

PARKSVILLE – OCEANSIDE REGION SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

May 2nd, 2018

From: Parksville/Qualicum KAIROS Committee*
To: Oceanside Churches and their congregations
Re: Proposed Supportive Housing Project at 222 Corfield Street, Parksville.

“For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”

Matthew 25:42-43

P/Q KAIROS members, as well as members of Oceanside churches, are challenged by the Matthew 25: 31-46 passage as we endeavour, by God’s grace, to help find reconciliation and right relations in all that we do as individuals and groups in the communities where we live and work. Sometime this means praying with our feet by attending a meeting or writing a letter in support for people less fortunate than ourselves. These are both theological and political acts.

Today, those of us who live in Oceanside are faced with a **human rights issue** right on our own doorstep – that of Supportive Housing for people in our community who have no choice but to live in a tent or on the streets, sleeping in secluded doorways and, at best, extreme cold weather shelters. We can either see this as a challenge we feel we can’t or that we don’t want to deal with OR we can see this as an opportunity – an opportunity to ‘*help provide for the hungry, the homeless, the thirsty, the stranger*’ - the sinned against of our society. **Is this a God given opportunity to be the “Caring Community” that we profess to be? Is this an opportunity to support every effort to provide a Supportive Housing facility – right in the middle of our community?**

There is no easy answer. Many concerns have been raised by local residents both for and against the new residence. One concern is the likelihood that a low-income community may include people with drug addictions and people with criminal records coming from other parts of the Island or the mainland to find supportive housing in this nice new facility. Some say we are a tourist town and don’t want our local stores and other facilities adversely affected. Some anticipate an increase in crime, and in the number of used needles around our streets and parks. Other local residents see this as one part of the answer to the dire need for affordable accommodation for existing low-income families and individuals who currently live here and are part of the Oceanside community.

The following is an attempt to answer ten of the most commonly asked questions being raised by concerned local resident of Oceanside. Most of the answers have been taken from the information documents supplied by the various organizations involved in the housing process. You are encouraged to take the next step suggested in Question #9 on page 3 and to seek further information from the websites and address listed at the end of this paper.

The voices of all the residents of Oceanside are needed, not just Parksville residents.

Questions/Answers:

1. Is homelessness in Oceanside, as big a problem as it is made out to be?

One of the main responsibilities of the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness has been the monitoring of homelessness as this relates to the need for affordable housing. The result of the homeless count in 2013 was 66 homeless individuals, 66% of respondents were residents of Oceanside for more than 1 year; 40% were older than 45. In 2017, 101 unique individuals accessed the Extreme Weather Response Shelter. The results of the count done on April 18th, 2018 are not available but all indications are that numbers are on the increase.

2. Why do we need a Supportive Housing facility in Oceanside and why Parksville?

The need is evident and has to be addressed as soon as possible. If we do nothing not only will the cost to human suffering increase but also the financial costs related to providing supportive facilities such as those currently proposed. The land on which the proposed Supportive Housing project is to be built is owned jointly by the **City of Parksville**, the **Town of Qualicum Beach** and the **Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN)**. (The RDN includes the surrounding communities of French Creek, Nanoose Bay, Bowser and Errington/Coombs/Hilliers.) Consequently, all residents of these areas can be involved as concerned citizens by conveying their opinion to the Parksville Council and/or speaking at public meetings. (See #9 below)

3. Why give people who live on the streets a nice new apartment? Is it not better to help them get a job, provide a drug addiction or medical treatment center, or provide more space in night shelters or hostels, BEFORE provide housing?

The answer is NO. Finland has solved its homeless problem by providing supportive housing first and then tackling the other related issues. The programme, introduced in 2007, is called **HOUSING FIRST** and has not only reduced homelessness to practically zero but also reduced the resources needed for related support services such as night shelters, hostels, transition houses and medical care provided by government funding. Crime statistics have also dropped. It is a success model being seriously looked at by the UK and other European countries and also Australia. The Housing First principles are now being applied in some areas across Canada.

4. Why is the Supportive Housing to be built at 222 Corfield Street and who will be responsible for managing the proposed facility?

The land on which the proposed Supportive Housing project is to be built is situated in Parksville. Consequently, the **Parksville City Council** has jurisdiction over the land and the responsibility for changes to zoning bylaws before the construction of the new facility can begin. In addition, **BC Housing** assigned \$6.9 million towards the construction and on-going costs of the proposed Supportive Housing. The **Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS)** was involved in the initial discussions and will be responsible for the on-going management of the facility. The **Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness** and the **Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN)** have also assisted in the initial planning and will be involved, in various ways, in the days to come.

5. What will the building look like and how many will it accommodate?

The building will be a three-story modular (factory-built) housing structure. It will have approximately 50 units of permanent supportive housing and space for winter shelter use. The units will be safe and

secure self-contained (own bathroom and kitchenette) studios with shared amenity space. There will be space for the ICCS staff to provide services as needed.

6. Why must this housing facility be built so close to downtown? One of the key factors in choosing the 222 Corfield Street location is that **it is within walking distance to basic amenities** which people need, particularly Oceanside Health Centre. Access to the SOS, Salvation Army, the library (for computer use), transit, the stores, and employment areas is also convenient, helping tenants achieve success in their transition from homelessness. The tenants will have their own address. **They will have a safe place to live.**

7. Who will select the people who get these new apartments and will they be rent free? The ICCS will be responsible for screening the new tenants. Homeless people who apply to live here will need to meet eligibility requirements, including a police check and will be assessed to ensure that their needs can be met through on-site and off-site support. Drug/medical needs will be part of this assessment process. All residents will pay rent and sign a program agreement. **Oceanside residents will be given priority.**

8. Some of these tenants may have drug addictions, a criminal history, poor communications skills, or a history of property damage. Will there be any kind of support services in place for people learning to cope with such challenges?

Not all homeless people have addictions or a criminal history. It is not known yet how many potential tenants will need addiction counselling or medical referrals. The estimate is around 10%. Support services will be provided 24/7 by the Island Crisis Care Centre (ICCS) for all residents as needed.

9. What is our role if we want to demonstrate that we are a Caring Community and that we approve of the decision to have a Supportive Housing facility built at 222 Corfield Street S?

- a. **Write/email** a letter of support to the Mayor of Parksville and to the Councillors as soon as possible. **Letters from all residents of Oceanside are needed, not just Parksville.**
- b. **Attend the City of Parksville Council meetings** dealing with the first, second and third readings of Zoning Amendment Bylaw 2018 2000.116 concerning 222 Corfield Street S. property.
- c. **Attend the public hearing** that will be called by the City of Parksville, likely the end of May or beginning of June, and **voice your support.**

10. Will there be opportunities to volunteer or to donate items for the residents? How can I give ongoing support to this project?

All potential volunteers must pass a criminal record check and complete volunteer training. The building will have limited storage and sorting space for donations. ICCS will release a list of small or consumable items it will receive on site. Other donations will be directed to the Society of Organized Services (SOS) and the Salvation Army. Individuals are encouraged to speak to their neighbours about the benefits Supportive Housing will bring and participate in the public

