

**The City doesn't
build housing!**

There has been much confusion of late about the City's role in housing developments. In part, this is a good thing, as it is a result of a mini-housing boom in the City, the likes of which we have not seen in a very long time. But, it also adds unnecessary angst and frustration to what should otherwise be great news for Quesnel.

The great news is that we're hoping to see at least three multi-unit housing developments break ground this year, adding almost 100 new and diverse housing units to the City's very limited variety of housing options. According to a recent report from UNBC, Quesnel's housing stock is rapidly ageing and is mismatched to the current needs and desires of residents and people wanting to relocate to Quesnel, so these new units are a welcome and timely addition to our City's housing options.

Part of the reason these new units are being built at this time is a housing incentive bylaw Council put in place to attract provincial funding to the City and to attract private sector investment. The bylaw provides property tax and development cost charge relief to new housing complexes that meet our City's need for more accessible, adaptable, and affordable housing. BC Housing essentially requires this kind of partnership from municipalities before this Crown Corporation will commit provincial funding and partner with not-for-profits to build new housing units.

But, other than providing this kind of financial incentive and working with proponents to ensure that any proposed housing development meets the City's needs for more accessible, affordable, and low environmental footprint housing, Council does not dictate the exact kind of housing that will be built or comment on the targeted clientele – that is the sole purview of the proponent.

The main role that Council (and therefore the City's planning department) has in housing development is as a land use planner:

establishing land use designations in the City's official community plan (OCP) and then establishing specific zones for each part of the community and parcel of land in the City that reflects the desired land use Council has articulated in the City's OCP.

Once the OCP and land use zones are set (with public consultation) any development proposal that meets the established OCP and specific zone for a particular piece of land would not trigger any further public consultation. This sometimes confuses people who want to weigh in on a specific development project but aren't given the opportunity because the proposal does not require any public consultation beyond what occurred when the OCP was approved and the zoning established.

That is why Council cannot comment on any development proposal (like the potential replacement for Seasons House) until a development permit is applied for and our planning staff formally reports to Council that the proposal requires an OCP and/or zoning change. If a change is not required any development can proceed without further public comment, if a change is required then the public can provide comment, but only on the specific change that is required to enable the project to proceed.

The bottom line: the City does not build housing; it merely enables development projects through land use planning and incentives. The second bottom line: get involved in our current OCP review, as that sets the baseline for future zoning and development projects in the City and in your neighborhood (as well as general policies Council will establish for the development of the City through to 2030).

We will be asking for more input on the current OCP development process in the very near future, so please check the City website and Facebook page regularly for more details on this important opportunity for you to engage in the future development of our City.

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This column is paid for by the City of Quesnel.

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