

**Improving housing quality
and options in Quesnel**

Improving the quality of the existing housing stock in the City, especially rental properties, and developing more diverse housing options is critical to the future of our community. Consequently, in 2015, Council made the decision to take the leadership role on a housing strategy for the City, and we've been working hard on this initiative since then.

At a recent Council meeting, the Community Development Institute (CDI) of UNBC presented the results of their recent housing study, which reaffirmed the need for us to continue to aggressively pursue the housing strategy we adopted in 2015. The CDI study shows that while Quesnel continues to enjoy some of the lowest real estate values and rental rates in the province, the City's housing stock is ageing and is mismatched with the current needs of residents and today's increasing demand for alternate housing options.

The majority of Quesnel's housing stock consists of older single-family residences with between two and four bedrooms and only one or two people living in these homes. This suggests that Quesnel's housing stock is mismatched relative to the actual need for living space. But, Quesnel has few alternate housing options available for people who either want smaller footprint homes, want to downsize or retire into smaller living spaces, or want a more efficient living space so they can "work and play" rather than work and then "work" to maintain their yard or home.

We hear continually from seniors that we need more diverse housing options for them to retire into: multi-unit housing options that are adapted to their needs, would allow them to travel more easily, and would reduce the workload associated with home and yard maintenance so they can age in place. Making more multi-unit housing options available for seniors would also make it easier to provide accessible and adaptable housing and for health care providers to service the needs of seniors.

But, we also hear from younger professionals that they too would like the same kind of housing options: smaller footprint, easier to maintain, multi-unit type dwellings that would allow them to recreate and travel more easily. Many of these younger residents are not as interested in yards and gardens as previous generations were; they would sooner get on their bike or quad after work than mow a lawn, or strap on their skis or jump on their snowmobile instead of shoveling snow.

The early steps Council took to advance the City's housing strategy has attracted significant investment from the province and we will see three new housing complexes break ground this spring. This will create new housing opportunities for seniors, people with disabilities, and other targeted groups while also creating some market housing options to meet the needs outlined above. Council is now turning its attention to offering creative incentives to attract more private sector investment in new housing projects in the City.

In tandem with Council's attempts to attract investment in new housing projects, we are also focused on making improvements to the City's existing housing stock. We have introduced a new business license that will help us create a registry of rental housing units in the City and we are now exploring options to improve the quality of this rental stock by examining the possibility of instituting a "maintenance bylaw" which would stipulate the minimum standards for safe, quality rental housing in the City. Through our Official Community Plan process we will also be exploring options to enable legal secondary suites in the City so that some of the existing oversized single-family residences can be converted to meet the needs of today's residents.

Watch the City's website or Facebook page for housing initiative updates and opportunities to engage in our dialogue about options and opportunities to address today's housing needs.

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