

The CRD and the housing trust fund

Posted by

Friday, 11 February 2005 09:34 - Last Updated Friday, 11 February 2005 09:34

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There's been some discussion, and voting, about affordable housing in the CRD, the attached story outlines who voted in which way. A trust fund is one idea, but it puts the burden back on the hard working middle class. Legislating developers to build a percentage of affordable housing with each new project is another option being discussed. The citizenry have lots of good ideas - collect more taxes from those who own, but don't live here is another idea, or why not implement a rent freeze within buildings once the mortgage is paid.

If people appreciate the importance of housing, and develop a philosophy of inclusion - recognizing that the right of all to decent shelter exceeds the right of owners and developers to grow ever richer - then many of our social ills (including drug addiction and theft) will be on the road towards greater personal and community health.

http://www.canada.com/victoria/timescolonist/news/capital_van_isl/story.html?id=aefc0ae1-54c6-4fb6-b68a-66113826b958 <http://streetnewz.communitypipe.org>
Special CRD committee looks for accord on housing trust fund

Norman Gidney

Times Colonist

February 10, 2005

A proposed \$1-million regional housing trust fund is going to a special committee to hammer out a consensus for the concept around the board table at the Capital Regional District.

After an intensive round of presentations to each council over two weeks in January, only three of the CRD's 13

municipalities have said yes -- Victoria, Metchosin and North Saanich. Four more have said no or not now, or not this way

-- Sidney, Esquimalt, Langford and Colwood.

Six others -- Central Saanich, Highlands, Oak Bay, Saanich, Sooke and View Royal -- are in

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the "yes, but" category and want more information, major changes or more time to decide.

Several smaller municipalities shared Sooke's concern about getting "its fair share of affordable housing projects," as Mayor Janet Evans told the CRD in a letter. Sooke also wants the right to drop out later, if it joins now.

Taxing local homeowners to generate a special fund for affordable housing has been discussed locally for years, but it still generated lots of argument at the CRD on Wednesday.

Seeing his own municipality of Sidney listed in the negative in a staff report, CRD chairman Mayor Don Amos said: "I'm a little upset to see the heading, 'not prepared to participate.'"

"We're not saying we're not in favour of affordable housing, or not in favour of a trust fund. We didn't fudge our responsibility to the board. We said we're not ready to participate at this time."

Esquimalt Mayor Darwin Robinson emphasized his council's unanimous straight-up rejection. "We'll continue to do our own thing. There was absolutely no appetite for participation in another CRD activity."

The municipality has worked with a local nonprofit group to see affordable housing built, and will continue to do that, he said.

"I think most people in Langford just don't want it applied to their taxes," said Coun. Lanny Seaton of the Western Communities' biggest municipality. Langford has its

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own program and so far 14 homes to be sold at cost to low-income families are being set aside by developers in new projects.

Highlands representative Coun. Marie Brotherston said her community might look at joining the trust fund next year. Locating such housing projects in Highlands "wouldn't be appropriate . . . we're not close to transit."

Coun. Carol Pickup downplayed the objections of Saanich, which had a

fractious three-hour debate on the issue at its council meeting. It would be the single-biggest contributor to the fund at \$298,000 a year.

"It's a question of the t's and i's that need to be dotted in the bylaw,"

she said.

Fellow Saanich Coun. Leif Wergeland said waiting would be better. "Even if we have to wait a year to build consensus, it will be worthwhile. I believe rushing is not going to help us."

That prompted Saanich Coun. David Cubberley to say another delay was

"foot-dragging." There have been many meetings on this issue, he said. "I see the opportunity in front of us."

CRD planning director Mark Hornell said the board could proceed with just the three supportive municipalities, generating a total of \$302,000 towards the \$1-million target. Another option presented was to pull together a working committee to answer concerns, or postpone it until 2006.

Directors picked the second option, and decided to use the regional planning committee as a vehicle to hammer out a trust fund bylaw that brought more municipalities under the same roof. They're aiming for a March 23 deadline, so the new tax could be added to municipal property

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tax bills this year.

The committee will also discuss other ways of generating the money, such as gas tax rebates coming from Ottawa and promised new funds under a federal "new deal" for municipalities, as well as provincial money that could be in next week's B.C. budget.