



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

To: Mayor and Council

File No.: 5040-20

From: Chief Administrative Officer

Date: February 24, 2014

Subject: Braidwood Housing Project Interim Report

PURPOSE:

The primary purpose of this report is to provide Council with an interim report on a proposed supportive housing project at a City-owned property located at 810 Braidwood Road. This interim report, which is appended to this staff report, seeks DIRECTION from Council through the Committee of the Whole.

Prepared by Mr. John Jessup, a Social Housing Consultant hired by the City, the interim report also provides recommendations on a future social housing policy.

Mr. Jessup will be in attendance at the February 24th 2014 COW to present his interim report, and answer questions.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The Braidwood Housing Project has been identified as Council's number one priority in the City's 2013 Strategic Priorities Report which is available on the City of Courtenay website at:

<http://www.courtenay.ca/city-hall/strategic-plan.aspx>

INTERIM REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A. THAT Council authorizes the Social Planning Consultant under direction of the CAO to establish the Working Group described in this report to issue an EOI/RFP for development of the City-owned 810 Braidwood Road site as a supportive housing for homeless project for adult men and women.
- B. That the Social Planning Consultant immediately begin neighborhood consultation on the basis that the site will be developed as an approximately 30 unit supportive housing for homeless project.
- C. THAT Council instruct the Social Planning Consultant to work under direction of the CAO to enter into negotiations with BC Housing towards execution of an MOU between the City and BC Housing outlining municipal contributions to the project and committing BC Housing to a unit allocation to the project.
- D. THAT prior to entering into negotiations with BC Housing, the City of Courtenay undertake a preliminary geotechnical survey, a phase 1 environmental assessment, a hazardous materials survey of the existing building on the site, and a civil engineering review of the capacity of existing underground water, sanitary and storm infrastructure serving the 810 Braidwood Road site, to determine the extent of the City liabilities in regards to these issues for inclusion in the MOU.
- E. THAT the Social Planning Consultant under direction of the CAO enter into discussions with the Director of Development Services, the Director of Financial Services, and any other appropriate City staff to explore how the development fees and charges to be forgiven as part of the MOU with BC Housing for development of the Braidwood site will be recovered by the City.

- F. THAT the Mayor on behalf of City Council write a letter to the Mayor of the Town of Comox offering the services of the City's Social Planning Consultant on a pro bono basis to assist in securing the site for the Comox Valley Transition Society from the sympathetic public institution in Comox and to enter into negotiations with BC Housing to secure a unit allocation for the 2nd Stage Housing for women fleeing violence project proposed there.

Respectfully submitted,

David Allen
Chief Administrative Officer

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Social Housing Strategy Report to Council

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: SOCIAL PLANNING CONSULTANT

SUBJECT: SOCIAL HOUSING STRATEGY

STATUS: CONSIDERATION

DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2014

INTRODUCTION

This is the Interim Report from the Social Planning Consultant hired by the City. The report:

1. Examines gaps in housing need, and
2. Proposes a social housing strategy for moving forward.

BACKGROUND

The Social Planning Consultant has reviewed all documentation on the CVRD website, met regularly with the Ad Hoc Emergency Resources Organization (AHERO) Committee, interviewed key proponents of social housing in the community, reviewed the stock of existing social housing in the Valley, examined the development capacity of the Braidwood Site, and met with CAO David Allen and more recently with Director of Development Services, Peter Crawford, and Manager of Planning, Ian Buck.

The City has recently purchased a site at 810 Braidwood Road in Courtenay for the purposes of developing a supportive housing project for homeless people there. Prior to meeting with Braidwood Road neighbors and administering the EOI/RFP for the City-owned Braidwood Road site, it is necessary for Council to confirm the development plan for the site and commit to taking the necessary steps which, in the opinion of the Social Planning Consultant, are necessary to move the project forward.

ISSUES

1. Potential Gaps in Housing Need

It is useful at the outset of this discussion if we are all aware of the general description of the types of shelter and support services referred to in this report. These include: (1) emergency shelter, (2) drop-in centre, (3) supported housing, and (4) transition and 2nd stage housing for women.

Emergency Shelter. In many communities on the Island, North of the Malahat, the shelter is synonymous with the Salvation Army. Sometimes located in a renovated larger home or in a purpose-built facility, it contains beds for overnight accommodation. Some shelters are for men only. Others are for men and women. In Courtenay, the Salvation Army Shelter is "Pidcock House".

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Shelter beds are categorized as permanent beds and EWR (Extreme Weather Response) beds.

Permanent beds are available year round. EWR beds are only available from Nov 1st to March 31st, if on the night in question the temperature drops to zero degrees Celsius or below. Permanent beds are provided in shared bedrooms. EWR beds are mats provided in dorm rooms.

Funding can affect both permanent and EWR shelter bed availability. BC Housing funds most shelters on the Island. Unless non-profit housing providers are willing to supplement the cost of providing extra shelter beds, capacity is determined by the number of permanent or EWR beds BC Housing is willing to fund, even though the actual bed capacity of the shelter may be more.

Shelter admittance policy can also affect bed availability for persons whose sobriety is questionable. For those shelters whose administrative policy is more tolerant, a sobriety assessment capability and a social detox room is a practical requirement.

But a shelter is not housing. Bedrooms are shared with one or more clients. Bedrooms and dorms are locked in the morning and opened again in late afternoon. While clients can now spend the day in common areas of the shelter, they usually leave the shelter during some part of the day to carry out their daily routines in the community.

Shelter clients can only spend a maximum of 30 continuous days at the shelter. However, beyond 5 days, some shelters require that the client meet with a case worker to set up a Personal Development Plan (PDP) in order to ensure a longer stay at the facility. This assists them while they work through the personal issues that made them homeless and search for suitable permanent housing.

Drop-In Centre. A drop-in centre or those facilities and services associated with a drop-in centre are often incorporated into the shelter. Pidcock House provides showers, laundry and meals for clients, as well as personal assessment and counseling, and referrals to other local agencies which may be able to further help and support a client.

Supportive Housing. Supportive housing has two primary components as its name suggests: housing and support. Unlike a shelter, each tenant is provided a small self-contained dwelling unit with its own three-piece bathroom and modest but complete kitchen. To ensure development costs and operating expenses are manageable, most units in a supportive housing project are bachelor or studio units (same unit different terms only). A few units may be one-bedroom to accommodate the occasional couple or fully accessible to allow occupancy by a special needs tenant.

In addition to a site manager, supportive housing is staffed by a minimum of 2 support workers per shift on a 24/7 basis. Support workers are trained to deal with building security and maintenance as well as tenant supervision and support.

The philosophy behind supportive housing is grounded in “housing first” and “harm reduction” best practices. Tenants are admitted regardless of whether they have mental health or substance use issues. The idea is to house tenants first and then to engage them gradually to address their personal issues.

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This may involve putting them in touch with specialist support staff from other agencies, such as Mental Health and Substance Use staff at VIHA.

If the City-owned Braidwood Road site is developed as supportive housing, the non-profit housing provider selected to develop and operate the housing project will be required to operate the facility like any other responsible market rental apartment property manager. The goal is to select and support a compatible group of diverse tenants that can live together in a relatively harmonious community.

The non-profit housing provider must strive to create a mix of tenants that are capable of living independently with support. The mix of tenants will include some who require minimal support, others who require a moderate degree of support, and a few that require a high degree of support.

Not all homeless people or people at risk of becoming homeless will want to live in supportive housing. It is the responsibility of the non-profit housing provider to establish policies and procedures, rules and guidelines which ensure that all tenants can live in the project in personal safety and social fulfillment.

For some tenants, the project will be a transition to a more independent life. Through volunteerism, casual employment opportunities and vocational training, many tenants will move on to regular employment and market rental housing. Others, however, may not be capable of doing so, and for them, housing at the project will become permanent.

One important rule of tenancy is that no trafficking of drugs, alcohol or sex can be allowed on the premises. And, personal use of drugs and alcohol must be managed responsibly by each tenant in order to ensure that all tenants have the “right to quiet enjoyment” of their premises.

Supportive housing projects like all market rental apartments are operated under the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA). While the mostly single tenants will be low-income and many will have personal challenges such as mental health and substance use issues, given the level and competency of support provided on a 24/7 basis at the project, it should operate more or less like any other market rental apartment in the neighborhood.

Transition and 2nd Stage Housing for Women. Many larger cities on the Island have a separate non-profit society which has as its mandate the provision of transition and 2nd stage housing for women. In Nanaimo, it is Haven Society. In Campbell River, it is the Campbell River and North Island Transition Society. And, in the Comox Valley, it is the Comox Valley Transition Society.

In Courtenay, “Lilli House” is a transition house for women fleeing violence and is operated by the Comox Valley Transition Society. A transition house is operated similarly to an emergency shelter, but its focus is on women fleeing violence. This may be from violence or fear of violence in the home or on the street. It is this latter aspect which makes it seem like an emergency shelter, but the underlying need for transition housing for women is violence and fear of violence, not homelessness per se. And, unlike Pidcock House operated by the Salvation Army Community Ministries, no men are allowed.

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The issue with transition housing for women fleeing violence is that after 30 consecutive days, like emergency shelters for men and women, the women must somehow move on. For women with limited personal resources, the challenge to find longer-term affordable and safe accommodation is daunting. This is not only for single working women, but also for women from moderate to well to do circumstances awaiting divorce settlements who temporarily find themselves penniless. And, some women fleeing violence have taken their young children with them and require two-, three- and sometimes four-bedroom housing.

It is this need for longer term supportive housing for women fleeing violence and sometimes with children which fuels the need for what is called in the Violence Against Women Sector, 2nd Stage Housing.

To summarize, the “Violence Against Women” (VAW) Sector is distinguished from the homeless shelter and supportive housing sector in several ways:

1. Its primary focus is on women, single or with children, who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence in the home or on the street;
2. Managing and providing support for women fleeing violence requires a different set of skills and competencies than the training and experience required for support workers staffing emergency shelters and supportive housing project for the homeless, many of whom have mental health and substance use issues;
3. Tenant mix in 2nd stage housing requires some two-, three- and possibility four-bedroom units to accommodate single parent women with children, as well as child-minding facilities on the ground floor and play structures in outside landscaped areas;
4. BC Housing funds the operating subsidies for transition and 2nd stage housing for women fleeing violence through a separate budget category called the “Women’s Transition Housing and Support Program (WTHSP); and,
5. Further emphasizing these differences, most transition societies in BC, like the Comox Valley Transition Society in Courtenay, belong to a Provincial parent association called, the BC Society of Transition Houses.

This distinction between the emergency shelter and supportive housing sector for the homeless and the women against violence sector is important in light of the apparent competition between the two housing proposals emerging in the Comox Valley.

2. Social Housing Strategy

2.1 Prioritize Housing Needs.

A review of the inventory of existing social housing projects and a survey of key social agencies confirms that there are no supportive housing projects for the homeless and no 2nd stage transition housing for women fleeing violence in the Comox Valley.

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The survey also reveals that there is an emergency shelter for homeless men and women at “Pidcock House” operated by the Salvation Army Community Ministries, and a transition house for women fleeing violence at “Lilli House” operated by the Comox Valley Transition Society. Both located in Courtenay.

What is clear to the Social Planning Consultant is that these are two very distinct needs which beg to be considered separately not together as the discussion following further emphasizes.

2.2 Housing Needs Assessment

AHERO’s 2008 homeless survey identified 159 homeless people. Ninety-seven (97) were adult men and 29 were adult women. The remainder was youth (22) and children (12).

In January 2011, the CVRD Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness set priorities for housing needs in the Comox Valley:

1. Mentally ill and addicted
2. Women fleeing abusive relationship
3. Families
4. Youth (over 15 years)
5. Seniors living alone.

Similar to many communities on the Island, all target groups include a portion of First Nations’ people.

Also identified by the homeless themselves was somewhere to go during the day and/or when time runs out at the shelter.

There is no low-barrier emergency housing or sobering centre available.

Transitional housing that is available includes hotels, motels and a few low-end- of- market (LEM) rental apartments and secondary suites.

Shelter or housing for youth under 19 years is not available.

Residential treatment, supportive recovery and detox beds are in short supply.

Also in January 2011, the CVRD Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness identified in particular: “...longer stay housing such as transitional housing, second stage housing and supportive housing...” to meet existing outstanding needs.

The Social Planning Consultant concludes that the City’s priorities, based on all the previous work done by others as well as his own recent investigation, should be as follows:

1. Supportive Housing for homeless, many of whom are suffering from mental health and substance use issues, be developed on the City-owned Braidwood site subject to administration of an EOI/RFP; and,

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2. 2nd Stage Housing for women fleeing violence be the City's second priority and pursued on a separate site in partnership with the Comox Valley Transition Society without the requirement of an EOI/RFP.

2.3 Shelter/Transition House Bed Capacity and Utilization.

Bed capacity and utilization statistics provided by the Salvation Army Community Ministries for Pidcock House and by the Comox Valley Transition Society for Lilli House were reviewed.

Pidcock House. Based on 12 permanent beds for men and 6 permanent beds for women, a total of 18 permanent beds, during 2013 there was a total capacity of 6,570 bed-nights at the Shelter. Out of 6,570 bed-nights available, 5,061 bed-nights were used, or on average 77% of capacity. However, if only the 14 BC Housing funded beds are included, this yields 5,110 bed-nights available and an average usage rate of 99% capacity. Further, 2013 bed use stats suggest that on an average night, for every person turned away (384 turnaways), there was an unused bed available (351 beds unused) at the Shelter. And, finally, while total bed-nights used rose from 2011 (4,739 bed-nights) to 2012 (5,527 bed-nights), bed-nights used declined from 2012 to 2013 (5,061 bed-nights), although not to their 2011 levels.

If the rules of admission were loosened and BC Housing funding increased, some extra capacity might be found at the Shelter. This does not include the 15 EWR beds which could be available year round, not just Nov 1st to March 31st. But this also depends probably on BC Housing funding.

Lilli House.

For the fiscal year 2006-2007, 139 women and 66 children stayed at Lilli House. Also during the same period, 35 women were enrolled in the Detox and Supportive Recovery program. For the 2013 calendar year, 155 women and 79 children stayed at Lilli House, and during the same period, 72 women were enrolled in the Detox/Supportive Recovery program.

In 2013, Lilli House was full 243 nights. In 2013, more than any previous year, staff was forced to find some women accommodation at local hotels because Lilli House was full. This was increasingly the case because women were staying longer at Lilli House as there is no 2nd stage housing available.

3. Provincial Homeless Initiative (PHI) Program and Braidwood Site Opportunities

PHI Program

BC Housing has provided the City \$50,000 in PDF (Proposal Development Funding) to pay for an EOI/RFP and schematic design and other preliminary work towards a supportive housing project. Typically, a supportive housing project would be in the range of 30 to 40 units. This ensures that the capital budget is in the \$6.0 to \$7.0 million range and the operating subsidy is around \$1,200.00 per unit per month net of the interest and principle on the 100% mortgage which BC Housing automatically assumes responsibility for.

From the previous review, two options emerge for the City-owned Braidwood Road site:

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The first option is to include a shelter and drop-in centre along with supportive housing for homeless, or just build supportive housing alone?

The second option is to build supportive housing for homeless only, or to take on the additional challenge of doing both a supportive housing for homeless on the Braidwood site, and a 2nd stage housing project for women fleeing violence on another site?

Supportive Housing for Homeless on the City-owned Braidwood Road Site in Courtenay

An analysis of the development capacity of the City-owned Braidwood Road site reveals that in order to keep within the 1.2 Floor Area Ratio (FAR), a supportive housing project of 30 studio units is possible. This assumes that half the ground floor and all of the 2nd and 3rd floors would be residential units. The other half of the ground floor would be offices and counselling rooms, a board room, a multi-purpose room and a laundry. Subject to geotechnical review, a partial basement would be provided to include mechanical, electrical, elevator and IT rooms, as well as bulk storage lockers for tenants. The basement is not included in the FAR calculation. In spite of these constraints, variances would be required to reduce the 3rd floor side yard setbacks from 6m to 4.5m (20 to 15 feet), reduce the parking requirements from 1.5 stalls per unit to 0.15 stalls per unit, and reduce usable outside open space to about 232 square meters (2,500 sf) in total. Homeless people do not own cars. Most of the parking will be for support staff and visiting specialist staff from local agencies. Other municipalities on the Island (Victoria, Nanaimo and Campbell River, for example) have parking requirements of 1 stall for every 10 units for supportive housing for homeless projects.

A specific development plan is required because the site is smaller and the FAR lower than would allow a more typical supportive housing project with, say, three residential floors of 12 units each, for a total of 36 units, and a full ground floor for offices and support amenities, and utility and service rooms.

No site is ideally located for homeless supportive housing. The Braidwood site is sandwiched between a retail/commercial use on one side and a multi-residential use on the other. It is opposite an older trailer park. In short, the site is located in what could be described as a transition zone. It is somewhat distant from the downtown area and public transit is not nearby, so it is not well located for an emergency shelter and drop-in centre. But it is an acceptable site for housing apartments for the homeless and tenant amenities to support them. It is also in close walking distance to the retail stores at the Washington Park Centre mall.

Proposed Publically-owned Site in Comox for 2nd Stage Housing for Women

In the Consultant's view and following the recommendations of many other groups in the Valley, the first priority must be development of supportive housing for adult homeless men and women. However, it emerged during discussions with community groups that the second priority should be the development of 2nd stage housing for women and single-parent women with children fleeing abusive domestic violence or homeless women experiencing violence on the street.

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Unlike supportive housing for homeless adult men and women, 2nd stage housing for women fleeing violence is distinctly different in several ways as earlier described in the background to this report.

The important conclusion is that these two initiatives must be considered separately yet simultaneously as they are both major deficiencies in the housing options available in the Valley.

Further, it must be appreciated that there need be no RFP for a site dedicated to the development of 2nd stage housing for women fleeing violence in the Valley. The Comox Valley Transition Society possesses the management and support staff trained and experienced to develop and operate such a project. No other non-profit group in the Valley can claim competency in this field.

Consider also the experience of the neighboring municipality to the North, Campbell River. Having developed 2nd stage housing for women first, they are now realizing that they still need supportive housing for homeless adult men and women.

Comox Valley Transition Society has revealed that they have approached a sympathetic public owner of a suitable site in the Town of Comox for development of a 2nd stage housing project for women fleeing violence.

This report recommends that the Town of Comox support this initiative and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure securing the site for the Comox Valley Transition Society for this purpose. This must include the Town of Comox entering into an MOU with BC Housing to provide the operating subsidy through the Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program (WTHSP) for this project.

DISCUSSION

"Luck favors the brave!"

The 810 Braidwood Road site is owned by the City of Courtenay. It is located in a "transition zone". It is smaller physically and lower in zoning density than ideal, but it is adequate for the purpose of supportive housing for homeless people. Maximizing the number of supportive housing units delivered on this site will remove these homeless people from having to use emergency shelters and drop-in centres. Although Pidcock House is operating close to capacity, removing 30 adult men and women from the street will relieve the pressure on the Salvation Army facility. Because the development capacity of the Braidwood site is limited, perhaps this will motivate BC Housing to consider also committing to building the 2nd stage housing for women fleeing violence in Comox as well. No thoughtful person would propose that single homeless men and women, many with challenges with mental health and substance use issues, would be compatible with single women and single-parent women with children fleeing violence. Thus, there is a need to separate these two kinds of social housing in considering how to move forward with both on separate sites.

Einstein purportedly said, "If I was given an hour to save the world, I would spend the first 55 minutes defining the problem!" Well, I must give the Comox Valley communities the credit for taking the first 55 minutes to define the problem. However, I believe, now is the time for decision.

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In my view, the City must proceed with engaging BC Housing in negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding similar to what Campbell River, Nanaimo and Victoria have previously entered into. If successfully negotiated, this will confirm the municipal contribution to BC Housing and confirm BC Housing's commitment to the project for the City .

The Social Planning Consultant is prepared on a pro bono basis to make himself available to the City of Courtenay and the District of Comox (and the friendly public institutional vendor) in entering into negotiations with BC Housing to secure both the municipal contribution and the BC Housing commitment to these two projects.

Are there any guarantees in all this? No. But the age old adage applies: "Nothing ventured. Nothing gained".

WORKING GROUP ON EOI/RFP FOR BRAIDWOOD SITE

The Social Planning Consultant proposes that an EOI/RFP be issued to all non-profit housing providers in the Comox Valley and on the Island as the means of selecting the housing provider for the supportive housing for homeless project on the City-owned 810 Braidwood Road site.

The EOI/RFP to be prepared, issued and evaluated by the Working Group comprised of the following members:

1. The Manager of Planning for the City, Mr. Ian Buck.
2. The Senior Project Officer assigned to the project by BC Housing, Ms. Donna Money.
3. The Manager of Mental Health and Substance Use, Mr. John Fitzgerald, or his designate.
4. A representative appointed by the BC Non-Profit Housing Association.
5. The Social Planning Consultant, Mr. John Jessup, as chair.

This is a professional/technical working group with knowledge and expertise in preparing, issuing and evaluating EOI/RFP submissions. The role of the working group is to recommend to City Council, the housing provider selected to operate the supportive housing for homeless project on the City-owned Braidwood site.

A comprehensive report on the EOI/RFP process will be provided to City Council. All of the results of the EOI/RFP submissions will be provided for Council's review. It will be City Council's decision alone as to which of the housing providers submitting should be appointed as project sponsor. Council will be under no obligation to appoint the sponsor recommended by the working group.

One final comment must be made on the selection criteria at this stage and that is the notion of building community capacity for supportive housing. There will be great temptation to go for non-profit housing providers with deep competence in the development, operation and management of supportive housing for homeless. Yet, the Social Planning Consultant highly recommends that extra points be given to local groups from the Comox Valley. Local non-profit societies whose members are drawn from the Comox Valley communities and whose boards of directors are nominated from community members will provide accountability at the local level. Even if locally based community non-profit groups are not

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fully competent to deal with the development and operational issues which emerge in a supportive housing for homeless project, the question is whether they are capable of rising to the challenge. Otherwise, the Comox Valley will be dependent upon the competence and expertise of outside groups, accountable to outside communities.

CITY FORGIVENESS OF DEVELOPMENT FEES AND CHANGES

Approval of a 60-year lease of the City-owned Braidwood Road site for \$10.00 nominal rent will require a two-thirds majority of Council. However, forgiveness of development permit and building permit fees and DCC's will require the City to identify an alternate source of funding for this purpose. The Director of Development Services advises that DP and DVP fees of \$4,500.00, building permit fees of \$7.50 per \$1,000 of construction value (\$30,000 for a \$4.0 million construction value), and DCC's in the range of \$375,000 would apply. The issue for the City is how would these costs be covered? Whether paid by the City or not, site servicing costs for the project would need to be determined following a site servicing study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Social Planning Consultant recommends:

- A. THAT Council authorizes the Social Planning Consultant under direction of the CAO to establish the Working Group described in this report to issue an EOI/RFP for development of the City-owned 810 Braidwood Road site as a supportive housing for homeless project for adult men and women.
- B. That the Social Planning Consultant immediately begin neighborhood consultation on the basis that the site will be developed as an approximately 30 unit supportive housing for homeless project.
- C. THAT Council instruct the Social Planning Consultant to work under direction of the CAO to enter into negotiations with BC Housing towards execution of an MOU between the City and BC Housing outlining municipal contributions to the project and committing BC Housing to a unit allocation to the project.
- D. THAT prior to entering into negotiations with BC Housing, the City of Courtenay undertake a preliminary geotechnical survey, a phase 1 environmental assessment, a hazardous materials survey of the existing building on the site, and a civil engineering review of the capacity of existing underground water, sanitary and storm infrastructure serving the 810 Braidwood Road site, to determine the extent of the City liabilities in regards to these issues for inclusion in the MOU.
- E. THAT the Social Planning Consultant under direction of the CAO enter into discussions with the Director of Development Services, the Director of Financial Services, and any other appropriate City staff to explore how the development fees and charges to be forgiven as part of the MOU with BC Housing for development of the Braidwood site will be recovered by the City.
- F. THAT the Mayor on behalf of City Council write a letter to the Mayor of the Town of Comox offering the services of the City's Social Planning Consultant on a pro bono basis to assist in

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securing the site for the Comox Valley Transition Society from the sympathetic public institution in Comox and to enter into negotiations with BC Housing to secure a unit allocation for the 2nd Stage Housing for women fleeing violence project proposed there.