



**CITY OF VERNON AND SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL:
PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW AND HIGHLIGHTS
2007 - 2025**

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Social Planning Council
for the North Okanagan

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Background:

The Partners in Action model was piloted in 2007 and has since served as the framework for the community development approach led by the Social Planning Council North Okanagan (SPCNO). The City of Vernon provided seed funding in 2007 to develop the pilot, and then in 2008, entered into a longer-term agreement with SPCNO to provide social planning services for the municipality. SPCNO serves as the hub for the social service sector, the umbrella organization for community-based strategies, and as a bridge between partner groups and the City of Vernon.

Partners in Action Model:

The Partners in Action model is a solution-oriented, community driven approach to address increasingly complex social issues.

Action Teams:

The key to this model is to break down larger social issues into manageable solutions. When an issue or problem is identified or brought forward to a coordinating committee, an action team is created. The task of the action team is to problem solve. Action teams can be created ad hoc or include already established committees in the community. Once a solution is reached, the action team disbands.

Coordinating Committees:

Members are recruited based on the skills and knowledge they bring to the table, in addition to representation of an agency or group. The role of the coordinating committees is to identify problems and potential solutions and then create and oversee action teams.

Committees:

HART Committee, COOL Team, Housing Action Team, Local Immigration Partnership Council, Emergency Food Action Network

Community Strategies:

Homelessness and Housing Strategy, Harm Reduction/Opioid Crisis Response Strategy, Immigration and Settlement Strategy

Social Planner Position:

Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan

Social Planner Funding Source:

City of Vernon

Committees/Action Teams Funding Sources:

Provincial and Federal Government, Local Funders and Various Foundations

Strategic Goals:

- ✚ Build awareness and understanding of social issues
- ✚ Work collaboratively to problem-solve areas of concern
- ✚ Develop resources/policies to address gaps
- ✚ Monitor and evaluate action teams and their outcomes

Collaboration and Coordination Evaluation Outcomes (at a glance) 2007 - 2025:

<p>Economic Impact of Partnerships Developed:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$</p>	<p>Attracting local, provincial and federal funding for community organizations is a priority for SPCNO. Since 2007, SPCNO has assisted partner organizations with grant writing and partnership development that has resulted in significant investment for the non-profit sector in Vernon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ \$12,570,000.00 - Capital Funding ○ \$4,172,299.00 - Project and Program Funding
<p>Number of Active Networks/Committees:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	<p>SPCNO hosts and facilitates five community committees to support coordination and collaboration between partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The COOL Team Homelessness ○ The Housing Action Team Non-profit Affordable Housing ○ The HART Committee Toxic Drug Crisis ○ The Local Immigration Partnership Council Welcoming and Inclusive Communities ○ Emergency Food Action Network Food Insecurity
<p>Number of Action Teams:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">209</p>	<p>Since 2007, SPCNO has facilitated 209 action teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 62 Homelessness 33 Affordable Housing 42 Toxic Drug Crisis 46 Welcoming and Inclusive Communities 13 Food Insecurity 13 Other (Recreation, Healthcare, Emergency Response)
<p>Number of Partners Engaged:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Current: 56</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Overall: 245</p>	<p><u>Coordinating Committees (Current): 56</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 Non-profit Sector 17 Government Organizations/Departments 8 Faith Groups 2 Business Associations 3 Education 5 First Nation/Indigenous Partners <p><u>Members on Action Teams (2007-2025): 245</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51 Non-profit Sector 39 Government Organizations/Departments 31 Business Sector 98 Private Citizens/Groups 8 Faith Groups 9 Other Committees/Coalitions 5 Education 4 Local Funders

✚ Background:

In 2007, there was very little infrastructure or programming to address homelessness in the community despite a dramatic new trend of vulnerable people sleeping outside in parks and public spaces. Although there had always been a small transient population in the community, homelessness was not on the radar or seen as a pressing community issue before the early 2000s. For the most part, people’s housing was secure, and affordable units were available to meet the needs of different household income levels.

By the early 2000s, the lack of investment by senior levels of government in affordable housing and the closure of mental health institutions had started to take its toll and was being felt in communities across the Province of BC. Vernon businesses and residents were upset by the visible homelessness and the impact on public spaces, and non-profit organizations were under resourced to provide services and programs to this population.

To address these concerns, the City of Vernon partnered with the Social Planning Council to support community coordination and collaboration and launched the Partners in Action model in 2007. Homelessness and lack of affordable housing are still a priority today, and the COOL Team and the Housing Action Team continue to perform small miracles on a daily basis, despite the incredible challenges caused by the current housing crisis, toxic drug crisis and extreme weather events.

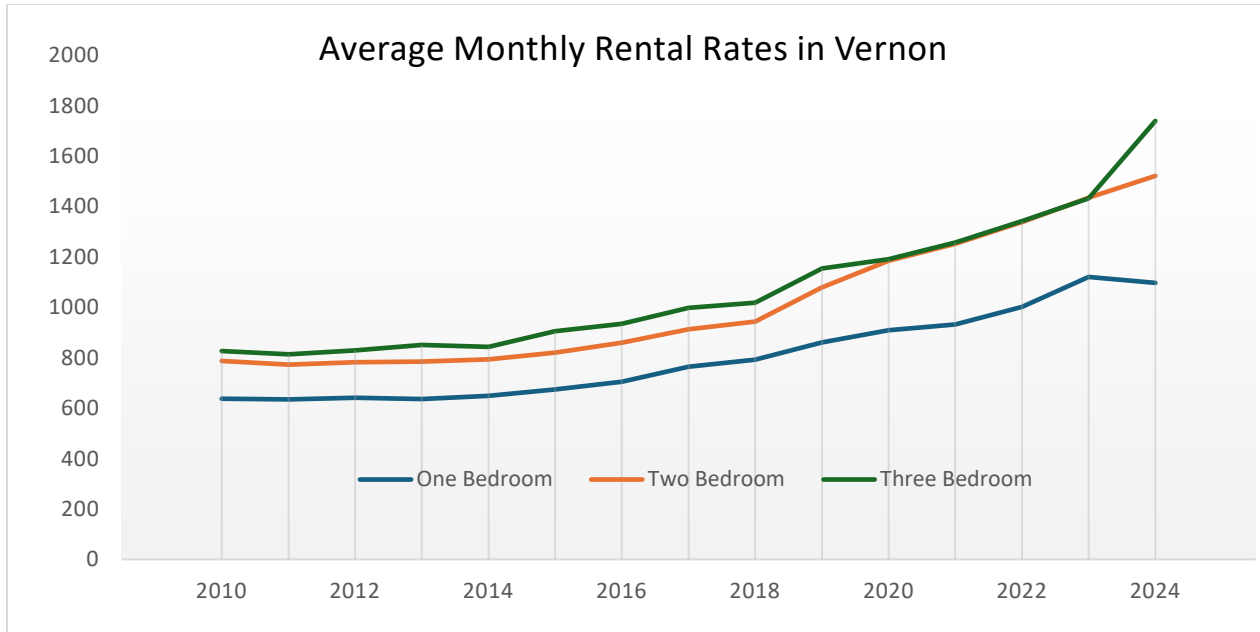
✚ Homelessness Indicators:

The COOL Team have been monitoring the number of people sleeping outside since 2009 and then added more detailed surveys of unhoused people from 2016 to 2019. In 2020, it was announced that Vernon would be added to the BC Housing Point-in-Time Count, and the COOL Team assisted BC Housing to complete the count/surveys in 2021 and 2023. The next Point-in-Time Homeless Count will be on April 10, 2025.

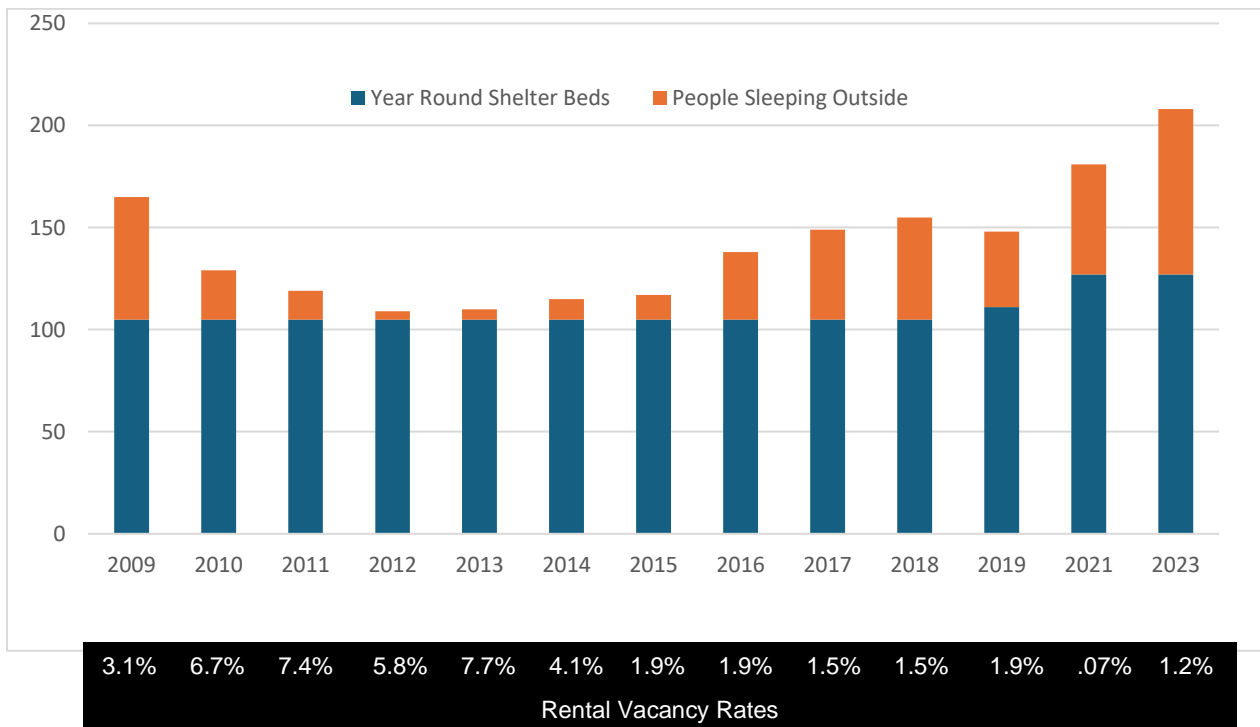
Annual Counts	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of People Observed Sleeping Outside in Camps	60	24	14	4	5	10	12

Point-in- Time Counts/Surveys	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2023
Number of People Sleeping Outside	33	44	40	22	54	81
Number of People in Shelter Beds/ Temporary Accommodation	111	109	121	129	170	198
TOTAL:	144	153	161	151	224	279

As can be seen by the Homeless Counts, the number of people sleeping outside and experiencing homelessness in our community is growing, similar to communities across the Province of BC. Despite increases in shelter beds and efforts to build new affordable units, people who are homeless continue to identify a lack of affordable housing options as one of their main barriers to housing. This is reflected in the average monthly rental rates in Vernon.



When the rental vacancy rates are compared to the number of people sleeping outside, there is an interesting correlation between these statistics.



Homelessness Action Teams (Highlights: 2007-2025):

- In 2019, an updated Homelessness Strategy was developed and then launched by SPCNO with input from community partners (the original strategy was from 2007). Although the pandemic, the toxic drug crisis, the housing crisis and extreme weather events have intensified the homelessness issue, the COOL Team continues to work closely together to ensure people sleeping outside have access to services and supports.

- Gateway Shelter opened in the fall of 2008, after a summer with no shelter services or homelessness related programs in Vernon. The 25-bed facility offered shelter, meals and referrals to other services in the community. This was the beginning of a long-term relationship between BC Housing and Turning Points Collaborative Society. Soon after the shelter opened, additional programs were added, including the Homelessness Prevention Program and Homelessness Outreach Program.



- The COOL Team was founded in 2009, and strengthened the relationship and collaboration between Bylaw, RCMP and community outreach teams. The COOL Team continues to meet every two months, oversees the extreme weather responses for people who are unhoused, and have launched multiple action teams to address gaps in service. SPCNO provides facilitation, coordination and communication support for the COOL Team collaboration.



The COOL Team and SPCNO coordinated local homeless counts from 2009 to 2019 (on a volunteer basis without government funding) and then joined the Provincial Point-in-time Count in 2021 and 2023. SPCNO works with the provincial consultants and coordinates partner participation in the count process. There is now funding to offset staffing costs and peer honorariums. The next Point-in-time Count will take place in Vernon on April 10, 2025.

- The COOL Team provides regular updates on programs and services to the Community Safety Office for the *Vernon Survival Guide*. SPCNO ensures the *Vernon Survival Guide* is promoted and available throughout the community.

- The Community Safety Office, Street Clinic and COOL Team volunteers take part in annual community clean ups to address concerns from local businesses. In April 2019, the Folks on Spokes program was launched to provide ongoing support to clear debris in the downtown area from April to October. The program is staffed by peers (people with lived experience of substance use) as this helps to create a sense of belonging and pride for participants, and builds relationships between peers, businesses and the wider community.





Public washrooms were provided in the downtown core in 2019 and access to drinking water fountains added to the washroom facilities in 2023. The Community Safety Office spearheaded and launched the Peer Ambassador Program (located close to the two public washroom locations) to help address concerns about safety and vandalism. Changes to the physical surroundings, such as removing benches and shrubbery, have also helped to reduce issues. However, the cost for providing overnight security prohibits washrooms from being open 24 hours per day.

- The COOL Team have proven the strength of their collaboration during the pandemic and extreme weather events. Emergency food “pop up” programs were launched during COVID and outreach teams offered regular wellness checks to people sleeping outside. During the heat dome and subsequent cold weather events, the Library and Upper Room Mission extended their hours to provide safe spaces. Extreme weather protocols have been developed and are updated regularly so partners and clients know what additional services will be put in place, such as the warming bus, if needed. SPCNO liaises with the City of Vernon’s ESS Program and provides coordination and communication support to the COOL Team during community emergencies.



During the pandemic, the City of Vernon worked closely with action team members to ensure there was access to larger facilities, so that shelter beds could remain available. In May 2020, BC Housing and Turning Points Collaborative announced that Vernon’s emergency shelter, housed in the Curling Club, would be the first in the province to introduce sleeping pods to better protect those experiencing homelessness against COVID.

- In 2021, SPCNO worked with the City of Vernon to secure grants from the Strengthening Communities Fund through UBCM. As a result, the motel program provided much needed temporary accommodation during the pandemic and resulted in approximately 50 people being permanently housed.
- The Strengthening Communities Fund also covered expenses for substance use counselling, cultural safety training, and homelessness crisis intervention services in public spaces. Capital investment included access to drinking fountain facilities in the downtown core and upgrading shower and laundry services at the Street Clinic. SPCNO was responsible for the grant writing, partnership development, evaluation and reporting to UBCM on behalf of the City of Vernon.



Homelessness – Moving Forward:

- Although access to basic amenities has improved significantly since 2007, there continue to be limitations for people who are unhoused and not staying at a shelter. Shower and laundry services are limited to weekdays, and public washrooms close overnight. Lack of places to store belongings during the day continues to be a challenge. Storage solutions have been attempted over the years, but community partners report that a storage program requires additional staffing, not just capital investment in physical storage. Lack of operational funding for an ongoing storage program remains the biggest barrier to resolving this issue.
- People sleeping outside are reporting security concerns in public spaces over night, particularly Polson Park. If Polson Park is not a viable option, this puts more pressure on other public spaces and increases the number of people sleeping in alleys and on private properties.
- Individuals often do not sleep well outside (due to weather and safety concerns) and then during the day, they lack places where they can rest or nap. The Upper Room Mission and the Vernon Library offer safe and welcoming spaces, but do not provide spaces for sleeping during the day.
- It is unclear which level of government is responsible for the health and safety of unhoused people who are not in the shelter system or for the interventions needed to address wider community impacts and concerns. Currently, the municipality and service providers (including non-profits and faith groups) are leading the response with limited capacity and very few resources. Confirmed and ongoing funding from senior levels of government would allow community partners to plan for additional services to address the current gaps in programs, provide access to amenities requested by people sleeping outside, and allow for further investment in neighbourhood programs to reduce the impacts on businesses and residents.

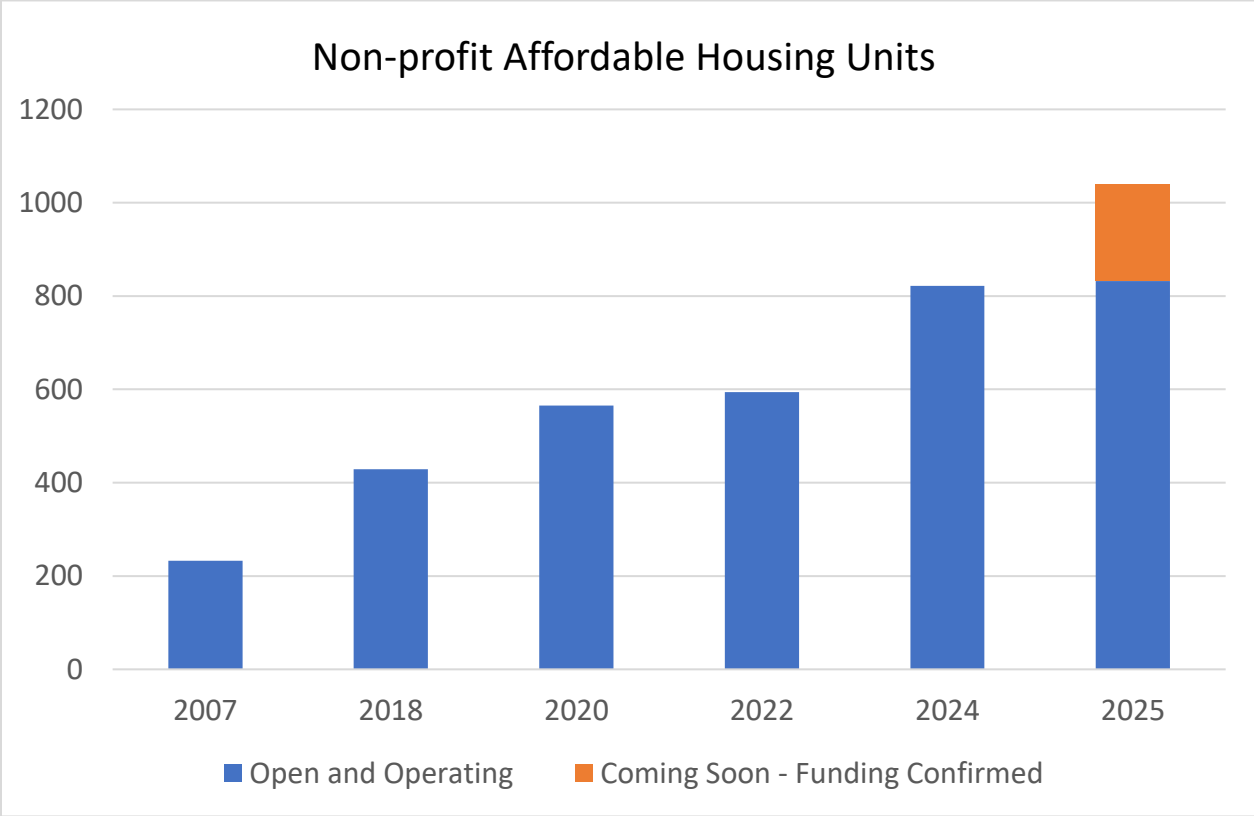
Affordable Housing | The Housing Action Team:

Background:

Despite the housing challenges facing communities across the Province of BC and nationwide, the local non-profit housing sector has significantly increased the affordable housing stock in Vernon over the last decade. It is not easy to secure capital grants, and overseeing the construction of a new building is a huge task, but our local non-profits have persevered and succeeded. This speaks to the collaboration that takes place between the City of Vernon, the housing non-profit sector and senior levels of government.

Affordable Housing Inventory (2007 – 2025):

Since 2007, a total of 599 non-profit beds/units have been added to the non-profit affordable housing stock in Vernon BC. In addition, another 208 units of affordable housing projects have been approved by BC Housing and are under various stages of development. This represents an enormous capital investment by senior levels of government, in particular BC Housing, over the last decade. Member of the Housing Action Team continue to apply for funding for capital projects to bring more affordable housing units to the community.



Affordable Housing Action Teams (Highlights: 2007-2025):

- In 2007, SPCNO and Community Futures North Okanagan helped to launch the Vernon and District Community Land Trust. The initial model for the society was based on preliminary research of housing land trusts in Canada. The Land Trust has since been rebranded as the Okanagan Village Housing Society and now owns and operates approximately 100 units of affordable housing. They have recently secured land through a generous private donation and plan to apply to BC Housing for an additional 96 units of affordable housing.



Village at OK Landing, Okanagan Village Housing

- In 2008, SPCNO and the City of Vernon launched the community’s first Affordable Housing Strategy. By 2019, the majority of the recommendations from the strategy were completed by the City of Vernon including:
 - the expansion of secondary suite zoning, and the elimination of fees.
 - restructuring Development Cost Charges, including waivers for affordable housing.
 - implementing the Rental Housing Incentive Grant to assist with development cost charges for market rental units.
 - strengthening the Strata Conversion Policy to protect existing rental housing.
 - providing land and partnering with local housing non-profits and BC Housing for new affordable units.
 - using Housing Agreements to increase density for more affordable units.

- SPCNO partnered with the City of Vernon’s Affordable Housing Advisory Committee to host Housing Forums in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018. The events brought together community stakeholders, provided speakers and presentations, and encouraged discussions and partnerships. In 2016, the Housing Forum included a tour of one of the community’s first universal design homes built by Everton Ridge Homes on Turtle Mountain.

- In 2010, SPCNO facilitated a partnership between the City of Vernon, Kindale Developmental Association, the Vernon and District Community Land Trust and Habitat for Humanity and developed a business model for a six-plex called Under One Roof. The project was completed in less than one year. The business model was then adapted in 2013 for the Vernon Viridian, and 20 more units were added to the affordable housing inventory.



- In 2012, SPCNO partnered with Community Futures North Okanagan and the City of Vernon to create the Affordable Housing Developers Package. This included a detailed land inventory of properties owned by non-profit societies, faith groups and different levels of government.



SPCNO facilitated the Harwood Neighbourhood Council to address concerns regarding Bill’s Place, a recovery home that opened in 2013. A Good Neighbour Agreement was successfully developed and monitored in conjunction with the Harwood Council. In 2017, Turning points Collaborative purchased the house next door to Bill’s Place and opened a second stage recovery program to help participants in the next step of their recovery journey.

- SPCNO launched the Housing Action Team in 2017, to support the efforts of the non-profit housing providers in Vernon. The Housing Action Team meets every two months to network and problem solve, and to hear presentations from various levels of government. Although technically these organizations are in competition with each other for construction grants, they prioritize collaboration and mutual support.



Thunderbird Manor, Vernon Native Housing



Albert Place II, CMHA Vernon Branch



My Place, Turning Points Collaborative

- In 2024, SPCNO launched a brochure called the *Vernon Housing Guide* to provide information for people wanting to apply for non-profit housing in the area. The brochure is posted on the SPCNO website.

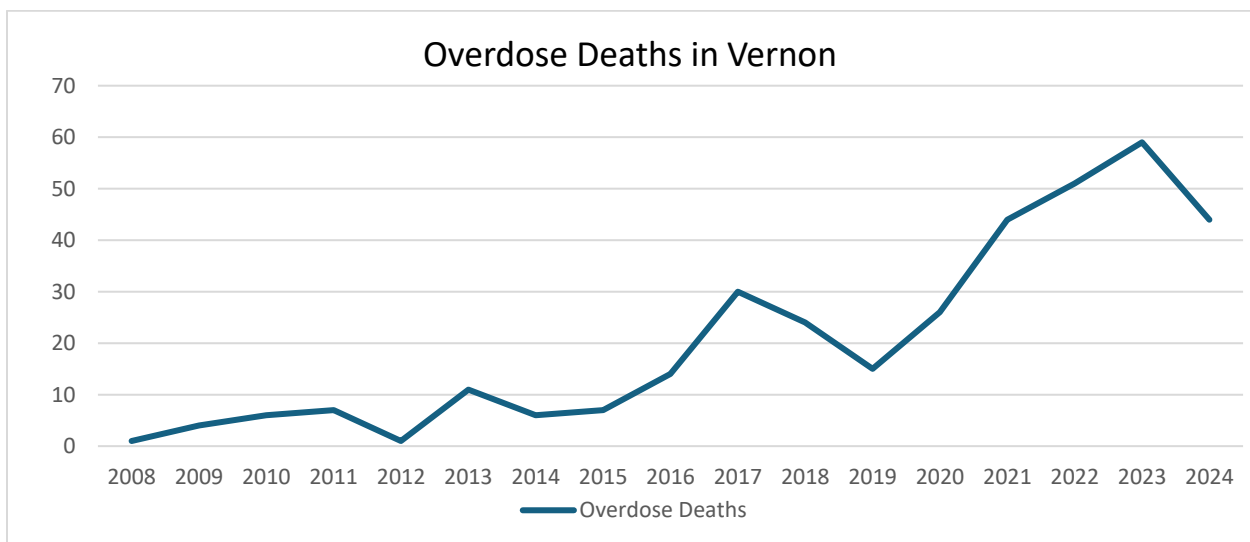
Affordable Housing – Moving Forward:

- The City of Vernon has an excellent relationship with local non-profit housing organizations and BC Housing which is one of the reasons Vernon has done so well in securing capital and operating funds for non-profit affordable housing.
- The biggest challenge for the non-profit housing sector is access to land suitable for building affordable units. Without a piece of property, the housing provider is unable to develop a proposal and attract funding from senior levels of government.
- The City of Vernon’s Housing Action Plan is an excellent document and includes detailed actions regarding ways that the City of Vernon can support the housing non-profit sector to deliver more affordable housing.

The Toxic Drug Crisis | The HART Committee:

Background:

In April 2016, the Provincial Health Officer announced a Public Health Emergency due to the growing number of illicit drug overdose deaths. Vernon has not been immune from this crisis and has experienced devastating losses over the last decade. In 2018, the Social Planning Council received funding from the Community Action Initiative to host the HART Committee and develop a Harm Reduction/Opioid Crisis Response Strategy. Despite best efforts at the local level, the number of overdoses in Vernon continued to rise and intensified during the pandemic. In 2024, there has finally been a reduction in the number of deaths, but the community continues to be impacted by multiple overdoses and the HART Committee continues to grapple with the best way to respond at the local level.



✚ Toxic Drug Crisis Action Teams (Highlights: 2018-2025):

- In 2018, the HART Committee was founded and the following year, SPCNO launched the Harm Reduction/Opioid Crisis Response Strategy.
- Increasing access to naloxone at the community level was identified as an early priority, given the number of overdoses taking place in public spaces and in private homes. In 2019, the Naloxone Challenge was launched, targeting small and large employers in the area and encouraging businesses to receive training and kits. Interior Health continues to reach out to service groups, agencies and organizations that may benefit from the training and monthly naloxone training is still being offered at the Okanagan Regional Library.
- The RCMP/OAT action team was created to provide supports and interventions in cells and enabled the Vernon RCMP Detachment to distribute naloxone from cells and refer people directly to Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) services.
- In 2019, the HART Committee partnered with the Shuswap North Okanagan Division of Family Practice to host an information and engagement session so that local physicians had the latest data on the impact of the toxic drug crisis at the local level and were informed of new and upcoming programs and treatment.



The Cammy Lafleur Street Clinic provided leadership training to peers with lived experience and then launched the peer outreach program in 2019. The Street Clinic continues to host the program which provides harm reduction supplies, referrals to treatment, and support services to marginalized people. Peer outreach workers assist with visits to areas where people sleep outside and office support within the Street Clinic. During the pandemic, peers operated a weekend “warming space” and supported the shower and laundry program.

- In March 2020, a Wellbriety Program was funded by the HART Committee and launched in a downtown location. This is a recovery program that uses Indigenous knowledge and principles to support people seeking to recover from alcohol and/or drug use and make positive changes in their physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.
- The Peer Ambassador Program was launched in 2022 to complement the Folks on Spokes clean up program. The program consists of peer teams setting up tables close to the downtown public washrooms, to share information and resources to people in the downtown core. This includes tourism guides and general information about Vernon, in addition to the *Vernon Survival Guide*. The program is operated by the Community Safety Office and runs from April to October, depending on weather.



- The HART Committee researched and developed a background paper in 2022, regarding the feasibility of a sobering centre in Vernon. This is a safe space for unhoused people to become sober and connect to mental health/substance use supports and would reduce pressure on the hospital and/or RCMP cells. Funding would need to be secured for this project to move forward.



The HART Committee has made a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation continues to support programs that support Indigenous perspectives and wellness. The HART Committee sponsors culturally appropriate naloxone kits that include painted stones, cedar/tobacco ties and cards for distribution at the Street Clinic. Starting in 2023, monthly Indigenous Women’s and Men’s Nights are hosted in partnership with the Street Clinic.

- In 2023 and 2024, events were organized to honour International Overdose Awareness Day. The HART Committee provided funding for refreshments for a screening of the documentary, *Love in the Time of Fentanyl*, at the Towne Theatre in August 2023. “Together We Can”, a ceremony to honor and remember lost loved ones due to the toxic drug crisis, took place at Civic Memorial Park in August 2024. Leading up to the event, the HART Committee delivered cookies to a variety of first responders, as a personal invitation to the event, and to acknowledge the numerous lives saved by their actions.



- Recognizing that frontline workers are struggling with grief and loss from the deaths of clients, SPCNO secured funding and coordinated a workshop series called *Strategies for Wellbeing* aimed to help address stress and burnout. The sessions were launched in November 2024.

🚦 Toxic Drug Crisis – Moving Forward:

- The response to the toxic drug crisis has been complex, heartbreaking and increasingly polarized. At the HART Committee, there is an emphasis on welcoming multiple perspectives at the table and in viewing harm reduction as a wide continuum, rather than a narrow and specific response.
- Our community needs a variety of culturally appropriate programs and responses including youth prevention programs; further investment in mental health and substance use counselling and treatment programs; harm reduction initiatives such as overdose prevention services and naloxone; and recovery programs and longer term recovery homes.
- As a community, it is important advocate for all types of programs and responses, honour family and friends who are grieving, and support first responders, front line workers and peers who are doing their best to keep people alive and connect them with health services to assist them with their journey.

Background:



The Local Immigration Partnership Council (LIPC) implements and monitors the City of Vernon’s Settlement and Immigration Strategy. The focus of the strategy is to develop a welcoming and inclusive community where people from diverse racial, cultural and religious backgrounds feel a sense of belonging. The goal is to attract talented people from around the world to call Vernon home and to create a community where they feel safe, valued and respected. The LIPC has also made a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and has started to build relationships with the local First Nation, Indigenous partner organizations and Indigenous consultants.

Welcoming and Inclusive Communities Action Teams (Highlights: 2014-2025):

- SPCNO secured funding for a number of marketing initiatives to assist local employers with their human resources recruitment strategies, including newcomers to Canada. Some examples of projects include:

- The Living in Vernon Brochure, translated into four additional languages.
- The Moving to Vernon Webpage, located on the City of Vernon’s website.
- What’s in Vernon for Me? A brochure designed for candidate partners/spouses.

- Community Futures North Okanagan launched the Rural Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) in Vernon in 2020. Social Planning Council assisted with the original grant application and remained a member of the RNIP Advisory Committee until the program ended in August 2024. The RNIP Program supported 507 businesses with 1034 worker recommendations and led to 2068 new Immigrants (including family members) choosing Vernon as their home.



To highlight diverse voices in Vernon, a series of public art installations were funded and developed over the years. In 2014, *Fabrics of the World* was completed and found a permanent home outside of the City of Vernon’s Community Services Building. In 2015, the *“I am” Alphabets* were launched and can be viewed on the walls of the Community Safety Office. In 2017, SPCNO secured funding for the *Mosaic River*, currently “running” through Cenotaph Park.

- In 2016, a multicultural garden was launched at Patchwork Farms in conjunction with Vernon and District Immigrant Services Society. An Indigenous Garden was added in 2017, located at Okanagan College, close to the student residences.

- Between 2016 and 2020, multicultural champion stories were published in the Vernon Morning Star on a monthly basis. The program highlighted the stories of 50 wonderful people from a variety of cultures giving back to our community.

- RespectFest was a partnership between SPCNO, the Downtown Vernon Association and Allan Brooks Nature Center and took place in September 2017. Events included interpretive art and history walks, environmental and educational opportunities, and a one-day Multicultural Celebration of food, dance, music, and culture. Over 7000 members of the public took part in 40 different activities, with participation from 30 different partner organizations.



- In 2017, SPCNO developed a protocol in conjunction with the RCMP and other stakeholders to ensure a coordinated community response in the case of a high-profile incident of racism or hate. The protocol was used in 2020, when the RCMP, the City of Vernon and the community came together to respond to hate flyers scattered close to local schools.

- Social Planning Council launched a video in 2021 that highlights examples of residents organizing against racism. The video is meant to inspire people who want to take action but aren't sure where to start or how to get involved.

- In the Spring of 2022, a resource was created that outlines the supports that are currently available (provincially and locally) to people who experience racism in Vernon BC. The brochure was promoted through the service provider networks and is posted on the SPCNO website.



In 2023, the first Sikh Heritage Month Community Celebration was hosted at the Sikh Temple and highlighted the past and present contributions of Sikhs in the region. Partners included the North Okanagan Sikh Society, Vernon and District Immigrant and Community Services, the Museum and Archives of Vernon, and the Social Planning Council.

- Starting in 2023, SPCNO launched SAGE (Service Agencies Grounded in Equity) and the group continues to meet quarterly. SAGE members have the opportunity to engage in educational workshops and work collaboratively to create welcoming and inclusive workplaces, for both staff and clients, within their organizations.

- Over the years, SPCNO has hosted numerous educational workshops for service providers, that are always fully subscribed:
 - 2016 | Respect in Action: Reconciliation and How to be an Ally (One Day Workshop)
 - 2017 | History of the Okanagan First People (Three Sessions)
 - 2020 | Cultural Education with Suqnaqinx Elder Mollie Bono (Five Sessions)
 - 2021 | How to be an Ally (One Workshop plus Two Additional Talking Circles)
 - 2021 | Community Bystander Training (Two Sessions)
 - 2022 | Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Training (Two Sessions)
 - 2022 | Human Rights 101 (Webinar)
 - 2023 | OKIB Cultural Safety Training (Two Day Workshop)
 - 2024 | Whiteness at Work (Five Online Training Modules)
 - 2024 | More than a Rainbow Sticker (Three Sessions)

✚ Welcoming and Inclusive Communities – Moving Forward

- Starting in April 2025, SPCNO has secured a three-year agreement with Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to continue the Local Immigration Partnership Council and facilitate partner initiatives that support a welcoming and inclusive community.
- SPCNO will also continue to work with Community Futures North Okanagan and be a member of the Advisory Team for the Rural and Community Immigration Pilot (RCIP).

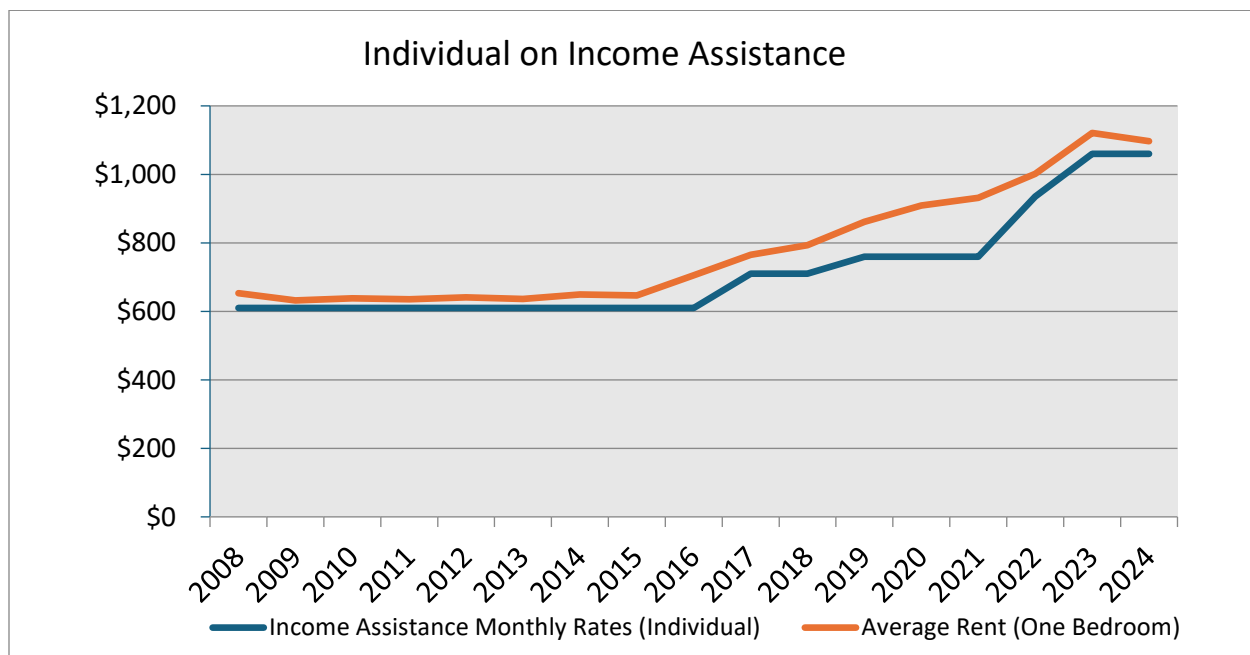
Food Insecurity | Emergency Food Action Network (EFAN)

✚ Background:

The Emergency Food Action Network (EFAN) was founded in 2010 and meets twice a year to promote collaboration between faith-based emergency food programs, charitable food organizations and service providers who address emergency food needs. Trinity United Church and SPCNO co-host the Emergency Food Action Network and SPCNO maintains an email distribution list and provides ongoing communication between meetings.

✚ Food Insecurity – Cost of Living Challenge:

The chart below outlines the challenges for an individual on income assistance who is attempting to pay rent on a fixed low income. Income assistance rates for an individual fall just short of the average monthly rental rates for a one-bedroom apartment in Vernon, leaving no money left over to purchase groceries. People are then forced to use emergency food programs for their ongoing daily nutritional needs.



This is just one example of a household with significant cost-of-living challenges. There are many other examples, including low income working parents and seniors on pensions, who are also accessing emergency food programs. For many households, the dramatic increase in monthly rental rates leaves very little income for purchasing groceries and meals.

🌱 Food Insecurity Action Teams (Highlights: 2010-2025):

- In June 2010, SPCNO, Interior Health and community partners organized a community strategic planning session for charitable food organizations. Participants at the session expressed an interest in meeting regularly and increasing the coordination and collaboration between emergency food stakeholders and partners, leading to the establishment of the Emergency Food Action Network.



Patchwork Farms was launched in 2012, a partnership between Okanagan College and local non-profits. Funding was secured to run a community garden, plant a food forest, and provide access to land to younger entrepreneurial farmers experimenting with different kinds of crops. An Indigenous Garden was later added to the project. SPCNO assisted with partnership development, business plan research, and grant writing for the project. Patchwork Farms remained active until 2021, when components of the gardens were moved to allow for construction of student housing at Okanagan College.

- On an ongoing basis, faith and volunteer groups meet to coordinate the schedule for emergency meals during statutory holidays. Social Planning Council assists with coordination and scheduling, developing calendars and promoting the meals and locations. Thanks to these amazing volunteers, Vernon provides emergency food access 365 days of the year, even on long weekends and during the holiday season.



- In March 2020, the Upper Room Mission announced that it would drastically reduce its meal services (from ten meals per week to two per week) due to the pandemic. SPCNO quickly reached out to local funders and faith groups to provide temporary pop-up food programs. The Community Foundation North Okanagan provided the funding and faith groups maintained and/or added programs to help fill the gaps. Not one meal was missed during the pandemic, despite limited resources during an incredibly stressful time.



During the pandemic, local non-profits were concerned about food insecurity for individuals and families accessing their programs. SPCNO and the Community Foundation North Okanagan (CFNO) launched a food service to connect low-income seniors and families with grocery cards and local programs such as the Good Food Box. The partnership between the Good Food Box, CFNO and service providers is now an ongoing program.

- In 2025, SPCNO launched a brochure called *Eat Well, Live Well: Your Guide to Food Resources in Vernon* that is now posted on the Social Planning Council website.

✚ Food Insecurity – Moving Forward

- It is important to recognize that food insecurity is caused by a household’s lack of income rather than a scarcity of healthy foods. There is no question that communities need to support local emergency food programs that are meeting immediate needs of individuals, seniors and families who cannot afford groceries or don’t have access to cooking facilities. However, to address the root causes of food insecurity, senior levels of government need to review social policy relating to household income and bridge the gap between income supports and the true cost of living in local communities.
- Currently, emergency food programs rely heavily on local funders, community donations and volunteer faith groups. Ongoing grants from senior levels of government are needed to support food insecurity initiatives at the local level.

Other Areas of Focus | Recreation, Healthcare and Community Emergency Response

✚ Background:

Although the main areas of focus for the Partners in Action model are homelessness, affordable housing, the toxic drug crisis, and food insecurity, there are times when action teams are created around community opportunities to address other social determinants of health. Over the years, SPCNO has assisted social development projects related to recreation, healthcare, and community emergency responses, amongst other topics.

✚ Action Team (Highlights: 2007 -2025):

- One of the first action teams related to social policy was initiated in 2007, when Greater Vernon Services was approached by SPCNO regarding a recreation discount program for low-income households. With input from community partners, the Recreation Centre created and launched a user-friendly system for administering the discount, and individuals and families with financial barriers began accessing programs and services, many as first time users of the facilities.



- In the Summer of 2021, Social Planning Council assisted the City of Vernon with emergency planning for vulnerable populations during the heat dome. The plan ensured that individuals, seniors, and families (in particular, those without access to air conditioning) were provided with safe and accessible spaces to cool off during the day. Accommodations were made for pets, transportation, and storage of possessions (if needed), to reduce barriers and ensure easy access to the spaces. SPCNO assisted City staff to coordinate additional resources from community partners, to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

- In June 2024, Community Futures North Okanagan submitted a proposal for a Community Health Centre to the Ministry of Health, with plans to provide primary care to approximately 6000 unattached people. Social Planning Council assisted with community consultations within the health sector and with social service providers. SPCNO also provided feedback during the proposal development and helped to secure letters of support for the application.



Conclusion:

The Partners in Action model is a unique partnership between the municipality and the non-profit sector, and Social Planning Council is honoured to oversee the community collaboration within the social service sector. There is an upcoming change in personnel, as Annette Sharkey, the current Executive Director/Social Planner, has announced that she will be leaving the position by the end of June 2025. A transition plan is in place, and SPCNO is looking forward to welcoming a new Executive Director/Social Planner and continuing to provide social planning services for the City of Vernon.