

## CRD's 'watershed' moment

### Full support for housing plan: New strategy puts end to fighting, confusion

**Judith Lavoie**

Times Colonist

*Thursday, March 08, 2007*

The Capital Regional District board has passed a targeted plan to deal with the region's growing crisis of homelessness and housing affordability.

The strategy, which received unanimous approval yesterday, is intended to replace a scatter-gun approach that has been plagued by in-fighting, a lack of leadership and duplicated services.

"This is a watershed moment for the CRD because all municipalities are now part of a strategy in what I believe is a regional issue," Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe said yesterday.

Instead of service providers lobbying different municipalities and, in turn, municipalities lobbying the provincial and federal governments, there will now be a regional plan to leverage funding from other levels of government, Lowe said.

The Regional Housing Affordability Strategy is the first attempt to get municipalities, businesses, community service agencies and groups such as the Vancouver Island Health Authority and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., working together to solve housing issues.

"We will have overall planning decisions, which have been lacking in the past," said board chairwoman Denise Blackwell.

Persuading every municipality to work together is a huge accomplishment, said Victoria Coun. Dean Fortin.

"I think all politicians of whatever stripe and whatever party are now saying 'yes, you need to do something about affordable housing.'"

Homelessness and lack of affordable housing is not an insurmountable problem, Fortin said. "Absolutely, we can solve it."



CREDIT: Bruce Stotesbury / Times Colonist

Linda Ross, CEO of the Aboriginal Housing Management Association, says the region's new plan to deal with homelessness and housing will help her organization make the best use of a recent \$50.9-million affordable-housing grant from the federal government.

Under the strategy, the Capital Region Housing Corp. will be realigned to form an affordable housing secretariat, under the leadership of Housing Corp. executive director Henry Kamphof, and a regional homelessness secretariat, led by CRD health planner Jeremy Tate.

The plan calls for a regional homelessness task force to come up with an action plan and ensure mental health, addictions, housing and other programs are aimed at the most needy areas, without duplication or gaps.

At the meeting, directors singled out VIHA as an agency that needs to come to the table with commitment.

Kelly Reid, VIHA manager for residential services, said in an interview that VIHA is excited about the initiative, but, with a plethora of health priorities, could not commit to more dollars. But, he said, the new strategy will help VIHA prioritize its funding. The strategy received accolades from non-profit groups and the development industry.

Linda Ross, CEO of the Aboriginal Housing Management Association, praised the new strategy, saying the plan is needed to help her organization make best use of a recent \$50.9-million affordable-housing grant from the federal government. "Without some partnerships and organized strategy it's not going to go very far," she said.

Marie Savage, Urban Development Institute administrative co-ordinator, said the development industry is looking for ways to create affordable housing, and that "bringing together all the housing groups and giving them one co-ordinated place to get the information they need for funding is a fantastic thing."

Mabel Jean Rawlins-Brannan, Victoria Community Council executive director, said the unanimous support was a milestone.

"I would love to break open a bottle of champagne right now," she said.