

CREATING HOUSING FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

A Case Study



Featured Project:

New Hope Centre, Nanaimo, the Salvation Army

Introduction

No one expected the Salvation Army's new emergency shelter in Nanaimo to take so long to develop. After all, the mayor, council and city staff supported the original site proposal. But strong opposition from business and residents meant two sites were rejected before the facility finally found a home.

Now, the New Hope Centre emergency shelter and transitional housing is under construction on the parking lot of Nanaimo's original Salvation Army (SA) church, which was renovated in 2004 to offer support services. When the shelter is completed in 2007, the two buildings will be connected, and the centre will help homeless people stabilize their lives.

In 2001, the federal program, Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), offered funding to build facilities for the homeless. The local SCPI Working Group on Homelessness sent out an expression of interest to develop an emergency shelter and selected the SA proposal. During the next three years, the Salvation Army and the city went through three sites:

- SA originally owned a heritage house in downtown Nanaimo, and wanted to renovate this building for an emergency shelter. Development drawings were prepared for the rezoning process and an open house was held. But there proved to be considerable opposition to this site, much of it from businesses in the area. One business threatened to relocate outside of downtown if the site became an emergency shelter. The city was trying to encourage businesses to open or stay in the downtown core, so the rezoning only got to the first reading.
- (The city eventually bought this site from SA for \$300,000, which the organization put towards renovating the church to accommodate support services for people in the community, such as lunch and dinner for homeless people, family services such as counselling, food hampers and referrals, and help finding affordable housing.)
- City staff and a councillor then proposed buying a second, privately-owned site they considered suitable for the new shelter, and initiated rezoning. However residents in the new neighbourhood opposed this location too. This neighbourhood was in transition; although formerly quite run down, residents had worked hard to establish a single family neighbourhood. This site also did not get past first reading.
- Finally, city staff and the Salvation Army decided to build the emergency shelter in the parking lot next to the original SA church. The zoning here allowed a larger building than originally envisioned for the emergency shelter, and two floors of transitional housing were added to the plans. There was less opposition to this third site because, by now, people had recognized the need for a facility to alleviate homelessness in the community, and realized the Salvation Army had already been on the site for almost 150 years.

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Highlights

Residents served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income, single men and women, 19 years and older, including: • Residents with mental health and/or substance use issues • Residents with HIV/AIDS • Women who have left violent relationships • Seniors • Residents involved in the criminal justice system
Project goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SA responds to human needs to transform communities • The SA is developing New Hope Centre, an emergency shelter and transitional housing, to help people who are homeless stabilize their lives
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2001, phase two of the federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) offered funds for facilities to support homeless people • The local SCPI Working Group on Homelessness sent out an expression of interest to develop an emergency shelter (SA was part of this group) • The Salvation Army proposal was selected • Three sites were considered between 2001 and 2004: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1st site – SA owned a property in downtown Nanaimo with an existing heritage house, and proposed renovating the house into an emergency shelter, which required rezoning ○ SA notified neighbours by letter and phone and held a public open house to introduce the proposed project ○ There was community opposition, mostly from businesses in the area, so council rejected this site ○ 2nd site – City staff and a councillor found a second site that was opposed by residents in the new neighbourhood, who did not want to see housing and services located together in their neighbourhood ○ 3rd site – In early 2004, the city proposed building the shelter in the parking lot site next to the church ○ Also in 2004, the Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness was created and held meetings with the city about the need for a shelter ○ The site was zoned for a four-storey building, so city staff suggested SA add two floors of transitional housing above the two-storey shelter ○ This site is located outside of any residential area and the downtown core, and faced less opposition, as people had recognized the need ○ Planning began in 2004, the building is now under construction, and the facility is scheduled to open in 2007

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Building features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new building will contain 16 self-contained studio apartments on the top two floors, and 27 emergency beds that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ six emergency, non-medical, unlicensed detox rooms (one bed per room) ○ four male dormitory rooms with a total of 15 beds ○ one women’s dormitory room with three beds ○ three family unit beds ○ two flexible use rooms designed for overflow as crisis, extra shelter or transitional beds, depending on need any given night • The studio units will contain a bathroom, small fridge and microwave, and will house men and women • A drop-in centre with access to programs, computers, etc. • Safety and security features include lighting, video surveillance cameras, security fencing at the rear of the property, and door access controls
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA will own and operate the development, provided cash equity of over \$375,800, and contributed land and improvements valued at \$1,089,700 • The Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness contributed a \$1.9 million capital grant • Human Resources Development Canada contributed \$300,000 through phase two of the SCPI program • The city gave a grant of \$300,000 towards the emergency shelter and transition units on the final site, partly to reimburse SA for design expenses incurred for the two failed attempts to find a suitable site • The city and regional district forgave Development Cost Charges (DCCs) worth \$120,518 • The Real Estate Foundation contributed \$75,000 towards design fees for the project (although \$25,000 was spent designing the first location that was defeated by public opposition)
Keys to making the project effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunch and dinner are served to the homeless seven days a week • SA family services offers counselling, food hampers, and other services depending on client needs • SA refers clients to other agencies for services including those that provide housing placement

Successful practices

How Nanaimo facilitates special needs housing

- Nanaimo has an affordable housing policy in its Official Community Plan (Plan Nanaimo), but has no policies specifically addressing homelessness.
- A city social planner liaises on initiatives for the homeless population, co-chaired the SCPI Working Group on Homelessness, and represented the city on the review committee that recommended the New Hope Centre receive SCPI funding.

Innovative strategies to address opposition

- Council and staff approved the shelter in principle, supported rezoning, and expedited the development permit process.
- The city established a Community Advisory Committee to help SA communicate with neighbours about the need for a shelter, which helped appease community concerns. Information was shared around the table and then disseminated by committee members throughout the community. A local TV program profiled the committee.
- Features such as lighting, video surveillance cameras, security fencing and door access controls were integrated into the design to address community concerns about safety and security.

Lessons learned

Best practices for mitigating NIMBY

- The determination of all supporters to move the project forward.
- Willingness to compromise, in this case, mostly on the location.
- Perseverance over a long period.
- City council and staff cooperation and support.
- The community's perception that a shelter was needed.

Municipal leadership

City council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mayor and council were supportive and recognized the need for an enhanced shelter facility from the beginning. Ultimately, council suggested SA build a four-storey building on its own parking lot, as allowable in the zoning.
City staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City staff helped SA identify concerns and discussed how to engage with neighbours and other stakeholders. SA then sent a letter to the neighbourhood, followed up with phone calls, and held an open house at the first site. • Staff members were involved in technical design reviews, as the different rezoning processes progressed. • Senior management discussed helping SA replace funds expended on changing the design over three proposed sites. • After two unsuccessful rezoning applications on two separate sites, the social planner formed a Community Advisory Committee for the New Hope Centre to send a positive message to the community about the need and benefits of the shelter. The committee met for awhile, but became dormant when project planning at the third location was delayed. With construction now underway, the committee is meeting again to discuss a range of issues, including the building's operation.

Making a difference in residents' lives

Reducing substance use – Alcohol and drugs will not be allowed in either the private living space or the common areas inside and outside the development.

Support services

- Staff will be on site 24/7, and services will be based on needs identified once the facility is operational.

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- A crisis response nurse will support residents in New Hope Centre, funded by VIHA.
- The centre will be connected to SA's renovated church, which provides support services such as:
 - A commercial kitchen and dining room, where lunch and dinner are served seven days a week.
 - Family services offering counselling, food hampers, referrals to community agencies, and other services, depending on the needs of clients (who are not necessarily homeless).
 - A program to help people find affordable housing, which links with other agencies that provide housing placement services.

Relevance to other municipalities

Challenges

- Although the mayor, council and city staff supported the first site proposed by the Salvation Army, the rezoning application was ultimately unsuccessful, because residents and business people opposed that location.
- Various opposition groups to the first two sites held meetings to plan opposition strategies.
- One nearby business threatened to close if the shelter was built on the first site, and the owners visited the city manager. Council was loath to lose this business, as the city was encouraging businesses to open or remain in the downtown area. As a result, the city did not want to proceed with rezoning this site.
- Opponents held private meetings with councillors and the city manager, wrote emails and letters to the editor, the mayor and council, and went door to door with petitions.
- Local media reported on the opposition.
- Unfortunately for the first site, another social service agency, the 7-10 Club, a breakfast soup kitchen, applied to rezone a nearby location for its meal program. The two applications went forward at the same time and heightened anxiety in the adjacent community. The timing was unfortunate because Nanaimo could have had a new emergency shelter much sooner and at less cost had the original site proceeded.
- The opposition blamed the Working Group on Homelessness for the project.
- City council and staff were frustrated by the struggle to find a suitable venue. The city manager and a councillor looked for an alternate site that would not arouse opposition, and found a privately-owned site considered suitable. The city proposed buying the site and initiated rezoning.
- Opposition to this second site came from surrounding homeowners. The neighbourhood was in transition, from being quite run down to a single family neighbourhood.
- Opponents perceived the project as a concentration of services, and called the facility a "big box" service centre. Neighbours did not want to see housing and services co-located, and preferred a group home operation rather than the larger emergency shelter, a place for homeless people to simply sleep, not to receive services.
- After two unsuccessful rezoning applications on two separate sites, SA invited the most active neighbourhood associations to a meeting, and presented two options:
 - Build the shelter next to the renovated church, where SA already provided services.
 - Go back to the first site.

Neighbourhood representatives took these alternatives back to their organizations, which accepted the option to build the shelter next to the former church.

Conditions necessary to implement this approach elsewhere

- Have a development consultant the proponent can work well with at the outset to expedite the process. The length of time from conception to opening (the shelter does not open until 2007) has meant the number of emergency beds originally allocated is now inadequate for the city's needs.
- If a sponsor does not have skills and experience with public consultation or the development process, seek professional help.
- Develop a formal communications plan to guide the consultation process.
- Develop background information on the project before going public. Be ready to answer questions from the public.
- Have a good understanding early on of who will be housed in the proposed project, what services will be offered, and how the project will operate, so you can provide detailed, accurate information during the consultation process.
- Broader consultation about possible sites should have happened in seeking a second site, because the unsuitable location caused another round of intense neighbourhood opposition.
- Work closely with the sponsor to identify issues and develop workable and appropriate solutions.

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