

Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo present a case for putting the development of 6025 Uplands on hold

The Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo (CCN) started as a response by local community residents, small business owners, seniors and school children to the proposed development of the 6025 Uplands Drive site as low barrier housing for 'hard to house' 18-34 year olds.

The CCN started an awareness campaign in early October to notify local residents of the development and to share facts and information about the likely occupants of the low barrier housing and the effects on the community and neighborhoods.

Campaign materials included imagery that depicted a possible scenario and simply asked the question "What's wrong with this picture?". The campaign used statistical evidence from City of Nanaimo publications to describe low barrier housing and to raise awareness of not only the low barrier program, but of supportive housing for the homeless.

The CCN has been accused of fear mongering and scaring residents. Several times during the campaign, the CCN has been accused of using scare tactics to misinform the community and has been held accountable for doorstep mailers, newspaper adverts and editorial content appearing in the local press. At each stage, the CCN has responded with a level head, indicating the source of the materials used, describing the statistics and quoting senior City officials. This has not been a campaign of propaganda and fear mongering, but of awareness and statistics.

The CCN feel that City and Council have an opportunity to make the City of Nanaimo a flagship for social housing and helping the homeless. The campaign hasn't been about misinformation, rather educated, and informed decision-making that has the potential to provide the right solutions for the communities, homeless and the City.

The following statements and questions are the backbone to the CCN campaign.

1. Low Barrier housing at Uplands Drive was pushed onto a community without proper consultation.
 - a. We recognize the tight timeframe that City officials and Council were working to. We have heard from City Council that these deadlines were imposed at a provincial level due to untimely delays. The CCN reject this as an excuse, and state that the City Council should put the needs of the citizens and community ahead of the demands of provincial government.
 - b. The initial Memorandum of Understanding signed with BC Housing indicated that a period of consultation would be undertaken as part of the process. The Uplands Drive development was announced after the fact, and this consultation has not come to fruition.



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- c. The CCN request that City Council consider holding development on the site and consider public hearings with the community to find the right solution for the community and those intended to house.
2. Provincial funding may be withheld or lost should the development not proceed.
 - a. We have heard from MLA Ron Catelon that funding for the project will not be lost should the development be put on hold for consultation, or should a different site be selected.
 - b. We have heard from Minister Rich Coleman that funding will not be lost should the development be put on hold for consultation.
 - c. We have heard from BC Housing CEO, Shayne Ramsay that funding will not be lost should the development be put on hold for consultation.
 - d. City Council announced in a televised meeting on October 17 that funding would be lost if the project was put on hold. This is untrue and not the case.
3. The Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo now has the support of several hundred constituents in favour of freezing development on the Uplands Site.
 - a. A petition for 1,400 signatures was presented to Council on October 17 requesting that the development be cancelled at the Uplands Site.
 - b. Since October 17, the CCN has now gathered the support of the Hospital Area Neighbourhood Association (HANA) and has several hundred people outside the North end in support of the campaign to readdress the development of low barrier housing in the City of Nanaimo.
 - c. The CCN petitions now total over 2,000 citizens.
4. The Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo have been transparent and held open dialogue with the community.
 - a. As part of the CCN awareness campaign, a facebook group was launched that enabled citizens to communicate and discuss the issues of low barrier housing in Nanaimo, the Uplands site, drug and alcohol addiction and the provision of services to maintain healthy communities. This campaign page has grown in size to over 2,000 active users (people making comments on the site), 3,948 posts have been commented on and these posts have been viewed 117,940 times in 3 weeks. The support of the discussion for low barrier housing has been immense and should have been part of the City of Nanaimo's strategy when consulting with the community.
 - b. The CCN has had comments from both sides of the argument through the website and the facebook pages. We have held conversation with professionals, health officials, ministries and community to ensure an unbiased and fair hearing for all.
 - c. The CCN contest that the City of Nanaimo should hear the overwhelming call from the citizens of the city to freeze development on the site while selecting other suitable sites, near to service provision or in areas without immediate proximity to seniors and schools.



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5. The number of homeless is decreasing. Why is the City so keen to develop low barrier housing in the City without the need for provision?
 - a. The City of Nanaimo surveyed the homeless in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Year on year the number of homeless fell from 300 in 2006¹, 173 in 2007², to 115 in 2008³.
 - b. Homelessness fluctuates throughout the year, yet the highest number of homeless on the streets of Nanaimo has decreased year on year.
6. Provision of low barrier housing as a wet house environment is unsafe for the community and unsafe for the occupants.
 - a. The School District 68 board issued a letter showing that they had concern over low barrier housing in close proximity to schools. This was issued in May 2011 and responded to by the Mayor on 25 October 2011. Why were School District concerns not recognized before this date?
 - b. Several studies have been undertaken that show wet housing in large groups without appropriate support is ineffective.
 - c. The demographic for this type of wet housing is 18-34 years of age, and with hard to house occupants.
 - d. Wet housing requires no treatment planning, detoxification or rehabilitation for occupants. The CCN contest whether this form of housing is endorsing drug and alcohol abuse and whether the occupants will benefit from such housing provision.
 - e. The Uplands site has a known deficiency in support services, including walk-in clinics, methadone clinics, needle exchange provision and soup kitchens.
 - f. The site is immediately adjacent to a strata complex of vulnerable seniors.
 - g. The site is in close proximity to Dover High School, McGirr Elementary and several other schools and senior communities.
7. There are several other sites available for consideration that would alleviate the concerns of citizens and where better provision can be made for potential occupants.
 - a. In a recent meeting of citizens at Oliver Woods Community Centre, MLA Ron Cantelon indicated a number of other sites were available to the City to consider for the provision of low barrier wet housing environments.

¹ <http://intraspec.ca/HPSActionPlanSummary.pdf>

²

http://www.nanaimo.ca/assets/Departments/Community~Planning/Social~Planning/Social~Geography/Sept07_CensusRpt.pdf

³

<http://www.nanaimo.ca/assets/Departments/Community~Planning/Social~Planning/Social~Geography/Census08ReportHomeless.pdf>



- b. These sites were not in close proximity to vulnerable seniors and children and would offer rehabilitation and support services closer to the facility should they be considered for development.
- c. The CCN would like to open dialogue with the City and City Council to consider other options and sites, and to make decisions that are better suited to the communities affected by low barrier housing, and the homeless who are to be housed.
- d. All sites should be considered with feasibility studies and public consultation and communication.
- e. The low barrier program undertaken by the City of Nanaimo should be based on working models, learning from the mistakes of other municipalities and providing Nanaimo with an opportunity to be a leader in social housing and homelessness management for others to follow.

In conclusion, the Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo urge the City Council to consider freezing development on the Uplands site with immediate effect and to seek more appropriate locations where services and provision may be made that benefit all aspects of the community.

The Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo request that City Council hear the opposition of the community and voting public to the low barrier housing program currently underway within the City.

The Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo wish to enter a dialogue with City planners and City Council to find a better way to serve the needs of the homeless and where smaller units and detoxification schemes can be part of the program.



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