

From: Rob Grant [<mailto:rgrant@ssics.ca>]

Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 2:10 PM

To: Malcolm McNaughton; Heidi Hartman; Olsen, Adam; Gary Holman; Laura Patrick; Peter Grove; Peter Luckham; tboulter@sd64.org; sbenwell@sd64.org; AG.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Subject: Supported Housing for Salt Spring

To all,

I have attached a letter and request for your consideration.

Thanks,

Rob Grant

April 19, 2021

School District 64. Board Chair Tisha Boulter, Superintendent Scott Benwell

Capital Regional District. Gary Holman Salt Spring Island Director, Don Elliott Senior Manager
CRD Housing

Islands Trust. Trustees Laura Patrick, Peter Grove Peter Luckman, SSI Planner Stefan Cermak

Province of BC. Adam Olsen, MLA, Saanich North and the Islands, Minister of Housing Eby

BC Housing. Malcolm McNaughton, Director Regional Development, Heidi Hartman VI Regional
Director

via e mail

re: Supported Housing for Salt Spring Island

I ask that you take a moment to review the plan to develop a Supported Housing facility on the Drake Road CRD/School District property. I have more to say about the details, but my appeal is primarily about good planning. Effective community planning includes weighing pros and cons, exploring alternatives, analyzing costs and benefits of alternatives, placing the proposed action within greater community contexts, and simply following the wise builders adage of “measure twice, cut once” to confirm the proper fit before taking irreversible action.

Those of us involved in affordable housing and mental health services on Salt Spring Island know one thing for sure. Opportunities to take significant steps forward are rare, and when they do come around they are very fragile and precious within the complexities and limitations of our small island community. With this in mind, it is incumbent upon our leaders to make the most of these opportunities by ensuring they are carefully designed for success. This means intentional and thorough planning, including the engagement of community stakeholders to contribute local knowledge and expertise. Narrow planning and vision rarely turns out well.

It is my concern that the plans for Drake Road may be progressing without having considered two very significant facts that have emerged since the current direction was determined:

1. The lack of worker and family housing on SSI has progressed from very bad to a full blown crisis over the past few years, and is a clear and present threat to community functioning. Low income earners are leaving the island on a weekly basis. This is exactly why the Drake Road land was originally donated. The 5 acre size and location close to Ganges, schools and parks offers great potential to address this need in a most fitting way. The 2014 plan

for the property presented to Islands Trust proposed a 60-80 unit multi-family development with the intention of it being home to hundreds of people. There is a confirmation of water now that permits an initial stage of development. How would a first phase of a 30-unit Supported Housing facility for people with housing barriers impact the future plans and potential of the property? Is the meeting of the needs of this population at this specific location compelling enough to justify the repurposing of the property? I strongly support the development of Supported Housing for people with mental health and addictions challenges. It is long overdue. I may even support such a project on the Drake Road property if were not for Fact Two.

2. There is a viable, and quite possibly an ideal location for Supported Housing at the current Seabreeze Inne property that is proving its worthiness for this purpose as we speak. The design, location, cost, neighbor and community acceptance features are all favorable. Repurposing motels for Supported Housing has been a popular and effective BC Housing strategy throughout the province. Motel design and Supported Housing design are virtually identical, and the cost to purchase and convert can be half that of building a new facility with Supported Housing features.

I address this request in equal parts to the leadership groups that have had a hand in the process to date and what is to come. The baton/buck is being passed among all of these groups, but ultimately it is a team effort:

- a) School District 64, the donor of the Drake Road property with the original vision of increasing family and worker housing to address declining school enrollment. What happened to change this?
- b) Capital Regional District, the recipient and current owner of the land. As our local government the CRD has the strongest role in voicing the needs related to for overall health and well-being of community members. The CRD either initiated or accepted a plan years ago to shift the focus of Drake Road. Why the silence and absence of community engagement on this matter?
- c) Islands Trust, the local zoning authority being asked to stand back and permit the development to circumvent bylaws and community engagement to expedite the project. Islands Trust has the strongest role to ensure community plans are done responsibly, and shaped by local voices and interests. On October 21, 2020 Islands Trust requested of BC Housing some helpful actions to strengthen cooperation as part of engaging in an agreement of "friendly paramountcy". What has happened?
- d) BC Government, our duly elected representatives responsible for overseeing effective projects and services that use public funds to improve and strengthen communities. The government oversees BC Housing and its use of public funds. Where are you?

- e) BC Housing, the organization acting on behalf of government with the capacity to deliver many forms of affordable housing along the entire continuum of need. Salt Spring Island has been assigned funding in future budgets for both supported housing operations and the construction of new housing. BC Housing has a history of active community engagement regarding the development of Supported Housing. Why not on Salt Spring Island ?

Supported Housing can cover a wide range of support for a wide range of people. It will be very important to consider the specific nature of a new project for SSI in terms of the needs and expectations of the community, service providers and people being served. As the first, and only, staffed supported housing facility for people with mental health and addictions issues in a community with a major homelessness challenge there is potential for significant community health and safety benefit if it is planned effectively.

In closing, I would like to stress the point that the community is an overall system of interconnected priorities. Salt Spring Island needs Supported Housing. Salt Spring Island needs family and worker housing. There needs to be a coordinated plan to accomplish both. To put it candidly, a Supported Housing project will be hard pressed to operate effectively due to a lack of available workers. This is a reality for any Salt Spring employer looking to fill positions paying low to moderate wages.

Please have another look at the Drake Road plan, and expand the planning process to include the context of 2021 community needs and opportunities.

Yours Sincerely,



Rob Grant

rgrant@ssics.ca

