

Hiyám ta Skwxwú7mesh Housing Society

Questions and Answers

What is Hiyám ta Skwxwú7mesh Housing Society?

Hiyám ta Skwxwú7mesh Housing Society (also referred to as “Hiyám Housing” or “the Society”) is the new not-for-profit organization mandated to lead the development and management of non-profit housing for the Squamish People and raise the standard of housing for the community. The organization is mandated to build on strong cultural practices and traditions of the Squamish Nation. Hiyám Housing is currently developing their strategic plan to identify their deliverables for housing in the next five years.

Why a non-profit model?

Hiyám Housing is an arm’s-length non-profit organization overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors, as well as committees, which will soon be established. As a registered non-profit, the Society is eligible to receive funding and grants otherwise not applicable to for-profit organizations. Hiyám Housing must follow the regulations and rules set out in its bylaws and the Society Act. The Society’s bylaws are public and will be posted on the Hiyám Housing website once one it has been developed.

Why did Council create Hiyám Housing?

Hiyám Housing was established to address historical operational and governance issues in housing, prevent tenant arrears, and create good management practices. Council has provided the Society with funding to conduct appropriate, professional property management and to allow for autonomy in its operations. By being at an arm’s length from the Nation, the Society can create strong policies and procedures that can be enforced more effectively. Hiyám Housing was created by the Squamish Nation Council after an extensive community engagement process on the model.

What will happen to the current Nation non-profit buildings, tenants, and management?

The Squamish Nation Council is seeking to transfer three groups of affordable housing units to the management of Hiyám Housing: the Eshá7an Townhomes, the Wiwǫkem Tenplex, and the Wiwǫkem Thirteenplex. Before a transfer happens, Hiyám Housing will work with the Nation on how to best to support existing tenants with new policy changes and tenancy agreements, including how or if the Society chooses to start charging rent or a management fee. The community and tenants will be updated on the transfer of these projects.

Assessments are proposed for a number of these units to understand risk and liabilities in the transfer. Council supported the development of formal names for these housing units and a management approach that supports the needs and objectives of Hi'yám Housing, while also providing quality management for the tenants.

How will new housing be enforced?

The strategic priorities for Hi'yám Housing have been developed by Squamish Nation Council including creating fair financial, tenant, maintenance, governance, and human resource management policies and procedures. As well, putting the Residential Tenancy Act into place is a means to protect both tenants and the Society. These, along with appropriate funding for staffing, will allow for better enforcement of rules and regulations.

Where do members apply for the housing waitlist at the new fourplex, duplex and 95-unit building (Xwemelch'stn Housing Project) on Capilano Reserve?

Hi'yám Housing will be responsible for final resident selection and will create a community-based tenant advisory committee to make recommendations regarding selection of tenants. Tenant applications will be made directly to Hi'yám Housing once the necessary systems and process have been established. The new projects are still early in the development process. That said, the Society will keep the community updated on the application process.

What will happen to the current housing list with the Squamish Nation Registry Department?

The current on-reserve housing program and waitlist is still in place with the Squamish Nation Registry and Housing Department for community members. The Society will have a separate waitlist for non-profit housing (Xwemelch'stn Housing Project and other units) and systems in place to ensure a member cannot live in a house on-reserve and a non-profit housing project as well.

Who chooses who can live in the new fourplex, duplex and Xwemelch'stn Housing Project on Capilano Reserve?

All of these projects are considered non-profit housing for Squamish Nation members and for the community benefit. The projects are receiving both federal and provincial funding so they can remain affordable throughout the life of the buildings. The Nation will have operating agreements in place with the funders, which include tenant income requirements that the members must meet to be able to live in the building.

Hi'yám Housing will be responsible for processing member applications and adhering to the tenant selection requirements in the agreements. In addition, Hi'yám will have a tenant selection policy and committee to oversee the selection process to ensure it is fair and transparent.

What about self-financing and mortgage programs?

The Squamish Nation and Hi'yám Housing are working on implementing a home ownership program for members to live on-reserve. This program is currently just for single family homes at this point but could be an option in future housing projects. The mortgage program will be managed directly by Hi'yám Housing, in partnership with a financial institution and the Nation. The home ownership policy still needs to be approved and a management system put in place before we can start taking applications. We will keep the community updated on the application process.

Will there be a building manager and someone to keep things in order?

Hi'yám Housing will hire a building maintenance manager for these new projects to oversee maintenance issues. The Society is exploring mentorship and training opportunities for the community related to building maintenance. There will be many new improved procedures and practices in place.

The Society will also be hiring a property manager to manage the buildings directly, under guidance of the CEO. The finance clerk will help the property manager to develop our capital plan, annual maintenance budget, budget for preventative and corrective maintenance, as well as replacement reserves. The property manager will supervise tenant-related duties of building maintenance staff.

Will there be rules to ensure the safety of tenants?

Hi'yám Housing is a new and growing organization and is putting the necessary resources in place to manage that growth. The Society intends to increase the numbers and capacity of its staff in order to professionally manage these projects. These new housing projects come with operational dollars to hire staff to be able to manage the tenants, policies, and procedures effectively. Hi'yám Housing will have direct tenancy agreements with the tenants and a tenant housing support worker to aid when needed.

The Society will also be enacting the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) for all of the non-profit housing projects it manages. The RTA will safeguard the tenants and landlord and ensure a fair and transparent system is in place to deal with disputes. Furthermore, adopting rules from the RTA will protect tenants as well as the Society and will clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each party.

What is the Residential Tenancy Act?

The Residential Tenancy Act is the law in Canada that governs landlord and tenant relations in residential rental accommodations, including non-profit housing. The benefits of implementing the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) outweighed any negative components. These benefits

included the following:

- Enabling the legislation will allow the Society to adapt an 'already-baked' set of regulations and associated infrastructure that would be more efficient than the Society having to establish a whole new stand-alone system on its own.
- Enacting the RTA will allow the Society to collect rent in an impartial way based on a clearly-established set of rules. This will help address some of the challenges around collecting rent that the Nation has faced for many years.
- Operating under the RTA will likely result in well-maintained properties and tenants who are informed and supported on maintenance and upkeep of housing.

How does the funding work for the building?

These projects are funded by the Federal (CMHC) and Provincial Governments (BC Housing). The funds for this project can be broken up into three areas:

- Capital Grant: Provide up-front capital grant dollars to cover the start up and construction costs of the buildings.
- Loan: Low interest mortgage/loan to cover the full construction cost, paid on a monthly basis by the Society.
- Operating Dollars: The Society will collect rents from the tenants to cover operating dollars (mortgage, wages, and maintenance, etc.) for the buildings. That said, because these are affordable rents, the shortfall in revenue will be supported by the funders throughout the life of the building through a monthly subsidy to the Society.

What is "rent-geared-to-income"?

This is when you pay a portion of your income as rent. Rental fees are calculated when you get approved, and annually on a rent-geared-to-income basis (30% of household total gross income, subject to minimum rent based on # of people). If you are offered a rent-geared-to-income unit, the amount you will pay depends on the size of your family and your gross household income. If you are offered a low-end of market unit, you will pay an amount set at, or slightly below, private market rents.

Can members purchase units and get a mortgage in these new non-profit projects?

Not at this time; these projects are affordable rental projects.

Will there be engagement with the members on the new BC Housing-funded Xwemelch'stn Housing Project at the Capilano Lacrosse Box Site?

Hi'yám Housing will be hosting virtual community information sessions to answer questions and get feedback on the project. Information about exciting opportunities for employment, training, cultural expression and tenant programming at this new project will be presented at these sessions.

If you have any questions about this Xwemelch'stn Housing Project or Hi'yám Housing Society, please email info@hiyamhousing.com.