

# The Daily News (Nanaimo)

## Residents vent at meeting about low-barrier housing; North end citizens say they want to help, but are angry with way city has acted

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Illustrations: [Chris Koehn, Daily News] / Pensive north end residents at a meeting put on by the Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo Thursday night to provide information about how council is handling a low-barrier housing project for the area.;

Anxious north Nanaimo residents, many upset after the city decided to put a low-barrier housing facility on Uplands Drive, gathered Thursday night to learn more about the project.

The Concerned Citizens of Nanaimo hosted an information session at Oliver Woods Community Centre last night to shed light the controversy.

Attendance reached over 300 residents who filled rows of seats and lined walls two or three people deep to have a chance to speak their minds.

Council hopefuls revealed their stance to both jeers and cheers but the overall message was one of a citizenry unhappy with a closed process.

"In my common sense thinking the process was flawed," Coun. Bill Bestwick said of the city's previous actions involving the Bowen Road property slated to become a low-barrier housing complex near Quarterway Elementary. "I thought we were dishonest at best, and deceitful at worst."

Applause thundered throughout the room at Bestwick's admission that the city acted less than transparently.

"I don't think we've learned anything from that time," he added.

For council hopeful Gord Fuller, the response was less than friendly.

"I'm not here to kiss your ass for votes," he said. "I support supportive housing. I always have and I always will."

The crowd registered their discontent, however, Fuller found some common ground with the attendees.

"I agree that communication is flawed in this city. People don't get involved until something comes to their neighbourhood that they fear," Fuller said before being interrupted by one spectator who stood and shouted, "People don't get involved because there's no public disclosure!"

Residents made it clear that they don't oppose helping those in need, but disagreed with the way the city proposes to do it. Other residents who faced the same projects in their neighbourhood suggested a novel approach.

"We made an interesting decision to really try and embrace this supportive housing component. We decided not to fight it

anymore," said president of the South End Community Association Douglas Hardie, who's neighbourhood was selected for similar housing projects involving the Canadian Mental Health Association.

"It was controversial at the time for us as an association, but we have since developed excellent relationships with the Canadian Mental Health Association."

The crowd had mixed reactions to Hardie's suggestion.

The overarching theme to the protests were to put a stop to the project and bring about transparency.

The CCN debate continued beyond press time.

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