

Feb. 24, 2010

To the Chair of the OCP Steering Committee Sue Ellen Fast (sefast@shaw.ca)
and Municipal planner Dave Witty at dwitty@bimbc.ca

Letter to the OCP Planning committee in support of the Belterra Cohousing project

“We would like to update you on the Bowen Purchase Waitlist process. To reconfirm, you are in Position #2.” Well that’s great! I’m # 2 in line for nonmarket housing, and Belterra is my best option of attaining a desirable nonmarket unit.

But when is nonmarket housing going to happen and how, unless the OCP includes it in its plans?

I’m not looking for a hand out. I’m not looking to buy a mansion. I’m not looking to make a quick buck. I would just like to buy a housing unit on Bowen Island so that I can continue to live my life here and not worry about when the landlords are going to sell, jack up the rent, rent out at higher rates to summer visitors, or turf me out so their teens can take over.

I would like to buy something that is affordable and safe. I would like to remain part of the Bowen Island community. I believe that Belterra co-housing project offers one of the best solutions to all of these resolutions. As a candidate for nonmarket housing (#2 on the list!) I see Belterra as one of the best and brightest solutions for Bowen Island and it is a model that will well suit Bowen Island. I feel that the OCP Update Steering Committee has a responsibility to assure that the new Official Community Plan facilitates the creation of a diversity of housing types and in particular cohousing.

Cohousing allows for the community members to participate in the process of development and in creating something that fits individual needs, including units that are smaller than average, larger than average, suited for seniors, artists, families, people who would like to spend a bit more on solar panels, people who would like to spend a bit less and not have fancy flooring... and all the varieties of life. Cohousing is a far preferable model to any other proposals in which the units will be created based on assumptions and capitalistic calculations.

In the past the OCP has assumed people would not log and fence a five to ten acre section of land. It was thought that people would leave most of it as forest but of course if it’s theirs, then they’ll do whatever they can and want to do with it, as events have shown. We can’t assume what people will do. We have to plan to keep what is important and that includes planning on how to keep our green spaces and our community.

An additional benefit of the Cohousing model is that it clearly defines how little will be fenced and how much forest will be preserved. The cohousing model creates a community with a preexisting environmental plan. It preserves greenspace and creates affordable housing and community.

I've just been looking for something that is reasonable, what I've found is that Belterra is not only reasonable, it is commendable in its goals.

I have lived on Bowen Island my entire life. During my twenties, I could not buy into the market on a minimum wage living –not even when I held down three jobs at once. Now, in my thirties I have a respectable enough job as the school coordinator and in theory I should be earning enough to purchase a starter home, (I have been assessed at being able to afford a up-to \$220,000 mortgage,) however, the houses that I was looking at in 1999- 2002 that were in my fixer-upper/entry price range of \$195,000 are now in the \$400,000-500,000 price range, and they are not in any better condition.

As of Jan 2010 Vancouver and the Vancouver area has now jumped to the top of the list. **Vancouver now has the dubious honour of being the most unaffordable housing market on the planet!**

The average price of a house in Vancouver in December 2008 was \$560,953. The average cost of a home on Bowen Island right now is estimated at approx. \$838,000. We can't stop capitalism and the open market, but we can create a legacy of nonmarket housing which will provide a reasonable alternative.

"Housing prices are arguably more important than any other item for purchase -- home ownership anchors people into the community, which they value more when they own a part of it...Societies with affordable housing offer community, opportunity, and economic stability..."
From The New York-based Demographia report, released in Canada by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, 2009.

The creation of nonmarket housing is the only hope I, and many others have, of continuing to live on Bowen Island. If projects such as Belterra do not go ahead I can only see the continual loss of community and diversity on this island. We need to create a legacy of nonmarket housing to keep the legacy of Bowen Island as a diverse community alive.

I am writing this in support of including the Belterra Cohousing plan, and other cohousing and nonmarket housing options, in the OCP as vital parts of planning for Bowen Island's future.

Sincerely,

Sarah Haxby