

COMOX VALLEY COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS



ANNUAL REPORT

2020



COMOX VALLEY
Coalition To End
HOMELESSNESS

2020: A Year in Review – Our Annual Report

2020 was a year no one is soon to forget. A global pandemic, the opioid crisis, racial tensions, extreme weather and so much more. This year has been about overcoming immense obstacles, and together, as a Coalition, we have.

During the pandemic, the Coalition and our agencies pivoted many of our responses to help protect those who needed it most. Throughout the year, we've been advocating for our member agencies, the people we serve, and our collective needs – you can read more about these many responses in detail throughout this report.

This year we planned and implemented a Homeless Count supported by 60+ volunteers, donations from small businesses, and even hosted a Self-Care Day featuring chiropractors, massage therapists, free haircuts, and a BBQ onsite at Connect. Sadly, this year results from the Count show a 13% overall increase in homelessness from 2018.

We are truly in this all together. Our Coalition member agencies quickly adapted to our monthly meetings moving from in-person, to virtually with 30-40 people attending each month. We welcomed 5 new member agencies to the Coalition.

Not only that, but this was also a busy year with our partners at the Comox Valley Regional District with the Regional Housing Needs Assessment being released, the work of the Regional Poverty Reduction Plan starting, and a review of our Homelessness Supports Service Fund. Oh! And there was also a Provincial Election!

2020 was the year we officially opened the Connect Warming Centre, which was quickly proven to be a much-needed cornerstone service in our community – especially during the first few months of the pandemic. Through Connect we started a Shower Program at the Lewis Centre 3 mornings a week, and even purchased a van for Outreach Workers to assist their clients, drive them to appointments, deliver hot meals, pick up donations and much more.

While the pandemic highlighted the disparities between those who have and those who do not, it also brought community together in meaningful ways from deliveries of hot meals, to donations of warm clothing and outdoor gear for those experiencing homelessness, to outdoor internet cafes and handwashing stations.

Besides working with our partners the Comox Valley Community Health Network on Seniors Housing, the Coalition also made some new partnerships including having a seat on the CVRD Emergency Operations Centre to advocate for the needs of our community's most vulnerable, and being a key partner in the Division of Family Practice Community Wellness Collaborative where we worked with physicians, nurses and clinicians leading to the much needed establishment of a physician outreach program where doctors meet vulnerable people where they are at whether it be motels, Connect, or in encampments.

This year, our programs and operations of the Coalition were kindly supported by funders such as the Comox Valley Community Foundation, United Way Central and North Vancouver Island, Homelessness Prevention Service: Rural & Remote, SPARCBC, BC Housing, CVRD, City of Courtenay and community donors.

Thank you to all our member agencies, advisors, municipal leaders, donors, funders and caring citizens of our community for all of your efforts in ending homelessness in the Comox Valley during this very challenging year.

Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness

WHO WE ARE

The Coalition to End Homelessness is a collective of 31 member agencies who plan, coordinate, recommend, advocate for, and implement community responses to homelessness and increasing affordable housing.

HOW WE DO IT

We work within a wheelhouse of housing options to address homelessness

- ✦ A wheelhouse includes a safety net (emergency shelter, short-term supportive housing), housing with supports (long-term supportive housing, subsidized rental housing) and affordable market housing (rental and homeownership).

We believe in the power of collaboration and partnerships

- ✦ A collaborative systems approach is used to provide the most effective support strategies, while securing adequate resources.

We use a preventative, client-based approach

- ✦ Supports are delivered with unconditional positive regard, and emphasis will be placed on outreach, frequent contact with clients, relationship building, and individualized services.

- ✦ Ending homelessness requires prevention strategies to ensure more people do not become homeless.

We use our platform to educate, increase public awareness, and build community

- ✦ A coordinated public awareness program builds community understanding of homelessness.

We make funding recommendations for the Comox Valley Regional District Homelessness Supports Service Fund

The Coalition to End Homelessness has 4 strategic directions which guide the work we do.

- ✦ Strategic Priority #1: Create Additional Housing & Supports
- ✦ Strategic Priority #2: Community Collaboration, Prevention & Education
- ✦ Strategic Priority #3: Coalition Capacity Building
- ✦ Strategic Priority #4: Funding & Fundraising

Our annual update of our Strategic Priority #1 accomplishments can be found in our **Housing Plan**. This includes the CVRD Housing Needs Assessment key findings, housing built since 2016, Homeless Count results, housing funded through the CVRD Homelessness Supports Service as well as other affordable housing projects initiated.

Strategic Priorities 2-4 are related specifically to the work of the Coalition and can be found within the Coalition's **Action Plan**. Annual updates on other activities and progress can be found within this **Annual Report**.

Archived versions of the plan can be found on our website www.cvhousing.ca

HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE TEAM

The Homelessness Response Team (HRT) is a street outreach team coordinated by the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness and consists of frontline outreach workers from a wide range of nonprofit agencies, as well as partnerships with Island Health, City of Courtenay, RCMP, Island Health and the Ministry of Poverty and Social Development.

The HRT meets weekly to identify gaps in the system of care to support homeless individuals, provide updates, ideas and share knowledge, resources, referrals, and support.

During outreach, HRT members engage with and support homeless persons on the street, parks, and at encampments, motels etc. Meeting people where they are at is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic as many community services have been cancelled or reduced in hours. The HRT provides COVID-19 screening and education, agency referrals and income assistance support, hygiene supplies, and living supports. The HRT also identifies and prioritizes homeless persons who are medically fragile, or otherwise highly vulnerable and connects them to health services and physicians.

Through the Coalition the HRT also brings forward concerns and advocates for the needs of those experiencing homelessness. The HRT also provides education to the public to raise awareness, break stigma and build understanding on issues related to homelessness.

“I have nothing but good things to say. Everyone has been super awesome. When I first got here, I was in rough shape emotionally and the outreach team helped me. Made sure I have groceries and anything I need. I could not have asked for more help. The team really works together to provide a non-judgemental, down to earth, ‘easy to talk to’ vibes. They also helped me move, and in the middle of a pandemic. That is true dedication. I will always be grateful. You really are earth angels. Thank you so much and God bless.”

– feedback from outreach client



HRT OUTREACH WORKERS STARTING THEIR SHIFT DOWNTOWN COURTENAY

PANDEMIC COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

In September we met with our partners from the Comox Valley Community Health Network for a conversation with outreach workers about their experiences during the dual public health emergencies: BC's Opioid Crisis and the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Few of us would have ever imagined that we would live through a global pandemic in our lifetime. The Comox Valley Community Health Network recognized in the early days of the pandemic that we are all experiencing a significant life event that is impacting people's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. The Health Network started the Pandemic Community Conversations to help people see and find their role to play in helping to build health, connection, vibrancy, and resilience for our communities. The Pandemic Community Conversations were designed for people to connect with each other by having meaningful conversations. Conversation participants shared their experience of the pandemic, made sense of the times, and shared ideas about how people in our community might support the health and wellbeing of people and the environment during the next phases of the pandemic.

A [report](#) was written that reflects what was heard and the recommendations from the Pandemic Community Conversations with community frontline outreach workers.



CONNECT WARMING CENTRE

The Connect Warming Centre (Connect) is a Coalition initiative, operated by the Comox Valley Transition Society that provides a safe, welcoming space for vulnerable individuals experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. People can escape inclement weather, temporarily store, or dry out belongings, access washrooms, refreshments, and other immediate supports.

Connect also aims to improve self-sufficiency by providing assisted access to housing opportunities, social connection, literacy and education or volunteer opportunities, referrals to community social service agencies, as well as food and living supports.



In December 2019, we hired coordinators, outlined operational and behavioural protocols, and signed the license to occupy agreement with the City of Courtenay who provides our space in-kind. We acquired furniture, supplies and everything we needed to open our doors and set the space up. We started 2020 exceptionally strong with the opening of the Connect Warming Centre on January 16th. If permanent housing is not available, then at minimum, being able to provide a space for people to go during the day can make a huge impact on people's well-being. The space quickly proved to be a safe, welcoming place for folks experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness and welcomed approximately 50-60 people daily.

The pandemic's impact on Connect

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the closure and reduction of many services in the downtown Courtenay core, the Connect Warming Centre pivoted to respond to the needs of and to protect our most vulnerable populations. Hours of operation increased from Monday – Friday afternoons to 7 days a week. With strict health protocols and physical distancing measures in place Connect offers COVID-19 symptom screening and education, a washroom, hand hygiene, cell phone charging, access to wi-fi, coffee and hygiene supplies such as soap, hand sanitizer and masks. Staff remain available to help fill out income assistance forms, administer Vulnerability Assessments for supportive housing, and offer referrals to other agencies & access to living supports such as bus tickets, laundry tokens, grocery gift cards etc. Through our partnership with the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice, we now have a physician attending Connect regularly and assisting people on-site. Since opening, Connect has had nearly 7000 visits.

Our current partners include, AVI, Wachiy Friendship Centre, Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness, Ministry of Poverty and Social Development, Nursing Centre, Island Health Mental Health & Substance Use, Indigenous Women's Sharing Society, Division of Family Practice, and continues to grow.

"I come here to get out of my isolation. It gives me hope."

"I like coming here because there's friendly staff and people. It's a real nice place to hang out."

"I have mental health issues and sometimes I have to go to Connect for support. Sometimes I don't trust myself. It's frightening. This place helps me feel like support is never far away."

"It's a great place to come and relax and connect with good people."

"Through Connect I can get in touch with so many different resources to get my needs met."

"This place has been a big help in connecting me in a financial support worker that is helping with reintegration and rent for housing. You have been more than kind with me, and I appreciate it."

"A safe place to be that includes mutual respect, mutual dignity, caring and friendship."

"If I'm not able to calm myself down, you can help and if you can't, you connect me with someone who can and you're there to introduce, which helps me feel comfortable."

SHOWER PROGRAM

Since April 6th, 2020 Connect has also been operating a shower program based out of Lewis Centre 3 mornings a week. The City of Courtenay provides the space in-kind. We know in the face of this pandemic how important hygiene is and without this service, many unhoused people would not have access to a shower. At the Lewis Centre, there are 2 staff (one for men's and one for women's showers). Staff not only monitor safety and proper usage of the showers, but act as an additional health screening checkpoint and provide education and information about COVID-19 and other resources

"I would be dirty without these showers. Keeps me healthy. I'm happy this is happening – where I live there is no water- it's hard to wash with no water. Thank you!"

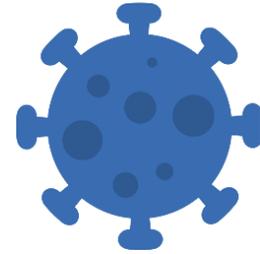
"Thank you, God, that this is happening for us. We can get clean; we have no worries. You guys are amazing. I appreciate the clean clothes. It doesn't exist anywhere else; we are very lucky."

"When I wash my ear, I feel so good cause I can finally hear."

"When my toes are twinkling from the nice soap you supply, I feel like dancing and saying thank you! When I brush my teeth (what's left of them now) I know I'll crunch food again."

"Personally, I don't think I would've survived without you guys."

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND HOMELESSNESS



On March 11th, 2020 60 volunteers in our community surveyed 132 homeless people for our 2020 Point in Time Homeless Count.

That same evening the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

On March 17th, Dr Bonnie Henry declared a public health emergency here in BC. The message echoed out throughout BC was to “Stay home, wash your hands, and practice physical distancing”.

As soon as COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic the Coalition and its member agencies worked around the clock to respond to the new needs of our community’s most vulnerable – many who felt isolated, fearful, uncertain, and unable to follow the advice to stay home, self-isolate, wash hands and practice physical distancing. Many social services shut down, hours were reduced, or services were moved online creating barriers to accessing support. Emergency shelter spaces were reduced to adhere to pandemic safety regulations. The Coalition and its member agencies advocated for public washrooms to be re-opened, transitioned food programs from inside to outside, built hand washing stations, increased hours at Connect with COVID safety protocols in place and worked with the City of Courtenay to have showers opened at Lewis Centre.

Coalition agencies worked with BC Housing to provide 42 motel rooms for those experiencing homelessness. These motel rooms include 2 meals a day, daily support visits from outreach, onsite security, and weekly visits from physicians. There is a waitlist to get into these motel rooms. *(For a comprehensive timeline of the Coalition’s pandemic response please see Appendix A)*

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the housing and support service deficiencies for so many of our vulnerable populations. While we have collectively (Coalition’s member agencies with municipal support, and the province) done a lot in the past 5 years, there is clearly much more to do as the demand for safe, affordable, housing continues to grow during these unstable times. As a Coalition we see a very real need to provide more support throughout the pandemic and beyond. We are encouraged to see what is being accomplished in other communities across BC and we believe that the Comox Valley must take immediate action to address the continuing and growing impacts the pandemic is having on our vulnerable populations.



CONNECT STAFF DURING THE PANDEMIC

THANK YOU TO OUR MUNICIPAL PARTNERS

Comox Valley Regional District
City of Courtenay
Town of Comox
Village of Cumberland

THANK YOU TO OUR COALITION MEMBERS & ADVISORS

Affordable Housing Vancouver Island Society
AVI Health & Community Services
Comox Bay Care Society (Care-a-van)
Comox Valley Affordable Housing Society
Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce
Comox Valley Community Health Network
Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative
Comox Valley Family Services Association
Comox Valley Head Injury Society
Comox Valley Lions Club
Comox Valley Recovery Centre
Comox Valley Regional Chapter of Nurses & Nurse Practitioners
Comox Valley Seniors Support
Comox Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church
Comox Valley Social Planning Society
Comox Valley Transition Society
Cumberland Community Housing Society
Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness
Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association
Eureka Support Society
Glacierview Lodge
Habitat for Humanity
Indigenous Women's Sharing Society
L'arche Comox Valley
LUSH Valley Food Action Society
Salvation Army
St. George's United Church
Stepping Stones Recovery
StrongCentre
The Views at St. Joseph
United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island
Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry
Wachiay Friendship Centre

THANK YOU TO OUR 2020 FUNDERS

BC Housing
City of Courtenay
Comox Valley Community Foundation
Comox Valley Community Health Network
Comox Valley Regional District
United Way Central & Northern Vancouver Island
SPARCBC

Questions about our Annual Report? Please contact us!

Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness

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Find us on Facebook! www.facebook.com/cvcoalitiontoendhomelessness



**COMOX VALLEY
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APPENDIX A

PANDEMIC RESPONSE TIMELINE FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

March 2020

- ✦ **March 11** – World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a global pandemic
- ✦ **March 15** – Coalition begins to share real-time COVID-19 service agency closures, hour changes, and other emergency updates via social media, our website and email
- ✦ **March 16** – Sonshine Lunch Club no longer offering indoor lunch service, access to washrooms, begins bagged lunch program. Warming Centre is temporarily closed
- ✦ **March 17** - Public health emergency is declared in B.C. City of Courtenay washrooms are closed, no public washrooms or running water source for homeless community
- ✦ **March 18** – water taps are turned on at LUSH Valley’s downtown community garden – the only source of water. EWR mats at Pidcock Shelter are extended beyond the usual Mar 31st.
- ✦ **March 19** – Coalition begins to meet daily with CVRD Emergency Operations Centre to inform team on pandemics impact on homeless community
- ✦ **March 20** – City of Courtenay public washrooms are reopened
- ✦ **March 21** – Division of Family Practice Vulnerable Populations Working group started, Coalition participates weekly
- ✦ **March 24** – Emergency funding request to City of Courtenay for Careavan, LUSH Valley, CVTS and Food Bank submitted. Food Bank closes its doors. Connect Warming Centre reopens with new safety protocols. Coalition drafts an emergency plan to house vulnerable populations in empty public facilities
- ✦ **March 25** – Coalition submits Vulnerable Populations Emergency Housing Options Report to EOC. Province announces support for renters and City of Courtenay reaches out to Coalition to start a shower program. Lifelong Learning Centre starts outdoor handwashing stations and internet café
- ✦ **March 26** – Coalition sends appeal letter and our emergency plan to MPs, MLAs and local government re: need for emergency housing supports for homeless
- ✦ **March 27** – PREOC sends directive for municipalities to work with BCH and Health Authorities to create homelessness emergency response plans, including municipal owned facilities that could be used for emergency purposes such as shelters.
- ✦ **March 31**– City of Courtenay approves shower program for homeless individuals at Lewis Centre

April 2020

- ✦ **April 1** – Coalition receives funds from CVRD for motel self-isolation rooms for homeless individuals.
- ✦ **April 2** - \$300 crisis supplement for vulnerable people announced by province
- ✦ **April 7** –Coalition receives funds from CVCHN for motel self-isolation rooms for homeless individuals. Coalition begins working on motel response and COVID-19 testing response with Island Health
- ✦ **April 21** – Coalition receives funding from CVCF for motel self-isolation response
- ✦ **April 22** – First draft of Coalition/Island Health self-isolation motel response published/shared
- ✦ **April 27** – COVID-10 Resource document for outreach workers published.

May 2020

- ✦ **May 1** – Provincial Financial Aid Program Opens. Coalition is awarded emergency response funding from HPS Rural & Remote for motel rooms, and other supports for those experiencing homelessness
- ✦ **May 4** - City of Courtenay Council unanimously passes resolution. *“Whereas there continues to be a significant homeless population in the Courtenay area whose presence in unsupported settings and unsanctioned campsites creates risks related to health and safety, including fire, environmental hazards and unhygienic conditions that, according to health officials, increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission; Therefore, be it resolved that the City of Courtenay work with the Coalition to End Homelessness to present a proposal to the provincial government for funding to address these risks through the provision of temporary housing and related support services.”*
- ✦ **May 6** - With the number of new COVID-19 cases continuing to drop, the province lays out its plans to gradually reopen.
- ✦ **May 12** – Coalition receives funds from CVCF for shower program. Concern from community mounting about use of motel rooms in Comox for vulnerable homeless individuals
- ✦ **May 15 - Vulnerable Populations Working Group** – Physicians Outreach program is funded. 3 physicians provide care to vulnerable individuals at the motels and Connect

June 2020

- ✦ **June 9** – Coalition and City of Courtenay send letter to BCH and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing requesting increased response for individuals experiencing homelessness
- ✦ **June 23**– Coalition receives funding from CVCF for Connect to purchase supplies. City extends shower program lease. Coalition submits a request to the City to extend the license to occupy at 685 Cliffe Ave for Connect.
- ✦ **June 25** –BC Housing sends a response letter indicating they are researching opportunities to assist our vulnerable population and will be reaching out. Around this time, BCH agrees to fund 32 motel rooms in Courtenay including funds for outreach staff, security, and meals.

July 2020

- ✦ **July 1** - Motel rooms for homeless individuals are already full and waitlisted. Outreach providing daily support and meals to residents
- ✦ **July 3** – Coalition receives March 11th, 2020 Homeless Count preliminary data. Shows that homelessness has increased by 13% since 2018 despite the construction of 46 units of supportive housing
- ✦ **July 7** –City of Courtenay agrees to extend Connect License to Occupy until Sept 30 and directs staff to write a report on a one-year extension
- ✦ **July 13** - Municipal leaders and Coalition Leadership Team meet to discuss next steps on advocating for emergency and permanent housing for vulnerable population.
- ✦ **July 21** – Funds are awarded to Connect and for the purchase of an outreach van through United Way

August 2020

- ✦ **August 7** –_Coalition creates a housing proposal to be presented to local municipal leaders and and BC Housing.
- ✦ **August 20** –_Federal government announces the transition from CERB to EI to begin Sept 28

September 2020

- ✦ **September 2** – Coalition provides feedback at HSABC's regarding "Unintended consequences of the pandemic on vulnerable populations"
- ✦ **September 16** – Coalition begins to write an official housing proposal including temporary and permanent housing

October 2020

- ✦ **October 7** – Coalition acquires feedback on our Housing proposal from outreach workers and our member agencies
- ✦ **October 20** – City of Courtenay approves a one-year extension to the license to occupy for Connect

November 2020

- ✦ **November 1** – Coalition begins to look into a temporary overflow shelter program as there are still many homeless individuals not able to access emergency shelter
- ✦ **November 20** – Coalition is awarded funding by CVCF for the continued pandemic coordination of the Coalition
- ✦ **November 25** – Coalition's Housing Proposal is finalized and sent to municipal leaders for endorsement
- ✦ **November 27** – As cases of COVID-19 rise, Island Health updates its mobile COVID-19 testing process for people experiencing homelessness. CVRD endorses the Coalition's Housing Proposal to be sent to BC Housing
- ✦ **November 30** – Coalition received full results of our 2020 Homeless Count www.cvhousing.ca/2020-point-in-time-count/

December 2020

- ✦ **December 1** – Coalition requests HSS funds previously earmarked for capital costs at Connect are reallocated to operational funds to keep Connect doors open during the pandemic
- ✦ **December 7** – City of Courtenay endorses the Coalition's Housing Proposal to be sent
- ✦ **December 21**- City of Courtenay approves staff to work with Coalition to find a temporary Overflow Emergency Shelter space

APPENDIX B: COALITION IN THE MEDIA

- Jan 7, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/62738/seasonal-warming-shelter-opening-in-courtenay/>
- Mar 10, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/business/courtenay-downtown-bia-working-to-keep-community-safe-and-vibrant/>
- Mar 12, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/data-from-community-counts-support-british-coumbians-experiencing-homelessness/>
- Mar 31, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/shower-facilities-to-be-made-available-in-courtenay-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- Apr 1, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/65328/comox-valley-regional-district-providing-148279-for-local-covid-19-efforts/>
- April 30, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/67899/courtenay-mayor-says-city-pushing-to-move-homeless-into-hotel-rooms/>
- May 5, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/68061/courtenay-pursuing-options-to-help-homeless-during-pandemic/>
- May 19, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/warming-centre-helps-vulnerable-comox-valley-residents/>
- Jun 6, 2020: <https://fb.watch/2x0tlvGb48/> - VIDEO: Connect and Shower Program
- Jul 6, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/community/comox-valley-community-foundation-allots-more-covid-19-emergency-response-money/>
- Jul 7, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/70373/comox-valley-looking-undertaking-poverty-assessment-and-reduction-strategy1/>
- Jul 7, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/courtenay-council-praises-warming-centre-for-service/>
- Jul 13, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/point-in-time-count-indicates-homelessness-on-rise-in-comox-valley/>
- Jul 27, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/71261/comox-valley-community-foundation-dishing-out-another-121850-for-local-organizations/>
- Oct 7, 2020: <https://youtu.be/svUxKKfpOul> VIDEO: Keynote at CVCF Gala re: Coalition pandemic response
- Oct 20, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/courtenay-council-approves-lease-extension-for-warming-centre/>
- Nov 26, 2020: <https://youtu.be/JCQrJANDe2s> VIDEO: Coalition Coordinator - anti-stigma
- Dec 1, 2020: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/74242/comox-valley-coalition-to-end-homelessness-pitches-permanent-housing-for-vulnerable-populations/>
- Dec 7, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/comox-valley-organization-calls-for-more-housing-for-the-vulnerable/>
- Dec 14, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/courtenay-emergency-shelter-hits-capacity-in-cold-weather/>
- Dec 16, 2020: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/news/comox-valley-directors-discuss-regional-parks-service/>