

HomeSharing in the Southern Gulf Islands

Barriers & Potential Solutions

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In the following pages we will be discussing the data that has been collected by the Housing NOW Project team as of September 10th 2022.



With our ongoing community engagement efforts via our online and in person survey strategy, a more authentic commentary of the Southern Gulf Island housing experience has begun to emerge - quite unlike any scope of data the community have been presented with yet. An image of possibility is beginning to be seen with both regional representation and impact.

Introduction

With its primary focus on a general housing experience in the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI), the Housing NOW Project team was tasked, by the Southern Gulf Island Community Economic Sustainability Commission (SGI CESC) with data collection of home and property owners as well as the potential workforce population here in the SGIs. The intention was in creating a better picture of both current housing opportunities and the needs of the average individual and family, to aid in the possible creation of future housing opportunities with the implementation of an Intergenerational Homesharing program in the region.

General Findings

At this point in the lifecycle of the Housing NOW Project, we have had the collective participation of 76 individuals in the outer Gulf Islands region, which has included close to 30 businesses to date. As this project is still in its infancy, we are optimistic that with continued nurturing, these numbers will continue to grow, presenting a more complete picture of housing possibilities in the Southern Gulf Islands.

We must recognize that not every Island resident or business venture would be suitable to the project, just as not every member of the workforce population would be open to living in a communal home or property sharing situation without appropriate personal and property security assurances in place.

When considering participant numbers please consider two significant obstacles that impacted our project plan and our intended inter-island communication strategy for data collection:

- Complications associated with the SGI CRC lack of *Summer Communications Associate* job applicants, with whose involvement the project plan was created.
- Complications to our travel itinerary due to BC Ferry schedule changes and staffing shortages over the summer months of the project.

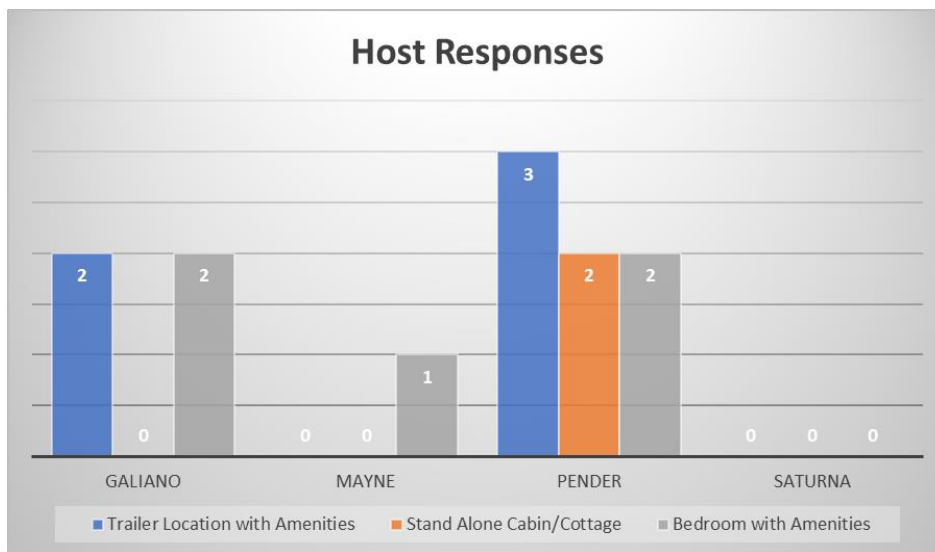
For these reasons our community engagement schedule was significantly impacted, consequently there has been a heavier reliance on social media platforms and individual Island publications than first thought. Our hope is to continue our inter-island communications engagement into the fall and early winter and we anticipate a higher response rate for Galiano, Mayne and Saturna Islands.

Housing Opportunities

The data collected from 15 Host participants; individuals or families interested in sharing their space, and 10 Guests - both year round and seasonal workforce population, have begun to paint a picture of what is available for immediate housing opportunities and what potential workforce would be looking for with regards to accommodation opportunities.

A total of 5 potential hosts responded that they have a trailer or RV accommodation (with electric and sewer) and 8 of the 10 potential guests responded that they are open to a trailer or RV as an acceptable living situation. This indicates future opportunity for housing and is positive.

Only 2 Hosts that participated were able to offer a stand alone cabin or cottage with all amenities available. 5 Host respondents were open to sharing communal space (bedroom with shared kitchen and bath) with a Guest.



Several potential Host respondents were interested in the possibility of a self contained RV (brought by Guest) on their rural zoned property if allowed to do so. As one participant wrote, *"We live on 6 acres of mostly forested land. If it were allowable under current bylaws, we could easily find room for a few tiny houses / trailers on our property. I would be interested to explore this idea if bylaws can be changed."*

HOST Response Patterns

Patterns that we began to see in the data received from survey participants, as well as from our collection of community transcripts (in person discussions) have been categorized, and they are as follows:

- Supports
- Security
- Bylaw and Building Regulations
- Damage
- Infrastructure Costs
- Senior Focus

Supports

The vast majority of participants spoke positively of a Homesharing Program model but there were several comments made regarding the level of support that would need to be offered in order for participation in this type of shared housing framework.

One resident of Pender commented *“Will you help with people leaving? A friend of mine invited someone into their home, because she wasn’t ready yet to leave the Island. The guy turned into a jerk - abusive. She couldn’t get him out so she chose to sell the house. She may have been able to stay in her home longer if she had had any support.”*

One homeowner on Mayne Island had this to share when asked about the Host and Guest connection process, *“...interested in connecting with the right guest, we have a huge garden, vegan lifestyle, and a special relationship with food. Looking for a lifestyle match as our space is sacred. Very pleased with the concept of the project and a pre-screening function to aid in finding those connections.”*

These types of comments would lead us to believe that there is some trepidation around the general concept of sharing space with ‘unknown’ community members and that there may need to be a system of support developed in order to more thoroughly entice community members to facilitate more housing opportunities.

Security

For many participants there was concern as to who they were sharing their space with, if unable to meet them through the usual channels - friends, family, etc. There was interest in criminal record or vulnerable sector checks, as one Pender resident asked, *“Children are on the property, is it possible to have a criminal record check for potential applicants?”*

This is something that home and property owners are permitted to ask of their tenants under the Landlord Tenant Act of British Columbia. It may also be significant to Hosts when living communally with a vulnerable child and senior population. ⁽¹⁾

Bylaw and Building Regulations

With the constraints put on the community by the CRD and Islands Trust with regards to building and occupancy expectations, many survey participants feel frustrated by the regional community's inability to just *"do what is necessary"* for its residents. As one Mayne Island resident proclaimed, *"We really shouldn't be speculating on housing programs."* Based upon numerous community responses and our research, it is the Housing NOW Team's opinion that the ability to share space and create opportunity for workforce housing is being severely impeded by our own governance and needs to be addressed.

Evidently the pressure of not having appropriate housing options available for our workforce is becoming noticeable. A long time visitor of Pender remarked, *"We've stayed at Currents at Otter Bay every year for the last eighteen years and see the problems when we return to the Island. The housing shortage is affecting the socio-economic well being of this place. The government is saying that it matters but their actions don't seem like it matters. This (homesharing) project is a great idea to get past the bureaucracy."*

Damage

For a few potential Hosts, there was an extreme concern for damage, both accidental and intentional, to the Hosts personal property and how best to manage that concern. There was some conversation surrounding events that had happened in the last few years about destruction to the home and its contents, leaving the Host respondents feeling unsure of becoming a landlord again.

The Housing NOW Project team feels that this liability concern may be alleviated with a comprehensive insurance policy to cover just such eventualities. This comprehensive policy could be considered a support to both Hosts and Guests.

Infrastructure (costs associated)

For several participants, although they recognize the importance of utilizing already existing living space, they did comment on their inability to accommodate Guests without some moderate to serious infrastructure funds to do so. One homeowner on Pender remarked that they, *"have an existing structure (small cabin) on our property but due to lack of water - poor well, etc. we would need infrastructure granting or financing for new water sources, in order to participate."*

One reasonable solution to address the necessity of improvements to infrastructure would be to research and support the development and facilitation of a regional granting program for these types of expenditures. This would be subject to scope of work and capacity.

Senior Wellness and the Importance of Relationship Building

With both national and regional concerns over senior wellness and the concept of aging in place; as well as the knowledge that both North American and European communities have begun utilizing Senior / Student Homesharing platforms with great success, to address their student housing shortages. It would be worth exploring a similar housing model here in the Southern Gulf Islands to address our workforce housing shortage.

This is an innovative way to not only utilize already existing space but create opportunities for seniors to remain in their homes longer, instead of aging out of their home communities - an [Intergenerational Homesharing](#) program may be the answer.

The data collected so far in the project shows us that 46% of Host participants would be interested in offering rental subsidies for assistance around the property with 70% reporting that they would be interested in assistance with house and yard maintenance. This prospect of companionship may also be of benefit to our SGI Senior population's health and wellness.

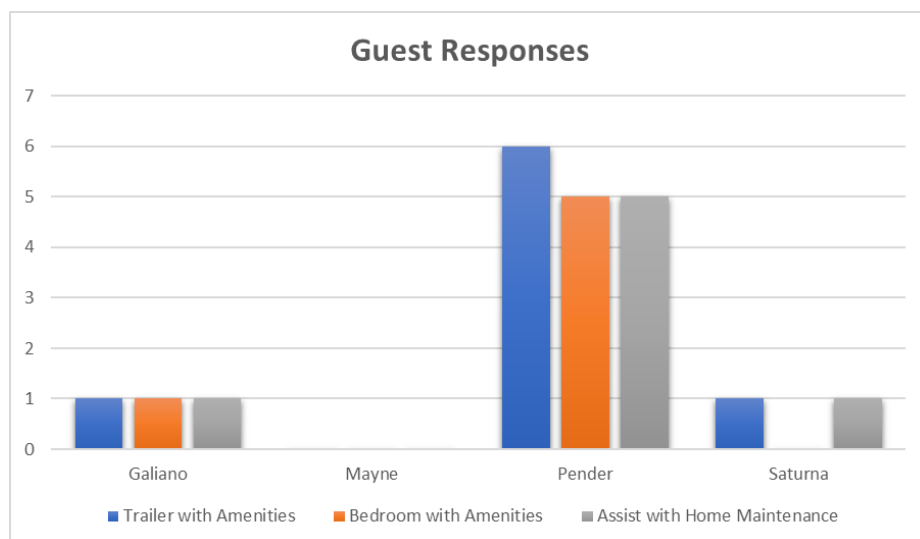
In discussion focused on a dedicated homesharing model, a Pender resident responded, *"Obviously this is not the only solution to the housing crisis, but it could be a portion of the solution - an affordable rent or in exchange for help with firewood / yard work / maintenance - I know seniors who would be thrilled with this idea."*

One long time Mayne resident commented, *"Seniors here would be looking at long term tenancy vs short term, and would appreciate the possibility of eventual vulnerable sector checks and a committed level of relationship building."*

**It must be noted that the Housing NOW Project has not collected data regarding age categorization from potential Host applicants.*

GUEST Response Patterns

As the data was received from potential Guests, there are several interesting pieces of information to take into consideration when we are developing potential solutions to our workforce housing shortage in the SGIs.



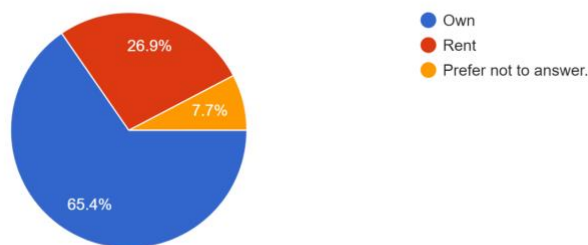
1. 8 of the respondents would feel comfortable in a trailer or RV (with sewer, water and hydro) accommodation opportunities.

2. *While only 6 of respondents would be comfortable having a bedroom in a home with shared (kitchen and bath) amenities.*
3. *5 -7 of respondents felt comfortable assisting with home maintenance, cleaning and or gardening - with or without subsidized rental rates.*

Business and Non Profit Organization Reporting

In designing our survey questionnaire platform both personal and business related questions were asked. As we began to receive the data of the 26 Businesses and NonProfits that have participated so far, a unique perspective of our Southern Gulf Islands workforce housing shortage was developing.

Do you own or rent your home?
26 responses



With 57.7% (15) respondents recording that *they* themselves have been personally affected by the rental market housing shortage and very close to 27% (7) reporting that they currently rent their home. As

one survey participant wrote, *"In addition to staff housing, as our family is about to grow, we are also in need of affordable housing as a small family in order to stay and run our business on Mayne Island."* It is no longer a given that a typical business owner is also a homeowner.

With over 35% (9) of the participants suggesting that they typically have between 4 to 7 employees working with them year round, we can begin to see an even larger ripple effect of negative impacts on our Island communities. Island entrepreneurs are struggling as the *"housing availability in hiring /maintaining staff and housing long term locums has been a barrier to attracting staff"* and the juggling of *"staff with rental leases that expire at random times"* have become perennial burdens to bear for a considerable amount of businesses and Non Profits in the Southern Gulf Islands.

Possible Solutions

There are limited possibilities available to address the shortage of affordable rental opportunities without new construction in the Southern Gulf Islands and based on the findings of the project so far, these could include:

Further Development of a Regional Homeshare Model

The SGI Community Resource Centre and invested regional stakeholders could become a *community driven* service provider with a “fee for service” business model.

Designed for individual households, service packages could be created to address the primary concerns (support, security of self and personal property) of potential Hosts.

If designed thoughtfully, this concept; as a *regional* program (Mayne, Pender, Galiano, Salt Spring, and Saturna Islands) could possibly become self-sustaining within a relatively short span of time and help to address a portion of our workforce housing shortages with some level of expediency.

Assist in the Creation of Long Term Tenancy Program

The SGI Community Resource Centre and invested regional stakeholders could become a *community driven* service provider with a “fee for service” Intergenerational Homeshare Program designed as a component of a functioning regional Homeshare Model.

The program would need to be developed in partnership with SGI senior wellness groups with a focus on our elder senior population - as either Host or Guest. It is anticipated that the development of this portion of the program would take place over a longer time period. There would be several levels of consultation with all partner groups before implementation of such a program component would be possible.

Assist in the Creation of a Workforce Housing Temporary Use Permit (WHTUP) Pilot Project

The SGI Community Resource Centre and invested regional stakeholders could undertake the development of a Workforce Housing Temporary Use Permit Pilot Project, not unlike the 2021 [Ucluelet District and Ucluelet Chamber of Commerce Pilot Project](#).

In essence, a fast tracked Temporary Use Permit (TUP) for private property owners, which allows for an approved campsite for the temporary (six month) housing of the district’s seasonal workforce. The permitted location could be used by individuals and families or rented to businesses looking for seasonal worker accommodations.

The introduction of this type of WHTUP would provide flexibility in achieving short-term socio-economic goals, helping to balance both public and private interests, as well as maintain a reasonable level of compatibility with the surrounding properties.

The district of Ucluelet application can be found [here](#).

**It must be noted that all properties within the District of Ucluelet are designated as an area where Temporary Use Permits may be issued to allow a use of land, on a temporary basis, not otherwise permitted in the District of Ucluelet’s Zoning Bylaw. This is not as easily accomplished within the CRD / Islands Trust Region due to varying bylaws on individual Islands.*

In Conclusion

As it is becoming more apparent that the single family dwelling building model that has been fostered over the last several decades in the Southern Gulf Islands has become unsustainable for our ever growing (2) and evolving communities, the development of an Intergenerational Homesharing Model and the creation of a Workforce Housing Temporary Use Permit are possible solutions without the creation of 'built space'. The Southern Gulf Islands do not have the luxury of time - we need safe and well administered solutions now.

These are possibilities that would allow the Southern Gulf Islands, as a collective, to foster kinship in community and continue on the path of allowable and affordable housing solutions, helping to advance the individual viewpoint on a shared living experience.

References

1. Tenants BC
<https://tenantsbc.ca/collecting-information/>
2. Statistics Canada - census profile
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=southern%20gulf%20island&DGUIDlist=2021A00055917029&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>