



FROM MY BACKYARD TO OUR BACKYARD

When NIMBYism Fades

April 2018



BCNPHA
BC Non-Profit Housing Association

We would like to express our gratitude to the BC Non-Profit Housing Association for allowing us to carry out this research. We would also like to thank the staff and community members at Turning Point Recovery Society, Coast Mental Health, Vancouver Native Housing Society, the City of Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver, and Community Builders Foundation for their generosity and insights. Lastly, the guidance of Adjunct Professor Noha Sedky was invaluable throughout this project.

Written and designed by:
Emily Huang & Simon Liem

In partnership with:
BC Non-Profit Housing Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE	5
RESEARCH QUESTION	6
METHODOLOGY	6
INTERVIEWEES	7
CASE STUDIES BACKGROUND	8
DUNBAR APARTMENTS	9
KWAYATSUT	10
TURNING POINT WOMEN'S HOUSING	11
SKEENA HOUSE	12
THEMES	13
TRANSPARENCY	13
DIRECT & OPEN COMMUNICATION	14
EXPOSURE	15
COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES	16
TIME	17
LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS	19
FURTHER RESEARCH	20
LIMITATIONS	21
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	22
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of supportive housing is crucial for individuals who are in need of recovery from substance use and those who are experiencing homelessness. This need, however, often collides with not in my backyard (NIMBY) attitudes. Communities express concerns that social and supportive housing will bring with it increases in crime and drug use, decreases in property values, and harm to children. In order to engage with these fears, we examined four supportive housing case studies to understand the process and approaches used by housing operators in the midst of community opposition. These case studies include the Dunbar Apartments, Kwayatsut, Turning Point Women's Housing, and Skeena House, all of which focus on the homeless population or women recovering from addictions.

Our findings reveal that strong partnerships with clearly defined roles between housing operators, municipal staff, local community members, and other organizational figures (e.g., health authority, police, non-profit agencies) form the basis for successful community engagement. The themes that emerged from our interviews are that **transparency** and **direct and open communication** build trust between the operator, tenants, and community; **exposure** to the tenants challenges prejudices about race, class, gender, and substance use; **Community Advisory Committees** (CACs) give space to ask questions and share humanizing stories; and **time** is required for operators to address concerns and for the community to overcome their preconceived notions of tenants.

"I think it's important that the District of North Vancouver has these services [supportive housing] for these people here. I feel like it's our job that these services exist, just like the swimming pool, the Maple Wood farm, the corner store where you can buy some milk. I feel it's part of a complete community."

- Annie Mauboules, Senior Social Planner, District of North Vancouver

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Cries of “Not in my backyard!” can ring out in any community that is facing change. The concerns may range from the ecological to the social. Resistance often walks a line between a desire for democratic input into shaping a community's future and obstructionism to maintain the status quo. Balancing these two sides of NIMBYism presents a particular problem for social and supportive housing operators who are looking for safe and welcoming areas in which to provide their services. Few are opposed to better options for those in need of housing (Tighe, JR, 2012), but when it comes to the question of where those options will be located, a common answer is ‘Not here.’

The attitudes of NIMBYists and their effects on decision making have been well-studied. Corianne Payton Scally & J. Rosie Tighe (2015) have examined the subject in detail with regards to affordable housing. In this project, we examine what happens after the decision has been made and social or supportive housing arrives in the backyard.

The BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA) has observed that even the most heightened community opposition to a social or supportive housing project tends to dissipate within a few months of completing a building if the project is well-implemented. With this in mind, our project attempts to learn why this is the case and to use the lessons learned from this research to highlight approaches and methods to calm opposition and better facilitate future supportive and social housing developments.



Photo © Derek Lepper, All Rights Reserved

RESEARCH QUESTION

What causes supportive and social housing projects that were initially facing NIMBYism to become accepted by the community after implementation?

To answer this question, we interviewed stakeholders to gain their insights, and from those exchanges, we identified a number of common themes. In interacting with a resistant community, many of our interviewees identified the importance of transparency, clear communication, exposure to the completed project, Community Advisory Committees (CACs), and time. We examine each of these factors in depth in this report.

Each project faced and persevered through significant opposition. The lessons that we learned from our research became focused on how housing operators can be successful in an environment imbued with NIMBYism and how to best integrate a social housing project into a hostile community. Notably, all of our cases were supported by their respective municipalities and the province. The NIMBYism that was experienced in the development stages of these projects did not have a great effect on the approval of the buildings; NIMBYism was less an obstacle to creating social housing and more an issue of gaining the community's trust. This was especially important to ensure that a tenant who was moving into a hostile environment would feel comfortable in his or her new home. We examine these issues in our Discussion and Conclusion in relation to the themes that emerged from our primary research question.

METHODOLOGY

We undertook a case-study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the opposition and the subsequent community integration of the social and supportive housing sites. The four case studies consisted of semi-structured interviews with various housing operator staff, municipal staff, and community members, and reviews of available public documents about the sites. One author was able to attend a CAC meeting for the Dunbar Apartments. We chose these cases with the guidance of BCNPHA and based on our own research, aided by Adjunct Professor Noha Sedky of the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning.

In this report, we give a brief introduction to each case study, followed by an examination of the themes. We then present our lessons learned and recommendations before our concluding discussion. We also include a brief section on the limitations of our approach and suggestions for further research.

INTERVIEWEES



Dunbar Apartments

- Renay Bajkay, Director of Housing Services, Coast Mental Health
- Marge Johnson, Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Member
- Dr. Pitman Potter, CAC Member
- Vicki Potter, CAC Member*
- Penny Rogers, Kitsilano Shower Program*



Kwayatsut

- Dave Eddy, Chief Executive Officer, Vancouver Native Housing Society (VNHS)
- Jody Puff, former Chief Operating Officer, VNHS
- City of Vancouver Staff Member**
- VNHS Staff Member**
- VNHS Staff Member**



Turning Point Women's Housing

- Annie Mauboules, Senior Social Planner, District of North Vancouver
- Brenda Plant, Executive Director, Turning Point Recovery Society*



Skeena House

- Julie Roberts, Executive Director, Community Builders Foundation
- Beth Anne Dolan, Supportive Housing Coordinator, Community Builders Foundation

* Interviewed but uncited.

** Participants requested anonymity.

Icons provided by The Noun Project

CASE STUDIES BACKGROUND

NAME	OPERATOR	DATE OPENED	LOCATION	CLIENTS	NUMBER OF UNITS
Dunbar Apartments	Coast Mental Health	2012	3595 West 17th Avenue, Vancouver	Individuals with mental health issues who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	51
Kwayatsut	Vancouver Native Housing Society	2014	675-691 East Broadway, Vancouver	Aboriginal adults and youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	103
Turning Point Women's Housing	Turning Point Recovery Society	2014	2670 Lloyd Avenue, North Vancouver	Women recovering from substance use	9
Skeena House	Community Builders Foundation; Aboriginal Friendship Society	2013	3475 East Hastings Street, Vancouver	Individuals transitioning into permanent housing	54



Provided by Turning Point Recovery Society

DUNBAR APARTMENTS

The Dunbar Apartments opened in 2012 to serve people with mental health issues who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of being homeless. The building was the fifth project to be opened as part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Vancouver and BC Housing, which dedicated fourteen City-owned sites to be used for social and supportive housing projects.

The Dunbar Apartments are located on West 17th Avenue at Dunbar Street. The building provides 51 apartments with 24-hour support services for the residents. Four of the apartments are built for people with disabilities and are tenanted in collaboration with the St. George's Place Housing Society, and five apartments are reserved for Jewish tenants, who are brought to the building through the Yaffa Housing Society. All of the residents receive access to a variety of support services, including meals, connections to community resources, and social and educational events.

While the initial public engagement events gathered many supportive comments from the community, there were several concerns related to drugs, crime, and the mix of tenants who would be living in the building.

One resident at an open house event commented about the fear of how the "crime-free, anxiety-free" character of the Dunbar neighbourhood would be affected by the building, and the resident recommended that the housing be dedicated to seniors rather than people with mental illness (City of Vancouver, 2008). In an interview with the authors, a resident supportive of the project said that much of the opposition was fomented in private Facebook groups, often referring to the residents as "inmates" and portraying the apartments as a criminal facility.

The first meeting of the Dunbar Apartments' CAC took place in 2008, almost four years before the facility would

open. Membership included Coast Mental Health (CMH), representatives from the City of Vancouver, community organizations, residents, and others.

Today, there are strong partnerships between the Dunbar Apartments and local churches, community outreach programs, and schools. The building hosts regular social and cultural events with community members, and there are regular exchanges of volunteers between the tenants and local organizations.



Provided by Dunbar Apartments

KWAYATSUT

Kwayatsut is an eight-story supportive housing building run by the Vancouver Native Housing Society (VNHS) at the corner of Broadway and Fraser Street. The building has at-grade commercial space that is leased by the City of Vancouver. It is also home to the Broadway Youth Resource Centre with which it hosts joint programs. Kwayatsut is part of the City of Vancouver and BC Housing MOU.

The VNHS completed construction of Kwayatsut late in 2014, and began moving tenants soon after. The building provides housing for 103 Indigenous residents, 30 of which are youths between the ages of 14 and 24 years old, all of whom have experienced homelessness or are at risk of being homeless. Kwayatsut offers 24-hour on-site supportive services, and has the goal of providing “an Aboriginal perspective that has elements of Aboriginal culture to address life skills and social programming designed to foster a sense of purpose and community,” according to VNHS. The building was named Kwayatsut by Chief Ian Campbell of the Squamish Nation, and it means “Seeking one’s power” (Vancouver

Native Housing Society, n.d.).

Hostility towards the project appeared almost immediately after public consultation began in 2008. Two now-defunct websites, NIABY.com—standing for Not in Any Backyard—(NIABY.com, 2009) and MountPleasantNeighbours.org (Mount Pleasant Neighbours, n.d.), organized campaigns against the building. Both groups opposed the size of the project, and stoked fears about drug-use and the possibility of the housing creating a “ghetto” in the neighbourhood.

This opposition culminated in a three-day public hearing in 2010 in front of Vancouver’s City Council for the rezoning of the site. The rezoning was ultimately approved but with a modification to the design that removed three floors of affordable housing from the building, reducing it from eleven to eight storeys.

Since opening, Kwayatsut has developed strong relationships with the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, a nearby school, and other organizations to collaborate on a number of programs involving Kwayatsut and the neighbourhood.



Photo © Derek Lepner. All Rights Reserved.



TURNING POINT WOMEN'S HOUSING

Turning Point Women's Housing is a nine-bed recovery home for women, offering 24-hour on-site support services. Located at 2670 Lloyd Avenue in the District of North Vancouver (DNV), the land is owned by the municipality and had been unoccupied since 2010. The DNV offered the site for this project. The recovery home is operated by Turning Point Recovery Society (TPRS).

The idea for this project emerged when the District, Vancouver Coastal Health, the police department, and other non-profit organizations were finding that women "coming out of detox didn't have a place to be for support recovery," said Annie Mauboules, a Senior Social Planner for the DNV. Instead, women were going to municipalities such as Surrey, Maple Ridge, and Abbotsford, which were far from their support network. TPRS presented a recovery house proposal to the Standing Committee for Substance Abuse, which supports community organizations in reducing substance abuse on the North Shore. With the support of the Committee and the DNV Council, the project began in 2012.

Opposition emerged during the preliminary consultation process in 2013. The opposition consisted of common NIMBY concerns, such as decreases in land value, increases in drug use and crime rates, and a loss of park space (City of Vancouver, 2010). Community members believed a narrative that portrayed the women as sex-trade workers, prostitutes, and negligent mothers.

The development process was further complicated by the regulatory requirement for the site to be rezoned. The use of the recovery home in the existing Murdo Frazer park zoning had to be added. Despite the pronounced opposition and NIMBY attitudes, the DNV and TPRS were determined to make the recovery home a reality, while also responding to the community's concerns.

With time the opposition faded as people have realized that the recovery home did not come with their anticipated fears. This is reflected in the site's good maintenance and the lack of any increase in crime rates or drug use.



SKENA HOUSE

Skeena House is a transitional house located in the former Ramada Hotel on 3475 East Hastings Street. The City of Vancouver bought the facility in 2013 and leased it to the Community Builders Foundation (CBF) in partnership with the Aboriginal Friendship Society. Skeena House opened in December 2013 with a one-year lease agreement, which was renewed the following year (City of Vancouver, 2014b).

The building is geared towards Aboriginal clients, though not exclusively. The purpose is to house individuals who are exiting street homelessness and to help them transition into permanent housing. On-site and off-site services assist individuals towards full independence and community participation (City of Vancouver, 2014a).

The opposition emerged in early 2013 when the project was announced. CBF was not expecting the push-back as this was their first project that was located away from the Downtown Eastside. The local community expressed unease that the tenants were far from resources and the support networks that they required. Some also worried that Skeena House was inappropriate for a residential neighbourhood with schools. This speaks to a "misconception and assumption of what it means to be homeless," according to Beth Anne Dolan, the Supportive Housing Coordinator of CBF. When the renewal was announced after the first year of operation, opposition also highlighted the community's sentiments that the City of Vancouver was not upfront about the site's development in the beginning.

Currently Skeena House is well integrated into the community with support from the CAC. Locals also extend their assistance to the tenants through car rides, baked goods, and donations. There are only minor concerns but never directly related to the residents.

THEMES

After completing our interviews, we analyzed their contents to determine commonalities and differences between the case studies. We identified five themes that informed our analyses: transparency, direct and open communication, exposure, CACs, and time. Here we compare and contrast the cases using these themes.

TRANSPARENCY

In all four of the case studies, our interviewees emphasized transparency as a principle of public engagement, especially with regards to the projects' operations. Community engagement was a significant aspect at the start of the Skeena House project. Dolan discussed the value of having as many details as possible about the project early on, such as intake and selection processes, resource and support systems, and organizations who are involved. A lack of openness during the beginning phases of Skeena House was a point of contention for community members. This became an obstacle again when the City of Vancouver (COV) renewed the Skeena House's operations one year after its opening.

Clarifying to the public the different roles and responsibilities of the operators and their partners was cited as being important in making community members feel comfortable that the housing will be run professionally. "Early on at the [CAC] meetings, we had to set ground rules and make it clear that Kwayatsut was only responsible for their building, and not for everything that went on in the neighbourhood," said a COV staff member who sits on Kwayatsut's CAC.

CMH created a publicly available Operations Management Plan (OMP) for the Dunbar Apartments (Coast Mental Health, 2009). The document, which was written with input from the CAC, covered many of the issues about which neighbourhood residents were concerned. The OMP set out the building's mission, the support services offered, the client selection processes, and

"Good Neighbour Practices," among other items. "That was something we were extremely transparent with," said Renay Bajkay, CMH's Director of Housing Services.

We found that a perceived absence of transparency or information can exacerbate public skepticism towards a project. During the public hearings to rezone Kwayatsut's site, VNHS was in the position of being unable to answer questions about what type of support services would be offered to the tenants when the building opened. VNHS had never operated a building of Kwayatsut's size or with hard-to-house clients. At the time of the public hearing for the site's rezoning, which was four years prior to completion, the organization had not yet finalized the operations. Residents worried that the tenants of Kwayatsut may not be given access to needed supportive services. "We didn't know the extent of the support or what supports might be there," said David Eddy, the Chief Executive Officer of VNHS. "So we couldn't really answer that question definitively." Eddy added that he understood why the lack of information may have upset community members.

Similarly with Turning Point Women's Housing, DNV staff realized that a lack of transparency hurt the development process. Community members felt excluded from the details of how the municipality obtained the land and how it chose the housing operator. The DNV's response to these criticisms was that the priority was for "the housing operator [TPRS] to be licensed and have a good reputation," said Annie Mauboules. The staff realized that they did not give the public a chance to be part of this selection process. As a result, an Expression of Interest (EOI) is now made available to the community to increase transparency. The EOI is a process by which the DNV invites proposals from housing operators, who are subject to a selection process open to the public before staff goes to Council with the recommended option. This process differs from the prior procedure in which the

municipality selected the operator without external input.

A common demand from the community was to know who would be living in the housing, raising questions about how transparency had to be weighed against the protection of the tenants' privacy. "Sometimes [Community Builders] discuss the tenant makeup and the population that moves in a bit too much," said Julie Roberts, the Executive Director of CBF. "So I think we are perfecting the art of directing the conversation that's healthier but also maintaining the rights of the tenants." She added that striking a balance between sharing information and protecting privacy was difficult.

CMH's Bajkay emphasized that it was important for the community to know how tenants were being selected, even if identifying information could not be revealed.

During Kwayatsut's CAC meetings, VNHS was "always creating healthy boundaries for folks to understand that they weren't privy to personal information of tenants," according to Jody Puff, the former Chief Operating Officer of VNHS. She believed that in being honest about other aspects of the building, VNHS gained the trust of residents to the point that they understood that they could not have access to everything.

DIRECT & OPEN COMMUNICATION

As each of the projects opened, many of the operators felt scrutiny from the community over the behaviour of both the tenants and building staff. In response, the operators ensured that members of the community had direct lines of communications to the building.

At Skeena House, Dolan said that CBF maintains contact with community members, especially those who still have con-

"Now we do an expression of interest, people respond, we review, analyze, go to Council and say this is our preferred option... this is a transparent process."

- Annie Mauboules, DNV

cerns about any nuisance in the neighbourhood. Roberts ensures that CBF has staff available to answer calls, respond to emails, and meet with individuals in person. Having a space for a person to talk to about their concerns

is an important form of open engagement.

A direct connection to staff at a building was important to making sure that people felt their concerns were being addressed swiftly. A VNHS staff member said that responding quickly to any contact via email or through the CAC was important to make sure that the community members felt that they were being listened to, which built confidence in the staff.

These lines of contact also allowed staff to be aware of any problems that may be arising and to address them early. "Every time something seems to go wrong in the neighbourhood, they come first to our building," said CMH's Bajkay. "We encourage that, because we would rather they come and speak to the staff than randomly start picking on people in the street."

This type of communication was noted to be challenging at times for the staff. Listening to people's vocal opposition on the phone while remaining neutral was difficult for Turning Point Women's Housing staff. Mauboules said that it can be very draining, and even after many years as a planner, it takes practice and a certain skill set.

Another approach Mauboules used was hosting circle engagement sessions for Turning Point Women's Housing. This method avoids people's "grand standing" in front of the attendees. Having community members sit in a circle allows the opportunity for the community to speak to each other and ask questions rather than focusing their frustration at the housing operator or municipal staff. Mauboules found this to be much more effective for deeper

conversations and for those who are shy to have a voice.

For the Skeena House, Roberts suggested that they had “perfected how to communicate in a way that doesn’t take offense [while] understanding people’s fears [and] being assertive that we’ve done this before.” This helped staff be more confident despite the hostile environment, which made having healthy conversation a challenge. This highlights the need to have empathy and to be a good listener to build confidence in the process, reflecting Mauboules’ experience of maintaining a neutral voice in the midst of opposition against TPRS.

In addition, establishing open and direct communication can be strengthened when there are “experienced staff members in the housing market to do communication with the public,” said CBF’s Roberts. She added that front line staff should be the ones in the forefront of communication rather than those in management or executive positions.

EXPOSURE

Engaging with the community requires much work on educating the public about those who live in supportive housing. The attitudes associated with the opposition in Turning Point Women’s Housing and Skeena House were based on narratives common in the media, which perpetuated negative stereotypes about the homeless and those who experience substance abuse. As a result, Dolan said a “homogeneous vision of the person” is portrayed, which fails to represent the differences in each person’s experience and journey to recovery. To counter some of these ideas, some of the operators invited community members who were previously opposed to the projects to share and speak about their experience. Concerned community members could then hear from people they could relate to, rather than just from municipal staff, housing operators, and those who were supportive.

This strategy can also help engage

“[Tenants] would come in and they would tell their stories. They’d get done and there’s not a dry eye in the house.”

- Dr. Pitman Potter, Dunbar Apartments CAC member

the “media in a more proactive way and limit some of the exposure to the negative story,” said Roberts. She added that the media often overshadows the positive stories and experiences of these supportive housing projects.

Several interviewees felt that addressing opposition to community housing often required dealing with fear, which was seen as being at the root of the negativity. “They [community members] may be fearful of what is happening on the Downtown Eastside. I feel that maybe that’s where some of that fear and resistance came in,” said a VNHS staff member. “But as soon as we had our CAC meeting... those feelings just started to dissipate.”

Dr. Potter, a deacon of a Dunbar Anglican Church and CAC member of the Dunbar Apartments, recalled that discussions about concerns allowed community members to examine the source of those fears. He felt that most people were uncomfortable with how people looked or differences in behaviour, and that many felt more comfortable after discussing these issues with people who were familiar with the tenants. “It was kind of hard for the people who were taking a resistant view to hold up under those kinds of questions because at the end of the day they were ultimately persuaded... that they [the tenants] are not a threat to anybody,” Dr. Potter said.

During the Dunbar Apartments CAC meetings, potential tenants also volunteered to come and speak to the committee about their own experiences with homelessness. “They would come in and they would tell their stories,” said Dr. Potter.

"They'd get done and there's not a dry eye in the house." According to Dr. Potter, this helped humanize the people who would be living in the building.

VNHS's Puff felt that when community members were exposed to the tenants, it helped changed some of the preconceptions of those who were resistant. During the Christmas season, VNHS could share what tenants wanted as gifts. "Tenants, as they do, they ask for the basics. They aren't asking for an iPad tablet," said Puff. "They're asking for clothes and gloves and toques and mitts and socks." Puff believes that when community members saw the nature of what the tenants needed, they realized how reasonable it was and that they even had the ability to help the tenants.



Provided by Turning Point Recovery Society

TPRS brought community members on tours of other supportive housing locations. The purpose, Mauboules said, was to "demystify [and] destigmatize" the tenants and to allow the local community members to gain first-hand exposure. Although not everyone was convinced, Mauboules emphasized that she still considers this beneficial.

After Skeena House's opening and operation, Dolan described the community's involvement with the Skeena House residents. Local community members baked Christmas cookies, provided food, and hosted a barbecue event. These efforts helped expose the community to the residents through continuous interaction and relationship building.

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

All four of the buildings had CACs that met on a regular basis to discuss issues related to the sites and community. These committees were mandated under the MOU between BC Housing and the City of Vancouver for Kwayatsut and the Dunbar Apartments. Membership varied between the CACs, but they generally had representatives from the operator, the City of Vancouver or District of North Vancouver, community organizations, and residents.

The CACs provided a forum for many of the themes that we identified to play out. Operators could share information with community members in a transparent manner; in some meetings, tenants would share their stories with the members, exposing everyone to how the housing benefited the clients; and they served as a line of open communication where many stakeholders could discuss issues together. Puff recalled a Kwayatsut CAC meeting where the community policing representatives reported that there had been an increase in crime at a nearby shopping centre, and the representatives were able to address directly questions about whether the increase was related to Kwayatsut's tenants, which it was not.

"You have people at the table from various organizations, who can either take it back to their organization or address it immediately," said the City of Vancouver's CAC representative for Kwayatsut. "It's an opportunity for the non-profit to give confidence to the community members, to show

that there is a plan." She added that the CACs also allow the community members to bring up concerns that may not be directly related to the building but relevant to the City, which helped build trust in the committee as a useful endeavour.

The DNV's Mauboules said, "There was always a commitment to have a Neighbourhood Advisory Committee, which I think is really key because it provides a space for people who have concerns." These concerns usually entailed construction issues and traffic management further into the project's operation, rather than just fears of crime and drugs, which never became a real issue.

While members had their concerns addressed at these meetings, it also gave occasion for them to hear and spread positive news to the community. Dolan felt that CAC meetings allowed members to hear stories that humanized the work that came from these projects and possibly contribute to them.

"On our initial advisory committee, some of the people who were on it really had their doubts," said Marge Johnson, a community member of the Dunbar Apartments CAC. "The way they felt that they could find out about what was actually happening and to have some input into what was going on was to sit on this committee. They came not entirely convinced that this was a good thing, but they really wanted to be part of the dialogue and see what they could do."

The meetings were also positive in demonstrating the dedication of the operators to making the housing work. "People on the Community Advisory Committee saw how hard and diligently the staff at Dunbar were working to make it a success," said Dr. Potter.

Roberts of CBF felt that the "CACs still have bumps along the road," but they have come to play a "more supportive role than concerned role." With time, resident attendance dropped at all of the CACs,

which led to many of the groups deciding to meet less frequently, such as the case with Skeena House, in which meetings went from monthly to quarterly.

TIME

The themes above are a significant component in managing NIMBY attitudes and opposition early in the process. Most of our interviewees, however, believed that community members needed to see for themselves that a project does not make true their fears of increased crime or drops in property values. This ultimately requires time after a project is completed and operating.

Time was crucial for Turning Point Women's Housing, according to Mauboules. She spoke of a community member who had turned from being a skeptic to an advocate. Though initially resistant, he eventually saw that the building was well maintained, crime rates had not increased, and people were better supported in an apartment than on the streets. The gentleman volunteered to speak at public engagement events in favour of other supportive housing developments.

Dolan at CBF also said that "time [was the] biggest thing that helped change minds" for the Skeena House Project. People needed the chance to realize that negative effects were not happening in order for the stereotypes in people's minds to dissipate.

"You can only try to assure them [community members] that you are going to find the best operator possible, that they are experienced operators, and will sup-

"People believe when they see something happening. Not just when they're told that something is going to happen."

- Staff Member, VHNS

port their tenants...," said the COV staff member on Kwayatsut's CAC. "They have to actually see it and how it actually plays out."

The first Dunbar Apartments CAC meeting was held nearly four years before the building opened at a time when much of the opposition was still vocal. The long lead up to the Dunbar Apartments' opening allowed the operators and supporters of the project to deal with the concerns before tenants moved in. "A number of those early meetings were downright uncomfortable. There was name-calling. There were some raised voices," said Dr. Potter, "[We] were working really hard to try to basically demystify this exercise and to de-escalate concerns."

"It's become a normal part of the community, and I think that's time," said Dr. Potter, adding, "I think that's an inevitable outcome."

By contrast, Kwayatsut's first CAC meeting was held only a month before the building was opened in late 2014, which was four years after the last public hear-

ing. At the time of the first meeting, without the level of sustained engagement seen in Dunbar, the resistance and hostility from those opposed had already declined.

"I was anticipating that it would be much more difficult going in, and it really wasn't," said the City of Vancouver staff member. "It started with a very large group, and I think they just became more comfortable [that] they didn't come any more."

Attendance by community members at Kwayatsut's CAC steadily declined over time. Likewise, this decline is also evident in Turning Point Women's Housing CAC meetings. "These committees never remain. They serve a purpose but are not needed after," said Mauboules.

Despite an apparent lack of interest in the CAC from residents, both VNHS and CMH decided to continue to meet on a less frequent basis because the members saw value in having the committee as a way to communicate. Kwayatsut's CAC has been meeting for four years despite it only being mandated to exist for one year.



Provided by Dunbar Apartments

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Transparency and **clear communication** build trust in the operator and express the benefits of the project to the surrounding community.

- Have front-loaded communication in the beginning to make the process smoother
- Provide lines of direct connection with staff for the local community to voice their concerns
- Have experienced front-line staff to communicate with community members

Exposure to the tenants challenges prejudices about race, class, gender, and substance use.

- Educate the public about the homeless and people with addictions
- Expose the local community to tenants through volunteer events and housing tours
- Share humanizing stories by having former NIMBYs talk about their personal experiences

CACs are the mechanism through which many of these factors play out.

- Establish CACs before a project is open to involve and engage the local community
- Allow the community to address their concerns and ask questions through the CACs
- Challenge stereotypes through stories shared at meetings

Time plays a role in letting residents change their attitudes.

- Time provides community members a chance to change their minds about prejudices
- Early establishment of a CAC allows concerns to be addressed before a project opens

FURTHER RESEARCH

This report has identified several mechanisms by which an initially hostile community comes to accept, and sometimes advocate for, social and supportive housing in their neighbourhoods. Further research into this topic should explore how these mechanisms could apply to the approval stages of a process to help facilitate the development and community support for these types of housing sites. As discussed above, these projects had strong government backing, and community opposition was unlikely to have any significant affect on the sites' approval. In cases where a community has more influence over the housing site's development phases, we recommend investigating whether our identified themes and recommendations would positively influence community opposition. Aside from the time element, operators can follow the case studies' examples to inform how they can interact with a community earlier in the approval processes. This may also reveal the degree to which time is required for community acceptance, as this aspect may not always be evident in the initial public engagement process.

Recommended further research can also examine instances in which operator-community relations have not improved. One of the criteria for our case studies was that the housing sites are well integrated into a neighbourhood. By expanding the range of this type of research, there may be opportunities to identify gaps in public engagement or areas where alternative methods are needed. This could also be bolstered by seeking out the perspective of people who have been, or are, opposed to social and supportive housing. As discussed below, this was a limitation to our research.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation to our analysis is the lack of residents who were initially opposed to the projects but eventually came to support them. Their perspective may reveal what caused initially hostile attitudes to change over time. It also may be the case that those who did oppose the project still do but choose not to voice their opposition. An indication that this may not be true is that the attendance at the CAC meetings by community members has dropped significantly in all four of the cases. The operators believe that because no issues are being raised in those forums, there are unlikely lingering feelings of opposition. Other evidence to suggest that community relations are strong are the volunteer exchanges and reported good will between local organizations and housing operators.

Because we selected cases that we already knew to be good examples of strong community relations, we are unable to ascertain how generalizable the identified themes are. These case studies are also in a relatively small geographical area, which makes it difficult to know how applicable these findings are in different contexts. Research into instances where community relations are not well established would be beneficial to understand if the themes that we identified are a crucial feature of community integration, or if they are sometimes insufficient for the successful establishment of social and supportive housing sites.



Photo © Derek Lepper, All Rights Reserved

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In our research, the themes that we identified appeared to always be related deep-seated beliefs about the sites' tenants. Residents were afraid that their neighbourhoods would become ghettos, that children would be at risk from drug users, that women would engage in sex work, and that crime would increase. These were some of many fears that were not necessarily related to the housing sites in question. Preconceptions of race and class are often at the core of these attitudes (Tighe JR, 2012). Overcoming such ingrained beliefs required transparency, exposure, and time. Operators used the CACs and an emphasis on open communication to ensure that community members saw them as acting in earnest.

The approach we observed posed significant risks for the operators. In being transparent about operations, there was a chance that some of the fears would be validated. In the first months of the Dunbar Apartments' operation, there was a steady increase in emergency-service calls to the building. The CAC reported this directly to its members in an effort to maintain transparent operations. People who predicted an increase in crime were said to have been disturbed by the additional visits of ambulances and police, but their trust in the CAC kept them involved long enough to see the calls decrease.

The importance of being honest about issues that may upset the community was highlighted by a VNHS staff member. "You can't really have a community without a relationship. You won't be able to get people to understand what our goals are and understand what their goals are if you're not able to talk comfortably with each other," she said. "I think that if you're just trying to appease somebody, then you're starting to hide certain things."

For the stakeholder groups involved—

the community residents (both supportive and opposing), the operators, and the tenants of the housing sites—managing the tensions were not only important for the sake of community acceptance of the project, but also for the housing's success as a whole.

"We can't decide how a community would react. So we have to be prepared to work with it, and then follow through with what we said we would do."

- Renay Bajkay, CMH

Strong community relations were vital to ensure that the tenants who were moving into a new environment could do so safely. "The last thing we wanted was to move these people, who have experienced so much trauma in their lives and have experienced loss and are vulnerable, into a toxic environment," said CMH's Bajkay. "So we wanted to hear what the concerns were and work on those before we moved anyone in."

The opposition experienced by social and supportive housing sites was not unique to any of our cases. Many of our interviewees believed that the negative cultural values that underlie the opposition were not related to any specific issues to do with them. Rather, it had to do with more widespread beliefs about the populations they serve. Despite having to deal with issues that go beyond any single housing site, the housing operators showed that prejudices and fears can be overcome on a neighbourhood scale if given time and good faith efforts to engage the public.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

City of Vancouver (2008, 18 June). Development Permit Staff Committee Report, 3595 West 17th Avenue (Complete Application).

City of Vancouver (2010). Policy Report, Development and Building, CD-1 Rezoning of 675 - 691 East Broadway (at Fraser Street).

City of Vancouver (2014a). 3475 East Hastings Community Letter. Retrieved from City of Vancouver website: <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/3475-east-hastings-community-letter-nov-2014.pdf>

City of Vancouver (2014b). Operations Management Plan. Retrieved from City of Vancouver website: <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/3475-east-hastings-operations-management-plan-nov-2014.pdf.pdf>

Coast Mental Health (2009). Operations Management Plan Dunbar Street Apartments.

District of North Vancouver. (2013, May 7). Report of the Public Hearing. North Vancouver: District of North Vancouver.

MountPleasantNeighbours.org (n.d.). Fraser and Broadway development group. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20090801123207/http://mountpleasanthighbours.org>

NIABY.com (2009, 7 January). "Neighbourhood Harm Likely". Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20120718070555/http://www.niaby.com:80/index.cfm>

Sally, Corianne Payton, & Tighe, J. Rosie. (2015). Democracy in Action?: NIMBY as Impediment to Equitable Affordable Housing Siting, *Housing Studies*, 30:5, 749-769, DOI: 10.1080/02673037.2015.1013093

Tighe, J. Rosie. (2012). How Race and Class Stereotyping Shapes Attitudes Toward Affordable Housing, *Housing Studies*, 27:7, 962-983, DOI: 10.1080/02673037.2012.725831

Vancouver Native Housing Society (n.d.). Kwayatsut. Retrieved from <http://vnhs.ca/kwayatsut/>

