



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MR# 2023005

DATE: 24 January 2023

RE: Amherst takes another step in providing affordable/supportive housing

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – The Amherst town council moved forward with its efforts to provide affordable and/or supportive housing in this community on Monday, Jan. 23, 2023, when it approved transferring the ownership of a town-owned property to the Cumberland Homelessness and Housing Support Association.

The town purchased the property, located at 8/10 Prince Arthur St., for \$26,000 last year via a tax sale with the intent of making it available for affordable and/or supportive housing.

It has reached an agreement with the association, also known as Cornerstone, that will see the association renovate the building to contain affordable supervised apartments, a resource room, kitchen and support space for administration and support services once it takes over ownership of the structure.

The transfer of ownership, at no cost to the association, was recommended by the Intermunicipal Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee.

Provincial regulations require that a public hearing must be held before town-owned property can be transferred to a non-profit organization for less than market value. As a result, the public hearing is scheduled to take place at the Amherst town hall at noon on Feb. 8, 2023.

Addressing housing shortage

The Amherst town council also took steps to address its housing shortage when it directed staff to draft a purchase and sale agreement for four acres of town-owned property on Blaine Street with Halifax-based Black Bay Real Estate Group.





A condition of the agreement requires Black Bay to apply for a development agreement that reflects their proposal to develop the land, which is located off South Albion Street near Frank and Gino's restaurant.

Their proposal would see them build two, 64-unit, apartment buildings and 10 three-bedroom townhouses. It also includes a mix of indoor and outdoor parking as well as outdoor amenity spaces.

Staff noted Black Bay has demonstrable experience developing and operating multi-unit residential buildings in Halifax and Bridgewater.

The agreement would also include conditions around the timing of the development, which would see the project developed in a timely manner.

The completed purchase and sale agreement will be brought back to council for final approval.

In recommending the town proceed with developing the purchase and sale agreement, staff indicated developing the property would be an efficient use of the land and would provide much needed housing to the town, which is facing a housing shortage.

Staff also noted the development agreement process includes multiple opportunities for public input into the project.

Housing Infrastructure Investment Policy

The council also approved a Housing Infrastructure Investment Policy that council hopes will incentivise new housing development within the town, which is facing a housing shortage in all sectors of the housing market.

Developers have told the town the high cost of street and associated infrastructure installation is a deterrent to new subdivision development. The policy is aimed at addressing that issue by stating the town is prepared, on a case-by-case basis, to temporarily fund all or a portion of the street and underground infrastructure needed to bring new housing opportunities to market.

The policy states the Amherst town council will only consider such arrangements when:





1. Council is of the opinion there is a housing shortage within the town and infrastructure is required to meet the housing demand;
2. The town has the financial capacity to fund such infrastructure;
3. At the sole discretion of the town council, a satisfactory agreement can be negotiated that provides the town with adequate security and minimal investment risk;
4. The town retains the right decided if the town's human and equipment resources will be utilized to build and/or install any or all infrastructure within the development, as well as the amount to charge the property owner for that work;
5. Any decision to utilize town resources will take into consideration the impact the project will have on other capital projects or operational requirements of the town.

Staff indicated that any agreement under this policy would have risk mitigation built into it, the policy provides a significant opportunity to grow the town's tax base in a meaningful way in addition to having the town's initial investment paid back in full.

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