



FIRST NATIONS HOME ENERGYSAVE

# Community Success Story

## Nuutsumuut Lelum (All in One House)

### Community Context

According to the Government of British Columbia, more than 70% of Indigenous peoples in B.C. live off-reserve and many are under-housed. The Province is investing in the construction of new social housing for Indigenous peoples throughout B.C. in partnership with the Aboriginal Housing Management Association, Indigenous Housing Societies and First Nations.

In Nanaimo, the Urban Aboriginal Community has struggled with the health and safety of their community, partially driven by housing that didn't meet the needs of residents. The Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society, in partnership with BC Housing, collaborated to address this need through a new housing project. One of the main goals of the Nuutsumuut Lelum (Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society's Passive House) project was to create safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing for Urban Indigenous families. Nuutsumuut Lelum is Hul'q'uimi'num, and in English it translates to "All in One House".

The Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society operates on and recognizes the traditional territories of Snuneymuxw, Snaw naw as and Stzuminus, as well as the home of the Mid Island Metis Nation.

### Project Description

Nuutsumuut Lelum is made up of 25 affordable suites for youth, Elders and families of the local Urban Indigenous community in Nanaimo. The two-storey wood frame building consists of 12 three-bedroom, 3 two-bedroom, 6 one-bedroom and 4 bachelor townhouse-style units. The new construction is Passive House certified, and its design follows the principles of green building standards, making it highly energy efficient (up to 85% more energy efficient compared to typical construction standards).

Nuutsumuut Lelum integrates Indigenous cultural elements such as communal spaces, cedar siding, a 37-foot totem pole carved by Snuneymuxw First Nation artist Noel Brown, and Metis artwork by Keltie Chamberlain located on the property. The three townhouse-style buildings are arranged around an open courtyard. The complex's central circular courtyard serves as a community gathering place for residents, and it includes a fire pit used to foster culture sharing through singing, drumming and dancing. A large, shared common



Photo Credit: Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society



Photo Credit: Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre

### Collaborators

Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society  
BC Housing

### Funding Providers

Social Infrastructure Fund - \$4.6 million  
(Government of Canada, CMHC, Government of British Columbia, BC Housing)  
Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society - \$1.4 million  
City of Nanaimo - \$770,000 (land value) and \$221,000 (waived fees and levies)

### Project Leads

Owner: Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society  
Executive Director: Chris Beaton  
Manager of Housing & Property Operations: Thomas O'Brien  
Project Manager: Walter Hoogland  
Architect: DYS Architects  
CPHD: Mark Ashby Architecture  
Construction Manager: Saywell Construction Management  
Field Superintendent: Karl Binder  
Mechanical: DAS  
Electrical: Rocky Point Engineering and Osprey Electric  
Structural: Herold Engineering  
Landscape: Victoria Drakeford

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## Milestones

June 2015  
Nanaimo council approves housing proposal.

August 2015  
Project aims to use Passive House design.

January 2016  
Regional District of Nanaimo provides grant funding..

April 2017  
Project construction breaks ground.

June 2018  
Project opening.



Photo Credit: Island Urban Indigenous Wellness Society

room is equipped with a warming kitchen and provides space for larger gatherings like birthday parties and family dinners. The design also took into consideration traditional Indigenous Coastal architecture of the longhouse buildings.

Unlike conventional row house design, Nuutsumuut Lelum was developed to encourage community building. Two of the townhouse buildings face one another to promote socializing and community interactions. According to Thomas O'Brien, Manager of Housing & Property Operations, "when you come and go from your house, you see your neighbour and this fosters social interaction, community building and relationships among tenants." The outdoor courtyard provides a space for intergenerational learning and cultural gatherings. It is often used by tenants who gather around the fire to listen to Elders tell stories. This "brings great happiness to residents", says O'Brien. The building design has helped build trust and deep relationships among tenants. O'Brien sees community members look out for one another, help each other run errands and borrow items like sugar. He emphasizes how overcoming trauma in a supportive community environment has blossomed because tenants are considered family.

The Passive House building design elements include low slope roofs that allow suites to receive full sun in winter and reduce the summer heat, and 10 inches of polyiso insulation in the roof assemblies that deliver an R-value of 45. An airtight seal enables units to be heated by a heat recovery ventilator system that warms incoming air, helping to keep temperatures comfortable year-round. Heat pump water heaters are used to move heat from the air to the tank of water further reducing the energy needed for hot water. These building systems reduce maintenance costs and energy consumption, which save residents money over the long term while keeping monthly energy bills affordable. Constantly recirculating fresh clean air in the unit increases indoor air quality and creates a healthier environment.

Passive House has a net-zero energy performance and is the highest step on British Columbia's new Energy Step Code. By 2032, all new buildings in BC will be required to be built to the new 'net-zero energy ready' BC Energy Step Code— a high standard similar to Passive House.

### Lessons Learned

- 1. Net zero building standards:** The use of the Passive House standard for building envelope and building systems creates high performance homes not normally achievable in mid-level housing. Passive House design included: triple glazed windows and doors, building orientation, air-tight envelope, and eight inches of insulation on the entire building envelope. These initiatives result in lower energy use and operating costs when compared with a conventional building.
- 2. Affordability:** The low energy costs, low maintenance costs, and low rents (\$375 for bachelor, \$900 for three-bedroom units) help keep units affordable. The four bachelor apartments are designed specifically for youth (between the ages of 18 and 25), and three one-bedroom units are designated strictly for Elders. The integration of young people with Elders living in the community also fosters intergenerational knowledge sharing, traditional teachings and learnings.
- 3. Community:** The shared amenities and unique building design encourages community building. There is a deep sense of ownership among tenants. Families take pride and love where they live and are passionate about their community. A community Facebook page was started to share events, and memos are posted on doors for those who aren't social media inclined.

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