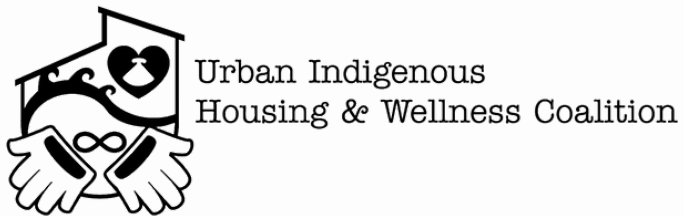




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Collecting Stories of Where  
You Live: A Strathcona  
Regional District Housing &  
Service Needs Estimation

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Prepared for:  
Coalition To End Homelessness  
Campbell River & District  
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## Report Disclaimer

This document is part of a larger housing and service needs project in the Strathcona Regional District called "Collecting Stories of Where You Live".

For more information on the project or to access the full report, please contact [info@crhousing.net](mailto:info@crhousing.net)

# Executive Summary

In the spring of 2022, the Strathcona Regional District (SRD) participated in a large-scale housing and service needs estimation, called “Collecting Stories of Where You Live,” to better understand what homelessness looks like in their community. The project was also an opportunity to understand the survey needs of residents in the Strathcona Regional District and to collect meaningful data to support decisions moving forward.

The Rural Development Network (RDN) worked with the Campbell River and District Coalition to End Homelessness (CRDCEH) to understand homelessness in Campbell River. Following the 2017 model outlined in RDN’s *Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness*, we developed a customized survey for Campbell River. Surveys were administered to community members in person by community service agencies across the region and online as an open Survey Monkey link. Surveys were available for a period of four weeks, from April 11 to May 11, 2022.

Of the 427 survey respondents, 311 were identified as housing unstable. An additional 304 dependents and 311 adults were reported as living with survey respondents. In total at least 801 people are living in unstable housing situations in the SRD.

Respondents identified a variety of reasons for housing instability. The top five reasons cited were respondents’ inability to afford rent or mortgage payments, low wages, housing in need of major repairs, increasing rent prices, and illnesses or medical condition.

This report shares data highlights from all responses across the SRD. We further break down results by demographic. We look at the employment and income sources and living situations of housing stable and unstable respondents. We also look at community supports and future housing opportunities for smaller community regions.

These results are broken down into the following community regions:

- Campbell River, We Wai Kai (Quinsam), Wei Wai Kum First Nation, and SRD Area D
- Cortes Island and T’oq (Klahoose First Nation)
- Quadra Island and the Outer Islands
- Gold River, Tahsis, and Tsaxana
- Sayward

In this report, RDN also suggests six opportunities service providers, housing coalitions, and municipal governments should consider as they continue to address issues of housing instability in the SRD.



# Opportunities Moving Forward

# Opportunities Moving Forward

Based on the findings outlined in this report, RDN has identified 6 opportunities for action to address housing and homelessness.

## 1. Protect and Develop Accessible Housing Opportunities

- Increase community awareness and understanding of homelessness
  - The purpose of community conversations around homelessness is twofold: (1) to support community learning on issues of homelessness; and (2) to highlight the various experiences of homelessness. With at least 720 individuals living in unstable housing conditions in the SRD, it is critical that public have well-informed and sympathetic perceptions of homelessness. Hosting community conversations to support a sympathetic mindset will be critical to successfully address housing instability.
- Highlight the need for affordable and adaptable housing projects to increase housing options for different household groups, including income-based units and increasing housing availability
  - When asked what housing unstable respondents wanted to see more of in their community, most respondents focused on housing. Specifically, they mentioned the need for increased available rental and purchase units to local residents, affordable/low-income units, and long-term rental contract unit options. For example, 255 housing unstable and 75 housing stable respondents showed support for having income-based rental units as a way to help stabilize housing within their communities and provide greater access to housing for those in need. Many respondents noted that without income-based rental units, they have no choice but to live with family or take on multiple roommates because they currently cannot afford to live independently.
- Advocate for improved and increased high need housing options, including transitional housing options and emergency shelter options
  - While survey results show that most unstable housing respondents (208) did not require shelter services, many of the respondents who did need shelter services could not access them. Respondents were unable to access shelter services for several reasons, including that there was no shelter in their community, the shelter in their community was at full capacity, and the shelter policies would have required them to be separated from their pet or their family members. Additionally, some respondents noted their concerns with the health and safety standards of the shelter(s) in their area. Conducting an emergency shelter audit across the region, scanning for the number of shelters and their average capacity, and a review of intake and operational policies to look for improvements is recommended to better support those respondents who are unsheltered and emergency sheltered.

## Opportunities Moving Forward

- 176 respondents believed that the development of a transitional housing unit in the SRD would help to address issues of homelessness. Further, results suggest that it would better support respondents experiencing domestic/family abuse and violence who either are housing unstable as a result of leaving their unsafe situation or who are unable to leave their situation due to lack of housing.
- Please note that projects focused on the development of affordable housing and/or transitional housing units are a massive undertaking. In rural and remote communities, such projects are more than acquiring land and a building. For example, they also often include approval and zoning processes, road, sewer, and septic construction. Further, funding is often very challenging to acquire to support such projects. The Cortes Community Housing Society is no stranger to these challenges; a community of approximately 1,100, Cortes Island is in the midst of an affordable housing development project. Despite all of these challenges, their continued efforts and dedication to this development will make all the difference for 24 families once the doors open. Recognizing these challenges, we recommend beginning with a regional conversation on transitional housing units and finding community locations best suited to serve residents across the region. Collaboration will be critical to the success of this recommendation.

### **2. Foster Community Awareness and Housing Education**

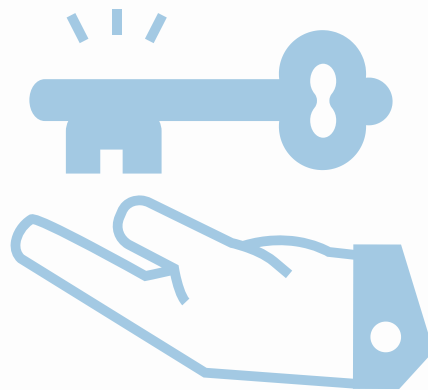
- Increase awareness of, and educate residents on, tenant rights
  - 160 respondents reported renting their home, though we expect that number is actually higher. With limited housing availability in the SRD, many of those respondents have turned to unauthorized or illegal rental units. As a result, respondents recognized that their housing situations are very precarious, feeling like they “are at the whim of their landlord.” They may have been subjected to higher rent, more frequent rent increases, discrimination, and a lack of safe/quality housing. By ensuring that community members are aware of and know their rights as tenants, respondents will be able to make informed decisions around their housing situation and, hopefully, alleviate stress related to their housing.
  - Respondents who rented legal units faced challenges with understanding and exercising their rights as tenants. Many faced challenges such as a lack of communication from their landlord, only sign seasonal or short-term rental contracts available, high rent prices, and rent increases. 139 respondents noted that they were spending more than a third of their income on housing (the national standard for housing instability), while 129 stated that they simply do not make enough money to rent a place long-term. By ensuring proper awareness and knowledge of their rights, respondents may be able to better advocate for themselves, voicing their concerns and providing protection to stabilize their housing situation.

## Opportunities Moving Forward

- Increasing awareness and knowledge of tenant rights might look like holding information and education sessions; offering information packages; providing general rental agreement templates, tips, and tricks; and/or advocating to governments and small- and large-scale landlords/property rental companies to better support their tenants.

### 3. Support Growth and Services for Aging Population

- Advocate for affordable and accessible housing for the aging population
  - While many respondents highlighted the struggle residents have in finding rental and ownership accommodations, even more noted the difficulty the aging population faces in accessing housing. Finding housing to meet their accessibility needs as well as financial means was proven to be nearly impossible for many respondents. The development of supportive care units, complex care units, and accessible and wheelchair-accessible income-based rental units would significantly improve the quality of life among respondents and help to stabilize the housing situation in the SRD.
- Promote and increase awareness of senior support services.
  - 96 respondents indicated that they are 65+ years old, and 142 indicated that they are between the ages of 46 and 65. Several respondents indicated that they are or will soon experience hardship in maintaining their home and property as a result of limited mobility, disability, limited finances, and general aging. Support services such as lawn and property care, senior-focused transportation (i.e., accessible transportation), delivery services, health and wellness supports, and social events would all benefit the aging population. We recommend promoting any services related to assisting aging populations that are currently in operation and consider developing additional support services that are not already in operation.





# Opportunities Moving Forward

## 4. Elevate and Increase Accessible and Affordable Community Services

- Advocate for accessible and affordable community services
  - Many respondents noted difficulty accessing basic need services, specifically shelter and food services, often due to hours of operation, distance from their residence, and/or lack of transportation/delivery options.
  - 107 respondents lacked sufficient and affordable heating in their homes, 55 respondents lacked indoor plumbing/bathing facilities, and 37 respondents did not have access to safe drinking water. Improved awareness of, and access to, crisis financial resources and supports is critical to ensure residents in the SRD are able to receive the basic amenities needed to ensure their home is in a livable condition. Further, many respondents emphasized their difficulty in paying their rent/mortgage each month, often falling behind without a stable income. Widely promoting that crisis financial support is available to individuals in the community may be critical to ensuring respondents do not lose their homes in times of hardship.
  - Perhaps, the most important community service for individuals living in the SRD is transportation. A significant number of housing unstable respondents indicated they travel upwards of three hours to access various services including grocery stores, doctors' appointments, laundry services, and mental health care. Others highlighted the increasing prices of travelling long distances to access services with gas prices going up and ferry tickets becoming increasingly expensive. For example, a return trip from Cortes Island to Campbell River can cost \$65 to \$70. These costs can be prohibitive to accessing services for housing unstable respondents. This barrier often leads to high-risk behaviour; many housing unstable respondents reported walking or hitchhiking to access services in other communities because they had no other option. Improved transportation services that are accessible for low-income individuals are critical to improve the safety and quality of life among housing unstable individuals and, more broadly, to address issues of homelessness.

# Opportunities Moving Forward

## 5. Encourage Community Engagement and Growth Management

- Consider land re-zoning options to allow for mobile home and/or tiny home accommodations solely for use by local residents
  - Both housing stable and housing unstable respondents who own property indicated that changes to land zoning options would encourage them to have a secondary suite or separate dwelling on their property. Currently, zoning requirements and regulatory by-laws prevent them from doing so. 236 respondents also noted that they would like to see more housing options, such as tiny homes, carriage homes, dock parks, and mobile parks in the region. These housing options would allow low-income and housing unstable community members to establish more sustainable and accessible housing. It could also be the key to re-establishing an individual or family's housing situation after a life-altering event such as divorce, addiction, loss of family support, or loss of finances.
- Facilitate a formal review of community land and tax policies, specifically regarding land zoning/re-zoning and the implementation of an empty homes tax
  - 218 respondents support the implementation of an empty homes tax, which would see higher taxes for property owners who allow their unit to sit unoccupied in the off-season. Additionally, 195 respondents indicated their support for the implementation of different development processes to stabilize the housing situation, including improving zoning processes to make it quicker and easier to build more diverse types of housing.

## 6. Promote and Adapt Short-Term Housing Solutions

- Encourage collaboration between community housing providers and vacation home landlords
  - By building a network of community housing providers and vacation home landlords, they can better communicate and collaborate around their service offerings; for example, they might be able or willing to offer their rental services to provide temporary housing to local residents during the off-season to support the gap short-term housing need.
- Advocate for dedicated property specifically allocated for local residents to park their mobile homes and/or tiny homes
  - Providing a space dedicated to local residents will increase housing stability within the community and provide more opportunities for local residents to stay in one place for longer, rather than jumping from short-term/vacation rental to short-term/vacation rental. Further, with the support of government zoning offices, the collaboration between community housing providers and vacation home landlords might see fit to develop policy encouraging their members to allow local residents to stay on their land in exchange for compensation (e.g., reduced land taxes, access to home improvement grants, etc.).

## Conclusion

This report is intended to support organizational, funder, and governmental decision-making around issues of housing and homelessness by providing reliable and up-to-date data on housing and service needs in the SRD. It should be used to complement the 2021 Campbell River PiT Count conducted by the province of British Columbia and the [2022 Strathcona Regional District's Housing Needs Report](#). It can also be used and referred to in SRD communities for program and advocacy purposes related to housing, homelessness, and service needs.

After receiving 620 survey responses over a four-week period, 427 responses were determined to be suitable for further analysis. Of those, 311 survey respondents were considered housing unstable. An additional 304 dependents and 311 adults reported as living with survey respondents. In total, at the time of the survey, 801 of people in the SRD were living in unstable housing situations.

As part of the survey, participants were asked, “Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?” Respondents were given the options “yes,” “no,” “I don’t know,” and “prefer not to answer” to guide their responses. Of the 427 survey respondents, 171 indicated “yes” to being housing unstable, and 48 indicated “unsure.” Using the Canadian definition of homelessness, we identified an additional 92 respondents experiencing housing instability. A total of 311 survey respondents were housing unstable.

An additional 304 dependents under the age of 18 and 311 adults reported as living with survey respondents.

In total, at least 801 people were living in unstable housing situations in SRD.

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