

Denman Community Land Trust Association — Denman Island, British Columbia

Goal

Provide secure, affordable housing for low-income residents.

Target Group

Households earning less than 120 per cent of the Statistics Canada low income cut-offs (LICOs), measures that vary by household size and city to determine a family's economic well-being. While the organization originally used 100 per cent of the LICOs, it raised its threshold in recognition of the higher costs of living on Denman Island. Households must also be in need of stable, long-term housing.

Synopsis

Denman Community Land Trust Association (DCLTA) was established in 2008 to counteract increasing land prices and decreasing supply of affordable and rental housing on Denman Island. The issue of affordable housing on the island has gradually gained prominence since the 1990s. More recently, an influx of relatively affluent new residents has had the effect of driving up property values, which in turn has contributed to a shortage of affordable homes and rental accommodation on the island.

Since its incorporation, DCLTA has been actively involved in creating long-term affordable housing for the residents of Denman Island who are most at risk. The group does this by acquiring and holding land for affordable housing. It is also actively working to establish affordable housing for Denman Island's senior population.

Description

Background and Context

Denman Island is a small, rural island located off the coast of British Columbia. The island is known for its west coast marine environment and its diverse community of approximately 800 households.

Land and housing affordability became an issue for residents of Denman Island in the early 1990s. A rapid increase in homeownership by part-time residents purchasing vacation homes, as well as urbanites seeking retirement homes, contributed to shortages of affordable ownership housing. Also, much of the rental housing was previously composed of dwellings made available by local homeowners. The availability of this type of rental housing decreased significantly, as fewer owners used their Denman Island property as their primary residence.

In response to these pressures, residents of Denman Island with a common desire to address the need for affordable housing on the island came together to establish Denman Community Land Trust Association. DCLTA was established as a non-profit organization in 2008 and received charitable registration in 2009. DCLTA was modelled after other community land trusts already in existence, such as the Calgary Community Land Trust.

Important related goals of DCLTA are to provide affordable housing that is developed and built in an environmentally responsible manner and that is in keeping with the Denman Island's rural roots.

How it Works

DCLTA receives land on Denman Island from donations and bequests of local land owners. Occasionally, DCLTA will purchase land if it is available at a low cost. Once land is donated, DCLTA considers its suitability for the development of affordable housing targeting low-income individuals and

households. For example, DCLTA would not pursue a project that placed seniors out of reach of community services, as it would consider this housing arrangement inappropriate for seniors' needs. Instead, the organization would prioritize the development of single-family houses with access to garden space and the opportunity to develop a home-based business.

DCLTA retains responsibility for the land, the project, and follow-up management. It would also consider leasing land to non-profit organizations, such as co-operatives and farm collectives, which would then develop affordable housing. This allows the organization to retain control of the land for the community's benefit, with the explicit purpose of keeping these areas reserved for affordable housing.

DCLTA is committed to maintaining rental rates at no greater than 30 per cent of a tenant's income. Like other land trusts, it is underpinned by a belief that affordable housing strategies are most effective when based on meeting the needs of residents within the community.

DCLTA is governed by a board of directors elected by the membership, and all staff are volunteers. The group has approximately 120 members (as of 2013), which represents more than 10 per cent of the island's adult population.

Planning and Design

DCLTA's approach recognizes that affordable housing can be provided in many forms. The organization is willing to consider building a variety of types of dwellings, in various parts of the island, and with varying lot sizes. This flexibility is necessary, given DCLTA's dependence on the availability of donated land, the acquisition of which is unpredictable. Although flexibility is important, DCLTA insists on being true to its overall principles, which include maintaining a balance among its housing, environmental and social goals.

The idea of a land trust was appealing to DCLTA's founders, since it allows the organization to retain control of the land. Like other land trusts, DCLTA was designed to keep housing on its land affordable in perpetuity.

Financing and Partners

Community members of Denman Island play an important role in DCLTA. Given the nature of a community land trust, DCLTA relies most heavily upon bequests, donations, and sale of land at below-market rates. It actively seeks out land on an ongoing basis, in order to further the number of affordable housing projects it can undertake. Since it is a registered charity, DCLTA can issue tax receipts for all donations of \$20 or more, including in-kind gifts.

DCLTA benefited from a CMHC Seed Funding grant in 2009-2010, which was used to help create its first affordable housing pilot project. This funding was put toward a variety of project activities, including drilling wells and conducting a wastewater site evaluation.

The Real Estate Foundation of BC provided a grant of \$12,200 that covered legal fees to develop agreements with the land donor, the Islands Trust and the Ministry of Transportation to enable rezoning, subdivision and transfer of the new lot to the organization. Extensive communications and meetings with the parties, plus participation in public information meetings and a public hearing, culminated in the filing of several documents at the land title office, including special covenants required by the land donor, a housing agreement and a sewage disposal covenant. The grant also enabled the development of formal tenant selection criteria and procedures as well as lease/tenancy agreements. Future DCLTA affordable housing projects will continue to benefit from these templates.

Other partners include:

- the Comox Valley Regional District, which is the local government responsible for land use zoning;

- the Comox Valley Housing Task Force, which shares a common interest with DCLTA in affordable housing for Denman Island residents.

Results and How Savings Were Achieved

Since its inception as a land trust, DCLTA has become an active member of its community in support of affordable housing. Its foundational work has included conducting a property data project, which provided mapping and parcel status for every property on the whole of Denman Island, and assisting in the evaluation of potential donations or purchases of land. DCLTA has also negotiated a bylaw amendment process, researched septic and greywater systems to meet provincial regulations, and created a template mechanism for the management of affordable dwellings.

In 2014, DCLTA will have tenants in one affordable house, while continuing to make progress on assembling a parcel of land for a five-unit affordable project for seniors. Though these tenants own the buildings in which they live, the land itself is held in perpetuity by the Trust.

All of DCLTA's work is carried out by volunteers. Other savings are achieved through donations and bequests, low-cost purchases of land parcels, and negotiations for economical purchases of materials. DCLTA avoids passing on costs to its tenants, as it perceives this to be contrary to its overall mission.

Impact on the Provision of Affordable Housing

DCLTA is working, slowly and incrementally, toward the protection of land for affordable housing on Denman Island. It maintains a focus upon rural living and lifestyles, as well as a commitment to protecting the environment. Consequently, there are some types of structures that DCLTA will not consider for development, such as multi-storey buildings. Furthermore, as Denman Island does not have the services needed to support hard-to-house populations, developing this type of housing is not one of DCLTA's objectives.

Suitability for Replication

- Since DCLTA's model relies heavily on donated land, a land trust may be more effective in rural areas where land is more likely to be donated, in larger blocks, for these purposes.
- In rural communities, a land trust can work with the local land use planning authority to create appropriate bylaws and agreements specific to proposed projects. By working together, the community land trust and municipality can provide a stronger guarantee of housing affordability over time.
- A community land trust like DCLTA provides a solution to a shortage of affordable housing that does not require as much money as other strategies. Housing can be provided incrementally, one unit at a time, as resources become available. A community organization such as DCLTA is also able to coordinate and provide donated materials, expertise and labour.
- Flexibility is required regarding the types of housing that can be built. An organization that targets a specific group of beneficiaries may be limited in what they can accomplish, as this model responds to the availability of land donations as they materialize.

Related Strategies

- [Providing Land](#)

Sources of Further Information

1. For additional information regarding the Denman Community Land Trust Association, see www.denmanaffordablehousing.org.