

## Vic West Community Assn. Questions from the Chat

June 2, 2021

### 1. Can Catherine Street be designated a Sober House for persons in rehab?

We have an urgent need for this kind of facility to bring people inside, address street homelessness and provide people with access to mental health and addictions treatment. There are no plans for this for this to be sobering centre. Once an operator is in place, we will work with the operator to determine how best to support the needs of people experiencing homelessness in the community and support them to access the kind of services you reference.

### 2. We have time to plan, why doesn't BC Housing will not entertain a more socially mixed facility, including hard to house people, but not limited to them. This type of approach - even if it resulted in more density, could produce a mix that feels more comfortable for Vic West residents and for the newcomers.

We have an urgent need for this kind of facility to bring people inside and address street homelessness. People who experience homelessness are as varied as any other neighbour. They may be seniors, persons with disabilities, people who have employment but no housing, or people who are working through mental health concerns and/or substance use. All residents in supportive housing have made a choice to work towards living a healthy, stable life.

BC Housing collaborates with local service providers on a thoughtful and thorough assessment process to ensure an appropriate mix of residents with the right supports live in the housing. Every potential resident is considered on an individual basis to ensure that the housing and services provided by the program match the support services that they need, such as life skills training, employment assistance, and help with accessing a range of social and health care services.

### 3. Is housing of Canadians a provincial or federal financial issue?

Housing is a complex issue involving all levels of government – federal, provincial, and municipal. The federal government and the Province – through BC Housing – both fund housing in British Columbia. We all need to work together to make housing more affordable for everyone in B.C. After years where the old government failed to build the kind of housing people need and let homelessness grow, our government is making progress but there's more to do.

In Budget 2018, the B.C. government introduced the Homes for BC 30 Point Plan with the largest investment in housing in B.C.'s history, committing almost \$7 billion dollars and working with partners to create 114,000 affordable homes over 10 years. More than 26,000 homes are already completed or underway throughout the province. In Budget 2021, the B.C. government announced an additional \$2 billion investment in development financing through B.C.'s HousingHub to finance the construction of thousands of new homes for middle-income families.

**4. If BC housing can use “paramountcy” (statutory immunity) to locate facilities in Vic West, why can’t they override the lack of “buy-in” from other municipalities and build shelters and supportive living in those communities?**

We are doing this with support from the municipality because there’s an urgent need to provide more permanent supportive homes as soon as possible.

Projects proceeding under statutory immunity are the exception. It will not become the rule. The Province will not proceed under statutory immunity without municipal support or unless there are exceptional circumstances. Our focus is on working collaboratively with local governments to get more people the homes they need.

**5. Will you give us a definitive answer to what the mix of residents will be for Catherine street? There have been rumours that it will be largely/only high-risk high needs which does not make sense in a residential area, regardless of the “supports” offered.**

That won’t be the case. BC Housing and the housing operator will collaborate with local service providers on a thoughtful and thorough assessment process to ensure an appropriate mix of residents with the right supports live in the housing. Every potential resident is considered on an individual basis to ensure that the housing and services provided by the program match the support services that they need, such as life skills training, employment assistance, and help with accessing a range of social and health care services. Every effort is made to ensure there is the right mix of residents to support the creation of a positive environment both inside and outside the building.

Offers of housing are made following meetings held by BC Housing’s Coordinated Access Table, where BC Housing, outreach providers, Island Health, and local non-profit housing providers assess applicants for suitability. Suitability considers neighbourhood considerations, accessibility to services, the housing operators’ experience, and mandates - all in the interest of creating a balanced mix tenancy that will support successful operation and tenancies.

**6. Will overnight tenting be allowed in rainbow park?**

**The City of Victoria is responsible for rules around overnight tenting in parks – the Province is not involved. Here is the response from the City of Victoria:**

Overnight sheltering is permitted in Rainbow Park in accordance with the Parks Regulation Bylaw. More information is available here: [victoria.ca/sheltering](http://victoria.ca/sheltering).

**7. Does BC housing have unlimited provincial budget?**

No.

BC Housing’s 2021/22 budget is \$2.05 billion, including provincial contributions of \$1.821 billion. In Budget 2018, the B.C. government introduced the Homes for BC 30 Point Plan with the largest investment in housing in B.C.’s history, committing almost \$7 billion dollars and working with partners to create 114,000 affordable homes over 10 years.

In Budget 2021, the B.C. government announced an additional \$2 billion investment in development financing through B.C.'s HousingHub to finance the construction of thousands of new homes for middle-income families.

For more information about BC Housing's budget, see the BC Housing's 2021/22 – 2023/24 Service Plan: <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2021/sp/pdf/agency/bch.pdf>

**8. Will there be a gender mix?**

Yes.

**9. When will the Community Advisory Committee be established?**

For the new temporary shelter at 225 Russell St., the Community Advisory Committee is currently being established. BC Housing is currently reviewing applications for the Community Advisory Committee and will be setting up a meeting in the near future.

For the new supportive housing at 865 Catherine Street, the Community Advisory Committee will be established closer to opening. BC Housing will reach out to the community with more information at that time.

**10. Can we get a commitment from BC that the “emergency shelter” on Russell will not be extended beyond 18 months?**

225 Russell is part of a long-term strategy to create supportive housing in the Capital region. As we initially committed, after 18 to 24 months operating as a temporary shelter, this building will be converted into 40-units of supportive housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness – we will not be continuing to operate it as an emergency shelter. BC Housing has been transparent with both current and future plans for this building.

**11. Understanding the need for a critical response, to what degree is the success of this initiative dependant on long term funding - is the funding model sustainable?**

BC Housing will be providing capital and sustainable operating funding to develop new supportive housing at 865 Catherine Street in Victoria. Ongoing operating funding will be negotiated between BC Housing and the non-profit operator.

**12. What additional funding is being provided to Island Health, police, addiction services etc.**

We're pleased to fund primary care, mental health and addictions services through Island Health to ensure residents have the support they need. Some services are delivered on site, and people also receive support accessing services in the community as appropriate – like a treatment or detox bed. Within a week of arriving at the Russell St shelter one person had already entered detox.

**Response from the Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions:**

BC Budget 2021 makes an historic, half billion-dollar investment in mental health and addictions services – the largest investment in our province's history. We are expanding access to mental health and substance use services to better connect people to

evidence-based, culturally safe care as we continue building the comprehensive system of care that British Columbians deserve.

That new investment includes \$330 million over the fiscal plan to provide a full spectrum of substance-use treatment and recovery services, including \$152 million for opioid treatment. Part of that will fund 195 new substance use treatment and recovery beds in communities throughout the province – including in Island Health – to help more people get on a path to recovery, building on the 100 new adult beds and 123 new beds for youth, announced in 2020.

- Island Health is also funding or providing direct services for the Russell Street site:
  - Primary Care: Cool Aid Mobile Van (nursing and physicians), aim will be to treat urgent health needs and attach residents to Community based clinics for longitudinal primary care
  - PEERS and/or AVI: Housing Overdose Prevention Peer Support – dedicated space for supervised consumption on site
  - Mental Health & Substance Use (MHSU): in reach treatment for registered clients, and transitional supports for move in and stabilization from Encampment Outreach Team

BC Housing will be working to plan supports for the Catherine St. site as well.

**For questions about police funding, contact the City of Victoria.**

**13. Minister Eby, is anything being done to expand the Vancouver project to give Government paid opioids to chronic users? My fear in Vic West is that opioid users will still be leaving their shelters to seek their supply and still be requiring money to fund that supply. A free government supply of these pharmaceuticals would go a long way to addressing these fears.**

**Response from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions:**

- The B.C. Government is working to separate people from the toxic illicit drug supply to prevent overdose, help people stabilize their lives, and keep communities safe.
- Increasing access to prescribed safe supply is a top priority and expansion work is actively underway.
- Provincially, the number of people being prescribed safer alternatives to the toxic, illegal street drug supply has increased by 475% since February 2019.
- People who use drugs in the Victoria area can access the Victoria Safer program delivered by AVI Health and Community Services.
- This program is funded by Health Canada and provides a community-based, flexible safer supply model with health care provider oversight.

- This program connects people to prescribers (to access safe supply), outreach workers and nurses to support people's health care needs.

**14. The core question is whether a centralized or decentralized model of care best meets the needs of the homeless population. I submit the current decentralized and expensive lowest common denominator policy pursued by government is an abject failure. What are the KPI (Key Performance Indicator) metrics that BC Housing uses to determine project success?**

BC Housing works with non-profit operators to provide a range of housing options for people experiencing homelessness, including shelters, rent supplements, supportive and subsidized housing. Every effort is made to provide each person with the environment that will best meet their individual needs. Supportive housing aims to help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to connect to support services and achieve housing stability.

One of the primary metrics that BC Housing looks at is how long an individual maintains their housing. This is a measure of success. It is also important to recognize that not every resident will move onto independent housing. For some individuals, success is maintaining the unit they have.

The Social Return on Investment studies on BC Housing's Research Centre Library show there is success in different models of supportive housing. For details, see: <https://www.bchousing.org/research-centre/library/tools-for-developing-social-housing/bk-sroi-series-summary&sortType=sortByDate>

**15. How will you provide funding to guarantee proper supports and training for staff dealing with individuals with challenges?**

BC Housing partners with non-profit housing providers that have extensive experience working with and supporting people experiencing homelessness. Part of the operational funding provided by BC Housing includes 24/7 staffing support to ensure that residents have access to the supports they need.

Island Health is already providing services at the Russell St site and BC Housing will engage with Island Health to discuss health services for Catherine St. Services provided by Island Health or their contracted service providers would be determined based on the needs of the individual and where they are in their wellness journey. Island Health will continue to provide access to health care supports and services for residents, including access and referrals to a range of treatment options.

The housing operator will ensure that all staff have the appropriate training and skills necessary to support the clients. Training required by BC Housing includes, but is not limited to: crisis prevention training; first Aid/CPR; mental health first aid training;

domestic violence and safety planning; substance use awareness and safety training; and trauma-informed training.

**16. Acknowledging that it's not BC housing's policy to fund neighbourhood security enhancements, given that BC Housing acted against their own policies for community engagement, will an exception be made in this case due to the negligible communication and poor notice that would have allowed residents to plan?**

We all want safe neighbourhoods. If our residents or housing operator see vandalism or witness crime in the neighbourhood, they will connect with the Victoria Police. BC Housing will continue to work with community partners including the Victoria Police Department to address any concerns. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) will also be instrumental in continuing this dialogue, letting us know about concerns, and finding proactive solutions.

Catherine St will be a purpose-built property and security measures would include well-lit and fenced grounds, extensive camera monitoring and a controlled single point of entry. Just like any other residence, if there are concerns with specific individuals coming on property or loitering around the property, BC Housing will work with City bylaw and Victoria Police around potential solutions.

The most important security feature, both for residents and the community, is staffing. The building would have staff onsite 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure that residents are supported and that any concerns are addressed in the timely manner.

**17. What happens if we're not happy with the CAC or other consultation processes? What do we do then?**

BC Housing is committed to making this work. Homelessness is a community challenge and takes a community response. BC Housing uses this model in Victoria and other jurisdictions, and it has proven to be effective. We will respond as best we can and adjust as needed.

**18. How will you deal with increased criminal activity in the area? Will there be an increase in police presence or resources? What steps will be taken to keep residents and areas like the Songhees walkway safe?**

We all want safe neighbourhoods. If our residents or housing operator see vandalism or witness crime in the neighbourhood, they will connect with the Victoria Police. BC Housing will continue to work with community partners including the Victoria Police Department to address any concerns. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) will also be instrumental in continuing this dialogue, letting us know about concerns, and finding proactive solutions.

**19. Will local residents be warned if there's someone with a violent history placed in the units? And/or of criminal activities in the neighbourhood?**

All residents in supportive housing have made a choice to work towards living a healthy, stable life. The most important security feature, both for residents and the community, is staffing. The building would have staff onsite 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure that residents are supported and that any concerns are addressed in the timely manner.

Those kind of decisions around warnings would be made by the Victoria Police Department. They are the law enforcement body that oversees any warnings of a public nature. If the operator sees vandalism or witnesses crime in the neighbourhood, they will connect with the police.

We all want safe neighbourhoods. BC Housing will continue to work with community partners including the Victoria Police Department to address any concerns. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) will also be instrumental in continuing this dialogue, letting us know about concerns, and finding proactive solutions.

To help people, we need to first give them a safe place to sleep, food to eat, and access to services so they can move forward with their lives. People moving into supportive housing have been interviewed by professionals with experience working with people experiencing homelessness. The assessment tool is inclusive, person-centered, with a Housing First orientation, and identifies vulnerable individuals with the greatest need, and provides insight on how best to support them. From our experience, after a few months, residents settle, and the housing integrates into the neighbourhood.

**20. How is BC Housing and the City of Victoria going to deal with the liability created by inserting challenged individuals into our community? Will local residents be compensated for property damage and/or loss directly caused by residents of these facilities?**

People who experience homelessness are as varied and different as any other neighbour. They may be seniors, people with disabilities, or people who have employment. All residents in supportive housing have made a choice to work towards living a healthy, stable life. From our experience, after a few months, residents settle, and the housing integrates into the neighbourhood.

We all want safe neighbourhoods. The safety of residents, staff and the surrounding community is a priority. The most important security feature, both for residents and the community, is staffing. The building would have staff onsite 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure that residents are supported and that any concerns are addressed in the timely manner.

**21. Can some change management funds go towards increased security at Vic West elementary to ensure the safety of the children so close to Catherine?**

BC Housing and the selected non-profit operator would work collaboratively with the school to address any concerns that might arise and seek opportunities to help integrate the supportive housing successfully into the community.

We all want safe neighbourhoods. The safety of residents, staff and the surrounding community is a priority. The most important security feature, both for residents and the community, is staffing. The building would have staff onsite 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure that residents are supported and that any concerns are addressed in the timely manner.

Many supportive housing sites for people experiencing homelessness across the province have been operating in their communities and near schools for 10+ years with no issues and with support from the community. There are over 210 provincially funded supportive housing sites across the province that are within 500 metres of a school, and 52% of provincially funded supportive housing sites in B.C. within 500 metres of schools have been operating for 10+ years.

This would be a purpose-built property and security measures would include well-lit and fenced grounds, extensive camera monitoring and a controlled single point of entry. Just like any other residence, if there are concerns with specific individuals coming on property or loitering around the property, BC Housing will work with City bylaw and Victoria Police around potential solutions.

A Community Advisory Committee would be created to support the successful integration of the building into the neighbourhood and community, with representation from BC Housing, Island Health, the City of Victoria, business improvement association/Chamber, any relevant community partners such as school district, service providers and community members at large.