

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTLOOK

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## EDITORIAL

### Affordable housing always high priority in valley

**T**here is no greater issue in the Bow Valley than affordability.

From the soaring cost of food to the accessibility of modestly priced housing, the valley – and the entire province and country, for that matter – there are no easy or quick answers. While municipalities have attempted to find ways to get creative, the lack of provincial support has effectively tied the hands of local politicians and municipal staffers in making significant change.

With no provincial legislation that mandates a percentage of new development have affordable housing, it is left to municipalities to find clever ways to bring such units into the fold of their respective communities.

For many municipalities in Canada, a reach of five per cent of a developments being attained for affordable housing is deemed a success. Of course, attaining that has to come from either a developer's good grace or the ability of the two sides to negotiate. When it comes to providing affordable housing, a municipality is always coming from a point of weakness and facing an uphill battle.

In the Land and Property Rights Tribunal hearing between the Town of Canmore and Three Sisters Mountain Village Property Limited (TSMVPL) on the defeated Smith Creek area structure plan, several days have been spent on the discussion of affordable housing.

It was often highlighted at the hearing by the Town's witnesses the difficulty the municipality has faced in bringing affordable homes to the community. TSMVPL has also committed to a minimum of 10 per cent affordable housing in their two ASPs, which would bring the largest supply into the Town's affordable housing inventory. In reading the 1992 Natural Resources Conservation Board's decision on the lands, it's clear the importance of affordable, employee and low and modest cost housing was 30 years ago and continues to hold.

In the latest public hearing in Canmore, there was a call for the Lawrence Grassi Middle School area redevelopment plan to turn the project entirely into affordable housing. The project ultimately committed to bringing upwards of 20 affordable units, a further 20 units for staff

housing and an openness to discuss bringing more affordable homes as long as it doesn't significantly financially impact the project.

While it's easy to ask for affordable housing, it's just as simple to dismiss. A property owner is the ultimate decider of what they intend to use.

But there is no denying the demand for affordably priced units. In Banff, the soon-to-be constructed 33 housing units at The Aster proved highly popular as residents have flocked at the opportunity to own a home in Banff at a below market rate. Similarly, in Canmore, the last affordable housing units available for sale were 10 units in the Peaks of Grassi that quickly flew off the Canmore Community Housing shelves. The latest approval at the Canmore Planning Commission saw the Town's first common amenity housing units approved. Having only been put in the land use bylaw in 2019, the housing – which is largely used for employees – could open the door for new types of use in the community.

When victory was won in the Second World War, there was a sense of indebtedness to not only those returning from overseas but those on the home front. The Second World War had a transformative impact on Canada and not just on the front lines in Europe, Asia, Oceania and Africa. The Veterans Charter assisted people transitioning from military service to peacetime life, the Veterans Land Act put in place the first steps that allowed for the creation of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation – the successor to the Wartime Housing Corporation – to build homes for veterans as strawberry box and victory houses popped up by the thousands. The federal government has opened the vault for creating affordable homes in its 10-year \$70 billion national housing strategy that has seen rise to the rapid housing initiative and the federal community housing initiative.

The policy will help but should've happened 15 years ago and should continue to be a priority policy at all times.

Short of a time machine helping society address the issues that should've been fixed yesterday, the goal of working towards a better tomorrow is a necessity.

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