

May 25, 2020

RE: Public Hearing on the Cortes Island Seniors Society proposal for 965 Beasley Rd

Attention: Strathcona Regional District Board

Dear SRD Directors,

On behalf of the Cortes Island Seniors Society with respect to our Rezoning/OCP amendment application for 965 Beasley Rd, we are pleased to see that a tentative Public Hearing date of June 23rd 2020 has been proposed. We are writing this letter to emphasize the importance of holding a Public Hearing – both to our organisation and to the larger Cortes Island community.

In 2018, BC Housing selected our 4-unit Seniors Village expansion (currently under construction) as a Community Housing Fund project. Our 20-unit project for 965 Beasley Rd—now called Rainbow Ridge—was also declared eligible for later rounds of funding at that time. The second round of the Community Housing Fund was announced a few days ago, on May 21, and all projects with some form of BC Housing support are eligible to apply. Happily, this includes Rainbow Ridge. It is a rolling funding call, with applications being accepted starting May 27th 2020, but there is a strong indication that applying early will increase an organisation's chance of being funded.

We appreciate that holding a non-traditional Public Hearing is a compromise, and acknowledge that it would be ideal to have all Electoral Area Directors listening to members of the public in person, on Cortes Island. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to adapt in order to continue with important work, and we believe that a mixed electronic and in-person public hearing will allow the Directors to safely hear from all members of the public who wish to comment on the application, as well as receiving the traditional written letters of support or concern from the public via email and post.

We know that, given the depth of need for affordable housing across BC, the funding call will be extremely competitive. Any further delay of the Public Hearing or of the subsequent decision on the Rezoning/OCP amendment will put our proposal at risk of not being selected for this round of funding. There is no guarantee when, or if, another round of funding will occur. We appreciate that a final decision on this important land use application is still forthcoming, but want to emphasize the time-sensitive nature of our request. Provincial investment is vital to our undertaking. We have strong support for the proposal; we have worked diligently with our neighbours and the broader community to develop a design that is appropriate for the site and our community.

A quick review of our fundraising efforts up to this point: through the efforts of many community volunteers and generous donors, we were able to purchase the land for Rainbow Ridge. Our combined fundraising efforts on the Seniors Village and Rainbow Ridge have led to approximately \$1.5 million in donations, grants and low-interest personal loans, plus a \$400,000 capital grant from BC Housing and \$350,000 in low-interest loans. We've also secured a commitment from BC Housing to provide an annual subsidy of approximately \$35,000-\$40,000 for the operation of the Seniors Village. If the Rainbow Ridge project is selected by the Community Housing Fund, it will mean a further \$2 million capital grant and an

annual operating subsidy of approximately \$150,000-\$175,000 towards affordable rental housing. These funds are key to the post-COVID economic recovery of Cortes Island.

As you know, the successful Rezoning of Rainbow Ridge and its selection by BC Housing will mean 20-22 new homes for families, seniors and other households struggling to make ends meet and find healthy, safe and secure homes. We trust that you will support the recommendation of SRD staff to hold a modified Public Hearing in June. Give Cortes Islanders the opportunity to comment on the Rezoning/OCP application so that approval can be considered by the SRD and we can move forward with our work: creating affordable rental housing solutions and local jobs in our community. So much is on the line.

Cordially,

Elizabeth Anderson

Elizabeth Anderson, elizabeth@twincomm.ca 250-935-8559
Housing Committee Board Liaison, Cortes Island Seniors Society