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Teresa Howe faces eviction from the Shawnigan Lake property where her manufactured home is located.

Bruce Stotesbury/Times Colonist

MLA: Affordable housing hit by closing mobile home parks

BY LINDSAY KINES
Times Colonist staff

The dismantling of mobile home parks on Vancouver Island threatens to weaken the region's affordable housing stock and force more people into homelessness, NDP critic John Horgan warns.

The Malahat-Juan de Fuca MLA says he has been inundated with calls for help in recent months from mobile home owners faced with possible eviction.

"It's happening with increasing regularity," he said. "I've been holding meetings since last summer right across the riding in Sooke, Metchosin, Langford and up in Cobble Hill and the numbers that are coming to these meetings are just getting larger and larger."

"These residents — most of them seniors, most of them on fixed incomes — are living in fear."

In recent days, property owners have served 12-months notice on 29 families at Pedder Bay mobile home park in Metchosin, and another 12 families at a park on Bellendean Road in Shawnigan Lake.

In many cases, the mobile home owners say their homes are too old move, and there's no place to put them anyway, as trailer parks become increasingly scarce.

Horgan blames the trend on soaring real estate values on Vancouver Island.

"There are spots strategically located in and around my riding that developers would rather see condos on," Horgan said. "They get an immediate return. You're seeing these properties pass from one generation to another as well, and the younger generation, they want to cash in. I guess you can't blame them for wanting to do that."

But Horgan said the provincial government needs to do a better job preserving the mobile home parks as affordable housing, and protecting the residents who live there.

"We talk about homelessness, we talk about people at risk in our communities," he said. "Manufactured homes are a reasonable low-cost form of housing stock that's disappearing and what we should be doing is trying to encourage those parks that do exist to stay where they are. That could be through tax initiatives, potentially."

Teresa Howe, a single mother of three, fears having to abandon her \$125,000 mobile home after receiving 12-months notice at the Shawnigan Lake park. The current provincial legislation gives a "gross imbalance of power" to landlords, she said.

"All that's required is that they have to pay the tenants 12 months pad rent which is equivalent to \$3,500," she said. "It's an immoral legislation, as far as I'm concerned. It's not protecting us."

Rich Coleman, the provincial minister responsible for housing, was out of the country on vacation yesterday and unavailable for comment on the issue.

Howe, who commutes to her job as a legal assistant at a family law firm in Victoria, says the mobile home "is my affordable housing."

"There's nothing else out there for me. There's no way I could live in Victoria and raise my three kids and this is all I've got."

Property owner Syl Carle, who lives in Ontario, expressed sympathy for the plight of his tenants, but said he wants to build a house for himself and his family on the property.

"To some extent, it doesn't feel good to be asking for my land back, but it's purely economical," he said. "Land is at a premium out there. I have been looking for quite some time now for land like this that's overlooking the lake. There are no properties that sell around the lake for under \$1 million. So it's making it very difficult for landowners to keep deficit-operating parks like this."

were certain rivers he wouldn't go on unless Jeff had been on them. He was always safety conscious."

Flags at the city's fire department have been flying at half mast since the week-end news of Strang's death.

A friend of Strang's in the paddling community, who asked not to be named, described the 36-year-old man as "one of the safest and most experienced paddlers on the Island. It's a tragic accident and has impacted the kayaking community a lot. It's a very tight community and everyone knows everyone," he said.

By Monday, e-mails outlining details of the accident were flying around the whitewater kayaking community which on the West Coast does most of its activ-

ity in winter months when rain has swollen creeks.

Strang was well acquainted with the stretch of water that took his life, Harris Creek, located about a half hour north-east of Port Renfrew. He was paddling last Thursday with two other friends and had "run the river about 50 times or so. We know it very, very well," said the friend, who said he wanted people not to be left with the perception that people who river kayak "are risking their lives all the time. We don't do that."

But recent storms may have changed the river. "With all the flooding there have been a number of river rapids that have all changed, the flow is suddenly very different."

Civic leaders protest cuts to AIDS budget

BY JUDITH LAVOIE
Times Colonist staff

Cutting more than one-third of Vancouver Island Health Authority funding for Victoria agencies helping people with HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C is dangerous and short-sighted, outraged community leaders said yesterday.

"Any cuts at this time are unhealthy, unsafe and unacceptable," said Rev. Al Tysick of Our Place at a news conference organized by the Victoria Downtown Service Providers Committee. They were responding to news that funding would be distributed more evenly to communities all over Vancouver Island instead of 80 per cent to Greater Victoria.

The committee is comprised of a broad spectrum of social services providers in Greater Victoria and includes the City of Victoria, the Victoria Police and Downtown Victoria Business Association.

In a surprise move shortly before the news conference, VIHA offered one-time transitional funding for AIDS Vancouver Island, Victoria AIDS Resource and Community Service Society and the Victoria Persons with AIDS Society to give them more time to adjust. But, they were not mollified and said more funding is desperately needed instead of VIHA simply delaying the cut of about \$450,000, or 37.5 per cent, for a year.

"The only sensible announcement that could have been made on this issue is that funding to these support agencies will be significantly increased, rather than decreased, in order to meet serious shortfalls in existing services in the Greater Victoria area," said Irene Haigh-Gidora, Cool Aid Community Health Centre manager.

In 2005, 70 per cent of new HIV infections on Vancouver Island were around Greater Victoria and, despite growing numbers of clients, organizations have not seen a funding increase for more than a decade.

"There is nothing equitable about increasing service for the vulnerable in



Al Tysick: cuts unsafe



Murray Fyfe: need is great

one community at the direct expense to vulnerable individuals in another," Haigh-Gidora said.

Funding cuts could mean shorter hours and less staff at the needle exchange, fewer support and counseling programs and closure of street outreach programs.

VIHA has earmarked \$1.5 million annually for HIV/AIDS and hep C prevention and support services since taking over contracts from the Health Ministry in 2002.

Medical health officer Dr. Murray Fyfe said there is a great need for more services such as needle exchanges in communities around Vancouver Island.

About 50 per cent of hep C infections are now in central and northern Vancouver Island, he said. "There are challenges in meeting health-care needs on Vancouver Island and this is one of them."

However, a VIHA committee is already meeting to look at budget priorities and see if extra money can be found for Victoria, Fyfe added. Reduction of HIV and hep C infection rates is a priority, he said.

"But, there are a large number of priorities and the unfortunate thing is we haven't had any change in funding for a number of years," Fyfe said.

Victoria police Const. Lori Beauvais said the planned cuts could increase policing pressures.

"It could mean people don't have the support they may require. That may be in the form of housing or meals and that could increase illegal behaviour on the downtown streets," she said.

POTHOLES ON PARADE

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Send us the address, (e.g. 123 Main St., left lane, heading east) to localnews@tc.canwest.com and we'll share our findings.



Victoria firefighter killed in kayak accident near Port Renfrew

BY CAROLYN HEIMAN
Times Colonist staff

The Victoria Fire Department and Vancouver Island's river kayaking fraternity are mourning the death of a colleague who drowned when his whitewater kayak became trapped under a rock.

Fire Chief Doug Angrove confirmed yesterday that one of his members, Jeff Strang, was killed in an accident on Harris Creek last Thursday.

Strang joined the fire department in October 2005 and news of the young recruit's death has the department pretty shook up said Angrove. "All reports are that Jeff knew what he was doing. I talked to a Nanaimo firefighter who said there

were certain rivers he wouldn't go on unless Jeff had been on them. He was always safety conscious."

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But recent storms may have changed the river. "With all the flooding there have been a number of river rapids that have all changed, the flow is suddenly very different."

The accident happened around 1:30 p.m. when three paddlers were in a section of the swollen creek lined by high cliffs. Strang, who is married and from Duncan, went first, leaving his friends to watch as events went tragically wrong. Taking a less-preferred channel, he was sucked under a boulder and pinned while submerged.

Fellow kayakers tried, but were unable to pull the man out in the torrent of water.

Bill Meikle, Juan de Fuca search and rescue manager, said the area where the accident happened would have made a rescue "very difficult. The pressure of the water and the conditions there are extreme...It is basically a canyon. One side is straight up 300 feet." The road

side of ace where rescuers worked from is about 40 feet above water level.

Rescue teams got to the scene around 5 p.m. But the treacherous location, along with the diminishing light forced rescuers to leave and return in the morning to recover Strang's body.

By dawn Friday, members of Juan de Fuca, Cowichan/Duncan, Victoria and Nanaimo search and rescue organizations were at the scene. Using ropes to scale down the cliff and work from ledges along the creek, they found the the kayak. Fellow paddlers found the dead man around 1:30 p.m. a short way downstream.

Angrove said the fire department is discussing with the family what involvement it will have in the funeral service.

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