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Vancouver Housing Update E-Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM VANCOUVER'S COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Guest Editorial: Liz Evans, PHS Community Services Society



It's very exciting to see SRO hotels in the Downtown Eastside community being purchased by BC Housing. This secures homes for people who may have lived in them for years: rescuing them from the threat of development, high rents, poor maintenance, and ensuring that a dwindling stock of affordable housing is kept available for people in the community. SROs aren't ideal, but they're better than nothing as we wait for purpose-built homes for the people we care about.

In 1991, I worked the front desk of the first non-profit-managed hotel in the DTES – the Portland Hotel. This profoundly altered my life. What I now see is not a ghetto in need of saving, but rather a vibrant community – honest, up-front, full of humanity, humour, tenderness, and compassion – despite the pain, poverty and suffering. For the past 18 years, the PHS has attempted to prioritize the needs of people who have been highly marginalized.

With this in mind, it is exciting to welcome the new direction BC Housing has taken in making a priority of dedicating units in the newly purchased hotels for the homeless. Many of the people living on the street face barriers to existing shelters or housing. The only way to ensure these individuals come inside is to intentionally and explicitly dedicate funds and programs to this task. It requires this kind of direction to demand the appropriate programs get created.

While there is still much work to do in securing access to the types of addiction, health, and mental health supports needed by so many among the homeless population, the PHS is excited about giving the opportunity to people who would otherwise be sleeping in alcoves, stairwells, parkades and shop fronts humane housing as a first step.

The pain in our community does not disappear because of a clean housing unit, but without one, it is impossible. We are proud to be part of the solution, in partnership with so many others attempting to create honorable homes for those who have so often been left behind.

Sincerely,
Liz Evans, Executive Director
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SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

Government SROs focus on providing homes to the hard to house

In response to the success of the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shelters, BC Housing is moving to house people who are street and sheltered homeless by ensuring all provincially-owned SRO units that open in the next six months will be made available to hard-to-house individuals. Hard-to-house tenants in each building will receive a mix of supports and services depending on their needs and the size of the building. Tenants currently living in the SROs that are partially renovated will have the option to stay where they are or be assisted to find other accommodation, as they choose.

"Our focus needs to be on helping the people with the greatest needs and who have the most challenges in finding housing," said BC Housing's Margaret McNeil, Vice President, Operations. "All the SROs will have onsite staff. Support services staff will link tenants with social services as well as provide support and access to services. As part of the Immediate Homelessness Intervention Project, BC Housing and the non-profit operators will work with many partners such as Vancouver Coastal Health to ensure that coordinated resources are available to high-need tenants."

When the hotels were first purchased two years ago, the intent was to provide housing for a variety of tenant needs. However, with the immediate needs identified through the HEAT initiative to address homelessness in the streets, previous plans to have the SRO hotels serve targeted homeless-at-risk populations have been modified to allow the priority to be on housing those who are street entrenched. The targeted program will be revisited when supportive housing developments at the 14 sites owned by the City of Vancouver start to come on-line, and more housing units become available to support a variety of types of tenant groups.

"Finding homes for those in the community who are 'hard to house' is a priority for the PHS," said Mark Townsend, Executive Director, PHS Community Services Society. "These folks are on the streets, sleeping in business doorways and in parks because they face barriers to existing housing. We're glad to see BC Housing is placing a priority on putting this group into the vacant SRO hotels, as they are in desperate need of having a roof over their heads and a place to call home."

The Supportive Housing Registration (SHR) service, which manages the process for tenants to be placed in the SRO units, has streamlined its intake process and staff are working with the building's non-profit operators to sort out the most efficient and effective method of ensuring the right people get into the right buildings with the right support services. SHR has placed 146 people in homes since the service began operating in late 2008. So far, over 800 people have been referred to SHR; those who are not hard-to-house are being referred to The Housing Registry.

Renovations at some of the SROs have been accelerated in order to have them ready for occupancy sooner. At other sites, the scope of renovations has been scaled back in order to make units available sooner. BC Housing plans to complete these renovations at a later date. All the buildings will have the necessary health and life safety upgrades in place before occupancy. The goal is to provide homes for 500 hard-to-house people by the end of October.

BC Housing appoints Michael Anhorn to lead key initiatives

A familiar and respected face with non-profit operators on the Downtown Eastside, Michael Anhorn is now leading four key initiatives intended to break the cycle of homelessness. Michael is responsible for the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shelters, Supportive Housing Registration (SHR), the Immediate Homelessness Intervention Project (IHIP) in Vancouver, and BC Housing's role with the Downtown Community Court. Michael's title is Manager, Supportive Housing, Vancouver Coastal Region.



This new role complements the work of Catherine Talbott, who will continue to focus on transfers and tenant relocations for buildings undergoing renovation, negotiating operating agreements with providers, and providing property management oversight to the SROs and the emergency shelters.

"IHIP is intended to coordinate services the provincial government offers to homeless people so that they work in a more integrated fashion," said Michael. "This includes income assistance, the community court, health services, and housing. These services need to work hand-in-hand with SHR to ensure the coordinated placement of people in the provincially-owned SROs. Our priority is to house 500 street-entrenched homeless people before the end of October. We expect to find many of these people in the HEAT shelters, which is why our SHR staff work closely with the HEAT staff."

At the same time, it is vital that Michael build good relationships with housing and support providers operating in the Downtown Eastside as well as build awareness of the SHR service with referral organizations.

"I'm not aware of any jurisdiction in North America that has preserved housing for homeless people on this large a scale," added Michael. "It's exciting and challenging, especially given the current economic realities which mean we do not have the SHR staffing levels that we'd originally intended. We'll get it right; but there needs to be a lot of learning along the way."

Michael and the rest of the SHR staff work out of the Marble Arch Hotel at 520 Richards Street as part of the Vancouver Coastal Region staff.

Additional housing for the homeless

In recent months the provincial government has made two significant announcements regarding additional housing in Vancouver for people who are homeless. The St. Helen's Hotel was the venue for the January 30th announcement that the Province has acquired six more SROs (341 units) in the Downtown Eastside: Cordova Residence; Dominion Hotel; Hazelwood Hotel; Backpackers Hotel; London Hotel; and 566 Powell Street. Four of the SRO hotels were purchased; two have been leased with five-year renewable terms.

On March 17, Premier Gordon Campbell announced infrastructure spending in B.C., including \$172 million to construct six of the City of Vancouver supportive housing sites that have already been through the development approvals process. The premier made the announcement from a venue overlooking the site of 1338 Seymour Street where More Than A Roof Housing Society will manage 105 units with priority given to those living in emergency shelters and SRO hotels. Construction will start on the first site in May, and work on the other sites will get underway through the summer and fall. The other sites are 1005 Station Street (80 units; PHS Community Services Society), 525 Abbott Street (108 units; Atira Women's Resources Society), 188 East 1st Avenue (129 units; Lookout Emergency Aid Society), 3212 Dunbar Street (51 units; Coast Foundation), and 339 West Pender Street (96 units; Coast Foundation).

The six recently acquired SROs in Vancouver:



566 Powell Street



Backpackers Hotel



Cordova Residence



Dominion Hotel



Hazelwood Hotel



London Hotel

Renderings for three of the six City of Vancouver sites that will break ground in the coming months:



1338 Seymour Street



339 Pender Street



3212 Dunbar Street

Police see reason for hope at government-owned SROs

There are several SROs on the Downtown Eastside the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) views as huge drains on emergency resources. The Backpackers Hotel was one of the most notorious. Police were called to the site hundreds of times a year.

"The amount of drug dealing was horrific; conditions there were absolutely perfect for that, assaults, and room takeovers," said Superintendent Warren Lemcke, North Command, VPD. "We're pretty confident that, with government ownership and non-profit management, calls to us will decrease and we'll be able to attend to other duties."

Lemcke has noticed an increase in cooperation between the police and the non-profit housing providers since the government began buying SROs in the neighbourhood. "We're going to build on that growing cooperation; these things take time. Relations with some of the operators have been strained at times for various reasons. We're really trying to repair that and improve the quality of life for the people who live here."

Through the Partners in Action program launched last year, the VPD hopes to decrease crime and disorder and especially the victimization of marginalized people who often live in SROs.

Lemcke points to the many services and programs coming on line in the Downtown Eastside as reasons to be optimistic. "Everything happening here shows steps are being taken to move in the right direction. This is not about 2010. There will be a 2011 and a 2012. We need to do something for these people before, during and after the Olympics."

Click [here](#) to read a Vancouver Courier article about the government-owned SROs and the VPD's reaction to their management by non-profit operators.

Rainier Hotel opens its doors to tenants

There was a festive feeling in the air February 4 at the official reopening of the Rainier Hotel. The building's 21 self-contained units on the third floor are for women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and are managed by the PHS Community Services Society (PHS). The second floor will be a 20-unit treatment centre for women in recovery operated by Vancouver Coastal Health in partnership with PHS.

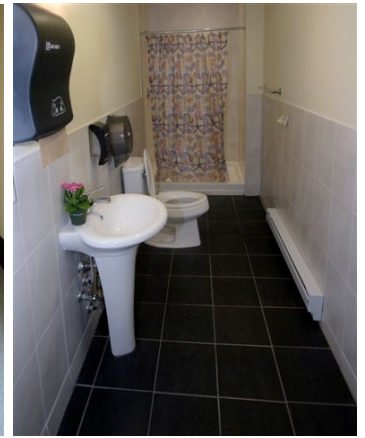
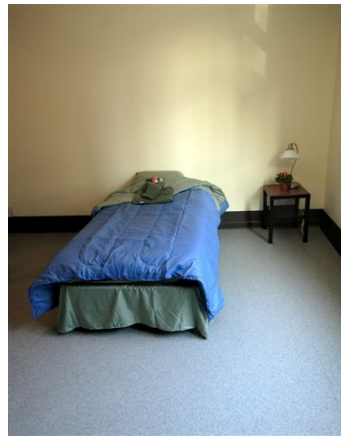
"We're hoping to see a lot of integration of the support services available between the second and third floors," said Mark Townsend, Executive Director, PHS.

The Rainier was built in the 1920s and was vacant



The lounge at the Rainier receives a blessing.

when the provincial government purchased it a year ago. Today, the rooms are nicely painted and the shared facilities (a lounge and a shared kitchen) look terrific.



Photos: A room at the Rainier (left) and a shared washroom.

Rainier tenant grateful for secure housing

For Gail*, a room at the Rainier is a step in the right direction. She is one of 18 women who came to live at the Rainier last November. Rooms come complete with a bed, small fridge, a microwave, a sink, cupboards and a countertop, and a work table. "I'm able to make soup and sandwiches and simple meals right now," said Gail. "Being pretty independent most of my years, I am looking forward to one day having a one-bedroom home. But, for the interim, this is quite comfy."

Being homeless came as a shock to Gail. She has a long employment history but her last three employers paid little more than minimum wage. When each ran into financial difficulties, Gail faced layoffs, without savings to buffer. The stresses over the past years took their toll; Gail did not recognize the signs of her deteriorating health and in mid-January she suffered a heart attack.

Gail is holding fast in her zest for life and is now optimistically in pursuit of new endeavours. This includes passing her GED (grade 12) in early March. She anticipates further college courses in the coming months.

Living at the Rainier, Gail knows people are looking out for her. "The PHS staff have been wonderful. We talk regularly, but they don't infringe on my privacy. I know they're there if I need them."

**Last name withheld to protect privacy.*

New Residential Tenancy Branch office

A Residential Tenancy Branch office is now open at the Marble Arch Hotel. RTB staff are available five days a week for half a day to provide tenants and landlords with residential tenancy information.

Breaking the cycle of homelessness site

BC Housing has launched a micro-website that focuses specifically on homelessness programs it funds. The site includes quick facts and statistics, printable fact sheets about various programs, and stories of hope. You can find the site at www.bchousing.org/breakingthecycle.



Dominion Hotel gets a makeover

One of the most recent SROs to be purchased by the provincial government, the Dominion Hotel requires only minor renovations to its electrical and mechanical systems as well as fire and life safety upgrades. The hotel's interior also needed a coat of paint and BC Housing staff took on this challenge as part of a team-building event. Working in teams, staff painted the rooms and hallways and also put together countertops and sink units to be installed in every unit.

"The day was meant to give our staff insight into the SROs – what the living conditions are like and the improvements being made," said BC Housing's James Weldon, who is in charge of renovations at the government-owned hotels. "Most of our staff never have an opportunity to see inside these buildings, so this was very informative for them. It gave them a better picture of the challenges and opportunities that come with revitalizing this housing stock."



BC Housing staff with paint brushes in hand at the Dominion Hotel.

Tentative SRO construction schedule as of March 31, 2009

Hotel	Units ¹	Tenancy status	Non-Profit Operator	Renovation Status	Anticipated Completion Date
566 Powell St.	12	Fully tenanted	Atira Property Management ²	5-year lease; no renos required	COMPLETE
Arco Hotel	64	Tenanted	Atira Property Management ²	Pre-renovation	TBD
Backpackers Hotel	40	Empty	PHS Community Services Society	UNDERWAY	May 2009
Carl Rooms	44	Empty	Atira Property Management with support services provided by PHS Community Services Society	UNDERWAY	April 2009
College Place Hotel (New West)	40	Empty	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	UNDERWAY	September 2009 (Plus an additional 15 shelter beds)
Cordova Residence	34	Tenanted	Atira Property Management ²	Pre-renovation	TBD
Dominion Hotel	63	Empty	Atira Property Management ²	UNDERWAY	April 2009
Drake Hotel ³	26	Fully tenanted	Atira Property Management ²	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Gastown Hotel	93	Tenanted	Atira Property Management ²	Pre-renovation	TBD
Hazelwood Hotel	112	Fully tenanted	Atira Property Management with support services provided by MPA Society	UNDERWAY	TBD
London Hotel	72	Tenanted	Atira Property Management ²	5-year lease	TBD
Marble Arch Hotel	138	Phased renovation /partially occupied	Atira Property Management with support services provided by PHS Community Services Society	UNDERWAY	Ph. 1: COMPLETE Ph. 2: July 2009 Ph. 3 & 4: TBD
Marr Hotel	29	Fully tenanted	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE ⁵ Being used for tenant relocations
Orange Hall	27	Phased renovation /partially occupied	S.U.C.C.E.S.S. ⁴	UNDERWAY	May 2009
Orwell Hotel	55	Phased renovation /partially occupied	Vancouver Native Housing Society	UNDERWAY	October 2009
Park Hotel	50	Phased renovation /partially	City Centre Care Society ⁴	UNDERWAY	June 2009

		occupied			
Pender Hotel	40	Empty	Vancouver Native Housing Society	Pre-renovation	TBD
Rainier Hotel	41	Tenanted	PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE ⁵
The Rice Block	42	Fully tenanted	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE ⁵
Roosevelt Hotel	42	Tenanted	PHS Community Services Society	April 2009	June 2009
Savoy Hotel	25	Empty	Atira Property Management with support services provided by MPA Society	UNDERWAY	July 2009
Shaldon Hotel	54	Tenanted	RainCity Housing and Support Society	Pre-renovation	TBD
St. Helen's Hotel	86	Phased renovation /partially occupied	Coast Foundation Society ⁴	UNDERWAY	October 2009
Tamura House	110	Tenanted	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	Pre-renovation	TBD
Walton Hotel	48	Empty	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	UNDERWAY	June 2009

¹ Unit numbers are best estimates of how many units there will be in each building post-renovations.

² Atira Property Management is providing supports as well as property management at this site.

³ This City-owned building is being used for tenant relocations. It will be replaced with a new building managed by RainCity Housing and Support Society.

⁴ Atira Property Management is managing this building until renovations are complete, at which time the non-profit operator will take over management.

⁵ Residential renovations are complete. Commercial and/or amenity space renovations are still underway.

EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM

Two more Downtown Eastside shelters go 24/7

The Beacon and Haven shelters are the latest in permanent year-round shelters to convert to 24 hours per day/seven days per week operations. Staying open during the daytime makes it easier for homeless people to move from shelters into supportive housing by ensuring people are there to help them. The Beacon and Haven, both of which are operated by The Salvation Army-Vancouver Harbour Light, were renovated recently and provide 100 shelter beds and a safe place for homeless men to come for a warm meal and much needed help.

"About a year ago, the Beacon was only open eight hours a night and consisted of mats on the floor," said Wayne Oster, executive director of Vancouver Harbour Light. "The Province stepped in and funded our renovations to provide more appropriate accommodations and increased staff support so that our clients can focus on getting the support they need to stabilize their lives. It has been a great success. Our clients are achieving more in terms of gaining access to treatment and housing than we ever thought possible."

Renovations to the Beacon and Haven included creating privacy partitions in sleeping areas, new bed bug resistance flooring and improved lighting. In addition, washrooms, security features, kitchens and common areas were upgraded and furnished.



Billy Smith, a former shelter client, now works at Vancouver Harbour Light.

HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

Homeless Outreach Program working with Downtown Community Court

Three days a week RainCity Housing homeless outreach worker Jesse Grubb meets with clients who have gone through the Downtown Community Court system and who need housing. He meets with BC Housing's community court liaison, Willie Tang, to review the current client list... to find out what the people's stories are, what type of housing they are looking for, and what they are suitable for. The clients who Jesse meets with need support in finding places to live.

The court has an agreement with The Salvation Army Belkin House to take in a number of clients on a temporary basis. Typically, clients can stay for 30 days; however, this can be extended on an as-needed basis provided the client is actively looking for housing. This is where most of the people Jesse works with first stay and where he meets them initially.

"The people who I work with generally need help in finding permanent housing and in filling out application forms," said Jesse. "It's difficult to find them a place to live – there are no extra resources for court clients and having a record is another obstacle especially if they have a history of violence. They often also have mental health issues."

The majority of Jesse's clients are homeless, but most have been living in shelters rather than on the street. Finding permanent housing is not a condition of their probation, so Jesse finds that some are not motivated to continue working with him once they realize there is no quick or ideal solution. Jesse fills out Supportive Housing Registration applications for them, but the demand for supportive housing in the Downtown Eastside exceeds the supply and his clients often end up in private SROs while they wait for more suitable accommodation.

"The private SROs are not ideal and the clients are not especially happy if we find them a home in one. But, you take what you can get and hope that it's a short-term solution."

Part of the Downtown Community Court's mandate is to establish community connections for its clients. Each client has a case worker to help them, so Jesse's role focuses mostly on housing as well as integrating the client with other services within their community. "This role is important because it helps people negotiate the processes they otherwise would not be capable of doing. Most of them wouldn't know where to begin to look for supportive housing or how to fill out the applications."

WHO'S WHO

Vancouver's Community Non-Profit Partners

Seventeen of the city's most experienced and respected non-profit groups work to deliver housing, shelter and support services to those in greatest need. These community partners operate the SROs, deliver the Homeless Outreach Program, and/or provide emergency shelter in Vancouver. This chart outlines the work that the group does with BC Housing and is not a complete list of the organizations' activities.

Group	Contact information	Participation
Atira Women's Resource Society and Atira Property Management	www.atira.bc.ca 604-331-1407	SRO Operator (566 Powell Street; Arco Hotel; Carl Rooms; Cordova Residence; Dominion Hotel; Drake Hotel; Gastown Hotel; Hazelwood Hotel; London Hotel; Marble Arch Hotel; Marr Hotel; Rice Block; Savoy Hotel); Emergency Shelter Program (Bridge Women's Emergency Shelter)
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Vancouver	www.rcav.org 604-443-3219	Emergency Shelter Program (Catholic Charities)
City Centre Care Society	www.cccares.org 604-639-8248	SRO Operator (Park Hotel)
Coast Foundation Society	www.coastmentalhealth.com 604-872-3502	SRO Operator (St. Helen's Hotel); Homeless Outreach Program (Yaletown)
Collingwood Neighbourhood House Society	www.cnh.bc.ca 604-435-0323	Homeless Outreach Program (Collingwood/Renfrew)
Covenant House Vancouver	www.covenanthousebc.org 604-638-4438	Emergency Shelter Program (Covenant House; Rights of Passage Shelter)

Kettle Friendship Society	www.thekettle.ca	Homeless Outreach Program (Grandview)
Lookout Emergency Aid Society	www.lookoutsociety.bc.ca 604-255-0340	SRO Operator (Tamura House; Walton Hotel; College Place Hotel); Emergency Shelter Program (Yukon Shelter; Lookout Downtown Shelter)
MPA Society	www.mpa-society.org 604-482-3700	SRO Support Services (Savoy Hotel; Hazelwood Hotel); Homeless Outreach Program (Kitsilano)
PHS Community Services Society	604-683-0073	SRO Operator (Roosevelt Hotel; Rainier Hotel; Backpackers Hotel); SRO Support Services (Marble Arch Hotel; Carl Rooms)
RainCity Housing and Support Society	www.raincityhousing.org 604-662-7023	SRO Operator (Shaldon Hotel); Emergency Shelter Program (Triage Shelter); Homeless Outreach Program (DTES)
St. James Community Services Society	www.sjcss.com 604-606-0300	Emergency Shelter Program (St. Elizabeth's Home; Powell Place Emergency Shelter)
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.	www.successbc.ca 604-684-1628	SRO Operator (Orange Hall)
The Governing Council of the Salvation Army in Canada	www.salvationarmy.org 604-299-3908	Emergency Shelter Program (Belkin House; The Haven; The Beacon; Crosswalk)
Vancouver Native Housing Society	www.vnhs.ca 604-320-3312	SRO Operator (Orwell Hotel; Pender Hotel)
Vancouver Recovery Club	www.thevrc.ca 604-708-9955	Homeless Outreach Program (Mt. Pleasant)
The Vi Fineday Family Shelter Society	604-736-2423	Emergency Shelter Program (Vi Fineday Family Shelter)

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