syndrome, pneumonia, and asthma. Pregnant people and people with existing lung conditions also experience more serious risks.<sup>10</sup> 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](#). We strongly recommend adopting a smoke and vape-free policy for this development.

In conclusion, we support the rezoning application of 1057 Gibsons Way 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

---

<sup>9</sup> Smoke-Free Housing BC. (2023, November 20). *Why Go Smoke-Free*. <https://www.smokefreehousingbc.ca/why-smoke-free#healthandsafety>

<sup>10</sup> 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>