



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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Vernon's collaborative approach to affordable and supported housing

Like many communities, affordable housing is a pressing issue in Vernon. The recently completed [Regional Housing Needs Assessment](#) identifies the urgent need to add more affordable housing units to the North Okanagan. Vernon's rental vacancy rate is hovering around one per cent – the lowest it has been in more than a decade*.

The provision of housing for all community members is a key concern for local government. So how is Vernon responding to the needs and demands of a diverse and growing community?

[Council's Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#) has specific goals and a commitment to add more affordable housing in Vernon through local and provincial partnerships:

- Create accessible and attainable housing for families with annual income below \$70,000
- Develop affordable housing partnerships, including the use of City lands
- Continue to partner with BC Housing, not-for-profits and the development community on affordable housing, including the use of City-owned land

Through a solution-based, collaborative approach, Vernon has increased its affordable housing inventory by more than 400 units since 2008, with a mix of affordable units, supported housing and permanent shelter beds. Vernon has also worked with numerous private sector developers to see approximately 570 new rental units enter the market in the same period.

Currently, another seven affordable housing projects and two supported housing projects (including 24/7 staff support) are in progress, which will add 297 new units to the community. These projects provide essential housing for lower income seniors and families, safe housing for women and children transitioning out of domestic violence situations, affordable housing for adults, and surety of basic shelter for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Our community has a need, as clearly demonstrated by the hundreds of applicants on current waitlists for affordable housing. Therefore, we are taking specific and strategic steps to fulfill that need in a responsible and sustainable manner.

But we are not doing this alone.

Accessible, attainable and supported housing solutions in Vernon are only made possible through our collaborative work with BC Housing, which has provided funding to groups such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Vernon and District Community Land Trust, Vernon Pensioners Accommodation Society, Archway Society for Domestic Peace, Habitat for Humanity,

Vernon Native Housing Society, and Turning Points Collaborative Society. These groups manage affordable housing. More than 2,000 Vernon residents benefit from the efforts of these service agencies.

Since Friday morning, more than 90 heartfelt letters have been received by my office, from a wide variety of professionals, concerned citizens, and those close to BC Housing initiatives. These letters and calls support the availability, operation and positive impact of supportive housing on our citizens, our businesses and our City.

As Mayor of Vernon, the last thing I want to see is a moratorium on supportive housing projects. At some point, local motels that have been used as shelter accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic response will transition back to tourism. This will force individuals who are without housing back on to the street and into our parks and downtown core.

Any delays in supportive housing projects would have a significant impact on downtown and area businesses and the wider community. Without these new supportive housing units, we are likely to see a surge in new homeless individuals and added pressure on the Bylaw Department, the RCMP, and our healthcare system to manage and respond to increased numbers of people sleeping outside, who would otherwise be housed in the new units.

BC Housing is a vital partner and resource in making affordable and supported housing available in Vernon. The organization has specific criteria for its supportive housing buildings, including 24/7 staffing, and is geared towards people who are experiencing or may be at risk of homelessness, who require support with mental health and or substance abuse, and who need supported services to maintain a successful tenancy.

In Vernon, supportive housing is provided by Turning Points Collaborative Society (TPCS) at My Place. TPCS has supplemented its services by adding a community support worker, a health navigator/counsellor, in-house recovery groups and on-site pharmacy services to assist the residents of My Place.

Through consultation with area residents and businesses, we are advised that the neighbourhood near My Place “improved in the past year,” and that the majority of local businesses would “support more supportive housing in the community.” This is positive and encouraging feedback.

The facts are clear. We need more affordable and supported housing in Vernon, not less. And working with BC Housing to access vital financial resources and housing supports is how we take positive steps forward in filling the needs of our residents to build a stronger, more resilient, and more productive society.

Victor Cumming
Mayor, City of Vernon

**According to an October 2020 report from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).*