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REPORT TO HOSPITALS AND HOUSING COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 07, 2024

SUBJECT **Future Housing Priorities and Partnerships Framework**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To seek direction from the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board to begin advancing an Acquisition Strategy (Appendix B) and the Rural Housing Program (Appendix C), through the development of a pilot initiative (Appendix D). These efforts aim to address unmet need related to housing affordability through innovation, partnership, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Housing First Program (RHFP) is a \$120 million (M) housing supply partnership between the CRD, BC Housing and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). As of January 2024, the RHFP has supported the completion of approximately 958 new affordable rental units across the capital region with an additional 97 by mid-2024. At full build out, the RHFP is expected to deliver up to almost 1,500 total units of affordable rental housing by 2028.

The CRD 2019-2022 Corporate Plan identified an initiative to determine continuation of a housing supply program beyond RHFP Implementation. Beginning with the CRD Board endorsement of the Southern Gulf Island (SGI) Housing Strategy in May 2022, staff then included consideration of a Rural Housing Program (RHP) as one component of the Future Housing Priorities and Partnerships (FHPP) white paper (Appendix A). The CRD Board endorsed the FHPP in July 2022, which also includes a focus on an Acquisition Strategy and Complex Care.

To advance efforts under FHPP staff were directed to look at options to fund the establishment, and seed investment for a scaled-up regional housing program. Though there is existing requisition capacity under Bylaw No. 3712 Land Assembly, Housing and Land Banking Service Establishment Bylaw, much of the current capacity is allocated toward approved capital projects under the RHFP. Therefore, the CRD Board directed staff to advance an amendment to Bylaw No. 3712 and advance a new loan authorization bylaw to permit the borrowing of up to \$85M.

The FHPP and the parallel work to advance efforts to increase borrowing capacity under Bylaw No. 3712 have been developed to position the CRD with a clarity of focus and sufficient requisition authority and debt capacity to support scaled-up regional efforts while seeking to incentivize partnership with senior levels of government.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Hospitals and Housing Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That staff begin advancing efforts under the Regional Housing: Acquisition Strategy; and
2. That the CRD negotiate and execute a Memorandum of Understanding with the Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership to receive \$100,000 for staff coordination of the Rural Housing Program pilot scoping.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred to staff for additional information based on Hospitals and Housing Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Social Implications

The capital region, like many communities across Canada, continues to experience challenges related to escalating cost of housing, affordability, and homelessness. Demand is particularly strong in the rental system and especially for affordable rental units. The FHPP seeks to position the capital region as a committed partner through looking at:

- An Acquisition Strategy, which aims to increase and/or preserve the supply of affordable rental housing within the urban areas of the region. The Acquisition Strategy will help to guide investment decisions using set criteria intended to help inform the CRD Board on prospective acquisition and investment. The range of model inputs are shown on page 5 of Appendix B.
- A RHP, which aims to increase, preserve, and broaden the supply of affordable housing in rural and remote communities. The approach recognizes the need to approach housing solutions in rural and remote communities with different expectations than those used for conventional housing projects in more densely populated urban regions. At this time, staff are only recommending a pilot on SGI and Salt Spring Island (SSI) to develop the program and test the efficacy of some initiatives, which, subject to CRD Board approval, could be implemented across to the region starting in 2025/2026.
- A Complex Care Housing initiative, which aims to increase the supply of housing with supports for people with complex needs and support complementary to the provincial Complex-Care Housing service. In Greater Victoria, Complex-Care Housing is delivered by Island Health in partnership with BC Housing and non-profit service providers. Due to the critical roles of Island Health, BC Housing, and non-profit organizations in the delivery of Complex Care, CRD staff worked through 2023 to engage, consult and explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership. Island Health and BC Housing continue to look at needs across the health authority, including on Southern Vancouver Island, and CRD staff remain actively engaged and are committed to supporting this ongoing effort. Additional updates will be provided to the CRD Board later in 2024 as the work continues along side Island Health and BC Housing.

Operational Implications

The Housing Planning, Policy, and Programs function operates within Regional Housing and receives grants from federal and provincial partner agencies, provides oversight, and deploys funds within the region, administers housing affordability agreements with developers and owners in the region on behalf of municipalities, and undertakes research and develops policy and programs focused on increasing housing supply across the region.

Staff capacity to advance work under this function was supported through the development of IBC 5a-2.1 Housing Opportunity Innovation and Outcomes Analysis. It is anticipated that there will be approximately 0.75 FTE available to support the advancement of the Acquisition Strategy, including 0.25 FTE management, and 0.5 FTE support staff.

The RHP pilot will be soft launched in 2024 using existing staff resources as well as 1 FTE of new capacity as a two-year term position. The new term position will be supported, in part, through Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) Program funding. Staff will begin implementation of program design and will work to leverage additional external grant funding where possible.

Service Delivery Implications

To exercise constraint and cost containment, the CRD Board directed staff to keep the core inflationary adjustment to 3.5% through the 2024 Service and Financial Planning Guidelines, which has been considered through determining the appropriate balance of requisition impact and securing sufficient capacity to begin advancing the Acquisition Strategy and RHP.

Initiating the Acquisition Strategy in full would require a significant lift in resources being available in the 2024 CRD Financial Plan. Property identification, undertaking appropriate due diligence and advancing acquisitions, subject to CRD Board approval, draws on internal capacity through the Real Estate, Regional Housing and Corporate Finance functions while also relying on the engagement of consultant services on items such as land surveys, environmental and geotechnical analysis, building condition assessments, archaeological reports, appraisals, feasibility analysis and massing modelling, etc.

Staff anticipate that current capacity, including that contained within the 2024 CRD Financial Plan, will be sufficient to support property identification and a high-level assessment of acquisition potential. Staff will then return to the CRD Board to request additional resources to undertake due diligence and funds to place a deposit on a project-by-project basis and through a budget amendment. Final decisions will also come back to the CRD Board, which may require an additional budget amendment.

The RHP pilot scoping work (Appendix D) is to allocate available capacity in support of building the program parameters to consider providing pre-development funding while also starting work on the development of a Missing Middle/Accessory Dwelling Unit Incentive Program. These efforts can be supported through available capacity and resources provided by the MRDT funding.

Intergovernmental Implications

The development of the Acquisition Strategy (applied primarily within the Urban Containment Boundary) and the RHP (applied primarily outside of the Urban Containment Boundary) is to acknowledge the diversity of housing need and development contexts across the capital region and provide suitable, flexible, and tailored tools to advance projects and programs better equipped to support local needs and opportunities and within a municipal/electoral area land use context.

The RHP envisions a whole government approach to support housing solutions outside of the Urban Containment Boundary and in the Electoral Areas where governance is inherently multi-jurisdictional. MRDT funding for 2024 will require a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between CRD and the SGI Tourism Partnership Society. The CRD has also worked to partner with the Islands Trust through an application to the CMHC Housing Accelerator Fund on Mayne Island. If successful, the funding will be awarded to Islands Trust and an MoU with CRD will be required to advance a sub-pilot project to accelerate 73 units of housing on Mayne Island.

In addition to the program, strategy development, and bylaw work undertaken by the CRD in support of advancing the Acquisition Strategy and RHP, the Government of BC has passed several pieces of legislation that alter the local government land use planning framework including increasing small-scale multi-unit housing, establishing proactive planning requirements, changes to development finance tools, and support for transit-oriented development areas.

Beyond the range of recent legislative changes introduced by the Government of BC, Budget 2023 also allocated a total of \$1.7 billion (B) over three years in operating and capital funding through Building BC and BC Housing programs as well as transit-oriented development. A recent example of this is the opening of a Community Housing Fund (CHF) call on August 28, 2023,

which closed on November 17, 2023. BC Builds was also announced on April 3, 2023, as a focused effort to speed up delivery of new homes and increase the supply of middle-income housing. Further details on BC Builds are expected into 2024. The CRD anticipates additional CHF calls in future years as well as calls to apply for funds through BC Builds, which present a range of ongoing partnership opportunities.

Through the 2023 Government of Canada Fall Economic Statement update, several additional resources were signalled including \$15B in new loan authority through the Apartment Construction Loan Program (ACLP), and \$1B for capital grants through the Affordable Housing Fund (AHF). It is expected that these new resources will be made available starting in 2025. It should also be noted that as recently as December 29, 2023, the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Government of Canada, announced that there is expected to be a renewed housing plan to help alleviate homebuilding cost pressures and boost productivity.

There are considerable changes locally, provincially, federally and the CRD has taken the necessary steps to develop key areas of focus through the FHPP and continues to secure debt capacity in support of seed funding for a scaled-up housing supply program.

Financial Implications

To advance the Acquisition Strategy, on December 13, 2023, the CRD Board approved amending Bylaw No. 4551 to increase the maximum requisition to the greater of \$11.5M annually or \$0.062 per \$1,000 assessed value for Bylaw No. 3712 Land Assembly, Housing and Land Banking Service Establishment Bylaw. This increase in maximum requisition represents a maximum change per average household of up to \$26 annually. It should be noted that the increased requisition will be committed to debt servicing costs for the \$85M capacity attached to the loan authorization bylaw which is currently subject to an alternative approval process (AAP).

In preparation for the potential approval of increased borrowing capacity through the approval of a loan authorization bylaw, and subject to a successful AAP, staff intend to begin exploring potential sites for acquisition while also starting to undertake scoping work on a RHP pilot project. This will be done through use of available capacity, which is subject to CRD Board approval of the 2024 Financial Plan.

As noted under service delivery implications, considerable works must be undertaken prior to bringing a recommendation forward to the CRD Board and staff will look to return to the CRD Board seeking funds on a project-by-project basis.

Environmental Implications

The housing priorities being advanced are with consideration of the Regional Growth Strategy, the *Islands Trust Act*, and core principles of smart growth planning. Each municipality and land use authority can ensure environmental metrics are met at the time of project approvals.

The Acquisition Strategy further considers two key components to support a reduction of adverse environmental impacts:

- 1) Walkability – The consultant has prepared maps depicting those areas that are within 400 metres of a transit stop, which are shown on pages 68-77 of Appendix B. This is to help the CRD focus its efforts on those locations well served by transit.

- 2) Parking – Due to the focus on walkability when considering potential acquisition or investment, the model prepared by the consultants assumes zero parking stalls for a studio, 1 and 2-bedroom unit. The model further assumes a single parking stall for any unit that is 3-bedroom + as this would consist of a larger family that may be more reliant on vehicle use.

Development undertaken on acquired lands would be subject to local government requirements and sustainability/efficiency measurement built into a capital or operating funding program. The RHP pilot scoping work will be taking place within the SGI and SSI electoral areas, which are under the land use authority of Islands Trust and the legislative obligations under the *Island Trust Act*.

CONCLUSION

Future Housing Priorities and Partnership initiatives are being developed to address unmet need related to housing affordability and homelessness through innovation, partnership, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Two consultant reports have been appended to the staff report with a focus on enabling the advancement of the Acquisition Strategy as well as a feasibility report on an RHP. Staff are recommending to begin advancing efforts under the Acquisition Strategy while also beginning to develop the scope of a pilot program on SSI and SGI that falls under the RHP. This is to be done through use of existing resources with any new resources being subject to CRD Board approval through budget amendments, which are to be advanced on a project-by-project basis.

RECOMMENDATION

The Hospitals and Housing Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That staff begin advancing efforts under the Regional Housing: Acquisition Strategy; and
2. That the CRD negotiate and execute a Memorandum of Understanding with the Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership to receive \$100,000 for staff coordination of the Rural Housing Program pilot scoping.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Future Housing Priorities and Partnerships White Paper
Appendix B: Regional Housing: Acquisition Strategy (Patricia Maloney Consulting, Bayshore Planning Services Inc., and Mullholland Parker Land Economists Ltd. 2024)
Appendix C: Rural Housing Pilot Project Analysis (Urban Matters, 2024)
Appendix D: Rural Housing Program Pilot (2024)