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SOCIAL PLANNING COWICHAN TURNS EFFORTS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE COWICHAN VALLEY

DUNCAN – Now that a site for the Cowichan Valley Housing and Resource Centre has been purchased in Duncan and construction can begin, Social Planning Cowichan will turn its attention to the need for affordable housing in the Cowichan Valley.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (Cowichan Branch) will oversee the operations of the Centre. “We will still be involved in the project as it moves forward, but more as key members on the Advisory Planning Committee,” said Candace Spilsbury, Social Planning Cowichan Board Chair.

Social Planning Cowichan recently completed a comprehensive study of affordable housing in the Cowichan Valley. Funding for the \$45,000 report came from BC Housing following meetings with the Duncan United Church Outreach Committee.

“Our findings show that while a shelter and resource centre for the homeless is vitally important, the need for affordable housing is a key issue here in the Cowichan Valley,” she said. “We need regional plans and policies so that people who cannot afford today's soaring housing prices and high rents have safe and secure places to live. Right now we have far too many people couch surfing and barely hanging on to the roof over their heads,” she noted. “It's a sad, troubling situation for so many people, not only here but throughout our province. We plan to do something about it.”

Recommendations from the comprehensive 120-page draft report include developing a CVRD Growth Strategy that includes affordable housing; establishing an action oriented Cowichan Valley Affordable Housing Council that brings together local housing groups, developers and municipal representatives to advocate for affordable housing; and pro-actively preventing homelessness by championing more day care services, support for employed people - particularly the working poor, and ensuring we have adequate mental health and addiction counselling services.

“Our next step is to meet with representatives of local, provincial governments to develop some action plans. 'Action' is the key word here. A lot of work went into this report and the last thing we want is for it to sit on a shelf gathering dust. We believe we have a 'made in the Cowichan Valley' solution to affordable housing, now we want to get to work as soon as possible,” she noted. The final draft of the report will be completed by late spring.

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