

SLIDE COMPANION – Attainable Housing in the Tuff City

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Slide 1: Introduction

This morning my hope is to present a snap shot of a ‘made in Tofino’ affordable housing approach that has germinated within Tofino over the past several years. I think that you’ll find that many of the merits of this model or approach is transferable to other communities facing similar affordable housing challenges.

Slide 2: Background

To start with... a little background to frame the discussion.

Obviously it’s no secret that Tofino has become a significant tourist destination, which has fuelled significant growth and development in the community over the past 15 years.

Slide 3: Whistler West

This has undoubtedly provided important opportunities and benefits to the local area but has also created various challenges.

Slide 4: Challenges

The increasing difficulty that many residents face in trying to secure proper housing is one of the biggest challenges facing our community. The problem is widespread and acute in the community affecting restaurant waiters to municipal staff to health care professionals.

Slide 5: Origins of THC

The decision and motivation to make changes was at the municipal government level. In 2002 Tofino undertook an Official Community Plan Review. During this process the issues surrounding housing affordability emerged as one of the biggest threats to the overall future sustainability of Tofino.

District Council struck an Affordable Housing Committee to develop an Attainable Housing Strategy.

Slide 6: AHS Recommendations

Two main recommendations of the strategy included:

- The use of municipally-owned land at no cost on which to develop attainable housing; and
- The establishment of a housing governing structure, the Tofino Housing Corporation.

Slide 7: Description of THC

The Tofino Housing Corporation is an incorporated non-profit business set up by the District of Tofino (its sole shareholder) but which operates at arms-length from the municipal government. The THC Board reflects the diverse community interests and includes a Council representative.

I'm not going to go into all of the organizational details of the THC but our mandate is quite broad:

To meet the housing needs of a diverse community of local residents and seasonal employees through the provision of perpetually attainable housing.

Slide 8: What we are and aren't

So what role does the local government and its housing authority play in providing affordable housing options?

Here is an illustration from Housing Matters BC, the most recent provincial housing strategy.

As you can see is the continuum of housing need. What you find are government funded "social housing" solutions ranging from a high level of support such as homeless shelters to lower service needs, your typical assisted living and social housing programs.

Each of these components are vitally important for a comprehensive housing strategy but what we've found in Tofino, and many other communities throughout the province, is that the continuum of housing needs is actually much broader.

So this is the housing void that the Tofino Housing Corporation seeks to fill. In a small town like Tofino it is really easy to see how wide this void is. School enrollment has dropped by 30% in the last 2 years, we can't find professional staff at the municipality or at the hospital staff because of this void in housing affordability. And everyone knows a handful of residents who've decided to leave town after years of doing what is commonly referred to as the Tofino shuffle – short term rental accommodations.

In effect this can be seen as a half step between traditional "social housing" programs and full market ownership.

This is what we like to call perpetually attainable housing. It is also known as Workforce Housing, I think in Whistler its called Resident Housing.

Slide 9: Features of PAH

Basically they all have similar features:

1. Access to affordably priced housing and/or land

This can be achieved through a variety of different means at the local government level such as increased development rights such as density bonussing, voluntary amenity contributions for expedited approvals or inclusionary zoning methods such as found in Langford and Ucluelet.

In Ucluelet, for example, any development that would trigger an OCP amendment, re-zoning of development permit requires between 15-20% affordable housing.

In Tofino the local government is divesting 40-acres of land to the THC for attainable housing purposes.

2. Potential end users need to adhere to a standard of eligibility. This criteria varies substantially across housing providers. From very rigorous 'means testing' to minimum residency requirements and everything in between. This is a decision that should reflect the desires of the local community.

In Tofino, because we have limited capacity our eligibility requirements do not include means testing but we feel it is sufficiently rigorous to separate the wheat from the chaff.

3. Ensure perpetual affordability. Through the use of housing covenants and deed restrictions.

The message we are trying to get across is that we are helping to provide the nest not the nest egg.

Slide 10: Coles Notes

This is the Coles notes version of what is required in developing our affordable housing program – a significant amount of work!!

Slide 11: DL114

As I mentioned about 40 acres of municipally-owned land is being divested to the THC at no cost to develop attainable housing – both rental and ownership. We are presently in the pre-development phase (still) of the project. Unfortunately we have critical staffing issues at the District and don't have a Planner on staff, which is causing some of the problems.

Our business model is based on selling some of this land at market rates to pay for the affordable housing component.

- Wide range of housing typologies
- Target rates of 70% of market

Slide 12: DL114

Slide 13: Conclusions

Let me start with the constraints to our model.

- Few existing models. In many respects we're developing our housing program by guess and by golly. We're lucky to have some examples like Whistler to learn from them. Inevitably we'll make our own mistakes as well.

- Grass roots based. The 'Tofino' approach reflects the housing needs of the local community.

Can't poach – each community has its own set of housing needs.

- Lengthy process – Even factoring “Tofino Time” it's been a long process.

There are a lot of steps to cover. Which is why you need...

- Need for 'Local Champions' - THC Board have been shlepping this idea for years within the community and surprisingly still as motivated as ever
- Local government support – I can't speak enough about the District Council.

Forward thinking and committed recognize that the social and cultural vibrancy of the community is deeply impacted by the lack of attainable housing and are willing to make significant strides to effect change

- Part of an overall housing strategy – including partnerships with senior levels of government. There is support through SEED funding with CMHC, provincially there are also funding opportunities

Slide 14: Wrap

There are many affordable housing models out there to chose from. One thing in my mind is certain. There needs to be a fundamental shift in the way we look at home ownership. The growing housing affordability gap is present, its getting more pronounced and it's not going away. In my mind it is at the local grassroots level where the solutions will be found.