

HOUSING the NORTH SHORE

Overview

On May 27th and 28th, 2009 three non-profit partner agencies, with financial assistance from the City of North Vancouver and BC Housing, successfully engaged the North Shore in a dialogue on the choices surrounding affordable and sustainable housing. North Shore Community Resources Society's Community Housing Action Committee (CHAC), Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society (LVSP) and the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) worked tirelessly for five months to create an engaging and solution oriented event. The event closely resembled the original plan submitted to the Sustainable City Grant Program and met its proposed budget. More importantly, the forum achieved the goals of raising awareness of affordable housing choices, providing the community a forum to voice its questions and ideas, and offered individuals future opportunities to continue to engage in discussions and efforts to increase affordable housing stock and choices in their neighborhood.

The Event

The two day event, held at the Leo Marshall Curriculum Centre and the Artist for Kids Gallery, was well attended. Over 115 people participated from across the three North Shore municipalities, Bowen Island and other lower mainland municipalities. The registrants were primarily those who live in detached single family residences, between the ages of 41 – 65 years old, and citizens from the District of North Vancouver. Approximately 70% of the registrants owned their own housing. In addition to municipal residents, experts in the field spoke and participated in the program workshops.

Michael Geller, President of the Geller group and Adjunct Professor for the Centre of Sustainable Community Development at SFU, opened the event on the evening of May 27th to a standing room only crowd in the Artist for Kids Gallery. Mr. Geller presented *Ten Ways to Create Affordable Housing*. The panel session that followed Mr. Geller's presentation, included responses from City of North Vancouver's Mayor Mussatto, District of North Vancouver's Mayor Walton, and District of West Vancouver Councilor and Acting Mayor Michael Lewis. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions of the elected officials using a written question submission format. Media coverage and feedback on the May 27th evening session was very positive, with particular interest noted on Michael Geller's presentation and the appreciation of the Mayors' attendance at the event.

Day two opened with a six-person panel presentation that represented different stakeholders in housing. A local city resident initiated the panel discussion and inspired a genuine and concerned exchange of ideas about the importance of and need for a variety of housing choices to ensure North Shore neighbourhoods remain vital and livable for all community members. Subsequent panel members included perspectives from a developer, the role of the municipal OCP, the purpose of BC Housing, considerations from an environmental professional, and the contribution of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This lively panel encouraged and elicited many questions from both panel members and the audience.

The afternoon sessions on the 28th incorporated the previous morning and evening presentations into targeted discussions focused on specific topics. Participants signed up for small breakout groups who brainstormed, discussed and presented back to the larger group their ideas and thoughts on: subsidized rental accommodation with support services, subsidized rental accommodation for families, market rental accommodation, environmentally sustainable buildings/practices, and low market purchase housing. The event was summarized and wrapped up by a representative from the Fraser Basin Council and participants provided their evaluation of the event and interest in future community participation.

Appreciation

In addition to financial contributions, this event was made possible because of the involvement of many organizations and individuals. The partner agencies wish to acknowledge the exceptional involvement of over 28 outstanding volunteers, who donated more 680 hours of their time, energy and enthusiasm to create and execute the event. The three North Shore municipalities provided planning staff time and consultation services. The North Vancouver School Board made available the use of their facility and the excellent moderating expertise of their superintendent. The commitment demonstrated through their attendance and participation at the forum by elected representatives at the municipal and provincial level was important. The many affordable and sustainable housing, health and other interested professionals who attended helped to expand the understanding of the solutions available to communities. Finally, the organizers' appreciated the participation of residents who generated new ideas for future consideration.

Outcomes

During day two of the forum breakout groups developed five general themes and recommendations that have subsequently been adopted as working plans by the forum steering committee and some fifteen other interested forum participants as we move into the fall. The working topics of these groups are:

1. Subsidized Rental Accommodation with Support Services
2. Lower Cost Below Market Housing
3. Rental Housing
4. Low Cost Purchase Housing

Members of the steering committee and these working committees will continue developing these themes and appropriate action plans.

Also, a final report on the forum will be presented to the three municipalities in the fall.

The positive community impact of this project was evidenced by the number of participants who provided their contact information in order to continue participating in specific housing related activities. The original Housing Forum Steering Committee has met on three different occasions since the end of the forum to finalize the maintenance of the website for the balance of the year, and ensure participants, who provided contact information, have been connected with the organizations that interested them. Finally, the production of a video of the event has been completed and distributed.

Registration and Attendance

Wednesday May 27th from 7PM to 9PM there were over 115 people in attendance (69% of those who had registered for Wednesday + walk-ins).

Thursday from 9:30AM to 3:30PM over 100 people in attendance (64% of those who had registered +walk-ins)