

Side by Side

An Introduction to the Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program



THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE (DTES) Revitalization Program is an integrated approach to help Vancouver's oldest neighbourhood become a safe, healthy and vibrant part of our city once again. Over the next five years, this work will help develop and implement long-term solutions to community safety and health, housing and economic development. The Revitalization Program recognizes that

achieving lasting success in any one area depends on achieving success in them all; just getting tough on crime will not improve the health of residents, promote better housing or encourage economic development. The Revitalization Program also recognizes that success depends on all parties involved working together. This report takes its title from the spirit of the Program – side by side.

Proud Past, Troubled Present

VANCOUVER'S DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE (DTES) is a large and diverse area of our city, encompassing such well-known neighbourhoods as Gastown, Chinatown and Strathcona (see map below). However, in recent years, some parts of the DTES have received national attention for the wrong reasons. Crime, substance abuse and inadequate housing have dominated discussion of this once-vibrant part of our city.

The DTES was once the heart of our city. In the early 1900s, the sawmills by Burrard Inlet and the port helped make this area Vancouver's first commercial

These changes emptied the streets – 10,000 fewer people a day came to the Downtown Eastside.

In the early 1990s, injectable cocaine arrived. As a port city, heroin had long been available here, but the much cheaper cocaine was more addictive, required more frequent use and made its users hyperactive. Easy access to drugs in the DTES brought more users into the neighbourhood, and many turned to theft to pay for their habit.

The stolen goods fed the growth of another industry – pawn shops and second-hand stores that bought the items.

For those who wanted to escape their addiction, lack of government support for treatment options made it difficult to easily seek help.

The closure of the landmark Woodward's department store at Hastings and Abbott in early 1993 was a major blow. Local residents lost an important place to shop for groceries, clothes and household items. Soon, many other local stores and restaurants followed suit and either closed or relocated.

Today, about 25 per cent of the storefronts on Hastings Street (between Richards and Gore) are now vacant and of those still in operation, many assist or benefit from the drug trade.

As the 1990s came to a close, the community also had to contend with the fallout of the drug and sex trade: an epidemic of HIV and outbreaks of hepatitis, and syphilis. Added to these have been continuing problems with unemployment, inadequate housing, and alcohol abuse.



Carnegie Centre (shown above in 1932) was once Vancouver's main library. Next door were the old City Hall and the Art Gallery. Together, they formed the heart of Vancouver's original city centre.

"I think people are grateful that the difficulties of the Downtown Eastside aren't in their neighbourhood. But that's an illusion. Our problems are everyone's problem. We are all part of the same city."

– Ken Lyotier of United We Can –
beverage container recycling program in the DTES that recycled 10.5 million containers and paid out \$800,000 in refunds in 1999.

district. Most department stores, banks, head offices, hotels and theatres were located in this neighbourhood. Hastings Street was a major transportation hub, with riders catching connections to other parts of the city from a streetcar terminus located at Hastings and Carrall. For decades, throngs of people lived, shopped, visited or passed through the DTES as Vancouver grew ever larger around this central core.

But like many inner-city neighbourhoods, change was inevitable. In 1959, the streetcars stopped running and the terminus closed. Then the main library moved to Burrard and Robson Street, and many head offices moved west as well. Later, the new Pacific Centre enticed Eaton's department store to move from its Hastings location to Granville Street.

Still Very Much a Community

DESPITE THE LOSSES it has suffered, the Downtown Eastside remains very much a community. Many people in the area care deeply about their neighbourhood. Several of the buildings are architectural treasures, and a legacy upon which to build. Most importantly, in recent years residents and businesses of the DTES have been working hard to overcome the problems the community faces.

The Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program was conceived and developed in 1999 to build on these efforts. It brings together for the first time all those who have a role to play in the community, including the three levels of government. And it brings these groups together to address all the challenges in an integrated and strategic way. ■



DTES at a glance

The DTES has several distinct neighbourhoods, including Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona, Oppenheimer, Thornton Park and Victory Square. For Program purposes, the DTES is the area bounded by Clark Drive (east), Richards Street (west) Burrard Inlet (north) and Terminal Avenue (south).

vital statistics

Land area	205 hectares
Population	16,000
DTES population as % of Vancouver	3.2%
Median household income	\$11,029 / year
Incidence of low income	68%
Public schools	2
Community centres	
Park area	14 hectares



What's Been Done?

Even before the creation of the Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program, many organizations, agencies, community groups, businesses and individuals worked hard to improve conditions in the neighbourhood. Here is just a sampling of what they accomplished in the last few years.

Safety Improving Community Safety

CRIME IS A MAJOR problem in the Downtown Eastside. Police and Fire statistics confirm this (see table). Some interesting trends that have emerged are:

1. **The majority of DTES crime is drug and/or alcohol related.**
2. **Many of the people responsible for this criminal activity are not DTES residents.**

Although crime figures reinforce the perception that the DTES is a dangerous place, in general, most forms of crime are declining in Vancouver.

Here are some recent initiatives – involving stricter law enforcement, getting tough on problem businesses, and creating a better living environment – that have contributed to making the Downtown Eastside a safer place for all.

- City Council has speeded up business licence hearings in which councillors decide whether a business should have or keep its licence.
- In 1999, the City revoked or suspended the licences of more than 16 problem businesses – places that were known to facilitate the sale of stolen goods or drugs, or were in violation of health and safety codes.
- The City has also enacted a by-law regulating the hours for several classes of businesses that had previously stayed open all night, and as a result

facilitated the sale of drugs. Businesses in the DTES now have to close from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. The City has enacted other by-laws regulating the location of new pawnshops and second-hand stores.

- New businesses or services that may have a social impact on the neighbourhood are now required to sign a Good Neighbour Agreement, as a condition of operating.
- Five community policing offices have been established.
- Forty additional police officers have been assigned to an area that includes the DTES.

The City's Engineering Department and local businesses and groups are working to improve the streetscape in the DTES. These efforts include:

- Cleaning sidewalks and gutters twice each week, and hand cleaning and flushing lanes three times each week; power washing and repairing sidewalks, providing more receptacles for litter; graffiti removal and better street lighting.
- Working with local businesses, such as United We Can, to hire DTES residents to pick up litter and clean the streets.

- More than 60 organizations, associations and companies have become members of the Vancouver Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment since it was established in 1997. The Coalition's mission is to help reduce crime and advocate for more effective drug and alcohol treatment.
- The National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) has funded various activities that have enabled residents to participate in developing solutions toward a safe and healthy community. ■

1998 safety statistics

DTES population as a % of Vancouver	3.2%
Police calls generated (as a % of Vancouver)	22%
Fire responses (as a % of Vancouver)	17%

A conservative estimate projects that successfully treating and training 5,000 addicts would eliminate up to 500,000 crimes a year.

"The underlying philosophy of this program is to strengthen the community by enhancing their ability to develop and participate in the solutions."

– Judy Rogers, City Manager
City of Vancouver

Health

Improving Community Health

THE DTES WAS ONCE known for having the highest rate of HIV infection in North America. While the rate of HIV infection has declined, this and other serious health issues continue to confront DTES residents and caregivers. Weakened immune systems caused by years of drug and alcohol addiction, as well as poor diets and substandard housing, have often lead to outbreaks of hepatitis, influenza, and pneumonia.

The cost of drug and alcohol addiction and attendant illnesses goes beyond the price of health and social services to include the suffering and unrealized potential of the victims.

Attention is now focused on implementing a comprehensive strategy to deal more effectively with substance misuse, as well as introducing harm-reduction measures to reduce serious health and social problems associated with drug addiction.

Effective services and treatment would ultimately reduce health-care costs for emergency services, hospitalization and treatment for serious illnesses related to drug and alcohol addiction. Meanwhile, other initiatives to promote better health in the DTES are already underway:

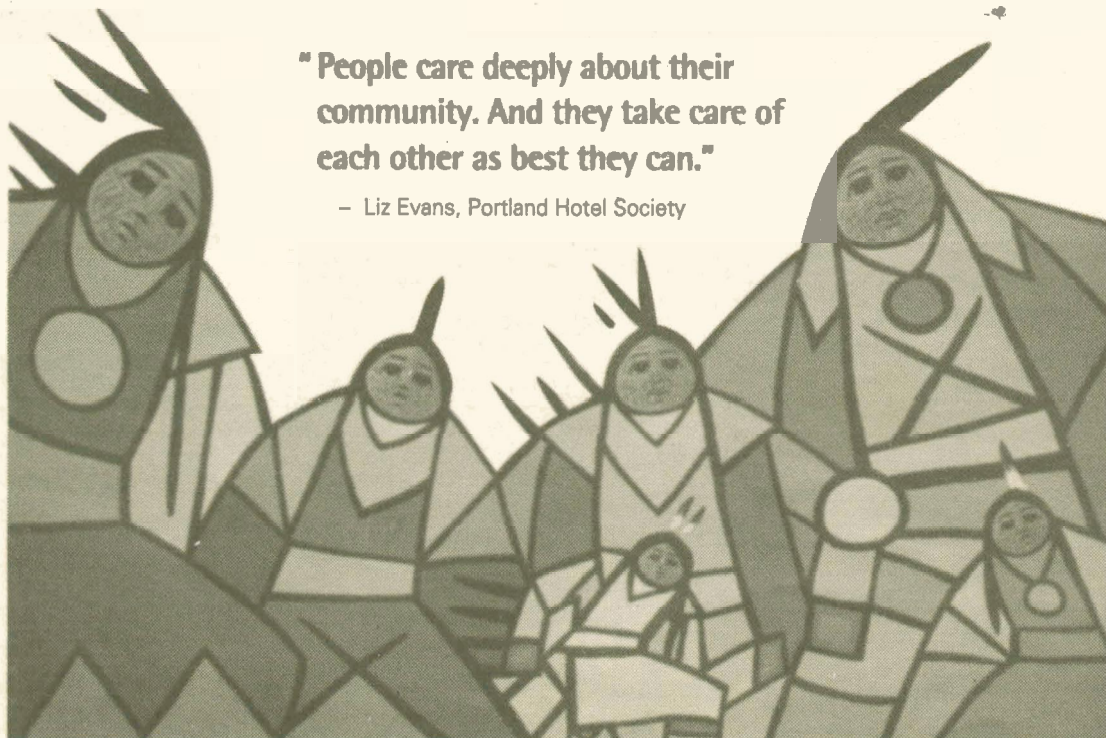
- The provincial government has removed rice wine from local grocery and convenience stores, to reduce potentially fatal abuse.
- The Vancouver/Richmond Health Board (V/RHB), through nurses and volunteers, has immunized and treated thousands of DTES residents for such ailments as influenza, pneumonia, hepatitis and syphilis. Other efforts such as education and outreach have also improved conditions. V/RHB recently reported that the rate of people becoming infected with HIV has dropped to about five per cent from 18 per cent, and

illnesses such as Hepatitis A and pneumonia are down. As well, overdose deaths in Vancouver have declined to 91 deaths for 1999 from 145 overdose deaths in the same period of 1998.

- The Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment sponsored an international forum in 1998 to debate drug strategies. The Coalition produced a drug prevention flyer targeted to youth, and also organized a community crime prevention forum last fall. ■

"People care deeply about their community. And they take care of each other as best they can."

– Liz Evans, Portland Hotel Society



Housing

Striking a Balance

VANCOUVER IS THE MOST expensive housing market in Canada. Finding safe, adequate, affordable housing here is increasingly difficult for low- and moderate-income residents. The DTES has long provided housing for these residents. Historically, it was home to many resource and seasonal workers as well as new immigrants. Today a wide range of people, including low-income seniors and young adults, and former patients of the mental health care system, also call the DTES home.

Affordability is only one aspect of the housing challenge in the DTES. In many cases, housing in the DTES is inadequate or in poor repair. Many residents can afford only small, single rooms with neither a kitchen nor a bathroom. Mostly found in old hotels, even this type of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing is becoming harder to find. Over the past two decades there has been a steady decline in the number of SROs, although most are being replaced with social housing.

At the same time, there is a need to accommodate more housing and create a mixed-income community in the general area in order to bolster the economy. As a result, market housing and commercial development in surrounding areas is growing.

The goal of Vancouver's City Council is to balance safe, affordable housing with market and commercial development within the DTES, replace SRO units and find ways to provide additional affordable housing in other neighbourhoods. Many initiatives are already underway.

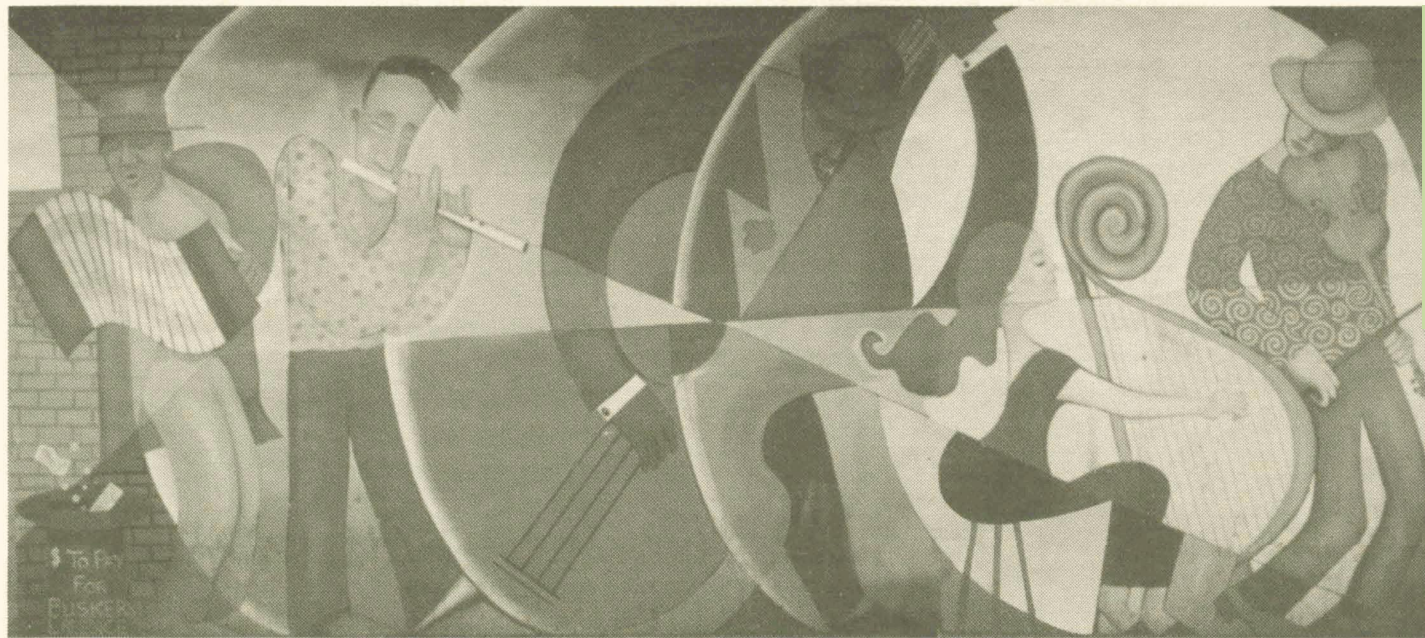
- Since 1997, 1,100 units of social housing have been built in Vancouver, with 400 of those units constructed in the DTES.
- Market housing has also been increasing in the area. For example, market housing has doubled in Gastown over the past five years. As well, by 2008, the number of market housing units in the broader area will increase to more than 17,000 from the current 8,000.



- In 1999, the City renewed its ongoing partnership agreement with the provincial government to ensure that social housing will continue to be built throughout Vancouver. Through these joint efforts an additional 1,800 units will be constructed in various areas of the City, with 800 of those units slated for the DTES.

and refurbishing SRO hotels. Recently, a co-operative effort involving all three levels of government, as well as local community groups and the Health Board, helped purchase and renovate two dilapidated SRO buildings. The Sunrise Hotel and the Washington Hotel have been converted to provide 136 rooms for low-income singles. The subsidized housing is operated on a non-profit basis. The ground floors will provide shops and services that will support the revitalization of the area.

- The recently refurbished Regal Hotel on Hastings Street will provide a drug-free environment for up to 39 residents. Meanwhile, the newly constructed New Portland Hotel, will provide housing for 87 people with problems that make them especially hard to house. ■



"I love this area. I moved my business here and brought my customers with me. They had no problem staying with me once they came and saw what is possible here. I believe there is a stronger sense of community here than I have seen anywhere else in the City. I'm committed."

— Yvonne De Valone, owner
Downtown U-Lok Mini Storage,
member of Strathcona Business
Improvement Association

Economic Development

Helping to Establish Legitimate Business

WHILE SOME AREAS of the DTES (such as Water Street in Gastown and parts of Chinatown) support a range of businesses and services, vacant buildings and boarded-up storefronts in other areas testify to the hard times that have fallen on this once vibrant commercial district.

Growth elsewhere in the city, shifts in commercial focus, and the intrusion of the drug trade have all contributed to the flight of legitimate business, and subsequent economic decline.

Encouraging more legitimate businesses to return to or start up in the DTES is essential to the success of the revitalization program.

Already, positive changes have been happening.

- A number of high technology companies have set up offices in the DTES.
Downtown U-Lok Mini Storage recently opened a new storage facility in the neighbourhood.
- The Vancouver Film School recently moved its operations in the DTES.
- Four Corners Community Savings, a bank located at Hastings and Main, started issuing loans last year to local businesses and residents, many of whom were not eligible for loans at other financial institutions. Today, more than 80 loans have been issued, with almost half going to low-income people.

- A large food market has opened at Abbott and Hastings in what was once the Fields department store.
- The recently completed International Village provides thousands of square feet of additional retail space and state-of-the-art cinemas
- The Vancouver Economic Development Commission (VEDC) has taken a lead role in working with residents, existing businesses, and all three levels of government to generate ideas for new businesses. Several business proposals are under development.
- VEDC has set up a mentorship program to assist DTES residents and organizations that may wish to start a business.
- The City has approved funding for the Strathcona Business Improvement Association, which will join the Gastown BIA in promoting the larger area's economic development. ■

What's Next?

Small Steps on a Long Journey

THE SMALL SUCCESSES to date in the Downtown Eastside are encouraging. Their true value however, may be in the lessons they teach about integrating efforts to improve safety, health, housing and economic vitality in the DTES.

They confirm that a step forward in one area requires progress in others. For example, if economic development is to move ahead, the streets must be safe. For streets to be safe, drug and alcohol abuse must be dealt with, which in turn hinges on adequate treatment, accessible health care and good housing.

Today, there is also a recognition that no one agency, level of government, program or community group can manage so large a task.

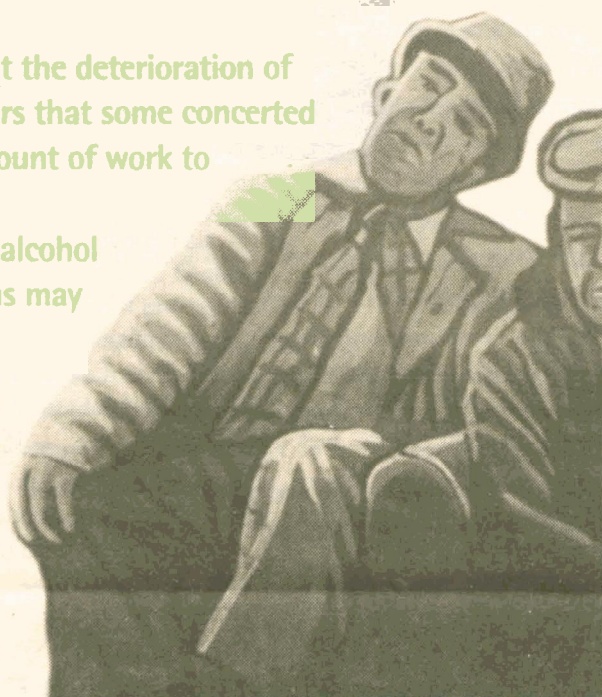
The work of the Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program recognizes these facts. It brings together for the first time all those who have a role to play – from the three levels of government, to the community and its residents, agencies, and businesses. It sets out a process by which these partners can work together over the next five years to develop balanced, integrated solutions, coordinate resources, and cooperate on projects.

(See sidebar for a description of various processes.)

The goal is to make the Downtown Eastside a safe, healthy and vibrant neighbourhood for everyone.

"There have been 20 years of studies about the deterioration of the Downtown Eastside and now it appears that some concerted action is being taken. There is a huge amount of work to be done and not enough people to do it. Incorporating the people who have drug, alcohol and mental health problems into solutions may slow the process, but it's worth it.

- Bob Gilson, Tradeworks, a 10-year-old program providing skills training for people on income assistance in the DTES and Strathcona



- Employment training programs for local residents.
- Training programs for owners and residents of SRO hotels to help improve the safety of these lodgings and the health of occupants.

Some Long-term Objectives

- Design a housing plan that will find a balance between protecting current residents by providing safe, clean affordable housing, as well as attracting and sustaining more legitimate economic activity to the neighbourhood through market housing.
- Development of a comprehensive substance misuse strategy for the region that involves a continuum-of-care approach: from prevention and enforcement, to harm reduction and treatment.
- Residents, agencies, businesses and government to develop a long-term economic revitalization plan that could include lease subsidies for new businesses along parts of Hastings Street, the establishment of a community development corporation, and seed money to start up new community-based businesses. ■

Vancouver Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment

The Vancouver Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment represents a diverse cross-section of community partners committed to improving crime prevention and drug treatment in Vancouver. The Coalition began in 1997 with 20 partners. Today, there are more than 60.

This March and April, the Coalition, along with various community partners, will sponsor a series of community forums to discuss a continuum-of-care approach to Vancouver's drug problem. For more information call 688.7202 or visit the DTES Web site at www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/dtes

National Crime Prevention Centre

In February 1999, the federal National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) provided a \$5 million grant to the City of Vancouver and its partner the Vancouver Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment. These funds were allocated to help the City and the Coalition work with people from the DTES community to improve safety in the Downtown Eastside.

Designed to promote community involvement in crime prevention, the program has to date:

- supported Community Directions, a group involving residents and agencies in the DTES. Their mandate is to educate and involve residents in discussions and plans that will promote a safer community.
- established a research project designed to poll residents on their perceptions of crime and their vision of a safer community. The project will hire 16 local youth to administer the survey.

Vancouver Agreement Marks Milestone in Cooperation

The Vancouver Agreement is a five-year commitment by the federal government, the Province of B.C., and the City of Vancouver to work together to support sustainable economic, social and community development in Vancouver. Although the agreement affects the entire city, the initial focus is on where the need is currently the greatest, in the Downtown Eastside.

The Agreement addresses three main themes: community health and safety, economic and social development, and community capacity building.

In each area, the three governments along with the V/RHB and the community, will develop workable plans, and begin implementation of those plans as soon as possible.

Next Steps

- A re-design of the Main and Hastings Street corner in front of the Carnegie Centre to create a social gathering place for the whole community.
- New by-laws to improve safety and the appearance of buildings in the DTES, including helping property owners remove graffiti from their buildings.
- Develop with residents and businesses of Chinatown a vision and plan for their neighbourhood.
- Work with businesses and residents of Gastown to develop a heritage management program that will make it easier to renovate existing buildings in their area.
- A new dental centre, funded by the provincial government, will provide basic dental services to low-income families and BC benefits recipients in the DTES. The centre, which will open in the fall of 2000, will be located in the Sunrise Hotel on East Hastings Street.
- The establishment by the V/RHB of a resource and a sobering centre to provide health, counselling and referral services to alcohol and drug addicted residents. Health Canada is a partner in the resource centre.
- Possible restrictions on the establishment of more convenience stores in the DTES.

key program partners

DTES residents, organizations and businesses
City of Vancouver
Vancouver Coalition on Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment
Vancouver/ Richmond Health Board
Vancouver Police Department
Vancouver Park Board
Vancouver Economic Development Commission
National Crime Prevention Centre
Federal and provincial governments through the Vancouver Agreement

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Cover photo: Carnegie Centre
City of Vancouver Archives
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Inside graphics found on murals painted by residents of the DTES.