

Housing Affordability Partnership

# FairWay Woods Case Study



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*James Mitchell, February 2008*



## FAIRWAY WOODS CASE STUDY

### Executive Summary

FairWay Woods is a housing development of the Victoria Cool Aid Society that provides supportive and affordable housing for individuals who were homeless or at risk of homelessness and experiencing the added burden of dealing with all the issues related to aging. FairWay Woods houses 32 individuals in a comfortable, home-like environment in the City of Langford. For the monthly rent of \$475, the tenants receive round-the-clock support from on-site staff along with Community Health Care Workers and other visiting services, comfortable, roomy apartments as well as one nutritious meal a day. The tenant's average age is in the range of 55-65 and at least half of the tenants have lived in the building since it opened in July 2003.

### Introduction

In 1995, the Victoria Cool Aid Society recognized a need for the supportive, secure affordable housing for individuals who were homeless or at risk of homeless and experiencing the added burden of dealing with all the issues related to aging. With the FairWay Woods project the Cool Aid Society sought to address issues of affordability for 32 individuals who fit this criterion. The development partners collaborated through an 8 year process to create an innovative housing project called FairWay Woods in Langford B.C.

The Victoria Cool Aid Society has a mandate, "to provide holistic shelter, housing and community health services to marginalized adults in the Victoria area". Its mission is to, "work to eliminate homelessness by working with others to develop community-based solutions." (Cool Aid Society, 2007)

The FairWay Woods project has been running since July 2003, and was recently evaluated in a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation sponsored Research Report: Supportive Housing for Homeless and Hard-to-House Seniors written by Nancy Gnaedinger. This case study will use the same information to examine the FairWay Woods development from the perspective of affordability.

### *Definition of Affordability*

The Housing Affordability Partnership has adopted the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation definition for affordability. The CMHC definition states, "The cost of adequate shelter should not exceed 30% of household income. Housing which costs less than this is considered affordable. However, consumers, housing providers and advocacy organizations tend to use a broader definition of

affordability.” (CMHC, 2008) The Housing Affordability Partnership also believes that an essential component of affordability is the quality of life provided by the accommodations. This component encompasses the layout of the living space, the services provided on site as well as the ascetics of the physical location and the amenities available in the community.

## Context for project proposal

The FairWay Woods project is located the Victoria suburb of Langford. The development is across the street from a small mall with health clinic, pharmacy, and therapy services. It is .75 km east of a much larger plaza which has a grocery store, Laundromat, video store, coffee shop, two modestly-priced restaurants, bakery, and optical shop; and it is 1.5 km west of a very large drug store/general store. The project is also situated adjacent to three other modern single story care facilities operated by VIHA. The landscaping provides privacy for the FairWay Woods tenants while providing easy access to the amenities in the community.

One goal of the project was to provide the tenants with an environment that was as home-like as possible. The designer and builder took extraordinary steps to ensure that the building and grounds did not have an institutional feel and was ascetically pleasing.

With the innovative use of landscaping and building design, the developer was able to provide the tenants the following facilities on a site measuring 2062 square metres:

- Parking for eight cars
- Garden shed for tenants
- Gardens
- Very attractive landscaping
- Camouflaged garbage area
- Covered smoking area for tenants
- Benches

The FairWay Wood building is an attractive, four-storey building that provides a total of 32 one-bedroom apartments (50-54 square metres), a dining room, laundry room with three coin washers and dryers, a library, two lounges, a south facing deck, and a staff room overlooking the lobby area.

### *Project proposal*

The FairWay Woods project is a specially built housing development for 32 individuals who were homeless or at risk of homeless and experiencing the added burden of dealing with all the issues related to aging. The monthly rent for the tenants is the Shelter Rate of \$375 a month plus an additional \$100 per month for the daily nutritious meal provided to all tenants. One of the underlying assumptions of the project is that it is more effective and less resource intensive to provide services while they are living in safe, stable, affordable housing to individuals than to address the myriad of issues that continually arise when the individuals are living on the street or in substandard housing.

Since the project opened, the turnover of the residents has been low. At least half of the residents have been living in the facility since it opened. The age of the residents spans 46 to over 75 and clusters in the 55-65 age range. “The tenants moved to FairWay Woods from a variety of living arrangements, including

a detoxification facility, hospital, other Cool Aid housing projects, shelters and substandard housing. A majority of the tenants have multiple and complex diagnosis, which include mental illness and addictions, as well as physical health problems associated with age, such as arthritis, heart problems and diabetes.” (Gnaedinger, 2007, p. 8)

The FairWay Woods project is a new build that was completed in 2003. “It is located on a busy, suburban, main street and is an attractive apartment building clad in siding and surrounded by soaring fir trees and lush landscaping. Within 50 metres of the front door of FairWay Woods are bus shelters for service to downtown in one direction or to the nearest suburban mall in the other direction. Across the street is a small plaza, with health clinic, health testing services, a pharmacy and a cafe. Other amenities such as a grocery store, are within a three block walk.” (Gnaedinger, 2007, pp. 7-8)

To assist the tenants to maintain their housing, the FairWay Woods project has incorporated three types of support services. “(1) On-site services are provided by Cool Aid Employees, who are present 24 x 7. They intervene in difficult situations, provide help with the instrumental activities of daily living (such as helping with medical appointments, tax forms, getting bus passes, etc.) and they prepare and serve a full meal, daily, to the tenants. (2) Clustered home care services are provided by Community Health Care Workers from the regional health authority, who gives scheduled assistance with activities of daily living (such as, in-suite meal preparation, personal care) to these tenants who require help. (3) Other visiting services, such as, home nursing and psychiatric social work, are provided to tenants on an as needed basis.” (Gnaedinger, 2007, p. 8)

## Description of Development Process

FairWay Woods is a creative project that took eight years from concept to completion. Its design and operations are based on a philosophy of respect for all human being and on a social model of care.

In conjunction with the objective of affordability, “the development team was governed by the following set of mutually agreed upon goals that were consistent with a “social model” of supportive housing:

- Reduce the inappropriate use of hospital beds and other expensive services, such as emergency wards, by “people who were falling off the edges”
- Create a “home” for this population, rather than just a place to live in the short term (e.g. a shelter or a place to be sick (e.g. hospital)
- Design a building for them that fits in with the community, so that it does not carry a stigma  
Ensure that the building design encourages social interaction and community participation
- Nurture a culture in the building that increases tenants’ sense of belonging and pride of ownership
- Ensure that both on-site and visiting service providers “do with, rather than do to or do for” clients, thus encouraging tenants’ autonomy and self-esteem
- Ensure, too, that support and care are provided to tenants at the margin of need only, so as not to create dependencies
- Treat tenants with respect (Gnaedinger, 2007, pp. 36-37)

## Post Development environment

### *Funding secured*

The funding for the development and operation of the FairWay Woods project comes from a variety of sources in the community.

The site for the FairWay Woods project was leased from the Vancouver Island Health Authority for \$1 per year for 60 years. The lease agreement restricts the use of the site to seniors' supportive housing for the duration of the lease.

BC agreed to provide funding under their special HOMES BC funding stream allocated for supportive housing for people who are hard-to-house. BC Housing also made a capital contribution as well as an operational subsidy to the project.

The building efficiency level, that is, the proportion of the building that is revenue generating residential living space, is 65-68 percent. (Gnaedinger, 2007)

Cool Aid's cost of operating FairWay Woods is approximately \$690,000 per year. This is \$1,890.41 per day, or \$59 per tenant day (including their daily meal): approximately one third of the cost per resident day in residential long-term care.

## Analysis

### *Unique obstacles and how they were overcome;*

One of the hurdles during development was that there needed to be a change in zoning from single family zoning to multiple residential zoning. Because this was a creative project, it was not easy, at first, to *'fit it into an existing slot'*.

"Another hurdle was the long wait for a building permit, which was held up due to other priorities in Langford at the time. A key player in helping the FairWay Woods project eventually overcome these hurdles was the planning department of the municipality, which co-operated with the project proponents and builder." (Gnaedinger, 2007)

There was a notable lack of resistance to the project from neighbours. The Cool Aid staff spent a significant amount of time talking with the neighbours, discussing the project and the population who would be living in the building. "The main concern of the community association was the possibility that staff members would park their cars on the residential streets. This was solved in two ways. First, only eight parking places were included on the FairWay Woods property. There had to be a variance in the parking regulations for the project. Fewer parking spaces than normally allocated for the number of dwelling units were allowed, given that the vast majority of tenants would not own cars. Second, the municipality limited parking to "residential permits only" on the side streets on either side of the intersection where FairWay Woods is located. The house directly across the side street from FairWay

Woods was promised and given a full cedar hedge, all the way around their property, to block the view of the project.” (Gnaedinger, 2007)

### *Lessons learned*

There is considerable advice from informants in this study. Some is addressed to housing sponsors, some to architects, some to service providers. The main recommendations are:

- Locate the building away from the downtown core, but within walking distance of shops and services.
- Keep the housing project small. Thirty-two units is an ideal size.
- Design a beautiful building that is residential in character and that blends in with the neighbourhood. Ensure that it has a garden and trees surrounding it.
- Pay attention to sound transfer in the building and remember that the elevator is used 24 x 7.
- Provide 24 x 7 on-site staffing.
- Ensure that all on-site and visiting staff members share a client-centred, flexible approach to support and that they work co-operatively as a team. Ideally, staff members will be mature adults with considerable life experience.
- Provide one main meal per day for tenants, included as part of the monthly rent.
- When selecting tenants for a new supportive housing project, strive for a mix or balance of tenant characteristics, such as physical ability, mental health, sociability, talents and background. When seeking tenants for an established housing project, ensure that they will fit into the ‘community’ that already lives in the building.

(Gnaedinger, 2007, p. 10)

For additional information on the FairWay Woods project, contact the Victoria Cool Aid Society [www.coolaid.org](http://www.coolaid.org) 102-749 Pandora Avenue, Victoria BC, Canada, V8W 1N9, (250) 383-1977, 383-1639 fax.

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