

Port Moody church plans affordable housing

St. Andrews works with agencies to provide 55 units of housing and a children's service centre on St. Johns property

Diane Strandberg / Tri City News

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The proposed building view from the Spring Street entrance, including the garden courtyard. Photograph By Catalyst Community Development Society

A 55-unit affordable housing project proposed by Port Moody's St. Andrews United Church was a dream for many years, says Rev. Julie Lebrun, and forming partnerships was a way to make it happen.

Speaking last Friday at a provincial funding announcement for \$5 million toward the \$26-million project, Rev. Lebrun said the heart of the church's ministry is to "serve the community" but it needed the help of the province and others — Catalyst Community Development Society, Share Family and Community Services and the Simon Fraser Society for Community Living — to provide much needed rental housing as well as community space for early intervention programs for children.

"By working together, we can do something pretty big," Lebrun said of the planned project, which still requires public consultation and city approvals, including a rezoning, before construction can start on St. Andrews' land at 2318 St. Johns St.

At last week's announcement, it was revealed that not only will the longstanding church be knocked down to make way for the project, with a new sanctuary to replace it, but the new housing will include townhomes as well as apartments to meet a variety of housing needs.

It will be an inclusive community, Lebrun said, meaning that people of all abilities, including adults with developmental disabilities, will have a safe place to live.

"We're very excited to be able to do that," said Lebrun, whose 50-member church congregation was for many years involved in the cold, wet weather mat program for homeless people.

Plans are for a building with entrances from both St. Johns and Spring streets, and underground parking, said Robert Brown, president of Catalyst, a non-profit society that builds, owns and operates affordable housing.

The project will span two lots owned by the church and will provide office and program space for the Simon Fraser Society for its work with children and adults; Share will also have space for some of its programs for children. The space will be called the Tri-City Children's Centre.

Christine Scott, Simon Fraser Society executive director, said the centre will help the agencies in their goal of integrating services for families while Sylvia Ceacero, Share's CEO, said her organization also provides housing and wanted to be part of this project.

Meanwhile, St. Andrews will be looking for a temporary home when construction starts and Lebrun said her group is casting about for space in the community.

"We'll be homeless for awhile," Lebrun joked, adding that she will be reaching out for space for Sunday services.

The current church was built in 1955 but St. Andrews has been in Port Moody since the 19th century.