



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – April 22, 2020**  
**COVID-19 Cowichan Task Force for Vulnerable Populations Updates Plan to Shelter, Support, and Self-Isolate Homeless and Precariously Housed**

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DUNCAN, BC – BC Housing and Emergency Management BC are considering a plan submitted by the COVID-19 Cowichan Task Force for Vulnerable Populations to provide shelter and support to homeless and precariously housed people. The plan focuses on creating small-scale, 12 people or less, outdoor tenting sites – none of which will be in parks – and providing hotel rooms for people who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.

The staff shortage for shelter workers has been a significant hurdle for developing the response plan. Providing only indoor shelter spaces is not feasible due to lack of available staffing; already staff shortages have led to the closure of the Women’s Night Shelter, previously operated locally by the Cowichan Women Against Violence (CWAV) Society. At this time, BC Housing has approved establishing one outdoor tenting site for women displaced by the Women’s Night Shelter closure; the location for the tenting site has not yet been finalized. Security, access to washroom, shower, and laundry facilities, health supports, and healthy food will be provided.

Debbie Berg, CWAV Executive Director, says “even though we have had to discontinue allowing women to come in to sleep at the shelter, the remaining staff have stayed in contact, providing women with meals and on-going access to showers, laundry, and storage facilities. The women we serve are looking forward to being settled in a safe and dry space where they know they will be less exposed to COVID-19.”

At the beginning of April, the COVID-19 Task Force for Vulnerable Populations, which is being led by Cowichan Housing Association, submitted a short-term 30-day response plan for consideration. Incorporating the feedback from BC Housing and Emergency Management BC, and understanding the staffing constraints limiting the provision of indoor shelter space, that plan has been modified and resubmitted for consideration. Should the plan be approved, the next steps will be to begin finalizing the tenting sites and hotel rooms, selecting people to reside at each of the sites, and arranging the provision of support services.

“We have had the opportunity to discuss with BC Housing and other potential funding partners the details of our plan and the rationale for our approach,” says John Horn, Executive Director of Cowichan Housing Association. “Those discussions have been productive, and we anticipate a positive outcome from BC Housing in the very near future.”

“This plan will at least provide us a starting point that offers some measure of stability, safety, and support for everyone,” comments Mayor Michelle Staples. “I recognize tenting sites are not ideal but, neither is the current situation with up to 137 people in our community without access to shelter. The task force will continue to work on medium-term and longer-term plans, including a post-COVID-19 transition plan.”

The task force will continue to provide updates and more detailed information over the next days and weeks.

For more information, please contact:

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Up to this point, the COVID-19 Task Force for Vulnerable Populations has included participation from the following organizations:

- Canadian Mental Health Association
- City of Duncan
- Community Action Team
- Cowichan Division of Family Practice
- Cowichan Housing Association
- Cowichan Neighbourhood House
- Cowichan Tribes
- Cowichan Valley Regional District
- Cowichan Women Against Violence Society
- Island Health
- Island Health Mental Health and Substance Use
- Ladysmith Resource Centre Association
- Municipality of North Cowichan
- RCMP
- School District No. 79
- Service Canada
- Social Planning Cowichan
- Sonia Furstenau, MLA
- Town of Ladysmith
- Town of Lake Cowichan
- United Way