

# Community Acceptance of Non-Market Housing

## Purpose

*The purpose of this guide is to help non-profit housing providers prevent and address common site selection and design concerns raised by communities related to non-market housing.*

*Guide 2 forms part of the Community Acceptance of Non-Market Housing Toolkit, a series of five guides.*

*For more information on the Toolkit, go to the Research Centre Library at [www.bchousing.org](http://www.bchousing.org).*

## Guide 2 Design Considerations to Gain Community Acceptance

More inclusive neighbourhoods can be created in the long-term by ensuring quality design to optimize outcomes for both residents and neighbouring residents in non-market housing developments. Avoiding community and neighbourhood opposition can be accomplished through thoughtful site selection, before a design concept is prepared. Attention to design details can also further address neighbourhood concerns while improving operational outcomes for the non-profit housing provider and living quality for residents.

This guide focuses on site selection and high-level design considerations related to proposed non-market housing developments. This guide is intended to help non-profit providers in their discussions with development consultants, architects, and other design professionals. These professionals will help guide non-profit providers through the design process and provide advice on how to design non-market housing with consideration of community acceptance. For additional information on design details, refer to BC Housing's Design Guidelines and Construction Standards, available online: <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/asset-management-redevelopment/construction-standards>. Some local governments may also have their own design guidelines.

### This guide summarizes:

- › Importance of design on living outcomes and mitigating concerns.
- › Pre-planning for design acceptance.
- › Design considerations with site selection to gain community acceptance.
- › Designing site to achieve community acceptance.



Margaret Mitchell Place, Vancouver

# Importance of Design on Living Outcomes and Mitigating Concerns

This section explores the importance of physical design and why it should be considered when seeking to gain and maintain community acceptance of a non-market housing development.

## Creating Quality Living Environments for Residents

Many challenges can be mitigated through appropriate design considerations and involving both the residents and building operators early in the design process. To ensure successful outcomes for residents and neighbours, non-profit housing providers must carefully consider the specific needs of the residents from the outset, for example in site selection and initial site design. Various resident groups will have different needs including: access to varying on- and off-site amenities, floor plans, unit sizes, specialized servicing needs, and privacy requirements.

If possible, site selection should be determined after the resident group is decided. The consideration of the resident group should be included with other factors such as proximity to schools and suitable employment, access to recreational and community facilities, public transportation, proximity to services (i.e. medical), neighbourhood character, and community demographics.

## Respecting Future Neighbours

Careful site selection and design consideration can mitigate and even avoid common neighbourhood concerns. An appropriate site and design may also result in a quicker and more cost-effective delivery of the development by reducing approval timelines and costs, as noted in Guide 1.

When neighbours are given ample opportunity for input in the design process, they become more informed and receptive to the development. Future neighbours want to see their views have been properly considered and addressed. Common concerns may be, protection of privacy, appropriate lighting, and any other design aspects that could negatively impact the quality of their living environment. Additionally, providing increased amenities for the whole neighbourhood, not just residents of the non-market housing, can be a way to gain community acceptance and create a more inclusive neighbourhood.



Salish Lelum, Nanaimo



# Pre-planning for Design Acceptance

## Fieldwork

- › Conduct an in-person site assessment of the specific property and study area where you are considering developing (typically a 400 m radius dependent on the scope and likely impacts of the development).
- › Explore the neighbourhood's existing conditions by taking notes and photos to understand factors such as the average ages and conditions of adjacent properties, common architectural styles, property maintenance and landscaping, and vehicle access (front driveways, underground parking, laneway detached garages, etc.) and parking conditions (amount of available on street parking, particularly in the evening).



215 West 2nd Ave, Vancouver

### TIP: Consulting neighbours can help achieve community acceptance for added density

Public consultation to help define neighbourhood character. Looking at issues such as maximum uplift and desired amenities to help accommodate additional density can help neighbours buy into the proposed non-market housing design and project overall.

“If the community is given an opportunity to create the solution, rather than having it imposed on them, the desired outcome will more likely be achieved.”

Curran, Deborah and Wake, Time. “Creating Market and Non-Market Affordable Housing: A Smart Growth Toolkit for BC Municipalities.” SmartGrowthBC, March 2008 (<https://toolkit.bc.ca/resource/creating-market-and-non-market-affordable-housing-toolkit-bc-municipalities>).

## Understand the neighbourhood's experience related to residential development and non-market housing

- › Note the level of recent, ongoing, or upcoming residential development in the area, particularly developments similar in scale and type to the proposed project. Do a scan of current residential development and rezoning applications in the area by looking for notice billboards on properties located in the study area and completing a search on the local government's website (search for 'under review' rezoning and development applications). Ask whether this is an established neighbourhood that will likely be resistant to change or one already undergoing significant development of the type and scale that you are proposing.
- › Consider attending a public hearing or open house if there is an ongoing development proposal that is similar. Review the councils and board minutes on any recent rezoning or development applications for similar non-market housing to gain insight into the level of support or opposition received and from whom (community organizations, residents, councils and boards, etc.). If the neighbourhood is unfamiliar to your organization, consider meeting local organizations and champions individually to better understand community issues, residents of the neighbourhood, and how the neighbourhood has interacted with non-profit housing providers in the past.
- › Consider meeting with homelessness coalitions or housing taskforces in the area to better understand community

housing needs, suitable locations, and history of non-market housing within the community. Conduct one-on-one meetings with elected representatives (councils and boards, school board trustees), health authorities, school principals, law enforcement officials, and/or religious leaders.

- › It can be highly beneficial to meet with other non-profit housing providers who have (or have tried to) develop in the neighbourhood/community in the past to learn from their experiences. Ask them about the types of concerns that were raised by the neighbourhood, how those concerns were addressed, and any operational challenges they are facing in their development.

### TIP: Ideas to get community input on design

- › Have project renderings available for local government representatives and public to see how design will fit into look of neighbourhood and give a starting place for feedback. If project renderings are not possible, show pictures of similar existing non-market housing developments.
- › Include renderings and photos on poster boards at public meetings. For a sample, please see: <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/public-engagement/projects>.
- › Design charrettes provide opportunity for more intensive feedback to gather suggestions from community stakeholders, but without binding housing providers to follow recommendations.
- › Consider having a project design station at public meetings with the architect and other design professionals available to answer questions.

Ideas from: County of Los Angeles and United Way Greater Los Angeles. “Supportive Housing Community Outreach Toolkit.” 2017. <https://nonprophousing.org/wp-content/uploads/Supportive-Housing-Community-Outreach-Toolkit-LA-United-Way-2017-12.pdf>.

## Review local government development related documents, guidelines, and bylaws

The zoning bylaws provide insight on the proposed site and area in the immediate vicinity of the subject site on aspects such as; the permitted uses (residential, commercial, etc.), types (large single family homes, multi-family apartments), heights, setbacks (how far the buildings are from property lines) and lot coverages/densities (percentage of the lot that is taken up by the building or the number of units on the lot). If the planned development is not aligned with your property's existing zoning and is materially different to that of the adjacent properties, consider these aspects, as red flags that may create additional concern from neighbours and increase the inherent risk of development rejection.

- › Review the local Official Community Plan (OCP) and relevant Neighbourhood or Area Plans. These documents will offer insight into the existing and intended character of the neighbourhood in terms of built form, uses and future amenities and aid you in determining whether your development is likely to be supported by local government.
- › Each year more B.C. local governments develop guidelines for multi-family residential developments. Some have developed comprehensive/prescriptive guidelines around what the physical design should look like.

## Engage design professionals with experience

- › At the very least, having a conversation with the local government's area planner is advisable to ensure there is a clear understanding of the local government's expectations about the design of the development and what policies are applicable to a particular site.
- › Hiring experienced, professional architects, engineers, and planners early in the site selection and planning stages is a critical part of project success.



PROFESSIONALS AND WHY YOU NEED THEM	WHEN TO ENGAGE THEM
<p><b>Architects</b></p> <p>Any structure over two-storeys or multiple units requires an architect to design and stamp the drawings. While designing the site, building, and living space, architects help with issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating design principles</li> <li>• Complying with local government regulations</li> <li>• Ensuring functionality for residents</li> <li>• Preparing design renderings for local government representatives and neighbours</li> </ul>	<p>The earlier architects are involved, the more likely you are to ensure that the design is appropriate and accepted by the local government and community.</p> <p>If selecting a site, an architect should be consulted before acquiring a site to determine the number of units the site can accommodate, and any design challenges the site/s considered may pose.</p>
<p><b>Engineers</b></p> <p>Engineers can assist with issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing physical site servicing (civil) and building (structural)</li> <li>• Determining servicing demand (based on number and type of residents)</li> <li>• Determining costs associated with the installation of water and sanitary servicing (based on location and site constraints)</li> <li>• Considering the capacity of the local government system to meet that demand</li> <li>• Flagging structural issues that may require costly building upgrades to mitigate such as geotechnical (i.e. if a site is on a steep slope or unstable ground), noise (i.e. if the site is on a busy street or next to a noise generating use), and hydrological issues (i.e. flooding risk or sea level rise)</li> <li>• Considering other servicing components such as water, sewer, stormwater, electricity, internet, parking, vehicle access, sidewalk/paths, and waste disposal/recycling</li> </ul> <p>Depending on the information provided by the engineer, this could modify your project size or make you reconsider the selected site.</p>	<p>Engineers should be consulted prior to site acquisition and be involved throughout the site planning stage.</p>
<p><b>Planners/Development Consultants</b></p> <p>A professional planner and/or development consultant can provide insight into site selection and the development potential based on what the local government is likely to approve and where (based on zoning, planning policy, land use precedents, and neighbourhood compatibility). A community planner and/or development consultant will assist with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing the site to mitigate community concerns (based on planning principles and neighbourhood context)</li> <li>• Designing an effective consultation plan that matches the needs of the project and community</li> <li>• Navigating the approvals process discussed in Guide 1</li> </ul> <p>Many planners and/or development consultants are trained in community engagement, conflict resolution, and identifying and communicating solutions in practical terms to the public and in technical terms to local governments (planning/development staff and councils and boards).</p>	<p>Planners should be consulted prior to site acquisition and be involved throughout the site planning stage.</p>

# Design Considerations with Site Selection to Gain Community Acceptance

This section provides key design principles to consider in site selection in order to ensure quality living environments for residents and neighbours and aid in community support for your development.

There are several important design aspects to consider related to both site selection (where to develop) and planning (how to develop). Beyond ensuring the design fits with the neighbourhood, it is important to have a design that will provide a quality living environment for future residents and existing neighbours, one that is operationally efficient and gains neighbourhood support.

While some non-profit housing providers need to secure a site for their development, others have land donated to them. Generally, affordability of a project is enhanced significantly with the donation of land, however the site may not be in the ideal location for the type of development being proposed. This may require flexibility on behalf of the non-profit housing provider in terms of the physical design and resident selection to respect neighbourhood context. In some cases, perhaps the sale or swap of land could be considered to acquire a more appropriate site. Often, the level of neighbourhood opposition can be determined prior to detailed physical design, formal community consultation, or development application. Research whether the site will suit your goals for the development.

## Consider how proposed housing would fit within the neighbourhood

- › Consider how many units, based on the determined unit sizes, can be accommodated within the identified zoning constraints. Review the cost effectiveness of the number of units you want to provide. For example, if the maximum height, floor area ratio, and site coverage (density) that is likely to be approved for the site will only accommodate 25 units and you are not prepared to operate and fund the development without accommodating at least 40 families, then another site or a different resident group will need to be considered.
- › A greater number of residents can mean increased neighbourhood opposition due to concerns such as overcrowding, too much density or noise and the non-profit housing provider's ability to manage the number of residents. However, too few residents can make the project financially unviable. Consider hiring an experienced non-market housing development consultant and/or architect to aid in the feasibility analysis aspects prior to site acquisition. Make sure that you prepare an operating budget based on the number of units you require to make the operation work. If you cannot achieve that number of units under the zoning, look for alternative sites.
- › Consider appropriate sizes for the units early in the process, based on the likely number of occupants per unit type and the type of residents (families, singles, young adults, seniors, etc.). Key components include, but are not limited to: number of bedrooms, kitchen and living room sizes, type and size of communal spaces, the amount of on-site support service space needed (if relevant), and whether elevators are needed and how many.

Engage an architect with experience on similar projects early on to design



Orwell Hotel, Vancouver



floor plan layouts and provide input into unit sizes. An architect will determine the number of units that can be accommodated on site within the identified zoning constraints (height, setbacks, density, etc.). Local governments will also have regulations on unit sizes.

- › Determine whether a site has any applicable Development Permit Areas (DPAs). Some of these areas relate to neighbourhood character, while others relate to site constraints (environmental, geotechnical, etc.) that must be addressed through additional investigation (technical studies) prior to development.

### TIP: Determining applicable development permit area

DPA maps are usually accessible online through the local government's mapping platform or on their planning department web page. If you're unsure, set up a pre-application meeting with a local government planner to discuss what development permit requirements apply to your site.

- › Also note the location and proximity of the site to other non-market housing developments and their types, both in terms of built form and who they serve. In most cases, to mitigate potential neighbourhood opposition, when possible avoid locating non-market housing within close proximity (400 m) to other similar non-market housing developments.

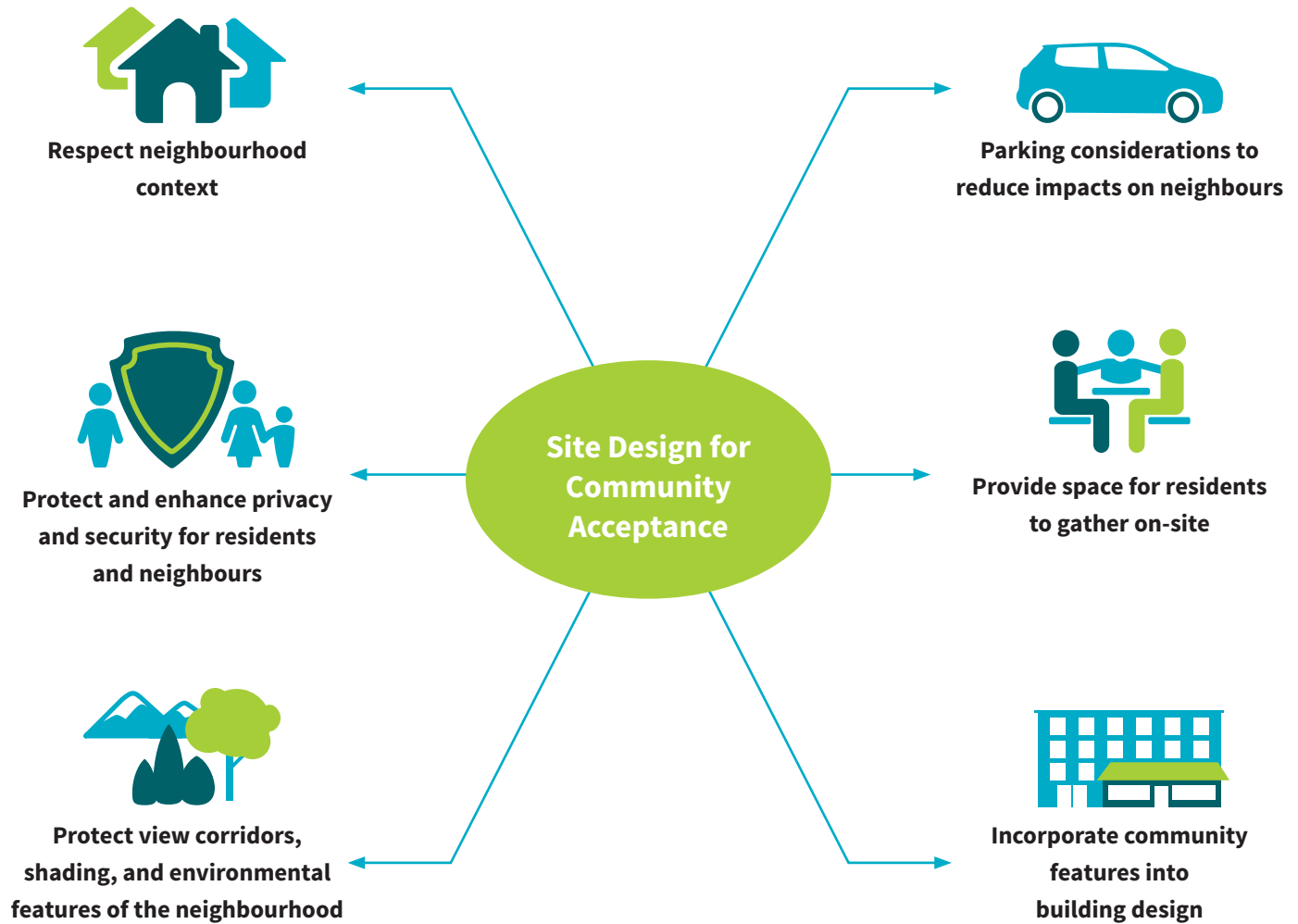
## Consider site servicing costs and whether the neighbourhood can accommodate servicing needs

- › If rezoning is required to allow an increase in density (number of dwelling units) plan for the cost of the application, the background reports and the extended time required to obtain approval.
- › In local government serviced areas (those areas with piped water and sewer), there are often significant Development Cost Charges (DCCs) that the developer, or in this case, the non-profit housing provider is required to pay to upgrade municipal servicing (water, sewer, stormwater, sidewalks, roads) to connect the site.
- › In un-serviced and rural areas, the developer may be required to tie your property into a municipal system (requiring extensive construction of piped infrastructure) or you may be required to develop a standalone water and/or wastewater system making the project infeasible or prohibitively expensive.
- › If you're unsure what the expected servicing demand would be, consult a civil engineer. If you're unsure what the DCC would be to meet your expected servicing demand, consult your local government's development services/planning department.



33134 Marshall Road, Abbotsford

# Site Design for Community Acceptance







Kitsilano Neighbourhood House

## Respect Neighbourhood Context

Respecting the existing and planned character of the neighbourhood is important. Even though existing homes and structures may be a mixture of different styles and ages, some underlying common architectural and landscaping elements usually exist. As much as possible, building setbacks, height and building character should respect existing adjacent development. Building materials should be familiar and, if possible, in keeping with surrounding homes. A conservative design approach is suggested to avoid concerns related to the fit of the buildings with the surrounding neighbourhood. If a non-profit housing provider has the option of selecting a site, consider the type of building required to serve the target client group and how that building type might fit into the neighbourhood. If you have been donated a parcel of land and do not have the option of site selection, you must consider whether the physical design of your development can respect the existing character of the neighbourhood.

### TIP: Ensuring neighbourhood fit can reduce opposition

Neighbours may use building design as a reason instead of their primary reasons for opposing a non-market housing development. Quality exterior, undifferentiated from the neighbourhood can help reduce opposition to the site.

### TIP: Reducing opposition to additional density through good design

Affordability and Choice Today's "Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide for Responding to NIMBY" points out a higher density site can be added to a neighbourhood so it does not look out of place. The report includes the following techniques to help a higher density building fit into a lower density neighbourhood and thereby potentially reduce opposition (cited from the Institute for Local Government's "Building Public Support for Affordable Housing" (2007):

- › Building setbacks
- › Height limits and step-backs
- › Variations in the façade
- › Street-level uses reflecting nearby storefronts or entrances
- › Architecturally compatible design
- › Locating taller sections where they are not as visible from public rights-of-way

For more information see: [https://data.fcm.ca/documents/tools/ACT/Housing\\_In\\_My\\_Backyard\\_A\\_Municipal\\_Guide\\_For\\_Responding\\_To\\_NIMBY\\_EN.pdf](https://data.fcm.ca/documents/tools/ACT/Housing_In_My_Backyard_A_Municipal_Guide_For_Responding_To_NIMBY_EN.pdf).

## Protect and enhance privacy and security for residents and neighbours

Privacy and security apply to all aspects of the building; outdoor areas, common areas and individual units. All components of the building should reflect appropriate privacy considerations for both residents and neighbours following standard Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and best practices.

Examples of options to increase privacy for residents and neighbours include:

- › Reduce overlooking by ensuring the building has appropriate side and rear setbacks from property lines.
- › Consider the building orientation.
- › Incorporate appropriate levels of screening such as fencing and landscaping for private areas (balconies and bedrooms), frosted windows or balcony dividers.
- › Consider staggering of floors.

Examples of security features include:

- › Having an office overlooking the street if the building operator has staff regularly on-site. This allows for passive surveillance, increasing the level of safety and security for residents and neighbours.
- › Lighting should be provided to increase safety. However, be respectful of light pollution (low mast directional lighting is the most appropriate).
- › Incorporating surveillance cameras into the design can help building operators see the exterior of the building to prevent and address safety and security issues.

The development should have signage that creates a sense of place. As a best practice, signage should also include the name of the sponsor and a contact telephone number. Including a contact number gives neighbours the ability to contact the non-profit housing provider to discuss their concerns. Another method of informing neighbours should be used when signs are not included. Crucially, the contact person must be responsive to neighbour concerns and available 24 hours a day. While this is an operational item, it will go far in creating a collegial and collaborative relationship between the housing development and the community.



### TIP: Ensure design is inviting

Keep the building design inviting to avoid an institutional look and ensure better fit into the neighbourhood.

Poor building siting and landscaping can reinforce the differences rather than the similarities between the development and the surrounding neighbourhood.

### TIP: Benefits of maintaining sightlines to street

Too often, new developments turn their back on the street with high fences or dense landscaping. Eyes on the street can increase safety and surveillance. It also has the potential of integrating the project into the community.

### TIP: Proactively design sites to increase security

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a concept of proactive design philosophy based on the idea that proper design can reduce the incidence of crime. Many local governments adhere to CPTED principles, either referring explicitly to them or implicitly through their own policies. To learn more, visit <http://cptedsecurity.com>.





## Protect view corridors, shading, and environmental features of the neighbourhood

Protect important views such as water or mountains for neighbouring residents and massing of the building. Consider the potential impact of the new building(s) on sunlight access for neighbours. For example, will the building overshadow well established vegetable gardens, patios or south-facing windows? Significant environmental features should be preserved wherever possible and, where practical, incorporated into the design of the development, for example large trees or rock outcrops. This may take some creative building design to step the structure, or orient the building to protect these features but doing so may reduce neighbourhood opposition to the project.

## Parking considerations to reduce impacts on neighbours

Most local government parking requirements do have different calculations for non-market housing developments versus market developments. Therefore, non-profit housing providers must determine appropriate parking rates for vehicles and bicycles based on statistics from other representative developments or even by conducting a formal parking study. Non-profit housing providers must then be prepared to defend them to the local government. While a local government may be willing to reduce the vehicle parking requirements, they will want to ensure that plans exist for other modes of transportation. The local government may have required formal processes for requesting a parking variance from market housing rates.



Non-profit housing providers will need to determine appropriate parking calculations and the number of spaces for scooters, bicycles, and/or shopping carts. Consider whether your residents are likely to use scooters, bicycles, and/or shopping carts and design an appropriate secure and screened location for parking the anticipated number (based on expected use for the proposed number of residents). For instance, in a family-oriented development, you may need to provide an abundance of safe and secure storage facilities for bicycles, whereas a seniors housing complex will require significant parking for scooters or other mobility vehicles. A transitional housing development may require additional storage space. If you're unsure what is appropriate, contact a development consultant or architect experienced with designing that type of housing or reach out to an experienced non-market housing operator.

### Provide space for residents to gather on-site

Different residents will desire different building amenities. Determine the appropriate shared amenities, locations and size (i.e. children's playground, daycare, smoking area, communal sitting areas, onsite support services, and common kitchen and dining areas) and factor these into your site plan and initial site design.

### Incorporate community features into building design

Incorporating amenities into the building through building design can help to achieve community acceptance as it can provide opportunities for neighbours to visit the building and engage with residents. Community amenities could also provide work opportunities for residents, or help off-set operating costs through rent.

If you're unsure what to include, ask at consultation and design charrette events. Neighbours may have useful ideas for community amenities they'd like to see within the development.

Examples of community amenities that could be considered for inclusion in the building design are:

- › Coffee shops or restaurants
- › Social enterprises (e.g. coffee shop, catering services, art gallery)
- › Community art
- › Space for non-profit operations
- › Space for private retail



Kettle on Burrard, Vancouver

## Case Study

### Cardington Apartments

Cardington Apartments in Kelowna is a supportive housing development for adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness, who are managing mental health and addiction challenges. Operated by the John Howard Society of the Central and South Okanagan (JHSCSO), the project opened in 2008 and was the first supportive housing site in the City of Kelowna. The development includes a social enterprise coffee shop and catering service located on the ground floor. This social enterprise partners with the JHSCSO to provide fresh local groceries and prepared food items and is popular with the community and residents alike. Cardington Apartments also has community art built into the entrance and has participated in local art tours. For more information, visit <https://www.bchousing.org/research-centre/library/community-acceptance/bk-case-study-cardington&sortType=sortByDate>.



Cardington Apartments, Kelowna





## How Was This Toolkit Developed?

This Toolkit was developed in collaboration with BC Housing's Research Centre and Dillon Consulting Limited using a variety of methods, including:

- › **One-on-one interviews** with representatives from four neighbourhood groups
- › **Focus groups** with four stakeholder groups: non-profit housing providers, local government representatives, community organizations, and Advisory Group members
- › **Case studies** from throughout the province
- › **Literature review** of relevant case studies and toolkits
- › **Meetings with BC Housing staff and Advisory Group members**

The information in this Toolkit relies on all the sources identified in this section. Where specific sections of other reports were quoted or copied with some slight adaptations, the original reports are cited. However, most components of this guide can be linked back to several pieces of literature, case studies, and primary consultation results, as well the original toolkit. Components of the Toolkit that are not specifically cited are pulled from a combination of these sources. Please see the bibliography on the next page for a listing of reports reviewed as part of the literature review to inform this Toolkit.

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*For more information about the toolkit and organizations consulted, please see the introductory guide here <https://www.bchousing.org/research-centre/library/community-acceptance>.*

## Who Helped Develop This Toolkit?

### Non-profit housing providers

- Affordable Housing Advisory Association
- BC Society of Transition Houses
- Coast Mental Health
- Greater Victoria Housing Society
- Island Crisis Care Society
- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
- Metro Vancouver Housing
- MPA Society
- New Chelsea Society
- Our Place Society
- PHS Community Services Society
- RainCity Housing
- Salvation Army Maple Ridge
- Sanford Housing Society

### Local Governments

- City of Kamloops
- City of Kelowna
- City of New Westminster
- City of Richmond
- City of Victoria
- District of North Vancouver
- District of West Vancouver
- Fraser Valley Regional District
- City of Vancouver

### Community Organizations

- Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness
- Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness
- Pivot Legal Society
- Surrey Homelessness and Housing Taskforce
- Together Against Poverty Society
- United Way Central and Northern Island
- Vancity Impact Real Estate Division
- Vancouver Coastal Health
- YWCA Metro Vancouver

### BC Housing would especially like to thank Advisory Group members on behalf of:

- BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- BC Non-Profit Housing Association
- Homelessness Services Association of BC
- Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation



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## More Information:

BC Housing’s Research Centre works in collaboration with housing sector partners to foster excellence in residential construction and find innovative solutions for affordable housing in British Columbia. Sharing leading-edge research, advances in building science, and new technologies encourages best practice. The Research Centre identifies and bridges research gaps to address homelessness, housing affordability, social housing challenges and the needs of distinct populations. Mobilizing knowledge and research expertise helps improve the quality of housing and leads to innovation and adoption of new construction techniques, Building Code changes, and enhanced education and training programs. Learn more about the Research Centre at [www.bchousing.org](http://www.bchousing.org). Sign up to receive the latest news and updates at [www.bchousing.org/subscribe](http://www.bchousing.org/subscribe).

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