

October 2008

Vancouver Housing Update E-Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM VANCOUVER'S COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Guest Editorial: Jeff Colvin, RainCity Housing and Support Society



My name is Jeff Colvin and I am excited to be the new manager of the Shaldon Hotel. RainCity Housing began managing the building on September 1, 2008 and we have been busy getting to know the current residents and staff. It was important that we gave the existing staff at the Shaldon the opportunity to keep their jobs and join the RainCity Housing team. I was thrilled when all of the staff decided to stay working at the Shaldon under new management.

The Shaldon is a unique program within RainCity Housing that will offer support to the existing 50 plus residents and the staff are already working towards making the building a great place to live. The residents have started offering their own ideas on what the building needs and we hope to use these suggestions in order to build relationships and improve people's quality of life.

It was rewarding to be able to house individuals from Vancouver's Downtown Community Court recently, as we were able to give them a clean, safe home quickly, and will continue to liaise with BC Housing and our justice system - this is truly what community and partnerships are all about.

We are eager to start creating a sense of community in the building and to offer support and assistance to folks who want our help. Everyone here at the Shaldon is looking forward to being a part of the positive change that is addressing homelessness here in Vancouver.

Sincerely,

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SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

Non-profit SRO operators, Province and VPD collaborate on Partners in Action protocol

Representatives from the 10 non-profit societies that manage 17 provincially-owned SROs, Minister of Housing and Social Development Rich Coleman, and Vancouver Police Chief Constable Jim Chu gathered October 17 to announce a "Partners in Action" protocol. This unique partnership is designed to ensure the SROs are a safe, secure, and supportive housing environment.

The protocol consists of six specific actions:

- A Partners in Action decal to be prominently displayed at participating SRO hotels to ensure a safe and secure environment;
- Vancouver Police Beat Officers assigned to hotels to enhance communications and collaboration;
- A Vancouver Police publication for police and the non-profit operators to ensure clear roles and expectations of police;
- The Province has provided a one-page description to the VPD of each SRO hotel, including an overview of the support services available to residents, and the name of the non-profit operator and contact information. The VPD will also be providing this information to E-Comm with regard to the client base at these SROs, for the information of officers being deployed to these residences so members are aware of any special needs;
- The VPD has provided a list of Staff Sergeants and contact information to the non-profit operators to improve communication in dealing with more complex, long-term issues; and,
- The VPD is also developing a plan to have new recruits receive a half-day orientation session in SROs beginning in 2009.

The protocol came about following discussions between the non-profit operators, provincial officials and the police. The VPD was invited to attend one of the regular SRO operational meetings. All parties saw an opportunity to establish a partnership to achieve the shared goal of creating safe housing environments. Substantial steps have already been taken to implement the protocol.

The partnership is intended to establish trust between the hotel operators and the police, and with the hotel residents. Improved communication should reduce potential for criminal activity and therefore the number of times police respond to 9-1-1 calls. The non-profit operators and the Province are determined to make these SROs places where tenants and staff can live and work free from unwanted influences and pressures. The VPD shares this view and is willing to dedicate specific resources to achieve this goal.



Mark Smith, Executive Director, RainCity Housing and Support Society, speaking at the Partners in Action news conference.



From left: John van Dongen, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General; Vancouver Police Chief Constable Jim Chu; and Minister Rich Coleman show off one of the new Partners in Action decals.

Renovations update

Preconstruction work has now been completed on all of the government-owned SROs purchased in April 2007 as well as on the Marr Hotel which was purchased in February 2008. Renovations are underway or are about to begin in most of the hotels which were purchased in 2007 and construction is scheduled to be completed before the end of this year at both The Rice Block and Orange Hall. Work at the Carl Rooms is three to four months ahead of schedule, thanks to thorough pre-planning resulting in an efficient construction phase.

Major structural repairs are required to the Marble Arch Hotel's south wall to save it from potentially collapsing. The façade has been removed and is now being replaced with a new wall. At the same time, the common bathrooms on all floors are being upgraded and the 38 suites on the south wall are being completely renovated. All the tenants in units adjoining the south wall were relocated to newly renovated suites on the building's north elevation. The Marble Arch is being used for tenant relocations during the SRO renovation process.



The Savoy Hotel

The Marr Hotel (which has been vacant prior to its purchase) is currently receiving structural, mechanical and electrical upgrades to ensure its safety and serviceability. Its 28 units will be available for relocation purposes shortly.

Tenants have been relocated thus far from the Walton Hotel to Tamura House and from the Savoy to the Drake. Fifty per cent of the Park Hotel tenants have relocated to a variety of new homes. In mid to late November, tenants from the Orwell, St Helen's, and the Molson's Bank Building/Roosevelt Hotel will begin relocations to allow for construction. Each building has a unique relocation plan designed in consultation with the contractor. Some tenants will move within their buildings while others may move to other locations during construction. All relocated tenants will have the opportunity to return to a renovated SRO unit that best meets their support needs.

College Place Hotel

In New Westminster, renovations are underway on College Place Hotel, a government-owned SRO that is being managed by Lookout Emergency Aid Society. This building includes 40 units plus a 15-bed shelter. The tenants occupying the SRO units have been temporarily relocated to allow for construction, while shelter operations remain fully functional.

Lookout staff and BC Housing's Health Services Coordinators were instrumental in helping tenants understand the need for relocation and how the upgrades to the building will benefit everyone upon their return. Most tenants are currently living at Peterson Place in Surrey; this site is managed by Fraserside Community Services Society. Several others have been given homes in BC Housing sites.



Commercial space

Many of the government-owned SROs include commercial space at street level. These retail areas are also undergoing renovations which will enhance the streetscapes and encourage retail opportunities that contribute to a sense of community. BC Housing and the non-profit operators will ensure commercial tenants are compatible with a building's residential tenants. Retail space also has the potential to become an important source of revenue for the non-profit operators.

SRO "before" photos

Photographer Michael Bednar has been taking photos of most of the government-owned SROs before construction begins. Once renovations are complete, he will take the "after" shots.

Following is some of Michael's work....



Arco Hotel



Park Hotel



Gastown Hotel



Marble Arch Hotel



St. Helen's Hotel



Molson's Bank Building/Roosevelt



Savoy Hotel

Walton Hotel renovations

Behind the hoarding and scaffolding at 261 – 265 East Hastings is the shell of the Walton Hotel. Built at the turn of the 20th century when lumber was cheap and plentiful, this government-owned SRO is currently undergoing substantial renovations. A significant number of rotten structural beams, walls and floors were discovered during the building's pre-construction period. The beams on the top floors were so rotten that they were no longer bearing any weight. Instead, this was transferred to the walls, which were laminated lumber. They were all that was keeping the building from falling down and likely would not have withstood even a minor earthquake. The building's back wall had to be rebuilt. The roof leaked and sagged and the skylights were all damaged beyond repair. There were high concentrations of lead, mould and asbestos throughout the building.



The reconstruction work is labour intensive and time consuming. These photos were taken at the Walton earlier this month.



An overview shot from one of the upper floors shows the extent the building had to be gutted.



A rotten floor now supported by a new beam (orange) below.



Examples of rotten beams. Beams have been or will be replaced on every level in the building.



New beams installed.



The back wall was structurally unsound and has been replaced.



Project Superintendent Ron Gust easily removes portions of the stone windowsills and crumbles it in his hand.

Tentative construction schedule

Hotel	Current Units	Non-Profit Operator	Anticipated Pre-construction Period	Anticipated Renovation Start	Anticipated Renovation Completion
St. Helen's Hotel	96	Coast Foundation Society*	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	September 2009
Walton Hotel	51	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	June 2009
Orange Hall	27	S.U.C.C.E.S.S.*	COMPLETED	October 2008	December 2008
Carl Rooms	47	Union Gospel (Heatley) Housing Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	March 2009
Molson's Bank Building/ Roosevelt Hotel	45	PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETED	November 2008	September 2009
Park Hotel	55	City Centre Care Society*	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	September 2009
Orwell Hotel	55	Vancouver Native Housing Society	COMPLETED	November 2008	July 2009
Savoy Hotel	26	MPA Society*	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	August 2009
The Rice Block	42	Atira Women's Resource Society*	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	November 2008
Gastown Hotel	95	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	28	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	December 2008 Will be used for tenant relocations
Rainier Hotel	46	PHS Community Services Society	TBD	TBD	TBD
Tamura House	110	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	TBD	TBD	TBD
College Place Hotel	40	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	September 2009
Marble Arch	149	City Centre Care Society*	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY	Phase 1: April 2009. Is being used for tenant relocations.
Drake Hotel	25	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.		
* Atira Property Management is managing this building until renovations are complete, at which time the non-profit operator will take over management.					

Bedbug protocol

Bedbugs are again a fact of life. A better understanding of the danger of chemicals once used to eradicate them has resulted in bedbug infestations in places from the world's best hotels to SROs in the Downtown Eastside. However, as much as possible is being done to prevent the transfer of bedbugs during tenant relocations.

The #1 rule implemented for each move is that no beds are transferred to new locations. A "bedbug room" has been established in each building and tenants take their belongings there prior to their moves. Clothing and linens are shipped to professional laundries, while the rest of their belongings are quarantined. A pest control company sprays these before they are moved to a tenant's new unit.



An old bed leans up against a wall at the Gastown Hotel.

Tenants at the Gastown Hotel suffered recently from a bedbug infestation. "We had to work with tenants to support them to let go of some of their belongings and have others sprayed or professionally laundered," said Janice Abbott, Executive Director of Atira. "We tackled the problem floor by floor, with tenants having to be out for the day when their floor was being sprayed."

A buffet was set up in the Marble Arch's common room where Gastown tenants were able to spend the day enjoying food and movies. Upon their return, they had new beds and linens and, more importantly, rooms free from bugs.

Fact or fiction?

Answers to some commonly asked questions about SRO operations.

Q. Do tenants who moved into the SROs from Oppenheimer Park have to go into a treatment program?

A. No, these tenants were given unconditional housing.

Q. What incentives are SRO tenants given to relocate for renovations?

A. All their moving and relocation costs are covered and they are given a \$50 gift certificate to Army and Navy or a retailer of the non-profit operator's choice. Upon return, they will have a renovated room with a new bed and a new fridge.

From SRO to public housing

Walk into George's* apartment on the top floor of a West End tower and you're greeted by a million dollar view over English Bay. It's a far cry from his home over the bar of the Park Hotel just a few months ago. George has moved from a part of town addled with addicts to a peaceful home where he can indulge his love of cooking. Pizza dough is rising on the counter and his fridge is full. There's plenty of shopping in his new neighbourhood including a farmers' market in the summer months in the park just across the street. He hopes to join the community garden in his new building and is also thinking of applying for one of the City's nearby garden plots. George is also planning on volunteering soon at the SPCA.

"I like it here; how could I not?" said the 66-year-old. "It's quiet; my neighbours are friendly."

George lived at the Park for several years and in a few other private SROs before that. A gentle man, he pauses when asked what it means to have a safe home. "I don't know how to answer. Living here is wonderful; I can't explain. It feels so good to have a nice place to come home to."

Editor's note: George is one of 21 former SRO tenants who now live in public housing.

* Name has been changed to protect privacy.

New Atira tenant liaison workers

Tenants at many of the government-owned SROs are getting to know Ana Cagas and Maddy Carlington. They are new tenant liaison workers with Atira Property Management, which is managing the St. Helen's Hotel, Orange Hall, Park Hotel, Savoy Hotel, The Rice Block, Gastown Hotel, Arco Hotel, Marble Arch, and Drake Hotel until renovations are complete. Both Ana and Maddy have worked as frontline support workers with Atira Women's Resource Society.

Housing and the Downtown Community Court

The Downtown Community Court has been in session since mid-September. As of October 1, case management plans that require housing were given to seven people. All of these requests were met immediately, with five people now living at the Shaldon Hotel and another two finding homes at The Salvation Army's Belkin House.

BC Housing's Health Services Coordinator Gordon Gies works closely with staff at the Downtown Community Court to arrange these accommodations. BC Housing is also funding a half-time outreach worker from RainCity Housing and Supports to search for homes for people who demonstrate the ability to live independently. Rent supplements have been made available for this.

Oppenheimer Park camper settles in at the Marble Arch

"It's a humble beginning but a good start," said Marcel as he surveyed the small room at the Marble Arch Hotel that has been his home since mid-August. Marcel was one of about 40 homeless people moved from a makeshift campground in Oppenheimer Park to various government-owned SROs. He had been living in the camp for about a week.

"It [the move] was frightening at first because I didn't know where I was going. When you're homeless, it's easy to equate offers of help with danger. So, I felt a mixture of fear and joy. When I was handed the key to my room, it became real. I'd started on my journey back to being whole."

Marcel, 44, had been homeless off and on since 1989. He has lived in private SROs and was found housing twice before by the Carnegie Outreach team that works in the Downtown Eastside, but was not able to maintain his tenancy. This time, he is determined to make things work. He sees a psychologist regularly and is seeking help with what he describes as a mild addiction and the occasional trouble he still has with anger and depression. Textbooks from the four semesters he spent studying civil engineering are scattered throughout his room as he brushes up on his studies. He intends to apply to BCIT's program and hopes to be back at school in the new year.

"It's awesome here; it gives me real peace of mind to know that someone is taking care of me and that I'm taking care of me too. There are tons of resources in Vancouver - you just need the courage and the willingness to use them. I'm starting to feel more confident and ready to get back to regular routines."



Gordon Gies

“Things are going well so far and we’ve been able to address the housing needs of everyone who has indicated to the court that they are homeless or have no fixed address and are willing to be case managed,” said Gordon. “One of them had been sleeping under a bridge for a year and she was feeling pretty good to have a place to stay inside.”

HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Carnegie Outreach team played an important role in assisting with the relocation of about 40 homeless people from Oppenheimer Park to various government-owned SRO hotels this past August. The group’s offices are located across the street from the park and the outreach workers had pre-existing relationships with nearly all the campers.



“Our involvement was to offer a connection to these people as human beings,” said Bob Moss, Outreach Supervisor. “We know most of these people and the biggest barrier to housing them has never been their willingness but rather the lack of appropriate rooms available. Some of them are very hard to house and this was the third or fourth time we’ve worked with them. BC Housing has a good understanding of the needs of this group of people and the government-owned SROs should be a more suitable type of housing for them than privately-owned ones.”

Carnegie Outreach was one of the initial partners in the Homeless Outreach Project and developed one of the first programs of its kind in Vancouver, and indeed in B.C., dedicated to seeking out homeless people living on the street and finding them permanent housing. Their success paved the way for the provincial Homeless Outreach Program. Bob estimates that in the almost three years that they have been operating, they have found homes for over 600 people. The Carnegie staff, most of whom are part time, believe in this work and are committed to finding appropriate housing for anyone willing to work with them.

“Housing is where it starts,” said Bob. “It provides a stability that is fundamental to moving forward. Without it, people will move from one crisis to another.

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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