

HIRRA Housing Committee Annual Report: April 2017

The new HIRRA Housing Committee began its first official year in April of 2016. The committee is an outgrowth of a series of more informal gatherings, the first of which happened in May, 2015. The results of that meeting were tabulated by Tony Law and are available on the HIRRA website.

The primary needs identified then were matchmaking between potential landlords and tenants, summer accommodation for workers and displaced tenants, making affordable housing units available, improving financing options, addressing regulatory barriers, and supporting ISLA. A second meeting to create a working group took place in November of 2015. At that time, it seemed best to focus on people who are already on Hornby and helping them find secure housing so they can stay. It was noted that the pre-school is full. Ideas included use of an existing website, a rental village, and how could owners of second homes be enlisted to support year-round rentals, such as allowing caravans to be located on their properties or even a voluntary “tax” to support other efforts.

The group met again in January of 2016 and it was at that meeting that becoming a HIRRA committee would give significance to requests and other communications. It was also agreed that a summer survey would be helpful. The group went back and forth about the best ways to let people know that you are looking to rent or that you are an owner with a place to rent to others. Issues around privacy were of concern, and the idea was floated to have a mediator who could help out when there is conflict. Following this meeting, a request was submitted to the HIRRA executive and then to the assembly to officially create the committee.

In May of 2016, the committee held its first “official” meeting. At that time several ideas were explored which, in the end, did not produce actions to be pursued. Two things that were unexpected did happen then. The first is that the committee became a place where groups involved in housing could come together and share information. This has continued to the present, with members of HICEEC, Elder Housing, ISLA, and others participating. Second, it was suggested that the committee focus immediate attention on supporting the ISLA project, so that the entire community would be behind it. Both these developments were seen as positive and enthusiastically endorsed. In particular, this led to letters of support for ISLA and a meeting between the committee chair and Bruce Joliffe.

In addition, a summer survey was put together using a generous grant from HICEEC, to which 169 people responded. The executive summary reads as follows:

The most significant finding is that contrary to the general assumption that presently Hornby does not have adequate rental supply to meet demand—that we are tapped or maxed out—in fact, with better communication, accountability, and with determined focus on the positive rental stories that we know exist in our community, the Housing Committee should be able to significantly transform the “crisis.” Respondents were supportive of developing an online platform to advertise those in need of renters, those in need of rentals, and also to facilitate private match-making. There are homes, right now, that people are not offering for rent that they are willing to rent provided the Housing Committee and our entire island can improve home owner confidence through a variety of strategic means. The above finding also demonstrates that both past and recent negative rental experiences should not be underestimated in determining the present crisis. These stories and experiences are overshadowing crisis mitigation. The survey also revealed the challenges of the Islands Trust’s new Temporary Use Permit and Secondary Suite policy.

Based on these responses, the committee has undertaken or will soon undertake the following:

1. We decided that a web page as part of the HICEEC.org website was the best way to go. The chair had a meeting with Daniel Arbour and all is ready to begin.
2. We decided to place notices over the summer designed to correct the one major error in the survey which is that we didn’t give people the option to contact us if they had a place to offer as a rental.
3. A major focus is to change the narrative about rentals on Hornby by collecting “success”

stories and placing them in The First Edition and on the website. Interview questions have already been created along with the beginnings of a list of people to interview.

4. The website can become a place where both those seeking and those offering rentals can notify each other. We further decided that such notices would be anonymous and that one person would know each person by name and would arrange meetings through personal contacts. In addition, we will add the possibility of people offering storage space.

5. We would discuss with the three trained mediators we know of on the island whether they would be available to help with landlord-tenant conflict. One has already agreed.

6. We will draft a sample tenancy agreement for Hornby Island. We learned that such agreements are actually legally required. We want one that will satisfy that requirement and, at the same time, express it in language which reflects our shared values.

7. We will draft a revision of "The Hornby Way" which will include attention to the reasons why everyone who loves Hornby is encouraged to think about housing.

Other ideas, such as a free loan society to help both owners and renters, were noted and placed on the back burner for now.

Respectfully submitted

Daniel Siegel, Chair