

COMMENT

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EDITORIALS

A big future for tiny houses

Many of us have a hankering to go where the wild things are — and on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, one of the wildest places is Port Renfrew.

Soon, we will have a chance to enjoy the splendours of the tiny village in tiny cottages. The price is, by the standards of the day, tiny too — starting at under \$130,000.

That price will give you a wood-frame 400-square-foot cabin on a waterfront property that was formerly a park for recreation vehicles. The cottages will have vaulted ceilings, appliances, laminate wood flooring, cedar shingle fronts and metal roofs. They will have large covered decks, which will come in handy in case it should happen to rain while you are in Port Renfrew. There will be storage sheds for your sports gear, and possibly even room for boat and trailer parking.

Admittedly, Port Renfrew can be a pain to get to and from, even with the improvements to Highway 14 and the opening of the road to the Cowichan Valley.

Once there, of course, the village is one that might have fallen out of a story book or a travel guide. With about 200 residents, it has a general store, outfitter, post office, cafes, a couple of pubs and sometimes, yes, a bit of light rainfall.

It's a great place to go if you want to lose the stress of everyday life. You can fish to your heart's content, or surf, or hike or simply enjoy the beach. You can get away from it all and find ways to actually enjoy life for a spell.

The project — being developed by Three Point Properties, and known as Wild Coast Cottages — seems ideal.

But it could be more than just a recreation spot. It could be an inspiration for a new way of thinking about housing.

The little cabins are being built in Sooke by Westco and then moved to their lots in Port Renfrew.

If this idea works as planned — and there is no reason to think that it would not — then surely there could be a market for similar housing elsewhere on the Island.

Micro-units such as this could help to relieve the housing crunch in several communities.

They would not be for everyone, but they could be perfect for people who don't need much space or don't have much money or spend only part of their time in this region.

Consider that the province is behind a plan to spend \$225 million to create 1,000 living units for the homeless in Vancouver. That's \$225,000 a unit, \$100,000 more than the ones going up in Port Renfrew.

(Land costs are much higher in downtown Vancouver than in Port Renfrew. But in Port Renfrew, unlike the Vancouver project, you get some land to call your own.)

Wild Coast Cottages could set an example for future developments and could lead to a new way of thinking about housing.

But it's not just a question of creativity and market demand. Municipalities — and the public — will have to be open to new, unfamiliar models of development.

Why not three little houses on an infill lot in an existing neighbourhood? Or, for that matter, a 400-square-foot house in a backyard?

But that's something to think about later. Something to ponder, maybe, while waiting out a slight bit of rain in Port Renfrew.