



# STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

**DATE OF REPORT** June 7, 2024  
**MEETING TYPE & DATE** Committee of the Whole of June 26, 2024  
**FROM:** Economic Development Division  
Strategic Services Department  
**SUBJECT:** Cowichan Region Workforce Housing Strategy  
**FILE:** 6750-20 REG 2022-2023 Workforce Housing

## **PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Cowichan Region Workforce Housing Strategy. It will be accompanied by a presentation from CitySpaces Consulting.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION**

That it be recommended to the Board that:

- 1) The recommendations outlined in the Cowichan Region Workforce Housing Strategy (Attachment A) under the “Four Strategy Areas” be considered for implementation as resources and priorities allow; and
- 2) The CVRD send letters to each member municipality thanking them for their participation, informing them of the completion of the Cowichan Region Workforce Housing Strategy, and offering for Economic Development staff to visit their Council to discuss the recommendations.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the December 8, 2021 CVRD Board meeting, a resolution was passed approving the development of a regional Workforce Housing Strategy (Resolution 21-539). The goal of the project was to identify actions for increasing housing availability and affordability for the labour force. Economic Development Cowichan (EDC) led this project on behalf of the CVRD, with support from Cowichan Housing Association and CitySpaces Consulting.

Work on the project began in 2022 with the launch of the Workforce Housing Surveys for employers and workers. The results demonstrated the impacts that housing challenges were having on both businesses and workers, and pointed to a suite of potential solutions to the housing crisis, spanning local government, non-profit, and the private sector. The results were presented to the CVRD’s Committee of the Whole on February 8, 2023.

In 2023, EDC and CitySpaces undertook additional research and engagement through multiple rounds of workshops and extensive one-on-one meetings with a large variety of stakeholders to inform the development of the Strategy. This process identified a multitude of underlying factors that were impacting workforce housing in the region, as well as potential solutions. The project team, in consultation with stakeholders and the CVRD Board, narrowed the focus of the project to four key areas for action:

- Enable industry-led workforce housing solutions
- Accelerate housing development
- Enhance short-term rental regulations
- Establish a housing corporation

The Cowichan Region Workforce Housing Strategy is included as Attachment A to this report. It is accompanied by three companion documents:

- Attachment B: Worker Snapshots, illustrates the diverse types of households experiencing a range of housing situations in the Cowichan region
- Attachment C: Case Studies, explores a range of housing solutions that have been implemented in other communities
- Attachment D: Context, provides the background content with respect to the approach and project phases, engagement process, as well as key indicators that demonstrate workforce housing needs and issues in Cowichan

## **ANALYSIS**

In the fall of 2023, as the project team was completing the first draft of the Workforce Housing Strategy, the Province of BC announced a suite of new legislation on housing and short-term rentals that had substantial impacts on the draft report. This necessitated a significant rewrite of the Strategy, and additional engagement, in particular with CVRD staff, to ensure alignment with the CVRD's response to the new legislation. Details on the roll-out of the new Provincial regulations continue to be announced, and the landscape continues to change, which has made it difficult to predict the impact of the new regulations. The Workforce Housing Strategy is in part designed to be an input into the CVRD and municipalities' response to the new legislation, while recognizing that there are still many unknowns.

Actions aiming to enable industry-led workforce housing solutions are to:

- Establish sites for seasonal workers accommodation, and
- Facilitate opportunities for groups of businesses to pursue joint workforce housing projects.

To accelerate housing development, the Strategy proposes to:

- Include temporary housing in Temporary Use Permit (TUP) guidelines;
- Educate the public on alternative housing forms;
- Encourage local businesses to participate in the Province's Standardized Housing Design Project;
- Host a Modular Housing Construction Summit;
- Investigate enabling policy to support industry-led solutions;
- Identify public lands that may support housing development;
- Expand areas zoned for manufactured home parks;
- Investigate labour shortage solutions in the construction and development industries;
- Explore the use of rental tenure zoning; and
- Collect data on modular housing construction.

Actions under the theme of enhancing short-term rental (STR) regulations are to:

- Provide opportunities for legal STRs to support temporary worker housing and tourism;
- Develop a business licensing program for STRs;
- Enhance the availability of on-farm agri-tourism accommodations; and
- Monitor the impact of changing Provincial and local regulations.

As a first step towards establishing a housing corporation, the Strategy proposes to:

- Conduct a feasibility study to identify the framework and process for transitioning Cowichan Housing Association to a Housing Corporation.

Looking forward to implementation, organizational capacity is likely to be the most significant limiting factor in progressing the recommended actions. However, Board support of these recommendations will allow staff to advance initiatives as and when resources and priorities allow.

Implementation of EDC-specific elements of the Strategy, including the timelines suggested in the report, can also be considered as part of the EDC Strategic Plan process. Furthermore, several of the recommendations have identified other CVRD divisions and municipalities as the lead for implementation. These recommendations are meant to inform and supplement work that is already underway to respond to the new Provincial legislation. Also, many of the recommendations will be advanced in partnership with industry stakeholders, some of which have already been identified by staff.

Throughout the project, staff and stakeholders recognized that the implementation of the actions within the Strategy would be enhanced by the establishment of a regional planning function. In particular, many stakeholders expressed a desire to see a collaborative, regional approach to servicing that is tied to land use planning and includes First Nations. Also, a regional housing coordinator position was noted as a potential outcome of the establishment of a regional planning function, and an opportunity to implement actions within the Workforce Housing Strategy and [Attainable Housing Strategy](#). The report includes a recommendation to this effect.

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Cowichan Workforce Housing Strategy was funded by \$27,000 from Function 121 – Economic Development, and \$50,000 from Function 100 – General Government Strategic Initiatives Fund.

There is currently no funding within Function 121 – Economic Development dedicated to implementing the recommendations in this report. Among options for implementation, staff will continue to monitor possible grant funding opportunities and bring those forward to the Board for consideration.

### **COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS**

A press release on the strategy will be released through the CVRD. The strategy will be available on the CVRD and EDC websites, and on the Plan Your Cowichan project page.

### **STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS**


This project supports objective 7 of the CVRD Corporate Strategic Plan: to make available a range of housing options and housing tenures at different income levels and stages of life. Specifically, it satisfies Action 7.2: complete the Workforce Housing Strategy.

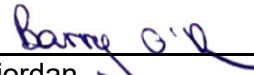
Referred to (upon completion):

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- Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
  - Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
  - Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
  - Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
  - Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Financial Considerations:

Corporate Officer

Chief Financial Officer

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A – Cowichan Region Workforce Housing Strategy
- Attachment B – Companion Document: Worker Snapshots
- Attachment C – Companion Document: Case Studies
- Attachment D – Companion Document: Context