

## Second Stage Transitional Housing (SSTH) New Build Project

### Finding, Evaluating, and Securing a Site

#### Introduction

This resource guide aims to provide actionable steps and strategies for shelters who need to acquire land for their new build project, either through donation or purchase. We will walk you through four steps:

1. [Establishing site criteria](#)
2. [Finding a site](#)
3. [Site evaluation](#)
4. [Securing the site](#)

It is important to note that if you have hired a Project Manager (also called a Development Consultant), it should be within their scope of work to assist you in finding, evaluating, and securing a site.

#### 1. Establishing Site Criteria

Prior to securing a site, it is important to determine your needs so that you know what you're looking for in a potential site.

When determining site criteria, revisit your Project Vision document. You can check out our [Project Vision Resource](#) if you haven't already accomplished this task.

**Create a comprehensive list of site criteria** based on the Project Vision and the needs of residents. This may include:

- **Public Transportation Access:** Preferably located on a public transit line for accessibility.
- **Access to Public Health Resources:** Within walking distance or timely transit to health services.
- **Walkable Neighborhood:** Located in a walkable area with access to amenities such as coffee shops, parks, and pharmacies.
- **Proximity to Organization Services:** Accessible by walking or timely transit to your other buildings.
- **Community Integration:** Avoid concentration of low-income housing and consider neighborhood acceptance.
- **Appropriately Zoned:** Ensure zoning permits the envisioned project.
- **Affordably Priced:** Site affordability to align with project budget.
- **Parcel Size:** Adequate size for project conception and development.
- **Outdoor Amenity Space:** Availability of outdoor space for amenities and green areas.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensure the site respects and honors the cultural traditions and heritage of local Indigenous communities, if applicable.

Organize these criteria by “must haves” and “nice to haves”. If a free site becomes available to your organization that does not match all your criteria, be prepared to compromise. A free site is extremely valuable and could be the difference between moving ahead with your project or not. Paying for land will add to your total project cost.

## 2. Finding a Site

The first option should always be to try and have a site donated. Free land could come from a few different places:

### Government

- **Contact your local councillors** to see if they know of potential sites suitable for your project.
  - There could be empty land ready to develop, unoccupied buildings that could be adapted, or land the local government is using but could also accommodate your project. (E.g. [YWCA Metro Vancouver has a 31-units of housing over a Firehall](#))
- **Meet with municipal / local government staff** to determine if they know of any potential sites that could be available.
- **Use the tool [a360.city/lands](#)** to determine if there are suitable provincial or federal sites available in your area. Note: this tool has mapped federal government sites, some provinces, and some municipalities. If you have difficulty accessing this tool, please reach out to the SSTH New Build project team ([ssth@endvaw.ca](mailto:ssth@endvaw.ca)) for assistance.

### Community Partners

- **Tell your community partners** that you're looking for a site for your project. This is something that your Board of Directors could assist with as well.
- There may a community partner who has land and would like to be a part of the project, such as a daycare or other service provider. You may be able to come up with an agreement that allows you to take over the land if they can become part of the project for free, for example.

### Faith-Based Organizations

- **Reach out to faith-based organizations** who may be interested in donating in their land.
- Many faith-based communities have large sites that might be able to fit a modest-sized project. If you're open to sharing the land, this could be a good option for your project.
- We have heard of numerous women-led organizations successful in partnering with organizations that no longer have use of convents. These spaces are often suitable for adaptation as they already serve a residential purpose.

### Corporations, Foundations, Philanthropists

- **Contact local corporations, foundations, and philanthropists** that operate in your area and let them know that you're looking for a land donation for your project.
- If you are located in an area with a large presence of a specific industry, it is worth your time to reach out to the big companies and ask for donations.
- **You could place an advertisement** in the local paper or other publication.

If you know of other ways to find free or discounted land, please the SSTH New Build project team ([ssth@endvaw.ca](mailto:ssth@endvaw.ca)) and we can add your ideas to our list.

If you're unable to find a suitable, free site, you will have to explore options for purchasing a site.

### Realtors

- **Engage a realtor to help you find a site for your project.** Realtors may also know of sites that are not publicly listed. Here is an example email to send to a realtor:

We are looking for a property in [insert location] that would be used as second stage transitional housing for survivors of violence. We have developed a preliminary site concept for 10 units and a significant amount of amenity, programming, outdoor, and support service space. We are looking for a medium- to large-sized lot that can accommodate a building of 12,000-15,000 ft<sup>2</sup>. It is important for the site to be located along a transit route.

## 3. Site Evaluation

### a) Create a Site Evaluation Matrix

Ideally, you will be able to identify multiple possible free sites for you to choose from. If you are unable to secure a free site, you will have many to choose from that are for sale. It is important to document the sites as you go and compare them to one another. We call this a Site Evaluation Matrix. See **Appendix A** for a template.

Based on the results of the Matrix, you should be able to identify your preferred site.

### b) Begin Site Due Diligence

Once you have identified your chosen site, you will want to undertake due diligence to ensure the site meets your needs. This is also true for donated land. While the land may be free, if there is significant contamination that you are on the hook for cleaning, it may not be worth the deal.

You will want to evaluate:

- **Existing Site Conditions**
  - Ask the current owner if there is an existing Environment Site Assessment study, to demonstrate there is no contamination. If this doesn't exist or is outdated (more than 12 months old), you can request that they pay for one.
  - Ask for a Geotechnical study to determine the soil conditions. If this doesn't exist or is outdated (more than 12 months old), you can request that they pay for one.
  - Check the floodplain and wetland mapping through the local government's land use tools. In urban areas, these will be available online. In smaller, rural communities, you will likely need to inquire with your local government.
- **Property Issues**
  - Ask the current owner for an existing site survey to determine the legal boundary.
  - Your lawyer can review the title report to determine if there are legal constraints.
- **Entitlement Research**
  - Reach out to your municipality and/or hire a lawyer to help you understand if there are any development agreements, environmental impact requirements, or historical preservation zoning requirements for the site.
- **Zoning Research**
  - If you are in an urban area, you may want to engage a planning consultant to help determine the zoning requirements for the site. For example, do you need to an official plan amendment, zoning by-law amendment, or minor variance for the property?
  - If you are in a rural area, you should discuss the zoning of the property with your local government's planning staff.

#### 4. Securing the Site

If you haven't hired a lawyer by this point, now is the time to engage a legal firm. It is beneficial to hire a lawyer with real estate background/expertise.

##### Donated Land

When receiving donated land, an agreement will need to be drafted. If it is from a government, there are likely stipulations around the level and duration of affordability of the housing to be created. There may also be buy-back options in the agreement. You, your Project Manager, and your lawyer should review the agreement carefully and provide feedback to the government if you would like anything changed before signing.

Understand if there are any levies or other charges for the land. While it may be donated, there could be additional charges that you're unaware of.

##### Purchasing Land

If you are purchasing land, you will need to negotiate with the seller to come to an agreement, which is followed by a contract.

The first step could include a non-binding Letter of Intent (LOI) that outlines the terms. This may include:


- The price to be paid at closing.
- Deposits to be paid to the seller to remove the property off the market.
- Conditions of closing, such as:
  - Site due diligence (such as findings from a Phase I Environment Site Assessment).
  - Securing funding or financing.
  - Planning approvals.
- Responsibilities of the buyer and seller.

If both parties agree to the LOI, this can be turned into an Agreement of Purchase and Sale (APS).

It is worth noting that it could take a significant amount of time to meet the conditions. For example, it may take a year to secure funding for the project. You will need an extremely patient seller to remove a property from the market but not lock-in the sale for a year. Also, the sale may fall through because you did not secure the funding and can no longer proceed with the project. It may be challenging to find both an appropriate site and patient seller for your project.

## Appendix A – Site Evaluation Matrix


The following is an example of a Site Evaluation Matrix. The categories in the first column will depend on the site criteria determined in Step 1, above. You should adapt this matrix to the criteria that you chose. We recommend that you keep the first three criteria: a site image, a summary, and site information. Repeat filling out the information for each site that you seriously considering for your project.

	EXAMPLE SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3
<p><b>SITE IMAGE</b></p> <p>Insert an aerial view of your site, if possible. This will help define the shape of the site.</p>			
<p><b>SUMMARY</b></p> <p>Provide a synthesized overview of the information discussed below for easy reference.</p>	<p>This site is located at the corner of X Road and Y Avenue, and is adjacent to a commercial plaza. The zoning allows for a residential care facility use on site. The site is large and available for a lower price relative to the other shortlisted sites. A constraint is that the site is located further away from existing client services. While there are some amenities within walking distance, many errands would require a bus trip. Additionally, X Road is a busy arterial street, which is not as pleasant for walking.</p> <p>A site plan will be needed for new construction.</p>		
<p><b>SITE INFORMATION</b></p> <p>Provide a brief description of the site.</p>	<p>Existing 1-storey restaurant on the northeast corner of X Road and Y Avenue, adjacent to a commercial plaza.</p>		
<p><b>PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACCESS</b></p> <p>Examine how close the site is to public transportation services.</p>	<p>It is well connected to transit with multiple bus stops at X Road and Y Avenue. It is a 6-minute bus ride to the local mall.</p>		



<p><b>PUBLIC HEALTH ACCESS</b></p> <p>Examine how close the site is to public health amenities.</p>	<p>It has some health care options nearby:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~1.1km from a medical clinic (in local mall)</li> <li>• ~1.5km from a holistic health centre</li> </ul>		
<p><b>NEIGHBOURHOOD</b></p> <p>Describe the neighbourhood the site is located in. Note the locations of grocery stores, convenience stores, parks, and other important landmarks. Assess walkability.</p>	<p>The site is located in X neighbourhood.</p> <p>There is a Tim Horton's within 300m of the site. The local mall, which includes a grocery store and a drug store, is 1.1 km away.</p> <p>There are other grocery/food options nearby: a farmers' market (1.1km) and a Loblaws (1.8km).</p> <p>There are multi-use pathways and bicycle routes nearby. The local beach park is a ~30-minute walk from the site.</p> <p>The <a href="#">walkscore</a> is 55, indicating that some errands can be accomplished on foot.</p>		
<p><b>PROXIMITY TO EXISTING SERVICES</b></p> <p>Examine how close the site is to your existing services.</p>	<p>This site is further away from existing services. Located at 1234 X Avenue, the existing building is ~2.6km away from the site.</p>		
<p><b>PROXIMITY TO OTHER EXISTING SHELTERS AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING</b></p> <p>Examine how close the site is to other shelters or transitional housing in the area.</p>	<p>The site is further away from other supportive housing and/or shelters. The local homeless shelter is ~3km away.</p>		
<p><b>ZONING</b></p> <p>Check the zoning designation with your local municipality.</p>	<p><b>TM - Traditional Mainstreet</b></p> <p>TM zoning permits for a wide range of residential uses, including apartment dwelling low rise, apartment dwelling mid rise, and residential care facility.</p>		
<p><b>SITE CONDITIONS</b></p> <p>Describe the physical attributes of the site. Consider the history of the site. Assess what work will need to be done to determine and, if necessary, address the conditions.</p>	<p>There are elevation changes throughout the property.</p> <p>There are trees and other shrubbery located at the back of the site, and it is unknown how much of this is developable.</p> <p>A site plan will be needed. No site studies have been completed and will likely be needed.</p>		



<p><b>AVAILABILITY AND TIMING</b></p> <p>Describe the site availability and the time it would take to ensure it is properly zoned for your purpose.</p>	<p>The site is currently for sale.</p> <p>The site would need a site plan, but likely not rezoning. This would be less than a year of planning processes [Note: Timeline is dependent on your location. You should hire a planning consultant to assist with this process.]</p>		
<p><b>LAND COST</b></p> <p>Describe how much the land costs, or any requirements needing to be met to secure the land.</p>	<p>~\$2.2M</p>		
<p><b>PARCEL SIZE</b></p> <p>Describe the size of the site and consider if the project would be able to fit on the land as is, or if modifications to the design need to be made.</p>	<p>The site is suitable for what is envisioned for the project. At a rough estimation, a four-storey project would fit on the site.</p> <p>Site: ~17,783 sq ft</p> 		
<p><b>OUTDOOR AMENITY SPACE</b></p> <p>Describe what the green space is like on the site.</p>	<p>Likely to have extra room on site for green space.</p>		
<p><b>OTHER CONSIDERATIONS</b></p>	<p>Demolition is likely required as the buildings are in bad shape. Some units remain empty due to unsafe conditions.</p>		