

## **For Immediate Release**

### **A Big Leap Forward to Address Homelessness and Affordable Housing in the Cowichan Region**

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Following six months of dialogue and action, Cowichan now has a Coalition to Address Homelessness and Affordable Housing.

Guided by a leadership team involving Cowichan Housing Association, Our Cowichan Community Health Network, Social Planning Cowichan and the United Way – the Home Team – the Coalition’s first task will be to complete and approve a Regional Plan to Address Homelessness and Housing in the spring of 2018, and establish priorities for action. Following on the heels of the release of a National Housing Strategy, the group is working to be ready for funding opportunities.

Home Team member Michelle Staples of Social Planning Cowichan reflected on years of research and action led by Social Planning Cowichan through the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate. “It’s been ten years since our first report on Inadequate Shelter in the Cowichan Valley. It’s taken a long time and a lot of work on the part of many people to bring this about, but we know from the experience of other communities that it takes about that much time. We’re ready to go.”

The Regional Plan is being developed through a Steering Committee hosted by the United Way, and will be adopted by the Coalition. The funding to support the Regional Plan process is funded through the federal government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy. “It will help the community to take a coordinated approach to prioritize our efforts,” said Melaina Patenaude of the United Way, “and will help us to rally needed support and partnerships at all levels.”

“A major part of what needs to be done is to communicate and coordinate our efforts,” said Terri Dame of Cowichan Housing Association’s Building Strong Foundations Project. “In the past few months we have seen incredible community support and enthusiasm, and we’ll be coming together to take that positive energy and move it in a common direction. ”

“Addressing homelessness and affordable housing in the region is going to take a big partnership effort over the long term,” said Cindy Lise of Our Cowichan Community Health Network. “The most recent Point in Time Count shows an increase in both absolute and relative homelessness over the past two years. “

“It’s important to understand that homelessness is a critical issue *and* the issues are much broader,” said Dame. 25% of CVRD households do not meet one or more standards for housing adequacy, suitability or affordability, and some of those households are owners who are also struggling day to day.”

“There is a whole spectrum of need, as well as housing along that whole spectrum that serves all demographics. It’s going to take concerted planning and action as well as policy and finances to pave the way. Having a plan will help us to organize, and there is a lot we can be doing now.”

In the short term, "there are a lot of things that are needed," said Staples. "The Coalition will be working together to coordinate our efforts to try to address immediate needs over the winter. There are many organizations working in parallel to provide support services, work on Housing First, and get Affordable Housing projects off the ground."

The Building Strong Foundations Project is supported by the Government of Canada Homeless Partnering Strategy.