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## March/April 2008 Newsletter

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### Cowichan Regional Child Care Task Force Kicks Off

The first meeting of the Social Planning Cowichan Regional Child Care Task Force was held on February 25th. Participants gave an update on the latest developments in the Cowichan Region and reviewed concerns and priorities. It was agreed that the educational component of child care is extremely important; child care is more than babysitting.

The group reviewed the highlights of the Victoria Child Care Council and a report by Ada Mawson of the Coast Salish Employment and Training Society. It was decided to increase the membership of the group to create a broader representation of the community. The next meeting is planned for mid-April.

### Message from the Chair

These have been exceptionally busy but most productive months. We have held three Affordable Housing Directorate meetings and our first Regional Child Care Task Force meeting.

These meetings were well attended and generated lots of good discussion. As you probably know, affordable housing and child care are Social Planning Cowichan's top priorities. Both are lacking – but in high demand! These are both complex issues which will probably take some time before we realize changes. Nevertheless, it's important that we get organized and get the proverbial ball rolling.

Valerie Nicol, Vice-Chair and I met recently with Linda Reid, Minister of Child Care and Claire Trevena, NDP Child Care Critic. Both meetings provided an opportunity to explain the drastic situation in the Cowichan Region and pose some questions on behalf of children, families, child care centres, businesses, the School District and the broader community. We certainly made our voices known that it cannot get much worse.

On the brighter side, we are pleased to have received funding from the Cowichan Regional District for this fiscal year. We believe the work we do – raising issues of community concern to improve the quality of life in our communities - is important, and obviously so does our local government. It is hard to do this work without an office, telephone or administrative support – so thank you council members!

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank all those generous people who are taking part in our housing and child care forums. The path ahead is likely long and bumpy, but walking it together makes all the difference.

**Candace Spilsbury, Chair  
Social Planning Cowichan**

## Regional Affordable Housing Directorate Update

The most recent meeting of the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate took place in mid-February. The group heard from planners Tom Anderson (CVRD) and Chris Hall, District of North Cowichan.

While there is no formal plan for affordable housing in the Cowichan Region, both planners described some ways, particularly the promotion of secondary suites, zoning, and the preservation of older homes to increase density and affordability. The issue of affordable housing, however, is complex.

With four municipal governments and nine electoral districts, arriving at a regional plan that everyone would support is challenging. There are other complexities as well. The village areas are not connected to services, so building larger complexes to realize economies of scale, is difficult. In addition, while local government representatives might support affordable housing, community support, in most cases, is lacking - "not in my backyard."

Comments from the Directorate:

- Affordable Housing should be legislated by government and should be attractive to developers and bankers, as they are the hold back in most cases.
- Affordable Housing should be part of an overall affordable life-style that includes transportation, schools, stores, child care etc.
- Affordable Housing is possible in smaller rural areas. Ontario has some good examples.

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This newsletter is produced by-monthly by Social Planning Cowichan. For more information contact Veronica Scott at [verscott@telus.net](mailto:verscott@telus.net) or 733-2441.

## Social Planning Cowichan Meets with Minister

Candace Spilsbury, Board Chair and Valerie Nicol, Vice-Chair had a 45-minute meeting with Linda Reid, Minister of Child Care, in mid-March. The purpose of the meeting was to express concern about the severe shortage of child care in the Cowichan Region. At this time only 48% of the need is being met. If planned school closures take place, the available number of spaces will drop even lower. This is because child care services are offered at three of the schools slated to close.

"We wanted to tell Minister Reid directly about the critical shortage in this area. We wanted to hear her ideas for how the situation can be improved," said Spilsbury. "We weren't able to find immediate solutions, but at least she knows how critical the situation is here," said Nicol. "We're on the radar." The two presented the Minister's office with a list of questions concerning almost every aspect of child care provision. They were given assurances that answers would be forthcoming.

"It's becoming even more of a serious situation because Cobble Hill, Alexander, Drinkwater and Maple Bay Elementary will be forced to close their child care services to make room for elementary students absorbed from the four closed schools, Spilsbury said.