



# Building Better Homes and Communities

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**Affordability and Choice Today**

## ACT Solutions

### *Survey Indicates Housing Mix Does Not Compromise Quality of Life Kelowna, BC*

#### **Issue**

Kelowna residents agreed their city needed affordable housing. They also favoured preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and protection of agricultural lands. To achieve both, the City of Kelowna needed to encourage higher density housing forms, such as secondary suites, infill lots, townhouses and apartments.

Policies promoting higher density housing had been part of the Official Community Plan for some time. When it came to building this type of housing, however, proponents often encountered neighbourhood resistance. It was easier to build single-family homes, even though they were unaffordable to many people and contributed to using more greenfield space.

#### **Plan**

The City believed better data on the actual neighbourhood impacts of affordable housing projects would help reduce opposition. It surveyed single-family dwelling residents in neighbourhoods with

mixed housing types and compared their responses to those obtained from residents in uniformly single-family dwelling, but otherwise comparable, neighbourhoods. Results were summarized in a report and relevant information was presented in an information sheet aimed at providing residents with information that, the City hoped, would help lower resistance to higher density housing.

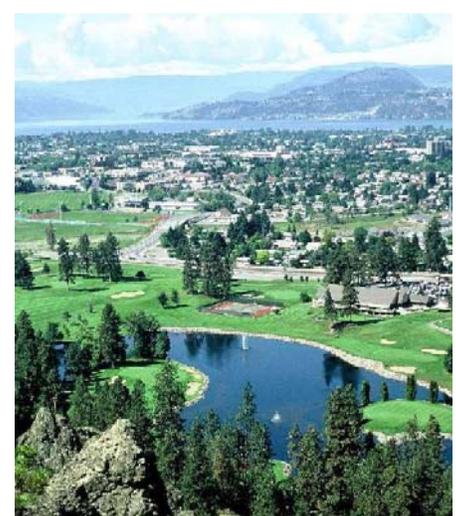
#### **Project team**

City of Kelowna's Housing Committee, along with building industry, housing advocacy and other government representatives.

#### **Results**

The City's survey showed that the majority of single-unit dwelling occupants felt similarly about their neighbourhood regardless of the mix of housing forms in their neighbourhood.

Survey respondents indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in



***Kelowna residents favoured policies protecting agricultural lands but resisted higher density developments.***

*Source: City of Kelowna*

their neighbourhood and that they did not plan or want to move. Their comments provided insight as to what they liked about their neighbourhood. More often than not, people living in areas with a mix of housing forms said they liked their neighbourhood because it was convenient and closely located to schools, parks, shopping and work.

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In addition, the survey revealed that most people agreed that desirable neighbourhood characteristics had either increased or stayed the same over the years they had lived in their home. The enduring and positive characteristics most often cited were property values, the friendliness of neighbours and the attractiveness of yards and homes. Noise volumes, vehicle and pedestrian traffic volumes, and the number of vehicles parked on streets and driveways were cited as the main detracting factors.

The project team concluded that a variety of housing forms would help to preserve farmland and environmentally sensitive areas, while making better use of existing and future residential areas. They also determined it would better serve the needs of a diverse population and a range of lifecycle and lifestyle choices.

“This is important as rising housing costs make multiple-unit housing relatively more affordable than single-unit housing,” the team concluded. “Also, average household sizes are getting smaller and a growing number of people prefer secure, low maintenance housing. These factors generate a growing demand for housing units that can be provided by new lots, suites, town homes and apartments.”

Housing forms that result in higher densities offer other benefits by:

- ❑ helping to revitalize older residential neighbourhoods with improved services and invigorating older commercial areas (more residents result in an increased demand for goods and services);

- ❑ reducing reliance on automobiles, particularly in neighbourhoods where commercial areas and other community facilities are within walking distance; and
- ❑ maximizing the use of roads, transit, water and sewer lines and reducing the cost of their maintenance.

“If building a mix of housing forms can help make better use of existing and future residential areas and help enhance our quality of life, then why do proposals for new lots, suites, town homes and apartments often encounter stiff opposition?”, the project team asked. “The good news here is that you can live in a neighbourhood with a mix of housing and enjoy all the benefits of a convenient location without sacrificing your quality of life.”

The City of Kelowna has since referred to the survey in its planning initiatives even though, says Manager Signe Bagh, the ground tended to shift quickly during the city’s overlapping periods of rapid growth and the data became less relevant.

“The survey was very meaningful at the time,” Bagh says. The results clearly demonstrate that quality of life is not compromised in higher density neighbourhoods, and this information may be very useful to other municipalities facing similar issues.

## **Related reports**

*Neighbourhood Satisfaction Survey: Report on Survey Results* (Planning and Development Services Department, City of Kelowna, 2003)

This report is available from the ACT website. See “ACT projects & solutions”.

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