Opinion

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Carving a future

We've still got one more paper to go in 2025 (not 2026 as I wrote last week) and the news keeps coming.

We will have more on Capilano University closing the local campus (probably in the new year). It's a sad but not entirely unexpected move, especially given universities' well-publicised financial troubles following the international student cap. (Ironically, the local campus apparently hasn't classically had many international students.) Losing a local hub for higher learning cannot be a good omen for community health — I have much respect for online learning, but there's also a reason people attend classes in person; a virtual setting cannot replicate the energy of in-person dialogue and innovation.

I checked in with Jessica Silvey on the future of the Carving Shed: Supporting Indigenous Arts Mastery (SIAM) program (funded through Evergreen State College but administered through Capilano), which has been running for two years. The course uses culturally safe, decolonized practices in what was the first Indigenous-led teaching and learning centre of this kind in the Pacific Northwest. Heiltsuk artist, Dean Hunt was the lead carver and under his and Silvey's tutelage, 40 Indigenous people partook in the program.

"We had some amazing artists that came out of there: young, beginning artists and older people who have retired," said Silvey, "[They] pick it with such a passion and they grow so quickly. I mean, it's naturally in them."

When Silvey started weaving, she remembers telling one of her Squamish Nation Elders, "I can weave!"

"She goes, of course, you can weave, dear. It was always in you. It was just sleeping! And that's how I felt about the carving shed project." Silvey doesn't know what comes next for the Carving Shed as it needs to be administered through a university, and location is an issue. We will see.

Hopefully, over the next few months, as the university rejigs its programs, Coasters will speak up (respectfully) for how post-secondary education can continue on the Coast (and what changes they want to see to increase local engagement). *Bronwyn Beairsto*

VIEWS

What's driving homelessness and crime in Sechelt?

Trevor **MCFADYEN**

Sechelt is having a nervous conversation with itself. You hear it in coffee shops, at the rink, and especially on social media, where fear hardens quickly into certainty: crime is rising, homelessness is exploding, and BC Housing's proposed supportive-housing project will push the town past the point of no return.

But when you step back from Facebook and look at the data, a different picture emerges.

Across Canada, homelessness is no longer confined to big cities. Federal point-in-time counts show tens of thousands of people experiencing homelessness on any given night across nearly every province and territory, including small towns that rarely faced visible homelessness a decade ago. This is not a local moral failure; it is a national systems failure now reaching places like Sechelt.

The same is true for crime. Research from Public Safety Canada and other policing studies contradict the narrative of a generalized crime wave. In small jurisdictions, a minimal number of individuals in profound distress generate a disproportionate share of police calls. Public Safety Canada reports that just five to 10 per cent of high-acuity individuals can account for more than a third of police interactions.

Local data reinforces this pattern. Sunshine Coast RCMP quarterly summaries show no broad-based surge in crime, but they do highlight repeat, high-needs individuals consuming significant police resources. A BC Prosecution Service report similarly found that a small cohort of prolific offenders across the province accounts for thousands of encounters each year.

I understand Sechelt's anxiety, though. My own kids no longer go downtown, even to catch a bus.

But this is not a story about declining values or a town losing its character. It is a story about institutional strain — what happens when a small community is asked to manage escalating complexity without the coordinated services modern systems rely on.

Research on homelessness in rural and small-town Canada makes this clear. In many smaller communities, per-capita homelessness rates now meet or exceed those of major cities, with a higher proportion of people unsheltered and far fewer local services available. Small towns do not attract homelessness; they absorb it without the infrastructure that larger cities take for granted.

That is where systems matter. Healthy communities do not rely on a single agency to manage homelessness or crisis behaviour. They rely on wraparound support — coordinated systems where mental-health care, addiction treatment, housing stability, outreach, income supports, and police liaison work together rather than in isolation. This integrated fabric is what stabilizes individuals and restores neighbourhood predictability.

Sechelt lacks that connective tissue, and its absence has made the town feel more fragile than it actually is.

The debate over BC Housing's proposed supportive housing project has become a proxy for broader fears about safety and identity. Many residents worry that concentrating complex needs downtown will overwhelm already-thin services. That concern is understandable. Larger cities have buffers — detox beds, 24-hour clinical teams, sobering centres, and transit access — that help supportive housing function. Small towns lack that insulation.

But it is essential to distinguish between the building and the supports that make the building work. Evidence consistently shows that supportive housing, when paired with strong wraparound services, reduces emergency calls and improves neighbourhood stability. The building itself is not the risk; the absence of integrated support is.

One proven model is Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), and more appropriate for Sechelt, ACT-Light — a scaled-down version used successfully in rural and small communities across Canada. ACT-Light provides continuous, relationship-based support through a coordinated team of clinicians, outreach workers, peer supporters, and police liaisons. Rather than reacting to crises, it proactively manages them.

Communities such as Campbell River, Penticton, Grey County in Ontario, and Brandon, Manitoba report reductions in police contacts, emergency-room visits, and street-level crises after implementing ACT-Light. Where wraparound support exists, supportive housing works. Where it does not, housing is forced to absorb pressures it was never designed to manage on its own.

Residents' concerns are not irrational — they are underserved. People have watched a small number of highly visible crises unfold repeatedly while overstretched institutions respond in perpetual triage. That experience deserves respect.

But Sechelt is not in decline; it is in transition. The real question is whether we let go of the pervasive fear and invest in the connective tissue and coordinated systems that small towns require for supportive housing to function correctly.

This is not a choice between compassion and safety. It is a choice between unmanaged complexity and managed care. The problem is solvable. The challenge is whether we keep arguing about symptoms — or finally build the system Sechelt deserves.

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