



Early Engagement Summary Report

Supportive Housing in Vancouver West 8th Avenue at Arbutus Street

July 2021





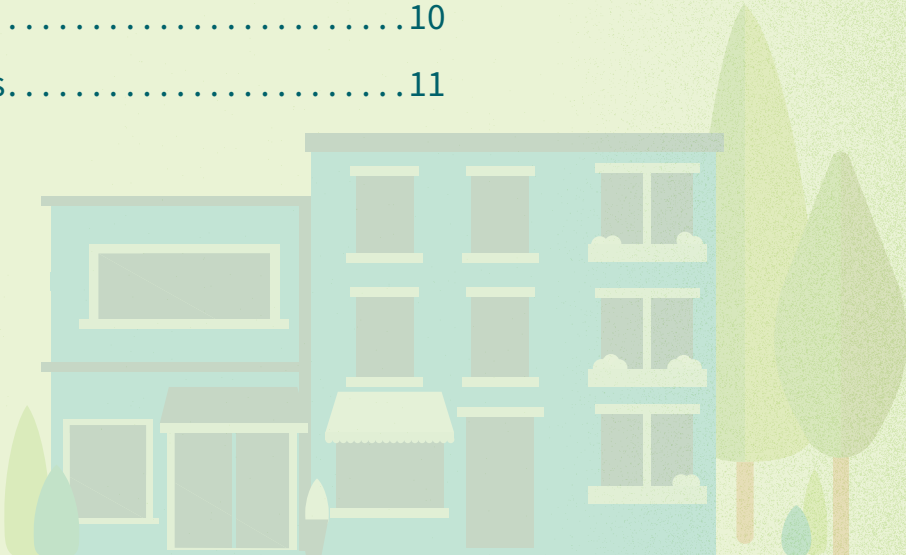
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Purpose

The purpose of this Early Engagement Summary Report is to provide an overview of community and stakeholder engagement activities and a summary of feedback that was received during the early planning stages for the proposed supportive housing at West 8th Avenue and Arbutus Street in Vancouver.

BC Housing and the City of Vancouver, the project partners, conducted this early engagement between February 11 and April 30, 2021, before the proposed project is submitted to the City of Vancouver for review through the City's rezoning application process.

This level of early engagement is aligned with BC Housing's best practices for community engagement and exceeds the public consultation requirements of the City of Vancouver's rezoning process.

This report includes a summary of key themes that have emerged from the early community engagement process which included four 90-minute Neighbourhood Dialogues, a four-week Public Comment Period, an ongoing online question and comment forum on the BC Housing Let's Talk webpage, and a Community Liaison available to receive feedback and answer questions by phone or email.

Frequently asked questions and corresponding responses provided by BC Housing during the engagement period have been included as an Appendix to this report.

Background

BC Housing is working with the City of Vancouver on a proposal to build new supportive housing at 2086 and 2098 West 7th Avenue and 2091 West 8th Avenue. Prior to submitting a rezoning application to the City of Vancouver, BC Housing engaged with neighbours, local groups and the community to introduce the proposed project and listen to feedback.

BC Housing is proposing a building that would offer up to 140 studio homes with supports for adults, seniors and people with disabilities who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the local community. Supports may include mental health care, medical care, education and training, reconnecting to culture, life skills training, substance use services, and help accessing income assistance, disability benefits, pensions, identification or setting up a bank account.

BC Housing is committed to bringing people inside and reduce the number of people outside struggling to survive. When a person chooses to live in supportive housing, they have a warm, safe place to call home, can access the necessities of life such as food, washrooms and laundry, can begin to heal from the damage caused by living outside and can strengthen community connections.

If approved by Mayor and Council, construction is expected to begin mid-2022.





Early Engagement Program

Goal and Objectives

The goals of the early engagement program for West 8th Avenue were to:

1. **Provide a variety of opportunities for neighbours, local groups and the community to learn** about the proposed housing and provide feedback



2. **Build awareness** of the need for housing with supports for people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver.



3. **Explore ways to build an inclusive community** where everyone has an opportunity for a safe and healthy place to live.



4. **Collect feedback** on the proposed design of the site to inform the rezoning application.





Opportunities for Community Feedback

BC Housing reached out to engage residents early in the planning process using a variety of channels to ensure the community had the opportunity to learn about the project and provide comments.

Community members were invited to ask questions and provide input to the project through:

Virtual Neighbourhood Dialogue Sessions



39 community members attended four 90-minute sessions where they viewed short presentations on the topics of homelessness, learned about supportive housing and the project details, and engaged in roundtable discussions with project staff.

Small-group Meetings with Local Organizations



BC Housing and City of Vancouver staff met with members of local organizations to discuss the proposed supportive housing project and listen to questions and feedback.

Public Comment Period



BC Housing provided a Public Comment Period that was hosted on its webpage from March 1 until the end of the day on March 31, 2021. Community members submitted questions about the proposed supportive housing and received responses from the project team. As part of the Public Comment Period, a self-guided presentation with information about the development proposal was available to review.

Let's Talk Housing Webpage



BC Housing invited public feedback through Let's Talk Housing, an online question and comment forum on the project webpage. The BC Housing staff continue to receive input through this question and comment forum.

BC Housing Community Liaison Email and Phone



A Community Liaison was available Monday to Friday from 9:00am to 4:00pm, for community members to contact via phone or email. The Community Liaison's contact information was included on all notification and presentation materials so that community members could submit comments and questions on the project and receive responses from BC Housing. BC Housing continues to receive calls and emails through the Community Liaison.



Engagement Activities and Timeline

The table below describes engagement activities related to the project.

Date	Activity	Description
February 10, 2021	BC Housing and the City of Vancouver delivered postcards to site neighbours	BC Housing sent postcards to residential and business neighbours within a 2-block radius of the proposed site to introduce the project. The postcards included a link to the Let's Talk Housing webpage, the Community Liaison contact information and an invitation to the Neighbourhood Dialogue meetings hosted in March.
February 10, 2021	BC Housing and the City of Vancouver reached out to local organizations	BC Housing and the City of Vancouver reached out directly to community organizations and other stakeholders to provide information about the projects and offer virtual meetings with BC Housing and the City of Vancouver staff. Community organizations and stakeholders included St. Augustine's Church, St. Augustine's School, Kits Neighbourhood House, Fairview Kitsilano Community Policing Centre, and School District Staff.
February 10, 2021	Let's Talk Housing West 8th webpage launch	BC Housing launched an online Question and Comment Forum to receive input from community members, to share project information and invite public feedback. https://letstalkhousingbc.ca/vancouver-west-8
February 11, 2021	Joint site announcement by BC Housing and the City of Vancouver	A news release was issued to inform the public about the plan for the new permanent purpose-built supportive housing site.
February/March, 2021	Meetings with local organizations	BC Housing and the City of Vancouver met with representatives from key stakeholder groups to discuss the supportive housing project and hear questions, concerns and feedback.
March 1 to March 31, 2021	Public Comment Period	A four-week Public Comment Period was hosted on the BC Housing Let's Talk webpage where community members could submit a question about the proposed supportive housing and receive a response from the Project Team. As part of the Public Comment Period, a self-guided presentation with information about the development proposal was available for review.
March 16, 2021	Fact Sheets delivered to businesses neighbouring the project	BC Housing delivered Fact Sheets about the housing proposal to businesses neighbouring the project to ensure the community had accurate information.
March 9, 10, 11, and 18, 2021	Neighbourhood Dialogue Sessions	A total of four virtual Neighbourhood Dialogues were held with neighbours. BC Housing and City of Vancouver staff provided information about supportive housing and pathways to homelessness. Community members had the opportunity to ask questions about the proposed project and provide input.

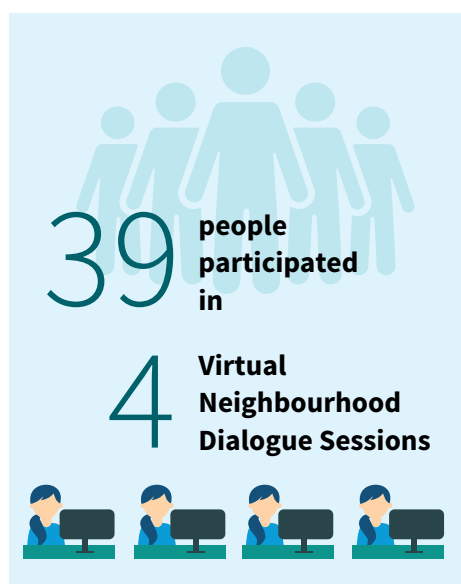


What We Heard

Participant Snapshot

BC Housing and the City of Vancouver worked together to ensure meaningful early engagement with neighbourhood residents through a process that is robust, fair and equitable, aligned with BC Housing's best practices for community engagement and exceeds the public consultation requirements of the City of Vancouver's rezoning process.

Community members and stakeholders participated in the engagement program in a variety of ways:



Guidelines for Respectful Dialogue

BC Housing wants to hear from everyone who wants to share their perspective in a safe and respectful way.

All conversations — in-person, over the phone, and/or online — are meant to be a place where people can share and listen.

We expect everyone will refrain from using language or acting in a way that is discriminating, threatening, abusive, racist or otherwise disrespectful. Discrimination or abusive language of any kind is not tolerated.



Summary of Feedback

The following themes have emerged from community feedback on the housing proposal to date:

Many community members expressed general support for the project. Comments included:

- It will be well integrated into the community
- Thank you for pursuing safe, affordable housing for vulnerable people
- Full support for the project
- This is a good location
- Housing like this is needed
- This project will add critical supportive and affordable homes
- There are many low-income people that would benefit from this site

Many community members expressed general opposition to the project. Comments included:

- There is a great deal of fear that it will change the neighbourhood
- It is irresponsible to pursue this proposal
- 140 units is too many for the area
- Objections to the location and the density

Many community members expressed a desire to maintain the character of the neighbourhood.

Comments included:

- The building will not fit in with the neighbourhood
- Current zoning won't allow for 12 storeys
- 12 storeys is too tall for the neighbourhood
- The community will begin to feel like downtown

Many community members expressed a desire to ensure adequate supports are in place for the residents in the building. Comments included:

- It is important to have proper supports at the site
- There needs to be long-term investment in supports for the residents

Some community members expressed a desire to be more fully consulted and engaged in project planning prior to the rezoning application process. Comments included:

- More Neighbourhood Dialogues are needed
- An extended public comment period is needed
- Provide more information about the project

A few community members expressed a desire to welcome the new residents into their neighbourhood.

Comments included:

- Looking for ways to welcome the new tenants to the community
- A community garden for tenants and other community members could be a good way to form community connections

A few community members expressed an interest in how the project will be operated. Comments included:

- Concerned about who will take responsibility for site operations and maintenance once the site has been approved
- It's critical to understand who is operating this and the programs that will be put in place



A few community members expressed a desire to see housing for single mothers and/or families.

Comments included:

- This site would be perfect for targeting a mixed model population like families or seniors as this neighbourhood is so rich in amenities
- Would like to see a specific focus to support families
- Supportive housing for families would be more appropriate
- The City should be approving family units

A few community members expressed concerns about stereotyping and stigma and a desire to share accurate information with the community. Comments included:

- It is upsetting to read misinformation being spread based on stigma
- The assumption that people experiencing homelessness are “bad” people is frustrating
- The invasive questions being asked by community members regarding future tenant backgrounds is concerning

A few community members provided suggestions and comments related to the design of the building and the outdoor space. Comments included:

- Consider a green roof
- Mature (vine) maples along West 8th Avenue could be integrated into the outdoor space
- Concern about the existing canopy trees along West 8th Avenue
- Consider a rooftop greenspace for gathering
- Concern about the trees near the site
- Concern about the square footage construction cost

Letters from community members were submitted including:

- A form letter expressing opposition to the project was submitted multiple times
- A form letter expressing support for the project was submitted multiple times
- A letter citing concerns was submitted by the West Broadway Business Improvement Association and a neighbouring Strata



Considerations

A few people asked for steps to be taken that would violate human rights, and/or federal and provincial laws including the BC Residential Tenancy Act. These included requests that BC Housing screen potential residents for drug and/or mental health issues and conduct criminal record checks. Responses to these comments include:

- It is important to be aware that residents of supportive housing have the same housing rights as all citizens.

A few people made comments and asked questions that confused supportive housing with SROs and/or shelters.

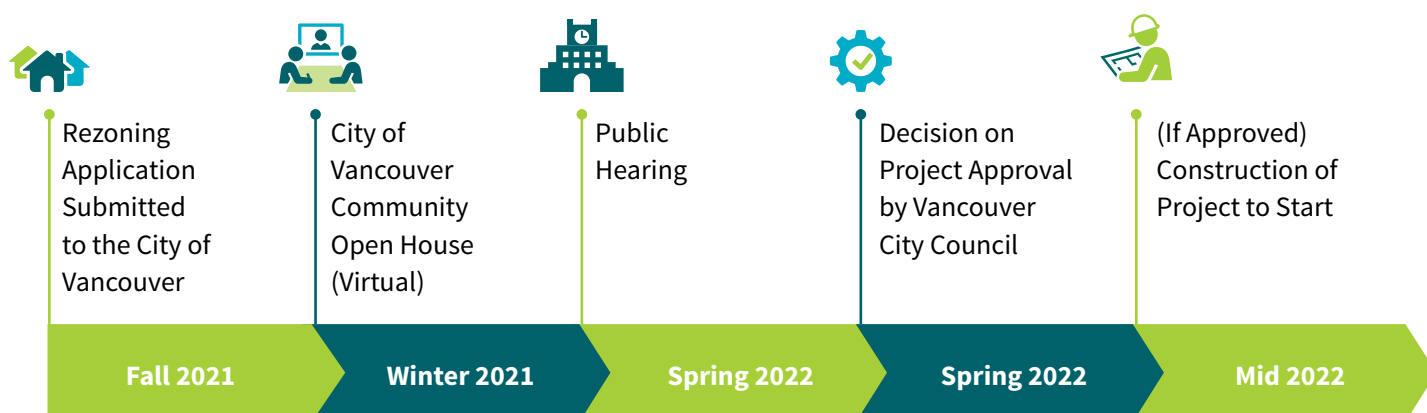
Responses to these comments include:

- Supportive housing is housing with supports. It is distinct from other forms of housing offered in British Columbia. Depending on the needs of the resident, this may include mental health care, substance use services, education, life-skills training, help assessing income assistance, disability benefits, pensions or any other service that support a safe, secure and positive future.
- Each resident at West 8th and Arbutus would receive a unique combination of services and programs tailored to support their health and wellbeing.

A few comments were based on stigma, misinformation and misunderstanding. These comments were discriminatory, disrespectful and reinforce the false notion that people experiencing or at risk of homelessness pose a risk to neighbourhood safety. Those comments have not been repeated here.

Next Steps

Upcoming phases of the community engagement process include:





Appendix: Frequently Asked Questions and Responses

The following questions emerged throughout the early engagement period. The responses from BC Housing are provided below.

Questions about **supports provided to tenants**



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All supportive housing programs are managed by non-profit housing operators that bring expertise providing customized supports tailored to meet the unique needs of each resident. For more on the types of supports provided, please visit: <https://letstalkhousingbc.ca/16664/widgets/80065/documents/49574>

Questions about **supervised consumption services** on site



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BC Housing takes a harm reduction approach, which means staff are available to support residents who are in various phases of substance use. When residents are ready to make a change, staff on-site will connect them with the appropriate support services.

Questions about the **the height of the proposed building**



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The proposal includes a 12-storey building because there is an immediate and urgent need to create warm, safe homes with supports for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These new homes could provide a vital connection to programs and services for 140 people in need.

This proposed project is in early stages and BC Housing has not yet submitted a rezoning application to the City of Vancouver. Once BC housing submits a rezoning application to the City, there will be a City-led consultation that will include an online Open House and Public Hearing, where building design elements such as height, will be considered.



Questions about the **public consultation process**



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We are in the early phase of public consultation. This is a proposed project and BC Housing is providing many opportunities for people to provide input. Members of the public could:

- Participate in the Public Comment Period until March 31
- Submit a question or comment at any time: <https://letstalkhousingbc.ca/vancouver-west-8>
- Call or email the Community Liaison at 604-829-9321 or CommunityLiaison@bchousing.org

Feedback submitted through these channels is being considered in the development of the rezoning application.

The project is in early stages and BC Housing has not yet submitted a rezoning application to the City of Vancouver. Once BC housing submits a rezoning application to the City, there will be a City-led consultation that will include an online Open House and Public Hearing.

Questions about **examples of other supportive housing sites**



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There are supportive housing projects in communities across British Columbia. For some examples, please visit: <https://www.bchousing.org/news/community-stories>

BC Housing also has a research centre that can be publicly accessed here: <https://www.bchousing.org/research-centre>

Questions about **who will be living in the homes** at West 8th Avenue and Arbutus Street



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The homes at West 8th Avenue and Arbutus Street are proposed to be supportive housing which is designed for adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. They can be young people, seniors, people with disabilities and anyone who has experienced trauma, poverty or struggled with the high cost of housing.

The non-profit housing operator and its partners will work together to create a healthy and inclusive community inside the building and ensure future tenants are connected with supports that best meet their needs.

Questions about the **number of accessible units** in the building



A

BC Housing's minimum standard for all projects is to ensure a minimum of 5% of the total units are accessible. Any additional accessible units will be determined through the design process and through consultation with the building operator. However, all units will be designed to meet Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) universal design guidelines, making all units adaptable for people with disabilities.



Questions about **supportive housing**



A

This proposed housing is a commitment by BC Housing and the City of Vancouver to take collective action to address the critical needs of people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver. The building's supportive housing program for residents would be managed by a non-profit housing operator that brings professional building management experience and expertise providing customized supports tailored to meet the unique needs of each resident. The supports may include mental health care, medical care, education and training, reconnecting to culture, life skills training, substance use services, and help accessing income assistance, disability benefits, pensions, identification or setting up a bank account.

Supportive housing offers residents a vital connection to programs and services to support their health and wellbeing. Supportive housing is for young people, seniors, people with disabilities, and anyone who has experienced trauma, poverty, or struggled with the high cost of housing.

Questions about the **rezoning application**



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The project is in early stages and BC Housing has not yet submitted a rezoning application to the City of Vancouver. Once BC housing submits a rezoning application to the City, there will be a City-led consultation that will include an online Open House and Public Hearing, where building design elements such as height, will be considered.

Questions about the proposed site **not including families or children**



A

BC Housing works in partnership with the private and non-profit sectors and community groups to develop a range of housing options.

We work to address critical gaps across the housing continuum, which range from emergency shelter and rent assistance in the private market to affordable home ownership. The homes at West 8th Avenue at Arbutus Street are proposed to be supportive housing which is designed for adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. BC Housing is also creating thousands of new homes across the province for families, women fleeing violence, seniors and people with disabilities.

For more information on the range of housing BC Housing builds, please see the summary of homes created here: <https://www.bchousing.org/about/our-organization>



Questions about the **Community Advisory Committee (CAC)**



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The purpose of the CAC is to:

- facilitate information sharing and dialogue
- build and maintain positive relationships amongst neighbours, the building operator and program partners
- identify and resolve any issues, opportunities and concerns related to the housing site
- explore ways to build and strengthen community connections

If the new homes are approved, a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) would be established in the months leading up to the building opening and the first meeting is typically held approximately one month before the building opens.

Community member representation (5 seats) is filled through an application process with preference given to a person who:

- is willing to abide by the Committee Terms of Reference and required time commitment
- is currently affiliated with multiple community organizations
- has experience representing their community on other committees/boards, etc.
- lives and/or works within a five-block radius of the housing site

Invitations to apply will be sent out to the neighbourhood before the building opens.

Questions about **tenant background**



A

It is important to know that people who live in supportive housing are not all the same. They can be young people, seniors, people with disabilities, people who have experienced trauma or poverty, and people who have struggled with the high cost of housing.

Questions about **neighbourhood safety**



A

People who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness are not all the same. They can be young people, seniors, people with disabilities, and anyone who has experienced trauma, poverty, or struggled with the high cost of housing. Many people living in supportive housing were already living in the local neighbourhood.

We recognize that some of the assumptions people make about supportive housing need to be addressed and encourage neighbours to become informed about the causes of homelessness and the important role supportive housing plays in helping to create safe, inclusive communities for everyone.