

RIVERVIEW VILLAGE PROJECT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Innovative plan for Riverview Lands integrates mentally ill and non-mentally-ill residents in a vibrant multi-use community

An integrated community of the mentally ill and non-mentally-ill is being proposed for the Riverview Lands by long-time advocate for the mentally ill and their families, Herschel Hardin, in a discussion paper made public today. Please see the attached.

The document, "Riverview Village: an innovative, ground-breaking community for the Riverview Lands" is also available at www.riverviewvillage.ca. Advance copies have been sent to B.C. Housing and the City of Coquitlam.

The proposal calls for a multi-use neighbourhood or village, whose leading objective is interaction between mentally ill and non-mentally residents— a neighbourhood for the seriously ill, but not exclusively of those who are ill. The model also includes work possibilities for those with an illness.

It's aimed at helping the seriously ill get beyond their residual symptoms – lethargy, lack of motivation, limited interaction with those who aren't mentally ill, difficulties many of them have with substance abuse, dependence on the health system for most of their support, and the narrowing of a sense of challenge and accomplishment because the residual symptoms of their illness may hold them back. It will also give them a sense of belonging. It brings the support and creativity of an "intentional community" to bear.

It's a departure from the usual practice of discharging patients into the urban landscape at large, where most aren't truly integrated and often become marginalized.

Also envisaged in the proposal are cultural and artisanal "clusters" centred on two of the heritage buildings (Centre Lawn and East Lawn). The buildings would have not just studios and some retail space, but also apartments, common rooms and perhaps performance spaces. "Vancouverism all within a couple of buildings," is how the document describes it. A horticultural centre, a museum on mental illness, a research centre, and tailored commercial use (like current film industry use) of some of the other existing buildings, are also part of the proposal.

The research centre would focus on the interaction of the mentally ill with the larger community, for which the proposed Riverview neighbourhood would be a living laboratory. Therapeutic programs related to overcoming the residual impact of illness, such as cognitive remediation therapy, which improves neurocognitive abilities and leads to improved social functioning, would also fall within the ambit of this research.

The Riverview Village proposal takes as a given that the needs of the most seriously mentally ill have priority for the Lands. It points out that "deinstitutionalization, with the gradual closing down of Riverview Hospital, has been disastrous for this cohort," and that "we owe it to them to give them first dibs on the Lands and meet their needs."

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