



Vancouver Housing Update E-Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM VANCOUVER'S COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

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Guest Editorial: Kim Stacey, Vancouver Native Housing Society



Home is not where you live but where they understand you. Cristion Morgenstern

On a cold, snowy day in mid-December residents stood and talked among themselves at the entrance to the Orwell Hotel. In the lobby (barely large enough to "swing the hotel cat" around), residents and staff talked about the next week's Christmas lunch and gift giving.

A typical day you may think, except for the fact that 25 residents moved earlier that day into

the Marr Hotel to allow for the start of an extensive renovation and rehabilitation program. A year from now, these renovations will provide accommodation and services many of us take for granted such as on-site laundry, cooking facilities and a private, safe and secure space to call home.

A year ago, Vancouver Native Housing Society took over the management of the Orwell Hotel. I remember vividly meeting the desk and management staff and thinking how challenging it would be to create an environment of caring, respect and trust. Through a gradual learning process involving residents, staff and the agency, we have evolved into a team that managed to successfully coordinate and organize the move of 25 long-term residents in six hours with 10 days notice and without major problems. Wow, how far we have progressed!

When renovations are complete, the Orwell will have upgraded rooms, a new roof and a ground floor commercial space that will include a community craft space and a café and catering business managed and staffed by residents and the local community. We will still have a lobby barely large enough to swing the hotel cat in, but it will be a warm and welcoming space.

It is my privilege to know and work with the Orwell's residents and staff and it is a wonderful opportunity for Vancouver Native Housing Society to manage this project as well as be a housing operator of one of the 14 City-owned sites. Collaboration between BC Housing and the housing providers is vital to the success of these initiatives. Together we may not solve homelessness, but we can provide affordable, respectful, safe, secure and supportive housing opportunities for many of our city's vulnerable citizens.

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SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

Homelessness Emergency Action Team

Mayor Gregor Robertson's Homelessness Emergency Action Team (HEAT) is partway through its 90-day mandate to provide immediate actions that the City of Vancouver can take to help people off the street and into a safe environment. Janice Abbott, Executive Director of Atira Women's Resource Society, was appointed to the team and brings the voice of non-profit operators to the table. Janice has experience in providing emergency, short and long-term housing to hard-to-house people.

"I speak with colleagues at other non-profits regularly in an effort to ensure I speak for all," said Janice. "I feel great about the temporary shelters that opened shortly after HEAT's creation. They've operated above capacity since opening and especially during those extremely difficult holiday weeks. The operators are doing an amazing job in difficult circumstances and have even found permanent housing for some of their guests."

Renovations update

Renovation work is moving ahead at many of the government-owned SROs.

At the Marble Arch, a phased approach is being taken with the renovations so that tenants will not have to be relocated. Phase 1, which is nearing completion, is the creation of office space on part of the main floor. These offices will be used by the Supportive Housing Registration Service and the Residential Tenancy Office. In Phase 2, the rest of the lower floor will be demolished to create a staging area for the renovations. The south façade will be replaced, the units along the southern wall will be renovated, and new washrooms will be added. The hotel's roof will be replaced between Phase 2 and 3. During Phase 3, repairs will be made to the north façade and the units along its face will be renovated. In the final phase, the few remaining units along the west wall will be renovated, the front façade refurbished, and the ground floor foyer and reception area completed.

Renovations to improve living conditions at the Gastown Hotel have also been happening. Alarms, fire doors, fire escapes, and sprinklers have been upgraded and 38 rooms renovated to accommodate tenants. Minor electrical upgrades were made to allow fridges in units, and hazardous materials remediation was undertaken in order to allow for boiler and mechanical repair work. Pest control has also made a huge difference to problems in this regard.

Goodnight, sleep tight

The government-owned SROS are now using diatomaceous earth in efforts to control bedbug infestations. Diatomaceous earth is a soft rock that crumbles easily into a fine powder. The substance is being placed into building wall cavities. When bedbugs crawl across it, they pick up traces of the powder. It absorbs liquids from the host's exoskeleton, causing the insect to dehydrate and die. At this stage, BC Housing is monitoring the effectiveness of diatomaceous earth and will provide regular updates on its findings.

Upgrades mean greater tenant comfort

The renovations being made to the SROs represent major upgrades to the buildings. Where possible, the renovations are energy efficient: high-performance windows, low-energy lighting systems, and efficient ventilation and heating systems are being installed; exterior walls and roofs are being insulated. Mould, asbestos, lead paint, PCBs, and other recognized hazardous materials are being eradicated from the buildings and moisture resistant drywall which inhibits mould is being added to all sites where finishes are being replaced. With the removal of hazardous materials, the building envelope repair, and the new ventilation systems, the buildings will offer a greatly improved environment for tenants.



Tentative SRO construction schedule as of mid-January 2009

Hotel	Current SRO Units	Non-Profit Operator	Anticipated Pre-construction Period	Anticipated Renovation Start	Anticipated Renovation Completion
St. Helen's Hotel	86	Coast Foundation Society ¹	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	November 2009
Walton Hotel	48	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	June 2009
Orange Hall	27	S.U.C.C.E.S.S. ¹	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	March 2009
Carl Rooms	44	Union Gospel (Heatley) Housing Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	April 2009 ³
Molson's Bank Building/ Roosevelt Hotel	42	PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETED	February 2009	January 2010
Park Hotel	50	City Centre Care Society ¹	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	May 2009
Orwell Hotel	55	Vancouver Native Housing Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	December 2009
Savoy Hotel	25	MPA Society ¹	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	July 2009
The Rice Block	42	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	March 2009 ⁴
Gastown Hotel	93	TBD ¹	TBD ²	TBD	TBD
Shaldon Hotel	54	RainCity Housing and Support Society	TBD ²	TBD	TBD
Arco Hotel	64	TBD ¹	TBD ²	TBD	TBD
Pender Hotel	40	Vancouver Native Housing Society	TBD	TBD	TBD
Marr Hotel	29	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETED	COMPLETED	COMPLETED Being used for tenant relocations
Rainier Hotel	41	PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	June 2009
Tamura House	110	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	TBD ²	TBD	TBD
College Place Hotel	40	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	September 2009 (Plus an additional 15 shelter beds)
Marble Arch	138	City Centre Care Society ¹	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	Ph. 1: Jan. 2009 Ph. 2: July 2009 Ph. 3: Jan. 2010 Ph. 4: TBD
Drake Hotel	24	Atira Property Management	This City-owned building is being used for tenant relocations during the SRO renovation process and will then be replaced with a new building providing supportive housing that will be managed by RainCity Housing and Support Society.		

¹ Atira Property Management is managing this building until renovations are complete, at which time the non-profit operator will take over management.

² Immediate fire and safety upgrades and minor improvements have been made to this SRO. Long-term renovations that are more substantial are in the planning stages.

³ Occupancy expected in late March, with exterior work completed in April 2009.

⁴ Residential areas are complete. Renovations are in progress to create amenity and retail space expected to be complete in March 2009.

Unique alarm system developed for SROs New system enhances tenant safety

The in-suite smoke alarms in the SROs were often being damaged and vandalized in an attempt by tenants to circumvent or silence alarms if they were smoking in their rooms. These were typically stand-alone alarms and without frequent room checks there was no way to know if they were functioning properly or even still installed. As a consequence, tenants and buildings were placed in potentially hazardous situations.

The challenge was to create a system that improved fire and safety measures in the buildings and that caused fewer nuisance alarms for the Vancouver Fire Department (VFD). Working with CFT Engineering, BC Housing came up with a unique solution. Combination smoke and heat detector units have been installed in each room. If

a tenant smokes in their room, a trouble signal is now sent to the trained building manager/on-site supervisor (instead of an audible alarm initiating). The building manager immediately does an inspection to determine the cause of the alarm. Similarly, if a tenant now disengages their unit because they want to smoke, a trouble signal is triggered which staff investigate. These new units are also tamper resistant, making them difficult to remove.

Because each alarm also includes a heat detector, an alarm is sent immediately to the VFD if temperatures in rooms rise quickly. All the government-owned SROs now also have sprinkler systems which would activate in the event of a fire.

Atira tenant liaisons

Atira Property Management is looking after several of the government-owned SROs until renovations are complete. Two tenant liaison workers are assisting residents with their relocation and moving needs at these sites. Maddy Carlington works with tenants at the St. Helen's, Marble Arch and Park Hotel, while Jessica Numminen takes care of the immediate needs of tenants at the Gastown, Marr, Drake, London and Arco hotels.



"This job is all about connecting with people on a very real level," said Maddy (pictured at far left). "I treat the tenants with respect and they appreciate that." Maddy has been a frontline support worker with Atira Women's Resource Society for three years.

Jessica (left) has first-hand experience with being homeless and is able to empathize with tenants. Her degree focused on health, housing and community development. She has been a frontline worker with Atira Women's Resource Society for eight months.

Tenant relocations during renovations

Tenants who live at the St. Helen's Hotel are moving within their building during renovations. During the first phase, tenants who lived on the east side of the building have moved to the west side. Once the renovations on the east side are complete, tenants will move into the renovated east side suites and renovations on the west side of the building will begin.



Some of the tenants from the Orwell Hotel have moved into the Marr Hotel so renovations can proceed at the former site. Once the first set of Orwell units is renovated, the tenants currently staying at the Marr will move back into their units. Then, the other Orwell tenants will move temporarily to the Marr so work on their units can be undertaken.

*Move-in day at the Marr Hotel for relocated Orwell tenants.
Photo: Michael Bednar.*

BC Hydro asked to complete some work at the Molson's Bank Building/Roosevelt Hotel prior to the start of renovations. Tenants will likely be relocated and renovations underway by late winter.

The tenants who opted to stay at the Park Hotel during renovations are coping well with the noise and disruptions. We are coming up to the completion of the first phase and expect to move the tenants internally soon from the upper floors to the renovated lower floors early in the new year.

Another SRO tenant makes transition to public housing

A little over a month after Timo* moved into Sunset Towers in the West End, the former St. Helen's tenant was busy volunteering at a special event at the public housing site. Volunteering isn't new to Timo; he's been helping out at a food bank for a couple of years now as well as at a community church.

"Volunteering gives me a focus and shows me that my life isn't so bad after all," he said. "It lets me give back and feel grateful for what I have."

These days Timo is feeling especially grateful for his new home. "I really like it. I feel safe and secure here. There are great facilities and some very kind people. It's on a beautiful tree-lined street, just steps from English Bay. I feel like I'm back in a world I want to live in and it's giving me a tremendous desire for recovery."

Sunset Towers is also close to the hospital where Timo goes regularly for check ups. He is a recovering addict who also has come through chemotherapy for malignant tumours that appeared all over his body. He has Hepatitis C and experiences anxiety and depression.

The cancer meant that Timo could no longer work as a technician in the film industry. Union disability payments failed to materialize in a timely manner and he was unable to pay his rent. After he was evicted, he lived in Belkin House for two months before landing at the St. Helen's Hotel where he lived for about a year and a half. It was a far cry from his Coal Harbour apartment and the lifestyle he had lead.



"The St. Helen's was loud and dirty. I had to be very guarded with my possessions and I often worried about my personal safety. I was beaten by another tenant so badly once I had to be hospitalized."

Living at Sunset Towers has given Timo a new lease on life. "I'm hoping to get well enough to support myself again. This is a great opportunity that I've been given and I see it as a stepping stone to an even better quality of life."

* Last name withheld to protect privacy.

Seasonal celebration at Orange Hall

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Multi-Level Care Society organized a Christmas party for its tenants at Orange Hall. Eighteen residents enjoyed a delicious meal and a great sense of community.



Downtown Community Court housing update

Willie Tang, a Health Services staff member with BC Housing, is now the housing liaison with the Downtown Community Court (DCC). Willie spends a half day every weekday at the court. Before he joined BC Housing, Willie was a case worker with Vancouver Coastal Health's Mental Health Housing Services' Community Transition team.

"It's exciting to be able to offer housing with supports to DCC clients and to assist them in integrating back into the community. With appropriate support in place, the goal is to reduce homelessness and the negative impact to the community from unlawful acts," said Willie.

Since the court's opening in September until early December, BC Housing placed seven DCC clients in SROs, one in public housing, and got two signed up for the Rental Supplement Program. An additional 25 spent less than 10 days in shelters, while eight more spent more than 10 days in shelters. Ten people were referred to shelters but did not show up. The 19 other people referred to housing opted instead to live with family or friends, enter a recovery house, refused shelter, or have moved away from the Downtown Eastside area.

Agreement to stimulate inner-city economic growth

The provincial government and Building Opportunities with Business Inner-city Society (BOB) have reached an agreement to foster economic growth and revitalization in Vancouver's inner-city through employment and procurement sourced from the inner-city for work on subsidized housing. The inner-city neighbourhoods include Chinatown, Strathcona, Oppenheimer, Victory Square, Gastown, Mount Pleasant and Downtown South. The goal of the agreement is to ensure local businesses and residents have real opportunities to participate in the social housing work that the Province is undertaking. The economic spin-offs from these inner-city developments will help small businesses in providing goods and services and employment opportunities for residents and their families, creating healthier neighbourhoods.

"One of our first goals is to identify the job opportunities and skills required by local employers and to recruit and train local residents for work in the many social housing renovation projects the Province has underway and planned for the next few years," said BOB CEO Shirley Chan. "BOB will also refer potential tenants for commercial space in BC Housing buildings."

BOB is the economic development agency for the Vancouver Agreement, an urban development initiative of the governments of Canada, British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver. It commits the partners to work together to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development.

Atira creates jobs for SRO tenants

Since the government purchased the SRO hotels, about 80 tenants have found work with Atira Property Management and Atira Women's Resource Society.

"Most of the work is as front desk clerks," said Janice Abbott, Atira's executive director. "Many tenants were already filling these roles, but were being paid \$3 an hour or less with no WCB coverage or benefits. Now, they are receiving a living wage and benefits including medical, extended health and vacation. We have also hired other tenants who had been out of the workforce for a long time. Many of these people have barriers to employment but, with support, are more than capable."



Aaron Boney attending a Watari SRO property management course. Photo: Michael Bednar.

Aaron Boney is one of the SRO tenants employed by Atira. He lives and works at the Gastown Hotel. "I started working on the front desk before BC Housing bought the building. The difference between then and now is huge. With Atira, my wage has almost doubled from \$8 an hour to \$14 plus I receive benefits. I'm so proud of

my dental card. Next month, I'll have been with Atira for a year and will have my first ever retirement plan. Atira is a company that stands behind me. They're helping me handle my addictions and some financial difficulties I had. I feel like I have a chance to get a grasp on my problems and that I have a future now."

The creation of these jobs has meant folks like Aaron no longer live in poverty. They are no longer stressed about affording rent, are able to buy food, and have access to medical care and benefits.

Temp workers on SRO renovations

EMBERS Staff Solutions, a socially responsible employment agency, has been liaising with construction companies doing the renovations at the government-owned SROs to find temporary work for its members. From mid-November to mid-December, several people worked as carpenters and general labourers at the Walton (Kindred Construction), Savoy (Scott Construction), Carl Rooms (Panther Constructors) and Orwell Hotel (Dubas Management and Construction).

EMBERS finds employment for people who have graduated from drug and alcohol programs. "All our workers have made decisions to change their lives and have supports in place to help them," said Executive Director Marcia Nozick. "We recruit workers from recovery centres and also take people who've been referred to us through BC Housing's Addiction Recovery Program. They work with our job coach/ rehabilitation counsellor who makes sure they are prepared for work. This person also keeps in close communication with the site supervisors to make sure no issues arise."

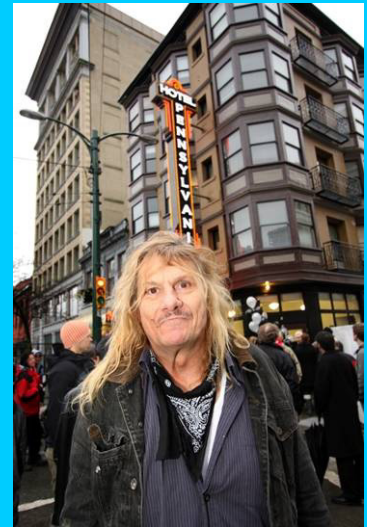
Jason Meredith has worked shifts at both the Carl Rooms and the Savoy. Now 37, Jason was an addict for 25 years, and was homeless for a couple of years. He is familiar with the Downtown Eastside and the issues that face people who live in the area. "With my background, it makes me feel good to see the effort going to making decent places to live there. I know I'm getting paid for the work I do, but it still feels a little like I'm giving back and working towards something I believe in."

Jason found the crews he worked with well organized as well as respectful of his circumstances.

"The people we place feel familiar with the Downtown Eastside," said Marcia. "They like working, gaining skills, and improving themselves. Our ultimate goal is to find them full-time work."

More supportive housing on Downtown Eastside

Over 130 new supportive housing units will become homes to people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness in the near future. The Pennsylvania Hotel, 412 Carrall, is operated by Portland Housing Society. It opened in early January. The Lux, 65 East Hastings, is operated by RainCity Housing and Support Society and is expected to open soon.



Tenant Earl Crow outside the Pennsylvania Hotel.

EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM

More temporary shelter beds for Vancouver

On December 16, Premier Gordon Campbell and Mayor Gregor Robertson announced a partnership between the Province, the City of Vancouver and the Streethome Foundation to provide \$1.5 million to create up to 200 temporary over-night shelter beds for homeless people living in Vancouver. Each partner is providing \$500,000 to fund the temporary overnight shelter beds until the end of March. These beds are in addition to Vancouver's 687 beds funded through the Emergency Shelter Program, and 498 beds provided through the Extreme Weather Response Program.

The temporary beds are in three locations across Vancouver. The shelters were able to open within days of the funding announcement and could not have come at a better time: the freezing temperatures and record amounts of snow in the ensuing weeks made the need for the beds critical. The shelters accepted shopping carts and/or pets in a bid to encourage people who are normally reticent of staying in shelters to come in out of the cold. All of the shelters have been operating over capacity.

Bedbug information for Emergency Shelters

Dealing with bedbug infestations in emergency shelters is a significant challenge. To assist shelters, BC Housing asked providers to share their strategies to prevent and respond to bedbug outbreaks.

BC Housing's Emergency Shelter Program has compiled a resource list of suppliers and basic tips to support shelters in reducing the incidence of bedbugs. To access the information sheet, visit www.bchousing.org/resources/Programs/ESP/ESP_Documents/Bed_Bug_Information_Sheet.pdf.

WHO'S WHO

Vancouver's Community Non-Profit Partners

Eighteen 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	www.atira.bc.ca 604-331-1407	SRO Operator (Rice Block; Marr Hotel; Sereena's Place; Bridge Housing for Women); 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 (Marble Arch Hotel; Park Hotel)
Coast Foundation Society	www.coastmentalhealth.com 604-872-3502	SRO Operator (Pender Street Supportive Housing; 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); Emergency Shelter Program (Yukon Shelter; Lookout Downtown Shelter)
MPA Society	www.mpa-society.org 604-482-3700	SRO Operator (Savoy Hotel); Homeless Outreach Program (Kitsilano)
PHS Community Services Society	604-683-0073	SRO Operator (Molson's Bank Building)
RainCity Housing and Support Society	www.raincityhousing.org 604-662-7023	SRO Operator (Drake Hotel; 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)
Union Gospel (Heatley) Housing Society	www.ugm.ca 604-253-3323	SRO Operator (Carl Rooms)
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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