

Vancouver Housing Update E-Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM VANCOUVER'S COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Guest Editorial, Darrell Burnham, Executive Director, Coast Mental Health



When I first heard the provincial government had purchased 10 SROs in Vancouver in April 2007, my initial opinion was that the primary benefit was protecting what I saw as poor, but necessary, housing from conversion. Since we've been awarded the St. Helen's Hotel on Granville last December, my eyes have been opened – very wide - and I now have quite a different perspective.

In addition to protecting the housing stock, the decision to purchase the SROs and have the non-profits take over the operations has achieved two other very important objectives:

- Improving the safety of the buildings - in the short run, the social environment; in the longer term, the structures;
- Providing skilled support for tenants, many of whom have lived a long time in the buildings.

I think achieving these two goals will go a long way to improving the health and living situation for the tenants. My original perspective on SROs still remains; it's still not my idea of ideal housing, but I recognize that for some people it's an essential starting place.

The path ahead is challenging. These are very old buildings, they are tenanted with vulnerable individuals and what we want to do is to upgrade the buildings with necessary safety improvements and insert a supported housing model without displacing tenants – not at all easy. I'm encouraged by the commitment of BC Housing staff and the diverse non-profit partners. Though we've worked with many of the players over the years, this is a different task with the groups unified by a common goal. There is stress throughout this process, but good will has dominated the meetings and discussions. I look forward to a time in about 18 months when we can look back on the decision to purchase the SROs and can truly identify the value for the tenants and the public.

Sincerely,
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SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

Updates on renovations

Most of the government-owned SRO hotels need substantial repairs. There are several steps that must be taken which means this can be a lengthy process. Nevertheless, significant progress is being made. The SROs are now being operated by reputable and experienced housing providers and have been upgraded to meet immediate safety standards. BC Housing meets regularly with Atira Property Management to ensure that any additional repairs that are needed are made and that the fire and safety systems work properly. Once renovations are complete, tenants will be living in newly renovated suites and benefiting from support services provided by the operators.

Rice Block

Renovations have begun at The Rice Block. Deck areas and wall assemblies are being repaired and mechanical and electrical deficiencies addressed. The fire escape will be thoroughly upgraded to make it safe and serviceable. Renovations to the building, which is half empty, are being done by relocating tenants within the building, so no one has to move out.

"We're looking forward to being fully occupied and offering support services to all 43 tenants by October 1," said Atira's Executive Director, Janice Abbott.

Orange Hall

Renovations at Orange Hall are expected to be done relatively quickly. Orange Hall is located next door to the Walton Hotel, which requires major repairs. The same construction company, Kindred Construction, is renovating both buildings.

Tamura House

Upgrades were done to this SRO, purchased this March, to bring 27 units from uninhabitable to habitable in just two weeks. Suites were painted and patched, and repairs were done to make sure the plumbing and fire and smoke alarms work. Tenants from Walton Hotel are moving into Tamura House while the former building undergoes major renovations.

Shaldon Hotel

Substantial renovations were carried out at the Shaldon in March to make it livable. New vinyl flooring that is much easier to keep clean and is more hygienic was installed. All the rooms and corridors were painted and improvements were made to the bathrooms. Mechanical, electrical and construction evaluations still need to be done at this building to develop the full scope of work that will be necessary to upgrade it.

Commercial retail space

Many of the government-owned SROs include commercial retail units, many of which are rundown and unusable. With the SRO renovations, this space will also be upgraded and has the potential to become an important source of revenue for the non-profit operators.



The Rice Block.



The Shaldon Hotel.

Tentative construction schedule

Please note: Renovating older hotels is a challenge at the best of times. During this process, the top priority is the health and safety of the tenants. Given the scope and numbers of buildings involved, the following construction schedule is subject to change as these renovations progress. Any changes to the construction schedule will be posted in a timely manner at www.vancouverhousingupdate.ca.

Hotel	Units	Non-Profit Operator	Anticipated Pre-construction Period	Anticipated Renovation Start	Anticipated Renovation Completion
Marble Arch	145	City Centre Care Society*	March to June 2008	TBD	TBD
St. Helen's Hotel	98	Coast Foundation Society*	March to June 2008	July 2008	TBD
Walton Hotel	51	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	COMPLETED	June 2008	June 2009
Orange Hall	27	S.U.C.C.E.S.S.*	June to July 2008	September 2008	December 2008
Carl Rooms	47	Union Gospel (Heatley) Housing Society	COMPLETED	July 2008	March 2009
Molson's Bank Building	45	PHS Community Services Society	April to July 2008	August 2008	August 2009
Park Hotel	56	City Centre Care Society*	COMPLETED	July 2008	TBD
Orwell Hotel	55	Vancouver Native Housing Society	April to July 2008	July 2008	January 2009
Savoy Hotel	28	MPA Society*	March to June 2008	July 2008	March 2009
The Rice Block	43	Atira Women's Resource Society*	COMPLETED	June 2008	October 2008
Gastown Hotel	97	TBD*	TBD	TBD	TBD
Shaldon Hotel	55	RainCity Housing and Support Society*	TBD	TBD	TBD
Arco Hotel	63	TBD*	TBD	TBD	TBD
Pender Hotel	40	Vancouver Native Housing Society	TBD	TBD	TBD
Marr Hotel	29	Atira Women's Resource Society	TBD	TBD	TBD
Rainier Hotel	46	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Tamura House	110	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	TBD	TBD	TBD
Drake Hotel	24	RainCity Housing and Support Society	This city-owned building will be upgraded and used for tenant relocations during the SRO renovation process and will then be replaced with a new building providing supportive housing.		
* Atira Property Management is managing this building until renovations are complete, at which time the non-profit operator will take over management.					

Major renovations begin soon at the Walton Hotel

Major renovations at the Walton Hotel are now ready to begin. The pre-construction phase is complete and site preparation and mobilization has already started. After a comprehensive review of the building during pre-construction, major renovations have been scheduled. A significant component of the renovations will be to replace rotten structural beams and wall assemblies. Major deterioration of the building fabric and structural elements has been caused by a number of light wells that provide natural light to tenant suites throughout two storeys of the building. The extent of the deterioration requires extensive intrusive renovations.

What does this mean for tenants?

The safety and comfort for the tenants is paramount to BC Housing and Lookout Emergency Aid Society, the non-profit operator of the Walton. Together, a decision was made to relocate the tenants for the duration of the renovations. Arrangements were made, for those tenants interested, to temporarily move to Tamura House, another provincially-owned SRO operated by Lookout. This move allows the tenants to stay together and receive support from the staff who they have worked with at the Walton Hotel. The extent of the Walton renovations was not originally known but potential safety risks, coupled with the disruptions and noise including living with repeated losses of power and water, will make it unviable for the tenants to live there during the reconstruction. Once the renovations are complete, every tenant will have the opportunity of moving back into a newly renovated unit complete with a new bed and other amenities and have access to needed support.

“When we discovered the scope of the work was much more than initially expected, and the length of time that the work would take increased by 50 per cent, we realized that the extent of the disruption to the tenants’ lives would be too much,” said Karen O’Shannacery, Lookout’s Executive Director. “We held a meeting with the tenants on May 23 to inform them of the decision and many are pleased to have the opportunity to move out during the renovations. Their concerns are mainly about wanting to be sure they can move back. They are so excited about getting new housing and they don’t want to lose that. We have guaranteed the tenants the right to return to the Walton after renovations are complete.”

Walton tenants started the relocation process to Tamura House on June 4, moving into units that have been prepared for them including a new bed. Tenants are being moved as rooms at Tamura House become available; the Walton should be empty by June 15.

Completely vacating the Walton will allow renovations to be completed in approximately 12 months instead of 18.

SRO renovation process

Where possible, renovation plans for the SRO hotels are still based on a phased approach and tenants will not have to move to another building during construction. This will depend on the condition of each hotel, the proposed scope of the work, and current vacancies. Therefore, the renovation process may need to vary at each of the government-owned SROs depending on what is required.



The Walton Hotel

A Walton tenant talks about the move to Tamura House

Trish has lived at the Walton Hotel with her partner, Johnny, for three years. In early June, they made the move to Tamura House.

“I was nervous and not sure that we should move when the idea was first brought up,” she said. “But when we heard it’s temporary, we agreed and got excited. The actual move was quite hectic; but it’s awesome, very clean. The staff are friendly and courteous.”

Trish has noticed a big difference since the Province purchased the Walton and Lookout started operating it. “The manager before was really bad and I felt threatened by some of the other tenants. When the government took over, it became a safe place for everyone; everyone felt comfortable.”

She added, “Renos will be good for the Walton. We plan to move back and can’t wait to see what the rooms will look like. There’s going to be a community kitchen downstairs. I love to cook and make big meals for everyone... my favourite thing to make is a big roast with vegetables and mashed potatoes.”

Savoy tenants prepare for relocation to the Drake Hotel

The 24 tenants currently living at the Savoy Hotel (pictured at right) will be relocating to the nearby city-owned Drake Hotel in early July to allow renovations to get underway.

"Moving to a hotel in close proximity to the Savoy means tenants will stay in the same neighbourhood, close to any support services they may have, while the Savoy is renovated as quickly as possible," said Janice Abbott, Executive Director, Atira Women's Resource Society.

Minor renovations such as painting and limited plumbing, electrical, fire and life upgrades are being made to the Drake Hotel before Savoy tenants move.

"The Savoy tenants have a real sense of community, so we're pleased that they will stay together in another small building,' said Tenant Liaison Worker Sheila Matthews, Atira Property Management. "I've been to see the Drake and it's great; I expect the tenants will be pleased."



The Savoy Hotel.

The Drake Hotel is owned by the City of Vancouver and has been offered to BC Housing to use for relocation purposes while the government-owned SROs are renovated. Sheila will assist the Savoy tenants with moving and Atira Property Management is hoping to provide transitional staff at the Drake Hotel until the end of July so there is continuity with the tenants. Beginning August 1, RainCity Housing and Support Society will take over management of the Drake Hotel. Once the SRO renovations are complete, the building will be torn down and replaced with supportive housing to be operated by RainCity.

New tenant selection system streamlines access to SROs

A new coordinated tenant selection (CTS) service for the SROs has been launched to assist existing tenants and new applicants find housing and support services that best meets their needs. The service was developed by BC Housing in collaboration with SRO non-profit housing providers, the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health and the BC Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. A significant benefit to applicants is they only have to register once with the service, rather than registering with multiple housing providers.

The CTS service is a new coordinated method to manage vacancies and ensure the best match for applicants to support services in the Downtown Eastside. This process will be implemented in partnership with the non-profit housing providers over the months ahead with the understanding that it will be evaluated on an on-going basis to ensure that it is serving the needs of tenants and applicants.

"The system provides a single point of access for people in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) looking for supportive housing and matches applicants to appropriate buildings and programming services. It also provides SRO operators with an efficient system to manage their vacancies, and gives them the final decision about which tenants to accept," said Dominic Flanagan, Director of Tenant Programs at BC Housing.

The CTS service will be located at the Marble Arch Hotel on Richards Street to ensure coordination with other downtown services, such as the emergency shelter system and community health services, as well as providing access to social housing outside of the DTES. For its first year of operation, CTS will not provide storefront access to city residents, but will work with housing providers to relocate existing SRO tenants to temporary housing for their safety and well-being while the buildings are being renovated.

BC Housing's Health Services staff will also be located at the Marble Arch and are responsible for tenant assessments to ensure people are placed in the most appropriate housing. Housing providers will play a key role in the selection process and will make the final decision about whether to accept a tenant. Key to the service is a common referral and screening process to ensure effective coordination and consistent service for both tenants and operators.

"I'm looking forward to seeing CTS in operation," said Sue Baker, Director of Supported Housing at MPA Society. "For tenants it will mean a much more individualized placement ensuring the housing suits the tenant, with no one who can't be accommodated somewhere in the system. And it will give operators a much richer resource, where we can bring issues to the table and talk about what's working, and what can

be improved.”

The 17 SROs purchased by the Province in the DTES will use the CTS service to fill vacancies in more than 1,035 units of supportive housing in Vancouver. “We’re very encouraged by the non-profit housing community’s response to CTS and we’ve been approached by some of them to incorporate additional buildings into the service,” said Dominic.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. to be non-profit operator of Orange Hall



Orange Hall, which is located on the edge of Chinatown, is home to many Chinese seniors. S.U.C.C.E.S.S., which has extensive experience in working with the Asian community in the Downtown Eastside, is the new non-profit operator of this government-owned SRO.

“Part of our mission is to provide a continuum of health services for seniors; Orange Hall will play an important role in fulfilling this,” said Alice Choi, Administrator of Health Services, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Multi Level Care Society.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. also operates an adult day centre and assisted living and complex care facilities in the neighbourhood. It will be able to bring existing supports such as its meal program and social and recreational program to tenants at Orange Hall.

Tenant support workers: Making an impact on tenants’ lives

Tenant support workers are available in all of the SROs owned by the provincial government. They wear many hats: helping tenants who need to move during renovations; answering questions about the renovation process in order to reduce anxiety; ensuring the buildings are safe and secure; helping tenants access services.

Sheila Matthews with Atira Property Management is the tenant liaison worker for the St. Helen’s, the Shaldon, the Savoy, the Rice Block, the Gastown, the Park, the Marble Arch and the Arco hotels. Much of her role will be taken over by the non-profit operators once renovations are completed.

“When I first had to move tenants from the Shaldon to the Marble Arch, it was a big learning curve,” said Sheila. “But by the second time, we had a system going. Many tenants needed reassurances they would be able to come home. In a couple of instances, we were able to move tenants from floor to floor rather than ask them to leave the building.”

During future renovations, Sheila is planning on organizing activities to reduce the disruptions caused by construction. “I really love this job and have a good skill set for it,” said Sheila, who has worked on the Downtown Eastside for seven years. “Building trust and seeing people being cared for is important to me.”



Atira Property Management Tenant Liaison Worker Sheila Matthews.

Catherine Campbell has been with Lookout Emergency Aid Society for over 10 years. She has been working with tenants at the Walton Hotel since Lookout took over operations in December. Recently, she has been involved in helping the tenants relocate temporarily to Tamura House.

“Change can be really tough for these people; they are naturally suspicious because of how they’ve been treated in the past,” said Catherine. “Building trust has been a top priority, hand-in-hand with giving accurate information. I’ve been working to establish a Lookout culture here, so they understand that when we commit to something we come through for them.”

Catherine is looking forward to offering more programs to tenants. “I think as we develop trust and continue to form a sense of community we will see tenants opt in to receiving support. There’s already a different feeling amongst Walton tenants. It was scary here before with real security issues. Now, the bars have come off the office window. I think it’s starting to sink in that things are changing for the better.”

Judi O’Brien is Coast Mental Health’s tenant support worker. She is currently at the society’s new Doug Story Residence in Yaletown and will be taking over at the St. Helen’s Hotel once renovations start there.

“Atira has done a wonderful job at the St. Helen’s,” said Judi. “A lot of undesirable people used to live there and the tenants weren’t cared for. People felt helpless; now they feel safer. Coast is hoping to include a floor just for women and another just for placements from our homeless outreach workers.”

In her current work at Doug Story Residence, Judi has seen dramatic changes in the lives of the tenants, who had been homeless or living in privately-owned SROs. “When you’re able to take 44 people out of a place like that and give them something clean and modern, it’s amazing. They now have a home rather than a room. I’m so impressed with how quickly they’re turning their lives around.”

HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Homeless Outreach Program has expanded and non-profit organizations have been selected to begin homeless outreach services in seven communities and four organizations have also been selected to provide increased outreach services in Vancouver and Prince George.

In Vancouver, the new organizations providing services are Collingwood Neighbourhood House in Collingwood/Renfrew, Kettle Friendship Society in Grandview, and MPA Society in Kitsilano.

“Being part of the Homeless Outreach Program means we can meet the needs of homeless people in our community more effectively,” said Paula Carr, Executive Director, Collingwood Neighbourhood House. “This gives us the resources to go where people are and give them support. One of our objectives is to create a neighbourhood that is more caring. I think that when you understand homeless people live in your own community, you feel a greater sense of responsibility toward them than you do when you hear about the number of homeless across the whole Lower Mainland.”

“There’s been a marked increase in the number of homeless people in the Grandview/Woodlands area over the past few years,” said Nancy Keough, Executive Director at the Kettle Friendship Society. “We’re very excited to be able to have outreach staff out on the street, talking with homeless people and connecting them with services. We see them at our drop-in centre all the time, and now we’ll be able to meet them where they’re at.”

Outreach workers provide immediate and long-term assistance to people on the street by offering food, clothing, and shelter as well as access to transition services such as life-skills training and health and social programs. By providing intensive, one-on-one help such as arranging and attending appointments with the homeless, the outreach workers enable them to receive health, nutrition and other basic services.

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	www.atira.bc.ca	SRO Operator (Rice Block; Marr Hotel; Sereena’s

Resource Society	604-331-1407	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 604-251-2801	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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