



Vancouver Housing Update E-Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM VANCOUVER'S COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Guest Editorial: Superintendent Warren Lemcke, Vancouver Police Department, North Command



For many years, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and surrounding area have been home to some of the most poorly run Single Room Occupancy hotels in the City of Vancouver. From a public safety perspective, many of these operations placed extreme demands on police, fire and ambulance with some of them generating hundreds of calls for service a year. Most of these were caused by poor management. But it wasn't the workload that was the major concern; it was the horrible living conditions the residents were forced to endure. From bed bugs to predatory landlords to crime and disorder down every hallway, the conditions were abysmal.

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One of the worst operations was the former Backpackers Inn at 7 West Hastings. This building was a fortress for criminal activity, drug dealing and violence against the occupants. The criminal actions were condoned by management and perpetrated by several of the building occupants. The closure of the building was welcomed by the Vancouver Police Department, but the reopening as the Beacon Hotel is even more welcome. This BC Housing building, run by PHS Community Services Society, a non-profit operator participating in the Partners in Action program, will provide much needed safe, secure and supportive housing in the area.

As with other BC Housing buildings, the key to success is government, the non-profit operators and the police working together under the Partners in Action commitment. Under this partnership, the Vancouver Police Department has provided liaison officers to each of the BC Housing SROs to work directly with staff on issues in the buildings. The VPD has also supplied ECOMM with background information on each of the buildings so that attending police officers are more aware before arrival of the issues they may face. As well, there are Partners In Action decals at each of these government-owned SRO hotels.

The Vancouver Police Department will continue to work with all stakeholders in the area to help reduce and eliminate homelessness and provide safe, secure and supportive housing for those in need. The VPD will work in partnership with the Province and the non-profits to yield an improved quality of life for those living in the SROs.

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SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

Renovations complete at several more SROs

This summer the Park, Savoy, Beacon, and Orange Hall joined the growing list of government-owned SROs that have undergone renovation work and are now providing safe and secure homes. For some of the tenants, it was an opportunity to move back into a newly renovated unit; for many others, it meant the first real home they have known in a long time. New tenants were selected through the Supportive Housing Registry service.

Tenants began moving into the Beacon Hotel (formerly the Backpackers Inn) on September 14. Approximately 20 of the new tenants had been staying at the New Fountain Shelter, one of the City's HEAT shelters. The Beacon's opening meant a large group from New Fountain could stay together. (Both the Beacon and New Fountain are operated by PHS Community Services Society.)

"These people have been living together since the shelter opened and have formed friendships," said PHS Executive Director Mark Townsend. "Over the months, we've seen them improve. Their sense of community helps them through good times and bad times. It's important for them to stay together."

Some of the PHS staff from the shelter will move to the Beacon, which also maintains continuity. "The clients have built relationships with our staff; the staff have gained their trust," added Mark. "This is important when you think someone should see a doctor or meet with a mental health team. The client is more likely to go if they can go with someone they trust."

SHR houses 500+ tenants

Over 500 homeless people have now been housed in the government-owned SROs and The Lux using the Supportive Housing Registration (SHR) service. The service works closely with housing providers and support agencies and coordinates its work with many other staff at BC Housing. The 500th tenant milestone was reached during the opening of the Beacon Hotel in mid-September.

"It's a real juggling act between many groups of people once a building is ready for tenants," said BC Housing's Catherine Talbott. "Eight to 10 different functions, from applicant assessments to furniture delivery and budget negotiations with the operator, have to align before the building can be made ready to accept tenants. Good communications and coordination is necessary."

The SHR service will continue to house people in SRO units as these become available either through the completion of renovations or the filling of vacancies as these arise. As the supportive housing sites being built by the City of Vancouver and the Province come on line, SHR will also fill these units. BC Housing will conduct an evaluation of the service this fall to ensure the service is working as well as possible.



Above: A kitchen in Orange Hall pre-renovations (left) and a common area kitchen post-renovations.



Above: a newly renovated unit at the Park Hotel before tenancy (left) and the building's common laundry facilities.



Above: kitchen area pre-renovation at the Park and another kitchen area post-renovations.



Above: putting the finishing touches on the exterior of the Savoy Hotel (left) and the building's renovated common washrooms.



Above: rooms at the Savoy pre-renovations (left) and post-renovations (right).

Tentative SRO construction schedule as of September 21, 2009

Hotel	Units ¹	Tenancy status	Non-Profit Operator	Renovation Status	Estimated Completion Date
54 East Cordova	34	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	UNDERWAY	October 2009
566 Powell Street ³	12	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	No renovations required	COMPLETE
Arco Hotel	64	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	Pre-renovation	TBD
Beacon Hotel	41	Tenanted	PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Carl Rooms	44	Tenanted	Atira Property Management with support services provided by PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Dominion Hotel	63	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Drake Hotel ²	26	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Gastown Hotel	93	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	Pre-renovation	TBD
Hazelwood Hotel	112	Tenanted	Atira Property Management with support services provided by MPA Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
London Hotel ³	72	Tenanted	Atira Property Management	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
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: Oct. 2009 Ph. 3 & 4: TBD
Marr Hotel	29	Tenanted	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Orange Hall	27	Tenanted	S.U.C.C.E.S.S.	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Orwell Hotel	55	Empty	Vancouver Native Housing Society	UNDERWAY	October 2009
Park Hotel	50	Tenanted	Atira Property Management with support services provided by PHS Community Services Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
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	Tenanted	Atira Women's Resource Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE
Roosevelt Hotel	42	Tenanted	PHS Community Services Society	UNDERWAY	January 2010
Savoy Hotel	25	Tenanted	Atira Property Management with support services provided by MPA	COMPLETE	COMPLETE

			Society		
Shaldon Hotel	54	Tenanted	RainCity Housing and Support Society	Pre-renovation	TBD
St. Helen's Hotel	86	Phased renovation /partially occupied	Atira Property Management with support services provided by Coast Foundation Society	UNDERWAY	November 2009
Tamura House	110	Tenanted	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	Pre-renovation	TBD
Walton Hotel	48	Tenanted	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	COMPLETE	COMPLETE

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

² 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.

³ Five-year renewable lease.

⁵ Residential renovations are complete. Renovations to the commercial are expected to be complete by Sept. 2009.

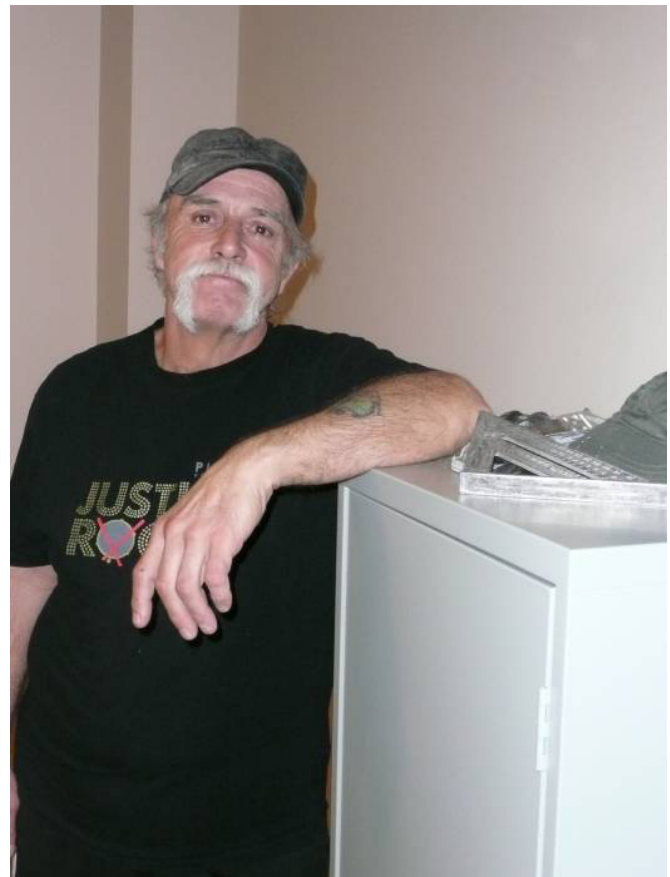
Beacon providing a ray of sunshine

When Moe Spires arrived home to his shared apartment in East Vancouver in the summer of 2005, he wasn't expecting to begin a journey that would lead him to the Beacon Hotel.

But on that day he found his roommate had left and with him went the share of the rent that Moe couldn't afford on his own. Moe had to move out.

Since he arrived in B.C. from the Maritimes 35 years ago Moe has plied his trade as a carpenter and construction labourer at projects around the city. The Downtown Eastside wasn't a place he wanted to go so in the summer of 2005 Moe set up camp in the shadow of the Skytrain line running behind the Real Canadian Superstore at Rupert and Grandview. He was comfortable with things there till December of last year when a combination of ill health and the construction of the new Central Valley Greenway trail forced him out of the wooded area.

Moe found himself on the Downtown Eastside and was one of the first people to take shelter in the New Fountain HEAT shelter that was opened last December. Living in a shelter was a new experience for Moe and the daily process of having to get up and leave for the day and not having much in the way of privacy was taking its toll on his mental health.



All that changed for Moe with one simple experience on the morning of Tuesday, September 15. For the first time in nine months, he woke up and didn't have to go anywhere.

He woke up in his new room at the Beacon Hotel where he has a door that locks and the privacy he had been craving. That morning, at the age of 59, Moe had the choice to get out of bed, go out for a coffee and then come back to his room to read and get some rest.

These days Moe tries to get labouring work with the employment agencies in the area, but otherwise spends time volunteering with the PHS Lifeskills program, helping out with Meals on Wheels and serving meals at the Lifeskills centre. From his perspective, 'it is all good.'

Long-term tenant returns to Park Hotel

The Park Hotel has been home to John* for some eight years. After the Province bought the downtown SRO, John had to move across the street to the Marble Arch for about six months while renovations were done on his unit as well as the rest of the building. In early September, John returned to his home, which boasts a large window overlooking Pender Street. "It's really nice; the job was very well done," he said of his upgraded unit. John appreciates the functionality of the renovated rooms and how easy they are to keep clean. "I just hope they keep it up!" he added.

John likes to keep to himself and doesn't know many of his neighbours. He works nightshift as a hotel auditor and sleeps during the days. On his time off, he enjoys visiting thrift stores and looking for bargains. He likes living at the Park because "it's all I need; I've lived in fancy apartments and I don't need all that."

** Last name withheld to protect the tenant's privacy.*

Strategic sourcing resulting in big savings

BC Housing has been working closely with the SRO operators to identify opportunities to improve the value of materials and services purchased for the renovated buildings. The results are millions of dollars in savings as well as improved quality on the goods and services acquired.

"Strategic sourcing is a process that requires a different mindset from the more traditional approach of choosing the lowest bid," said BC Housing's David Williamson, Manager, Supply Chain and Contract Services. "It requires us to think ahead so there is enough time to identify and research opportunities. It also asks us to think outside the box and look for opportunities that aren't necessarily obvious. And, it takes a lot of collaboration: internally; with our non-profit partners; and with suppliers."

Strategic sourcing was used for the furnishings of most of the SROs. One building was outfitted before the principle was applied. The cost of furnishing each of those units was \$2,000 with an expected lifetime of three to five years. With the application of strategic sourcing to the rest of the 1,700+ units in the provincial portfolio, the cost per unit has gone down to \$1,420 and the new furniture has an expected average lifetime of 30 years. The direct hard dollar savings is nearly \$1.3 million. And, if as expected the furniture really does last six times longer, the lifecycle savings could work out to be over \$16 million.

"We really looked to the SRO operators for their input on the furnishings," said Liz Meneses, BC Housing. "We wanted to save money, but didn't want to create rooms that felt like institutions. We worked with the societies as partners and their ideas were very valuable."

"We worked together to choose furniture that was durable and we were also able to contribute tips on bed bug issues that could arise with certain choices," said Christine Williams, Property Manager, Lookout Emergency Aid Society. "Societies have knowledge of issues that BC Housing may not think about, so collaborating is useful."

Howe Street shelter clients relocated to SROs

RainCity Housing and Support Society and BC Housing staff went to extraordinary lengths this summer to help relocate people staying in the Howe Street shelter into units at the government-owned SROs. The shelter, which was one of the City of Vancouver's HEAT shelters, closed August 7.

RainCity Housing Society operated the Howe Street shelter and, once the fate of the shelter was decided, their staff immediately started having tough conversations with the clients about what they wanted for their future. BC Housing staff built on the conversation RainCity staff started; they took the time to listen to the concerns of the shelter's residents and were able to gently convince them that housing was in their best interest.

BC Housing's Catherine Talbott said, "We were able to house 21 people on August 4, including two of the most outspoken clients. They returned to the shelter that night for dinner and talked about how great their rooms were and how happy they were to be in them. This seemed to really help sway the rest of the clients to accept housing the following day."

In all 36 people from the Howe Street shelter moved into SRO units.

WHO'S WHO

Vancouver's Community Non-Profit Partners

Sixteen 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; Park Hotel; Rice Block; Savoy Hotel; St. Helen's 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)
Coast Foundation Society	www.coastmentalhealth.com 604-872-3502	SRO Support Services (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; Beacon Hotel); SRO Support Services (Carl Rooms; Marble Arch Hotel; Park Hotel)
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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