



Housing Assessment
Resource Tools
(HART)

BC Public Lands Map

Case Study Report

Sept
2026

This project is about land, specifically lands that are located within the traditional and ancestral territories of First Nations, many of which remain unceded. We encourage you to consider what that means for you in your work and personal life, and how you can meaningfully engage with the Nations who have stewarded the land in your community for time immemorial. Find out who they are at <https://native-land.ca>.

We are especially grateful to all of the Indigenous organizations who guided this research, and who provided meaningful feedback that has informed it.

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« Le projet BC Public Lands Map reçu du financement de la Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement (SCHL) en vertu de l'Initiative de démonstrations de la SNL. Cependant, les opinions exprimées sont les opinions personnelles de l'auteur et la SCHL n'accepte aucune responsabilité à l'égard de telles opinions. »

Executive summary

Public land is one of the few levers that can lower the cost of affordable housing without new subsidy, but only if the right parcel can be found, assessed, and acted on quickly. Until June 2026, that meant cross-referencing land registries British Columbia, with no shared way to compare what was actually buildable.

The BC Public Lands Map (BCPLM), launched by HART on June 30, 2026 with support from CMHC's Demonstrations Initiative, brings that information into one free, public place. It identifies 52,384 publicly owned parcels across BC, covering roughly 397 million m² of land with an assessed value of about \$52 billion, and scores each one out of 100 for its suitability for housing. Applying HART's conservative density scenarios, those parcels could accommodate an estimated 661,000 non-profit homes.

This report provides a complete overview of the map: it explains what the map is, how it was built, and how to use it; provides a practical guide for non-profits and governments on how to partner to develop housing on public land, drawing on HART's past research; and finally presents four case studies of how early users have used the map in its first ten weeks.

Because the map is only a couple months old, no project identified through it has yet reached approval, let alone construction. The case studies therefore document how the map is changing the first step of the development process, site identification, rather than the last. Three findings stand out:

- The map replaces data collection, not data analysis. One regional government had recently spent about \$20,000 on a manual public land study. Their planner's view was that the map now handles the collection side of that work, freeing scarce resources for interpretation and partnership building.
- Site identification used to be reactive and largely a matter of luck. A non-profit developer described the pre-BCPLM process as relying on agent mailing lists, municipal GIS portals, and driving past sites: "it's mostly by chance." The map lets providers search proactively, including for land adjacent to existing buildings where shared staffing makes projects more viable.
- The map has uses beyond development. A lawyer working on encampment cases uses it to answer the question governments rarely answer when they move people on: "where to?"

Users also identified the gaps that matter most to them: infrastructure capacity (as distinct from proximity), land held by school districts and faith-based and civil-society organizations, and a municipal-supports layer. Thus feedback highlights the appetite for more data and expansion of the BCPLM beyond BC.

Since launch the map has been visited over 6,600 times with over 198k data requests fulfilled, signaling deep engagement with the map from each viewer. It has also been covered by [UBC News](#), [Business in Vancouver](#), the [Vancouver Sun](#) and [Times Colonist](#), [phys.org](#), [People First Radio](#), and the [Union of BC Municipalities](#).

1. The BC Public Lands Map: what it is and how to use it

1.1 Why public land

British Columbia has the highest provincial rate of core housing need in Canada, and CMHC estimates the province needs roughly 610,000 more homes than will otherwise be built by 2030 to restore affordability. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives puts the non-market share of that at about 25,000 new homes a year. BC Housing completed roughly 4,500 affordable and supportive homes in 2024–25, a 29% increase on prior years and still well short of that figure (HART launch presentation, June 30, 2026).

Land is where the gap is widest and where public ownership can make the most difference. In high-value markets like Vancouver, land can account for up to 60% of total development cost. Land contributed at low or no cost does not by itself make a project viable in the current cost environment, but it is increasingly a prerequisite: Build Canada Homes, for example, requires applicants to have access to land at the point of application.

The barrier has never been that public land does not exist. Data on public ownership has been available for years through ParcelMap BC and iMapBC. The barrier is that non-market housing providers, and often governments themselves, could not easily find it, compare it, or assess it, and so could only react when a level of government put a site out for proposals. HART’s literature review identifies the absence of a centralized, transparent public land inventory as one of three persistent structural barriers to using public land for housing in BC, alongside the lack of a permanent land banking framework and uneven geographic reach.

The BCPLM was built to remove that first barrier.

1.2 What the map covers

The BCPLM is an interactive, province-wide map of publicly owned land, scored for housing potential. It is free, requires no login, and runs in a browser. It is the first tool of its kind in Canada.

Headline figure	Value
Parcels mapped	52,384
Land area identified	Approximately 397 million sq m.
Potential non-profit homes (HART density scenarios)	Approximately 661,000
Assessed value of identified public land	Approximately \$52 billion
Ownership types included	Federal, Crown Provincial, Crown Agency, Local Government, Untitled Provincial

“Local government” is the largest category and includes municipalities, regional districts, school districts and other local bodies; the ownership field in ParcelMap BC records the general class of owner, not the specific agency. The map does not identify who exactly owns a parcel. Confirming specific ownership of a parcel is the first step of due diligence, using the parcel identifier (PID) shown in the map with BC Assessment and the Land Title and Survey Authority.

What was deliberately left out

Starting from the 2.2 million titled parcels in BC, HART excluded private, First Nations, mixed-ownership and unclassified parcels, then removed parcels intersecting Indian Reserves, BC Parks and Protected Areas, and National Parks. Using BC Assessment's actual-use codes, it then removed schools, hospitals, cemeteries, marinas, utilities and parcels in the Agricultural Land Reserve, along with parcels flagged for geological or flood risk or lacking road access. Finally, it removed very small parcels (under 100 m²), long thin parcels such as roads and trails, and very large parcels (over 5.1 hectares) on the grounds that these would require a master planning process before any housing could proceed.

Two of these choices came up repeatedly in the case study interviews. School district land is excluded because it is governed by the School Act and requires ministerial approval to dispose of; users in smaller communities nonetheless see it as one of the few realistic options they have (see Part 3). And the map covers only government-owned land, not the faith-based or civil-society holdings that rural users say they increasingly depend on. Both are recorded as expansion priorities.

1.3 How parcels are scored

Every parcel receives a BCPLM score out of 100, made up of three subtotals. The weights were set by the HART team with input from development consultants active in BC's non-market housing sector.

Component	What it measures	Max points
Amenity access	Employment, transit, schools and health care (6 points each) plus grocery, pharmacy, sports and recreation, and child care (3 points each). Amenity access uses Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada's Spatial Access Measures, which model travel by road network rather than straight-line distance.	36
Development potential	Vacant (25 points) or underutilized (15 points), based on BC Assessment improvement value relative to land value; potential density (up to 14), using the higher of the highest-neighbourhood or transit-oriented-area density; and a recent development index (up to 5) built from residential completions 2021–2025.	44
Site characteristics	Mean slope, flood susceptibility, wildfire threat, and parcel shape (regular vs. irregular), 5 points each.	20
Total		100

The BC Public Lands Map is a valuable tool for identifying underutilized public land with potential for affordable housing. The map can identify proximity to services and amenities alongside site characteristics such as parcel size, slope, and flood exposure, allowing users to weigh both opportunity and development risk concurrently.

- Assistant Deputy Minister John Thomson at the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, Province of British Columbia

1.4 Development scenarios and potential yield

For each parcel the map estimates how many homes could be built under three scenarios*, all drawn from 2021 Census dwelling density:

1. Current density: the density of the dissemination block the parcel sits in; essentially little to no change to density.
2. Median neighbourhood density: the median density of all blocks within 1 km – consistent with the surrounding neighbourhood.
3. Highest neighbourhood density: the highest density found within 1 km, applied to the parcel.

**Where a parcel is in a provincially designated Transit-Oriented Area, the TOA floor-space ratio overrides all three calculations.*

These estimates are conservative and do not account for zoning, official community plans, or as-of-right permissions. In HART's experience they more often underestimate than overestimate what could be built. Section 2.4 explains how this scenario approach builds on HART's earlier yield methodology.

1.5 How to use the map: a walkthrough

The map lives at hart.ubc.ca/bcplm. The workflow below reflects the live demonstration given at launch and the way beta testers described using it.

1. **Pick a place:** use the "select municipality" search to jump to a community; the map filters to that jurisdiction and the parcel count updates in the top right.
2. **Filter by ownership:** choose federal, Crown provincial, Crown agency, or local government, or any combination.
3. **Filter by status:** restrict to vacant, or vacant and underutilized parcels. Province-wide this removes roughly 5,000 parcels that are neither.
4. **Choose a development scenario and built form:** turn on one scenario at a time (unselect the previous one first), then choose low-rise, mid-rise, high-rise, or dense high-rise.
5. **Apply DASH and site filters:** minimum 100 ft (30.5 m) width, mean slope under 5°, regular shape, proximity to water mains and primary electrical lines, no heritage flag. These match the site criteria of BC's Digitally Accelerated Standardized Housing program.
6. **Filter by amenity access:** set "good" or "excellent" access to the amenities that matter for the intended residents: employment, schools, grocery and childcare for family housing, for instance.
7. **Sort by score:** set a minimum BCPLM score to identify the strongest candidates.
8. **Open a parcel:** the pop-up shows the score and its components, area, address, owner type, current use, zoning and OCP designation where available, improvement-to-land value ratio, assessed land value band, First Nations territories (from native-land.ca), hazards, and estimated yield under each scenario.
9. **Check the site photo:** use the Google Maps link to see what is actually there; many high-scoring vacant parcels turn out to be surface parking lots.
10. **Export:** generate a pre-populated parcel report to save or share. Users with ArcGIS Online can also add their own layers to the map; uploaded data stays in the browser and is not sent to HART's servers.

Two examples show how quickly the filters narrow the field:

Example 1 - A non-market provider in Vancouver looking for a wood-frame site

Starting from nearly 1,400 public parcels in the City of Vancouver, the provider selects the median-neighbourhood scenario and low-rise built form (328 parcels), restricts to vacant or underutilized (157), then applies the DASH filters. Fourteen parcels remain, mostly clustered downtown where land is in highest demand. Switching to the highest-neighbourhood scenario and low-rise surfaces 24 parcels spread across the city, including a 6,000 m² vacant local-government parcel scoring 77 in Grandview-Woodland that turns out to be a surface parking lot. The provider now has a shortlist for title searches that could be explored for their next project.

Example 2 - Provincial staff asking what the province owns in Penticton

Provincial staff looking to partner on a project in Penticton might start with flagging parcels under their ownership, but would discover that the local government owns much of the vacant land in the community, and there are about 5 parcels that score highly that could be great opportunities to work with the municipality to build new housing, with the province contributing funds and the municipality contributing land.

1.6 Features added since launch

HART committed at launch to keep updating the map through the summer. Several features described to beta testers in the case study interviews are now live on the public map.

1. Zoning and OCP layers from ICI Society, with the generalized OCP
2. Recent development activity index;
3. The community-response ("NIMBY") heat map showing where housing and social housing proposals drew support, opposition, or both, province-wide over the last two years
4. Completion of slope data for the five northern regional districts;
5. Applicability improvements that removed road-intersecting parcels.

1.7 What the map is not

- Not a substitute for due diligence. Title searches (LTSA), BC Assessment, and tools such as AutoProp are still required to confirm ownership and site characteristics, and certified professionals are still required for rigorous site evaluation. Covenants on title, Crown grant restrictions, contamination, and unsuitable soils cannot be identified at this scale.
- Not a predictor of development potential. Yield estimates are conservative scenarios, not entitlements.
- Not complete or perfect. HART chose to under-remove rather than risk excluding viable parcels, so in some places there are sections of road, land under bridges, embankments and parcels overlapping water that remain. About a third of parcels are missing some zoning or infrastructure data because not all municipalities have open data policies. The map also shows proximity to infrastructure, not its capacity, as there is currently no reliable, comparable, and province-wide source of capacity data.
- Not up to the minute. Core data was pulled in January 2026; parcels may since have changed hands or been built on. Updates will follow BC Assessment's annual cycle.
- Not an absolute indication that land is available. Identifying land as publicly administered does not mean it is available for development, and any use of the map to inform land decisions should consider impacts on Indigenous rights, title and interests. Users are encouraged to engage affected First Nations early.

“We often hear that Metro Vancouver’s housing challenges are driven by a shortage of land. HART’s BC Public Lands Map offers a more nuanced perspective by showing the scale of public land assets that already exist across our communities and their potential to support affordable housing. By making this information accessible and actionable, the project provides a valuable foundation for governments, non-profits, and housing providers to identify opportunities, strengthen collaboration, and accelerate housing delivery. Metro Vancouver is already drawing on this work to better understand how public lands can help expand affordable housing opportunities near transit and throughout the region.”

– Michael Epp, Director, Housing Planning and Development,
Metro Vancouver Housing

2. Partnering to build housing on public land: a guide for non-profits and governments

Finding a parcel is the beginning of a process, not the end. This part sets out what HART's research says about why housing on public land stalls, the partnership and tenure models that work, a step-by-step pathway from parcel to partnership, how to estimate what a site could hold, and the programs and mechanisms available in BC and federally as of September 2026, plus the ones that would matter if the map expands to other provinces.

2.1 What the evidence says

Two pieces of HART research underpin this guide: our 2025 workshop series encompassing nearly 50 interviews, four workshops, and over 100 interactions with senior housing-sector stakeholders on why more housing is not being built on public land. The second is a 2026 literature review of the legal, jurisdictional, infrastructural and institutional barriers specific to BC. They reach compatible conclusions.

Four recommendations from the workshop report

1. Decrease risk for developers. Risk was the dominant theme, and participants said it is disproportionately loaded onto the developer: in land (contamination, servicing, encumbrances, odd site conditions), financing (rate volatility, unreliable and competitive funding, unfunded pre-development costs), and politics (discretionary zoning, unrepresentative engagement, arbitrary council decisions).
2. Streamline municipal approvals across departments. Priority streams for non-market housing help, but siloed departments and sequential rather than concurrent reviews persist. Calgary's concierge-style Affordable Housing Priority Stream was admired in every community.
3. Build capacity in the non-market sector. Most non-profit providers are small and inexperienced in development; approvals processes rarely distinguish them from private developers; funding models often exclude support services.
4. Stimulate construction. Labour shortages, supply chains, and land speculation on permitted but unbuilt parcels.

The barriers specific to BC

Neither the Land Act, the Community Charter nor the federal Real Property and Federal Immovables Act mentions housing as a purpose of public land disposition, so decisions remain discretionary and often subordinate to other priorities. BC Housing has statutory authority to acquire and manage land but no land-banking mandate. Municipalities control zoning but not the disposition of federal or provincial land. Infrastructure shortfalls can add 20–40% to per-unit cost and years to timelines, and most public parcels fall into the “partially serviced” or “raw and constrained” categories rather than “permit-ready.” Data on public land is comparatively good in BC, thanks to ParcelMap BC, but is siloed across LTSA, BC Assessment, ICI Society, and separate federal systems.

This reinforces the complex, multi-dimensional challenges that face the sector, of which land identification is one.

2.2 Partnership and tenure models

Most successful public-land projects HART has documented rest on a decision about tenure and a structure for the partnership. The main options:

Model	How it works	Trade-offs
Long-term lease (60–99 years)	Public owner retains fee simple; non-profit operator holds a long lease, usually at nominal rent, with affordability covenants. Used by Burnaby since 2015, by the Vancouver Community Land Trust, by Toronto (lease-only since 2018), and required by BC Builds for landowner partners.	Keeps land in the public trust and secures affordability for the lease term, but financing and legal agreements are more complex; refinancing becomes difficult in the last 30 years of a lease.
Sale at nominal or discounted value	Land transferred to the provider, sometimes for \$1, with affordability secured by a Section 219 covenant on title. Whitehorse, Calgary and Ottawa have all used this.	Simpler to finance; lenders prefer ownership, but land eventually leaves public ownership, and covenants must do all the work of protecting affordability.
Tripartite institutional agreement	A school board or health authority, a local government, and a non-profit provider agree to develop institutional land under a long lease while the institution retains ownership. The Caledonia redevelopment in Victoria is the BC precedent.	Unlocks well-located institutional land, but requires ministerial approval under the School Act and a willing board.
Community land trust aggregation	A trust assembles parcels from municipal, faith-based, co-op and Indigenous owners into one portfolio, negotiates pooled financing, and delegates operation to non-profits. The Vancouver CLT Foundation is the model.	Achieves scale and economies, but depends on a capable intermediary (and sector capacity varies widely across Canada).
Co-development with civic uses	Housing built over or alongside a new fire hall, library, school or transit facility. Vancouver's Champlain Heights (fire hall plus family housing) and Coal Harbour (school, childcare and affordable housing) are examples.	Doubles the public value of a site, but adds complexity across multiple departments.

“At a time when community housing relies more on public lands to achieve greater levels of housing affordability, HART's BC Public Lands Map offers a tool to help spotlight the availability of public land while adding important clarity to the process of exploring new affordable housing opportunities.”

- Liam Griffin, Manager, Communications & Partnerships,
Brightside Community Homes Foundation

2.3 From parcel to partnership: a seven-stage pathway

The stages below are drawn from the workshop findings and the literature review, and mapped to what the BCPLM contributes at each. Non-profits and governments will enter at different points; a municipality that already owns a shortlisted parcel skips stage 3.

Stage	What happens	What the BCPLM contributes
1. Identify candidate sites	Proactive scan of vacant and underutilized public land in the target community, filtered for the housing type intended (family, seniors, supportive, workforce) and the in-tended construction method.	The core function: ownership, status, score, amenity access, hazards, DASH compatibility, potential yield. Turns a reactive RFP-driven process into a pro-active one.
2. Screen and rank	Reduce the shortlist by hard constraints (slope, flood, wildfire, heritage, shape, infrastructure proximity) and soft ones (neighbourhood density, recent development activity, community response history).	Filters and score bands do the first pass. Parcel reports support local ground-truthing, especially outside Metro Vancouver.
3. Confirm ownership and encumbrances	Title search via LTSA using the PID; BC Assessment check for recent sales; review of covenants, easements, Crown grant conditions, and OCP designation.	Provides the PID, address and owner type to start from, but does not replace this step.
4. Engage the landowner and the community	Approach the owning department or agency early; identify the internal champion; understand competing claims on the site; en-gage affected First Nations. Establish relationships before an RFP, not in response to one.	Community-response history helps prepare for engagement; owner type points in the right direction (local government vs. Crown agency vs. federal).
5. Align with programs and funding	Match the site and tenure model to available capital, financing, and land programs (section 2.5). Confirm the project meets each program's site and equity requirements.	DASH filters and built-form scenarios support applications to programs that require standardized designs or specific site characteristics.
6. Structure the agreement	Lease or sale terms, affordability covenants, timelines, off-ramps, and what is negotiable. Standardized agreements and prequalification reduce cost and time on both sides.	Yield scenarios inform the density and unit count that the agreement should enable.
7. Approvals and construction	Rezoning if needed, development and building permits, servicing agreements. Seek a priority stream or concierge where one exists; ask for concurrent rather than sequential departmental review.	Zoning and OCP fields flag where rezoning will be needed; infrastructure proximity flags where servicing conversations must start early.

2.4 Estimating what a site could hold: HART's yield methodology

Governments and non-profits need a defensible number for how many homes a site or a portfolio could produce before they can make the case for it. HART's 2024 report [More Housing Here: Understanding how many homes could be built on government land](#) set out a replicable method, and the BCPLM's development scenarios are its direct descendant.

The More Housing Here method

Using HART's earlier Land Assessment Tool data, the study:

1. Sorted parcels into site-size classes (0.5 to 25 acres; smaller sites are hard to develop, larger ones need master planning).
2. Classified each by amenity score using the 20-point HART index built on the StatCan/CMHC Proximity Measures Database: high (16-20), medium (11-15), low (1-10).
3. Built a comparable-building database of 64 recent projects in Metro Vancouver and the Greater Toronto Area to establish realistic floor-space ratios by height and site size.
4. Assigned an FSR to each site-size and amenity-class combination, from 8.0 for small high-amenity sites down to 1.0 for large low-amenity sites.
5. Multiplied FSR by site area for gross floor area, applied an 80% efficiency factor, and divided by 67 m² per unit and 2.47-2.51 people per unit.
6. Ranked sites in six priority tiers: high-amenity vacant (1), high-amenity occupied (2), medium-amenity vacant (3), medium-amenity occupied (4), and low-amenity vacant and occupied (5 and 6), then reported yield for tiers 1-4 only.

The result: of 3,971 mapped parcels from the Land Assessment Tool, 856 in priority tiers 1-4 could yield about 36 million m² of residential floor area, roughly 430,000 homes for just over a million people, in areas already served by infrastructure.

How the BCPLM builds on it

The BCPLM replaces the FSR matrix with observed neighbourhood density from the 2021 Census, which lets it produce three scenarios rather than one estimate and adapt automatically to local context: a parcel in Terrace is compared with its own 1 km neighbourhood, not with Toronto comparables. It also replaces the 20-point proximity index with HICC's network-based Spatial Access Measures and adds site hazards, infrastructure proximity, and BC Assessment-based vacancy and underutilization. The BCPLM's 661,000-home estimate for BC uses these scenarios; it is a screening figure, not a target.

3. Case studies: how the BC Public Lands Map is being used

3.1 Approach

HART interviewed four early users of the BCPLM between August 26 and September 10, 2026 - eight to ten weeks after launch. Interviews were 10–25 minutes, semi-structured, and covered how the map has been used, what the process looked like before, anticipated future use, and perceived impact on their work and the sector.

The interviews capture the change in the first stage of the process: how sites are found, screened and argued for, and the features users need next.

We also got feedback from members of our Advisory Committee, who oversaw the development and launch of the map.

3.2 The non-profit developer: “Maps are the starting point”

Who: A non-profit housing provider with multiple sites in several Vancouver Island municipalities, several of which have recently come off provincial operating agreements and are therefore candidates for redevelopment.

Before the map: site identification was almost entirely reactive. The provider relies on real estate agents and brokers who call non-profits when a listing might suit them, on listing mailing lists, on municipal GIS portals (which show the parcel fabric, zoning, OCP designation and sometimes development applications, but never who owns what across all three levels of government), and on noticing sites while driving around.

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“It’s a very unscientific approach to try to find something. Sometimes you’re driving around and you go by a site and you kind of go, “oh, what’s that?” It looks abandoned or vacant, and then you start digging around. It’s mostly by chance.”

- Development lead, non-profit housing provider

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How they used the map: during beta testing, the first thing they did was look at every one of their potential redevelopment sites to see whether any public land sat next to or near them, with a view to expanding a future development. The logic is operational: a property manager or support-staff team can cover three or four sites that are close together far more easily than sites spread across a region. There was not a lot of adjacent public land in this case, but the search took minutes rather than weeks, and the tester described the map as “very well set up” and “really well done,” noting that comments they submitted during testing were acted on.

"Proximity to existing sites and buildings really helps on the staffing side. If you can have a manager cover three or four sites that are geographically closer to each other, that becomes much easier than if all your sites were quite spread out. So when looking for new sites, that would be quite helpful."

- Development lead, non-profit housing provider

What they asked for: building outlines drawn over the public-land shading, to make vacancy visible at a glance; zoning and OCP designation; development applications and permits, to read what is happening around a site; municipal infrastructure; and a municipal-supports layer - which councils have expedited approvals or waived fees for affordable housing – for when they look at a community they do not already know. Several of these were live on the public map by the time of the interview. The one everyone wants and nobody has is sanitary sewer capacity.

"I did a rezoning in a mid-sized community years ago and there was one consultant who ran all the sewer models for the city. If you asked engineering, 'are we going to have any issues downstream from here?', they would have to contact the consultant to run the model, to then come back and tell them, to tell me. And there was a cost each time."

- Development lead, non-profit housing provider

Going forward: they expect to return to the map whenever they are about to put in an application on a site and see the benefit of having something else nearby, and singled out the community-response heat map as something they would look at before entering a new municipality.

"Maps are the starting point for land development. The more information you can layer on one map, the easier it is to help make decisions and guide a process going forward to produce the type of housing that's needed in a given area. If you can make a really good case – we need this type of housing here, for this reason – it really helps."

- Development lead, non-profit housing provider

3.3 The regional district: “It replaces the role of data collection”

Who: a senior planner at a regional district.

Before the map: the regional district had just completed a study of properties suitable for non-profit housing in its rural areas, funded at roughly \$20,000. The local affordable housing society, on contract to the regional district, adapted HART’s Land Assessment Tool parameters for a rural context (removing the transit filter, for instance, because the northern part of the region has no transit), and the district’s GIS staff generated the candidate list from BC Assessment data. Because local government land is so scarce there, the study deliberately extended beyond government land to school districts, churches, and institutional owners such as telecommunications companies. Of the top ten sites, one was regional district land, several were school district sites, and the rest were church or institutional properties.

How they used the map: as a back-check. The beta test coincided with the report going to the board, so the planner used the BCPLM to see what it surfaced that the manual process had missed or duplicated.

“I think it’s a phenomenal tool right now for urban areas. There are still a lot of question marks for us because a lot of our land is not governmental, or it’s just broad-brush Crown. We know the local government lands are pretty limited. We have a pretty good handle on our own lands. The provincial lands – there are some – but we’re really scraping the bottom of the barrel, and we’ve got to go to the civil-society ones.”

- Senior planner, regional district

Would the map have changed how they spent the \$20,000? Partly: the planner’s honest answer was that the district would still have needed to ground-truth the non-governmental lands, which the map does not cover, and in a small community the development planners already know who owns what. The greater value, in their view, is for consultants working with communities on housing strategies, and for smaller local governments without a dedicated housing planner.

“As communities are thinking about developing housing strategies and they want to know “where would we even look for land?” – this is a great resource to say, we don’t just have to talk about this in the abstract. We can actually think about where some appropriate locations might be, whether they’re local government or federal or provincial.”

- Senior planner, regional district

On impact: the planner drew an analogy with what happened when housing needs reports became a legislative requirement in BC in 2018 and HART automated most of the data work.

"It doesn't replace the role of data analysis, but it replaces the role of data collection, which is such a huge chunk of time, whether it's on the local government side or the consultant side... If you can spend the resources interpreting the data instead of collecting the data, that's a win for everybody, and it's a win for the community. The same thing is true of this: the more you can automate the data collection side and put the thought into "how do we activate that land, what's required to make that partnership work," the better off you're situating local governments."

- Senior planner, regional district

What they asked for: school district land ("a hard nut to crack from a process perspective because of the School Act, but not impossible, and in small communities without a lot of other land, one you want to look at"); faith-based and civil-society land, even at a cursory level; and, again, infrastructure capacity: "do we have sewer that can manage anything over a few homes per lot? That's the hard wall we hit." They found the natural hazard layers (flood, wildfire, riparian) immediately useful for a current OCP project and asked where the flood data came from so it could be reconciled with the district's own recent flood mapping.

"If you could bring all that together, then you're handing municipalities a third of their housing action plan ready-made. You've still got to develop the policy around it, but you're giving them the resources to think through: who do we partner with, how do we activate this?"

- Senior planner, regional district

3.4 The lawyer: “Where could people go instead?”

Who: a lawyer practicing in BC whose clients include people sheltering outdoors, in cases where the government or entity that owns the land is moving to displace them. Some of the use described was by other members of their team.

Before the map: the legal argument in these cases does not depend on identifying alternative land – it rests on the community existing where it is, usually in a location residents chose because it was private and did not interfere with public uses. But when a government insists people must move, the question “where to?” becomes central, and there were only two ways to answer it: know the community well enough to be aware of a suitable public site, or obtain the information from the government through litigation.

How they used the map: to look at what public land exists as an alternative when displacement is threatened, both in court and in negotiation.

“A lot of the work still happening in sheltering spaces is shifting the narrative from ‘you just got to clean up encampments,’ whatever that means, without thinking about the question of where people are going to go instead. So it gives us a tool to be able to say, ‘here’s where people can be instead, potentially’. If somebody’s saying people have to move, we can say, ‘okay, where to?’ and if they’re not answering that, we can say: ‘we see you also own these twelve vacant lots.’”

- Lawyer

The interviewee was careful about what the map does and does not do. It does not eliminate the need for site-level research, and no court order they have been involved in has directed people to a specific alternative site. Its value is as a starting point for a conversation that governments have generally avoided.

“If we were to agree this is a terrible place for people to be sheltering – where could we go instead? That’s a useful starting point.”

- Lawyer

What they asked for: a layer showing proximity to washrooms and services, which matters for identifying viable sheltering locations and which they recognized may be outside the map’s scope. They expect to keep using the map: “encampments aren’t going away.”

3.5 The provincial analyst: “A really powerful map”

Who: an analyst at a provincial housing agency who supports mapping work across the organization, from real-time hazard mapping to long-term planning.

Before the map: the analyst used the public land parcel layer in the BC government’s open data catalogue. It carries only a few fields – parcel size and ownership class, and is slow to open and query.

How they use the map: at least once a month, to check individual parcels – whether they are vacant, and how they score on amenities and other factors. Equally important, they use the BCPLM as a demonstration piece for the agency’s internal web and community teams: a worked example of how a story-map-style land tool should function, how users select parcels to view detail, and how it interacts with ArcGIS products and land title information. They have introduced it to other departments, which use it to search for information they need, and expect to point the agency’s development and asset teams to it when land title questions come up.

| *“Basically it will be like a prototype: does this solve your problem? If not, we’ll see what more datasets or functionality you need.”*

-Analyst, provincial housing agency

How it differs from their own work: the agency’s own mapping is largely operational and real-time – wildfire and natural-disaster risk to its portfolio. The BCPLM they see as a long-term planning tool; the two are complementary rather than overlapping.

3.6 Cross-cutting findings

What changed

- From reactive to proactive. Three of four interviewees described a pre-BCPLM process that depended on being told about land: by an agent, a colleague, or a court. All now describe searching for it.
- From weeks to minutes for the first pass. The regional district’s manual study was a funded project; the developer’s adjacent-site scan took a single sitting.
- From municipal silos to one frame. Municipal GIS portals are good, and the developer uses one several times a week, but none shows public ownership across all levels of government.
- A model for other tools. The provincial agency is using the map as a reference design for its own internal mapping; an influence that would not show up in usage statistics.
- Beyond development. The encampment use case was not anticipated in the map’s design and points to a broader role in public accountability for land.

What users want next

Request	Raised by	HART assessment
Infrastructure capacity (especially sanitary sewer), not just proximity	Developer, regional district; also the most common question at launch	No consistent province-wide source exists; HART reviewed Canada's Core Public Infra-structure Survey and found it aggregated at census-subdivision level with no capacity measure. Watching for provincial and federal work on this.
School district land	Regional district	Excluded by design (School Act constraints). Could be added as a separately flagged layer.
Faith-based and civil-society land	Regional district	Outside current scope (government land only). A cursory layer would help rural communities most.
Municipal supports layer: expedited approvals, fee waivers, DCC policy by municipality	Developer	Feasible from public sources.
Development applications and permits	Developer	Not available province-wide; the recent development index is the proxy.
Proximity to washrooms and public services	Lawyer	Outside original scope; low cost to add where open data exists.
Extreme-heat risk	Launch Q&A	Reviewed; available datasets too coarse for parcel level.

3.7 Reach and reception

Usage

In the three months from launch on June 30 to publication, the map itself was viewed over 6,600 times and the BCPLM information page on hart.ubc.ca over 10,000 times since launch.

"At a time when communities across BC are urgently seeking housing solutions, every innovation that removes barriers and strengthens decision-making is valuable. The BC Public Lands Map is an excellent example of how greater transparency and easier access to data can help identify potential housing sites and advance projects more efficiently. By shedding light on public land assets across the province, this initiative equips non-profit housing providers with the insights they need to explore new possibilities and plan with greater confidence. The tool's impact is perhaps best demonstrated by how quickly it has been embraced across the sector, highlighting both the demand for and value of this type of resource."

*- Erika Sagert, Director of Policy and Sector Capacity,
BC Non-Profit Housing Association*

Launch event

The map launched at a 90-minute webinar on June 30, 2026, with a live demonstration, a fireside discussion and audience Q&A before the link went public. 263 people registered and 164 attended, from the housing sector, all three levels of government and the public, across BC and other provinces.

Forty-six attendees completed a survey at the close of the event. Ninety-three per cent said the launch met or exceeded their expectations, and 98% found the objectives clearly stated. Asked whether the map would be a useful tool for them, 40 of 46 said yes. The one "no" was from an Ontario attendee, who added that they would use an equivalent for their province "for sure."

Asked which features excited them most, attendees pointed first to the depth and layering of the filters, then to having every level of government's land in one place, full provincial coverage, ease of use, the parcel report export, and DASH readiness. Two comments anticipated the case studies in this report: a municipal staffer who had done a similar mapping exercise locally and found it "surprisingly laborious," and a volunteer supporting unhoused people who planned to use the map to identify sites for social housing and interim sanctioned encampments - and to look for them in wealthier neighbourhoods. One attendee expected the map to be "particularly valuable to advocates for holding governments accountable for making best use of their land assets." The event recording has been viewed 53 times since publication; 121 people signed up for map feature updates.

Coverage

The launch was covered by regional and national outlets and by the sector. Coverage consistently led with the headline figures - more than 50,000 parcels and up to 273,000 potential homes in Metro Vancouver alone - and with our framing that the tool makes visible opportunity that is often overlooked.

Outlet	Date
Business in Vancouver	December 17, 2025
Union of BC Municipalities	June 24, 2026
UBC News; Peter A. Allard School of Law	June 30, 2026
phys.org	July 1, 2026
Vancouver Sun / Times Colonist (Alec Lazenby)	July 3, 2026
People First Radio (Vancouver Island Mental Health Society)	July 27, 2026

Sector engagement

The launch webinar drew an audience from the housing sector, all levels of government and the public, with attendees from across BC and other provinces. HART presented a prototype at Housing Central in November 2025, CHRA Congress in April 2026, a CMHC ECoH webinar in April 2026, and the completed map at the UBCM Convention in September 2026. We are slated to present the complete map at Housing Central in November 2026.

Conclusion and next steps

The BC Public Lands Map does one thing that nothing else in Canada does: it puts every level of government's land in one frame, scored consistently, for anyone to use. Ten weeks in, early users confirm the design premise, that the barrier to housing on public land was never the absence of land but the absence of a shared, searchable picture of it, and they are already using the map in ways HART did not anticipate.

"There is no single solution to the housing affordability challenges facing Metro Vancouver. Progress will require a wide range of actions and tools working together. By improving access to information about publicly owned lands, the BCPLM helps communities and housing providers identify potential opportunities for affordable housing and supports more informed discussions about how public assets can contribute to housing objectives."

– Senior housing leader at a regional government

The same users are clear about what would make the map more useful, and their list aligns with HART's own: infrastructure capacity above all; institutional and civil-society land for communities where government land is scarce; and the municipal policy context that determines whether a good parcel becomes a good project. HART's next research project will examine why well-located vacant public land in Metro Vancouver is not being activated, which will feed directly back into the map.

"The Province looks forward to continued engagement with the project team"

- Assistant Deputy Minister John Thomson, Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs,
Province of British Columbia

HART has also built the BCPLM to be replicated. The pipeline is scripted and most source layers exist nationally. The constraint elsewhere is data access, not method. Where a province or territory can assemble a parcel-level inventory of public ownership and assessment, the BCPLM shows what can be built on it, and the case studies here show who will use it.

HART thanks CMHC for supporting this work through the Demonstrations Initiative, and our interviewees for their candour.



