



West Howe SOUNDER

Elizabeth Rains

As I pattered in my garden this week and admired a view of Gambier Island in the distance, my thoughts turned to how my West Howe Sound neighbours and I are lucky to live in this community. I also thought about former neighbours who are no longer lucky enough to live here.

One of them, Joanne Hudder, lived in the YMCA Road area for almost 10 years but moved in January to a more affordable home in Merritt. Another friend, Francisca Ryan, who had been a director for the West Howe Sound Community Association (WHSCA), also moved because of housing costs.

Ryan had chaired WHSCA meetings and put considerable energy into community initiatives. In November 2016 she was forced to resign from the association's board. The bylaws require directors to live in West Howe Sound, but she couldn't find a rental there.

She had rented a home in Area F for six years, but it flooded and needed renovations. The landlord asked her to leave. Ryan, who works as a holistic healer, looked for something similar to the large two-bedroom that had cost \$800 a month.

A search turned up several two-bedroom suites in Area F for \$1,200 to \$1,400, she said, but they were small and unsuitable for Ryan and her 14-year-old son. She wound up moving to a large three-bedroom in Roberts Creek. It costs \$1,400 a month, which she can only afford because she rents out the third bedroom.

As she searched for a roommate, at least one cou-

ple and one single from West Howe Sound approached her, saying they couldn't find anything reasonable in their area. "The rents are really up there these days," Ryan said.

However, options are on the horizon.

At an open house at the Gibsons Public Market last week, Matt Thomson from the Sunshine Coast Affordable Housing Society showed me the society's plans to build two 10-unit developments. They would probably contain a mix of market and low-cost rentals, he said.

Although the locations would be in Gibsons, I figured that West Howe Sounders who can't find a long-term rental in their area might consider a move into one of the units.

Thomson said that was doable. "You wouldn't necessarily have to be a resident of Gibsons," he said.

But Gibsons owns the land the developments would occupy, so I posed the same question to Mayor Wayne Rowe. He

said, "Affordable housing is for the community, generally. Just because you're a few feet outside the [Gibsons] boundary doesn't mean you're not part of the community."

"What if someone from Vancouver wants to move there?" I asked. I suggested that Gibsons taxpayers may want to help renters from nearby areas, yet they might not be thinking of big city folk hoping to move to Gibsons – cheaply.

Rowe said he hadn't thought of that. "We [council] will have to discuss it."

They should do that soon. If all goes well, one or both developments could be under construction as early as 2019, Thomson said.

In the meantime, affordable rentals may spring up in West Howe Sound, Area F director Ian Winn said. At an SCR D planning meeting June 8, directors discussed rezoning some parcels in Langdale to allow for infill housing, he said. That means some one-house lots may become two-house lots.

However, a report from

senior planner Yuli Siao presented at the meeting recommended rezoning wait until properties currently zoned for infill "have been substantially built out."

As that happens, Winn said, he would expect some homeowners to build second homes for their relatives. Others might build affordable rental homes.

That seemed improbable to me. Yes, there could be inlaw homes, but people building rentals for the general public typically do it for profit. That means charging what the market will bear. So I asked Winn how the SCR D would motivate people to make the rentals affordable.

"There would be no restriction on affordability," he said, adding that creating affordable housing is a challenge.

Meanwhile there's another challenge on the housing front. West Howe Sound resident Pamela Robertson is proposing to build and sell up to 46 tiny, affordable homes on a 4.45 hectare parcel in Twin

Creeks. The homes would be between 200 and 300 sq. ft. I think my friends Ryan and Hudder, who moved to homes at least five times as large, would feel a bit squeezed – not in cost but in living space.

Hudder sold her home in Area F for around \$600,000 and bought something similar in Merritt for about half the cost. But there's another cost problem on the Coast, she said. "Affordability was one of the issues in our move, but my husband Fred's [Mostrovich] beef was the ferry cost," said the former member of the Coast's ferry advisory committee.

I'll have more about ferries in my next column. Meanwhile, please email your news of West Howe Sound to Elizabeth@Rains.ca, and please join me for the launch of my book, *Demon in My Blood*, at Truffles in Gibsons this Friday at 7 p.m. Sophie Staley, the affable owner of Truffles, has lined up musician Jamie Bowers to open the event.