



Songhees Housing for Wellbeing: Innovative, Community-Driven First Nations Housing

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For more than 4,000 years, the Lək̓ʷəŋən people (Songhees and Esquimalt Nations) have stewarded the Lək̓ʷəŋən traditional territory, located on Vancouver Island adjacent to the municipalities of Esquimalt and View Royal in the Capital Regional District. The Lək̓ʷəŋən people hunted and gathered on these lands, living together as an intergenerational community with deep cultural practices.

Today, Songhees Nation has more than 650 members, with about half living on reserve and half off-reserve. Many of the Nation's existing reserve lands are developed and most of their lands face encroaching urban development. Forty percent of Songhees Nation members expressed a need for on-reserve housing that is safe, secure and affordable. Their demand is twice the national average of Indigenous peoples needing core housing, and three times that of non-Indigenous people.

Given this demand, Chief and Council assessed the remaining land assets to meet the community's housing needs. The Nation's Chief and Council dedicated a 3.24 acre site for a new affordable housing development to improve housing options for members already living on reserve, as well as to bring off-reserve members back home.

Songhees Nation then partnered with the consulting team from Purpose Driven Development and Planning to help capture the community's vision for housing and to move the project forward. Together, they developed an approach and process that saw the project move beyond just an affordable housing development, to a reimagining of the future of housing for the Nation — one that reflects its culture, values and priorities.

The result? *The Songhees Housing for Wellbeing* is an innovative, community-driven development project that focuses on the culture, health and wellbeing of the Songhees Nation, now and for the future. This project is a plan for multi-unit housing on an urban site that both respects the community's values and

will meet the needs of Nation members at every stage of life for current and future generations.

With the goals of improving housing quality for members and to welcome off-reserve members back home, this project embodies intergenerational living, community connection, wellness and cultural revitalization. The final outcome will be a mixed-use, mixed-income development owned by the Songhees Nation that reflects the priorities and identity of the Nation. The critical visioning work that the consultant led with the community members set the course for this project and is grounded in community and Council-driven priorities

The Nation's Strategic Plan has clear priorities related to: self-governance; language revitalization; honouring culture; economic development; land, property and housing; education skills and employment; and health and social development. To ensure the Nation's Strategic Plan priorities are met in this housing development, the project team held a series of visioning workshops with Elders, youth and the others in the community in 2019 to identify their priorities for the site. From this series of community workshops, the vision for the development emerged around "Housing for Wellbeing."

The Nation envisioned a complete community, with affordable, versatile, intergenerational housing, as well as commercial and retail spaces, and shared amenity spaces for community gathering, supporting culture, and the health and wellbeing of its people.

A master plan concept was developed for 160 affordable homes and will be delivered in phases, starting with homes in a variety of unit sizes in a six-storey main building. This first phase is designed to meet the needs of members currently living on-reserve in overcrowded housing conditions, including Elders and families who want to live in intergenerational housing. A second phase of development will accommodate those who now live off-reserve and want to move back home, offering a five-storey

apartment building with a mix of apartments and ground-oriented units.

Intergenerational living is part of Songhees culture since time immemorial and the design of the main building takes a modern approach to extended families living together. Every floor features a family lounge to provide a shared space for family gathering, shared meals and events for the residents of each floor, whether they are extended families or other community members.

Both buildings have an age-friendly design with an emphasis on accessibility for Elders and families of all abilities. The development will also feature an early childhood learning centre, a community multi-purpose building, and additional indoor and outdoor amenity spaces for cultural events, gathering, shared meals, celebrations, events, education and cultural programming for both the residents and the wider Songhees community.

The development wraps around a central shared green space modelled after a healing circle, offering flexible spaces for educational programming, cultural activities and community events. The space is also designed with natural features to sustainably address stormwater management on site.

Other outdoor spaces including a children's playground and an ethnobotanical garden that will provide a direct connection to nature and green space to promote play, wellness and healing. The ground-level commercial and retail space is designed for community services, such as a coffee shop, bakery, and small grocery. To address the Nation's economic development priorities, the south area of the site has been designed for commercial, office and retail development in order to generate long term sustainable revenue for the Nation.

This project has been well planned from Council and the community's perspective by having the right consultant in place to define and lead the project in partnership with Songhees Nation. After the initial visioning workshops, a dedicated, Council-led Songhees Housing Steering Committee was formed to work with the consultant as the primary body to guide and advance the work through all project stages. The

Songhees Housing Steering Committee has been critical to advancing this project and ensuring the priorities of the Nation, from Chief, Council and members, are delivered. Regular community updates and opportunities for input are provided to members, confirming the project is delivering on the community's vision and goals.

From project visioning to delivery, the *Songhees Housing for Wellbeing* will build affordable, intergenerational housing for on-reserve members of Songhees Nation, enable off-reserve members to move back to their home community, and capture the community's vision for the future of housing and wellbeing. The final project will ensure the community will continue to thrive for generations to come. ■

Karen Tunkara is a member of Songhees Nation Council. She has been a Councillor for almost 10 years and works with the portfolios of Housing, Finance, Human

Resources and Tourism. Karen is on the Songhees Housing Steering Committee.

Don Albany is a member of Songhees Nation Council. He has been a Councillor for four years and works with the portfolios of Housing, Finance and Education. Don is a member of the Songhees Housing Steering Committee.

Carla Guerrero is the CEO and Founder of Purpose Driven Development and Planning. Carla and the team at Purpose Driven Development have been working with Songhees Nation since 2016 on their development and planning priorities for strategic Songhees lands including developing a masterplan.

For more information see:
<https://www.purposedrivenroi.com>

Annelise van der Veen is the Planning and Development Coordinator at Purpose Driven Development and Planning.

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