

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Ladysmith Resources Centre Association (LRCA)**

**314 Buller Street, Affordable Housing Project**



***Selection Criteria Questions:*** *who will occupy this building, how will they be selected, what is the selection criteria, does the distribution reflect need?*

As owner of the building, the LRCA will select the building's tenants. However, the selection will be based on tenants fitting into the specified population and income groups, and their individual suitability (e.g., the ability to live independently) for the building based on BC Housing criteria.

Our target populations are people with a developmental disability, seniors and families. These coincide with BC Housing's target populations for the Community Housing Fund program.

BC Housing's target populations are aimed to facilitate the development of mixed income affordable housing and financial viability of the project. BC Housing specifies 3 income groups: 30% of units must be for those of moderate income paying affordable market rents (90% of market rents), 50% of units are 'rent geared to income' (RGI) with rents that are 30% of the tenant's income, and 20% of units are low income, deep subsidy units (current around \$375 per month/welfare shelter allowance).

In accordance with BC Housing policies, the selection of building's tenants for RGI and deep subsidy units will be from the BC Housing Registry. Once construction starts, people seeking to become tenants of the building will be able to put their name on the registry.

The Supported Housing Committee of the LRCA is made up of individuals with a developmental disability and their parents. This Committee's input, along with input from LRCA program staff, and data from our partners at Social Planning Cowichan and the Cowichan Housing Association mean the LRCA is confident that this project's target populations are the right choices in terms of needs.

***Construction Questions:*** *When will construction start, and what is the current funding status?*

We anticipate construction will begin in the late winter/early spring of 2019/2020 and that the building would be completed in 12 to 18 months.

The LRCA has been granted \$3.5 million dollars by BC Housing conditional upon final approval. The remainder of the construction cost will come in the form of a low interest mortgage, financed by BC Housing and paid, in part, by the LRCA from rents charged to tenants.

***Building Design Questions:*** *how many units will be built, why the buildup of units along Buller versus 3<sup>rd</sup>, what type of units and how many, why this distribution of units, will this building be accessible, will this building be environmentally friendly and why 4 floors?*

Plans include 36 (4 studios, 29 one bedroom, and 3 two bedroom) units. This distribution of unit types is based on balancing need and affordability and adheres to BC Housing formula requirements.

The building design focuses on putting the majority of units along Buller Street. This design is the result of looking to best practices in design standards - placing parking out of view from the street.

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100% of the units will be universal design in terms of doorway widths, turning radiuses for wheelchairs and scooters, etc. 30% of the units will be adaptable (if required) to full accessibility (lower counters, sinks, etc.)

At minimum, the building will be built to BC Step Code 3. A Step Code 3 build will mean a building envelope that is 50% more efficient than 2012 BC Building Code requirements. It could be the most energy efficient building in Ladysmith.

The 4th floor contains 1 studio, 9 one-bedroom units, and 1 two bedroom unit. These represent 30% of the suites in the building. However, removing 30% of the units does not remove 30% of the construction or operating costs of the building. This is the most important fact to consider when it comes to the economics of the building. There are economies of scale in terms of the construction and the ongoing operation of the building. For example, the foundation for 3 stories would cost essentially the same as for 4 stories, as would the roof - the same holds true for essentially everything in between. The construction cost per square foot comes down as the overall square footage increases. When it comes to operation of the building, many costs would be very close to the same for 3 floors as 4. For example, the amount of landscaping, and then ongoing landscape maintenance would be the same. Obviously, it costs more to build and maintain a larger building - but it does not cost 30% less to build and operate one made that much smaller. The rents within the building will range from 10% to 50+% below market rents. With these low rents, generating the necessary revenue to cover the mortgage, a property manager, day to day maintenance, long term contingency funds for major repairs, etc. is a challenge. Taking away 30% of the units makes this all but impossible. In short, 36 units are required for the building to be economically viable to build, operationally sustainable over its lifetime, and to ensure that the building is well maintained functionally and aesthetically. There is also the matter of helping as many people as possible. The 4th floor could house 12-24 people, depending on if it is singles or couples occupying the units.

***Impact on the Community Questions:*** *how will this housing project fit into the LRCA's mandate and programs, will this create safety issues, how will this reduce homelessness, will this impact the quality of my neighbourhood or the value of my house, will this increase traffic in the area, will we lose parking spaces along 3<sup>rd</sup> and Buller, will this increase the noise, and will this decrease views and sunlight, how will your management of the housing reduce possible impacts on the neighbourhood, what about parking?*

In 2017 the LRCA adopted a new Vision to be *The Centre of Social Change in Ladysmith*. At the same time a new Mission for the Organization was adopted "Enriching the lives of people in the community through advocacy, programs and partnerships". This Vision and Mission are decidedly proactive, and this housing is an ambitious project to proactively address some of the local housing crisis.

The LRCA provides programs and services to some of the most vulnerable people in Ladysmith. Many do not have access to safe and affordable housing. By providing housing, the LRCA can work 'upstream' to address the impacts of poverty for a number of our community members.

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The Buller property was chosen due to its availability, price, and proximity to the current operations of the LRCA. It is expected that the LRCA will be providing program support (like the food bank, counselling, soup kitchen, income tax preparation etc.), too many of the individuals and families living in the building. We envision the building as part of the LRCA and the LRCA as part of the building. This location will also provide residents with easy access to shops and other services in the Ladysmith downtown.

The LRCA has provided services to the community since 1992 and has operated at its present site since 2011. Hundreds of people per week utilize LRCA programs at 630 - 2nd Ave. Over the years the LRCA has been a good neighbour, ensuring that day to day operations have a positive impact on the neighbourhood. This project will be managed to the same high standards.

A staple of Urban and Community planning is that more eyes mean greater security. A greater number of people in the neighbourhood will increase safety and security for everyone in the neighbourhood. This building will be a home to its tenants - they will have a vested interest in the building and its surroundings being a nice, safe place to live.

The continuum of housing looks at the range of shelter and housing options. It includes emergency shelter, supportive housing, affordable rental housing, rental market and home ownership. **This project is affordable rental housing.** By providing affordable rental housing in a market where there are very low levels of vacancy, we can prevent people from becoming homeless. Homelessness is a complex issue, but one of the root causes is low income and this creates a huge barrier in accessing housing where rental rates are so high.

The Government of British Columbia did two very extensive studies on the impact of Non-Market Housing on Property Values in 1995 and 2000. Both studies concluded that **there was no evidence to show that social housing or non-market housing affected property values.** The evidence demonstrates that non-market projects have not had a negative impact on the sale prices of nearby homes, and in fact average sale prices increased in the time since the non-market homes were introduced.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the occupants of the building will not have a BC driver's license because of disability, age, or will not be able to own a vehicle due to financial reasons. This is why walkability and proximity of the building to the LRCA and the downtown area is beneficial. We anticipate that because of our target populations, we will not see an increase of traffic or a loss of parking spots. 12 spots of parking will be removed from the Buller Street side, the boulevard reclaimed for pedestrian traffic with a winding sidewalk and 'greened' with trees, grass and plants. The onsite parking will add 18 parking spots and 11 parking spots will be added on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Moving the parking will make the spots much more accessible. the majority of tenant car traffic will come from the alleyway, reducing traffic noise.

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<sup>1</sup> "Impact Of Non-Market Housing On Property Values - Publications - Housing Policy - Housing And Construction Standards". *Housing.Gov.Bc.Ca*, 2018, [http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/pub/htmldocs/pub\\_Jan00PropVal.htm#similar](http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/pub/htmldocs/pub_Jan00PropVal.htm#similar). Accessed 3 Aug 2018.

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Shadow studies have been conducted on the design and results show that the building will open views and sunlight to the North East. SE views will affect one house which is already currently affected by the church.

#### **Miscellaneous Questions:**

- **Many of the residents will have mobility issues, why would you build on a hill?**  
Unfortunately, there are not many properties located in Ladysmith that don't face this challenge. 314 Buller Street property was chosen due to its pricing, availability and proximity to the LRCA and downtown shops and services. Efforts will be taken to reduce the mobility challenges of building on a hill include the creation of parking for scooters.
- **36 units is insufficient given the housing need, why are you not building more?** Lot size and financing limits the number of units that can be built.
- **Will this negatively affect the LRCA's capacity to provide social programs to the broader community?** Affordable Housing will support the LRCA's capacity to address the needs of the community. Social services make much more of an impact on an individual or on families when their basic needs, such as housing, are taken care of.
- **Will this negatively affect the LRCA's financial stability?** The budget and proposal for the housing project is completely separate from the operations of the LRCA. BC Housing requires the building to be self sufficient in order to provide funding.
- **The look of this building does not fit in with the neighbourhood/community, why not go with another design?** *Work continues to look at how we can make the building reflect aspects of its surrounding community. However, other aspects such as financial viability and addressing housing needs are also factors in the design. The building's shape is relatively simple because the costs associated with the BC Step Code 3 absorb a larger portion of the budget than an average build. However, with that efficiency comes lower utility costs, greater comfort for tenants, as well as a smaller environmental footprint. Preliminary plans are just that, preliminary. Over the coming months the initial design of the building will be fine-tuned, more details will be added, and a variety of materials incorporated which will help the building fit into the neighbourhood aesthetically.*
- **The Church was an historic building, why was it not incorporate it into the design of the project?** In 2015 81% of the congregation voted to disband the congregation because the building was beyond repair. Representatives from the Ladysmith Historical Society and the Town of Ladysmith's Heritage Revitalization Advisory Commission toured the structure and agreed that the building was not salvageable. Artifacts of importance have been saved. This includes some signage, a number of pews, the church's bell and the pinnacle of the steeple.
- **Would the money received by BC Housing be better spent on the food bank or other existing programs?** BC Housing and other government funders outline the allowable expenses and organizations are bound by these requirements. Many of the LRCA's programs are reactive in nature, this project is proactive in nature. By reducing tenant's cost of living expenses, it addresses upstream causes of poverty, thereby reducing reliance on the LRCA's other programs.

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- ***How was/will the community be consulted as this project progresses should funding be obtained?*** A Neighbourhood Information Meeting held on August 22nd, 2018, was a major time for community input. The rezoning application (to allow increased density) was first considered by Council on August 20th, 2018. Council referred the application to its Advisory Planning Commission (APC) for their consideration and input. The APC considered the application on September 13th, 2018. The rezoning application underwent a second reading at Council, followed by a Public Hearing, then a 3rd reading and a vote by Council which approved the rezoning, increased density and a variance allowing the building a maximum height of 14 metres (up from the 12 metres previous allowed on the site. Following rezoning, building plans are to be finalized and a Development Permit will be sought from the Town. The Development Permit process has multiple stages as well. Like the rezoning, the Development Permit process follows an open and public process laid out by the Town of Ladysmith with allowances for public input throughout.