

For immediate release**April 24, 2008****Comox Valley Commission Set as Next Step in Ending Homelessness**

At its April 22 meeting, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) board approved the formation of a “commission to end homelessness”, as the first step in implementing the recommendations of the mayor's task force on breaking the cycle of mental illness, addictions and homelessness in the Comox Valley, struck by Courtenay mayor Starr Winchester in December 2007.

That committee issued its report in March, and the regional commission struck earlier this week will oversee, coordinate and initiate the development of new housing and other services to end homelessness in the Comox Valley. The commission will be responsible for building or acquiring new housing that will support the need for 250 units for the homeless in the next five years, and for building or acquiring at least 500 new affordable housing units for some of those considered at risk of homelessness. As well, the commission will work with BC Housing, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance and the Ministry of Health – specifically the Vancouver Island Health Authority and Mental Health and Addictions – on resolving the issues around homelessness.

“Thanks to the Comox Valley MLA, Minister Stan Hagen, and his staff, we were able to have meetings with representatives from those agencies and ministries in Victoria last week,” said Starr Winchester, CVRD director from Courtenay. “We said from the beginning that the report from the mayor’s task force was not going to be just a document gathering dust on a shelf. Our goal is to make sure that we get safe, affordable places to live not only for the homeless, but also for people who are at risk of becoming homeless in our community.”

“Those appointed to the commission have a great deal of experience, lots of enthusiasm and huge dedication and they all participated fully in the mayor’s task force on homelessness,” said Winchester. “We are off to a great start, and we will achieve our goal by establishing partnerships. That is crucial to our success and will ensure that there is minimal cost to the taxpayers of the Comox Valley.”

The commission will initially comprise six members: Tom Grant, Ted Brooks, Hendrik Roelants, Shawn Wilson, Heather Ney and Starr Winchester. The Local Government Act requires any committee of the CVRD to have at least one member who is a member of its board. Ultimately the commission would have a maximum of 15 members and would include representatives from other agencies including BC Housing, VIHA, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, the Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce, the local faith community and the Ad Hoc Emergency Resources Organization (AHERO).

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) is a partnership of four electoral areas and three municipalities providing nearly 60,000 residents with 87 services -- from parks to full-service sports facilities to a solid waste system that serves both the CVRD and the Strathcona Regional District.

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Attachment: Short biographies of current commission members

CVRD COMMISSION TO END HOMELESSNESS MEMBERS
April 2008

Starr Winchester: Mayor of Courtenay; CVRD director; chair of task force on homelessness struck in December 2007, which led to the formation of this commission with its vision of resolving the problem of homelessness and unstable housing in the Comox Valley.

Tom Grant: Chair of Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, semi-retired businessman, Rotarian, Chair of Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness Society

Shawn Wilson: Chair of Steering Committee; Community Services Director, Salvation Army, running outreach and shelter programs for the homeless. Current president of Crossroads Crisis Centre in Courtenay.

Ted Brooks: Co-chair of gap analysis panel. Businessman, member of Ad Hoc Emergency Resources Organization (AHERO); Chair of finance and administration committee for ElderCollege. Former director of Comox Valley United Way and the Comox Valley Airport Commission.

Hendrik Roelants: Co-chair of gap analysis panel. Decision support consultant for Vancouver Island Health Authority Mental Health and Addiction Services. A founding member of the Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness Society.

Heather Ney: B.A. (Psychology); Executive Director, Comox Valley Transition Society

All above were members of the Mayor's Task Force on Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Addiction and Homelessness.