

Homelessness in Vancouver.

We can do something.



Homelessness is preventable.

People do not end up on the streets by accident. Public policy and urban development trends can either contribute to poverty and homelessness or prevent it. Vancouver is at a turning point; we now have the opportunity to prevent the homelessness experienced in other large cities. Without an anti-homelessness by-law that protects residential hotels and rooming houses, it could easily get worse.

Research has proven that one of the major causes of homelessness in Toronto and US cities is the loss of residential hotels and rooming houses. Cities such as San Francisco, New York and San Diego have all actively intervened to prevent further decreases in their hotel and rooming stock in order to stem rising homelessness. If Vancouver is to prevent a homeless catastrophe similar to those experienced by thousands in these cities, we need to enact similar controls.

A legacy of evictions & lost units.

1970 to 1996

- In 1970, there were about 13,400 SRO (single room occupancy) units in 436 buildings in the Downtown Core.
- By 1996, this stock had shrunk by 44%, leaving us with 7,500 units in 172 buildings.
- Fire and closure due to lack of maintenance were key factors in the loss of hotel units. However, many of the units were lost during Expo '86 when several hundred long-term residents were forcibly evicted for tourists.

In this past year...

In 1997, we lost over 600 units due to conversion of residential hotels to tourist accommodation.

We're losing our homes faster than ever. Creating an anti-homelessness bylaw protects low-income housing and prevents increased homelessness.



The loss of housing for lower-income singles is a war of attrition. In the past year, we have lost over 600 SRO units as residential hotels and rooming houses convert to tourist accommodation. These include **the Hartney Apartments (above)** where 20 units were lost. It's now known as the New Backpackers' Hostel at 347 W. Pender.

Some, like **the Plaza Hotel (below)**, at Robson and Richards, are being demolished to make way for condominiums. Developers continue to pay very little for the loss of low income housing. An **anti-homelessness bylaw** would curb the conversion and demolition of residential hotels and protect those most at risk of homelessness.

San Francisco passed such a by-law, "in order to protect the resident tenants and to conserve the limited housing resources." Its recognition of the importance of residential hotels went a long way to stabilizing the Tenderloin district, one of San Francisco's lower-income neighbourhoods.



9 good reasons why Vancouver needs an anti-homelessness bylaw...

- 1. We're not the first.** There are numerous examples in other cities both in Canada and the United States where restrictive measures to preserve low-income housing have been put in place. For example: Toronto's rental housing protection act, New York City's five year SRO conversion and demolition moratorium (1985-1989) and San Francisco's anti-conversion/demolition ordinance created in 1980.
- 2. We've been asking for one since Expo '86.** Community advocates as far back as 1986 – when hundreds of hotel residents were evicted for tourists – have been lobbying for measures that protect the SROs from conversion and demolition.
- 3. There is a direct relationship between the loss of SRO housing and increases in homelessness.** For example, New York City's loss of SRO units led directly to increases in homelessness. Between 1982 and 1987, New York City's average daily shelter population rose from about 3,800 to than 9,600 – a 250% increase.
- 4. Homelessness is bad for business.** Hotel evictions from conversions means more people on the streets sleeping on the sidewalks and on the front doors of businesses. What do you think when you pass by?
- 5. Demolition fees are not new.** In the 70s and 80s, Vancouver lost a large part of its rental stock when rental apartments converted to condominiums. To curb the loss, the City of Vancouver imposed a levy on apartments which converted.
- 6. Development controls already exist through zoning.** There is nothing new about restrictions on private property. In fact, developers and property owners often fight for development control through zoning when it serves their purposes.
- 7. SRO hotels and rooming houses are no ordinary form of real estate. They require special consideration.** SRO hotels and rooming houses are the last stop before the street and shelters. What other form of real estate carries with it the understanding that the loss of this housing stock leads to an increase in homelessness?
- 8. Hotel owners won't necessarily benefit.** Hotels that rent on a monthly basis pay property taxes far below what a tourist hotel must pay. Conversion to tourist accommodation means hotels will be taxed at nearly 4 times their current rate.
- 9. Numerous SRO hotels and rooming houses have benefited from federal money for renovations.** For many years now the federal government has had a program called Rooming House Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). Millions of dollars have been given to SRO owners to upgrade their buildings. If hotel owners are willing to accept the money, then they need to accept the social responsibilities that go with owning an SRO hotel or rooming house.

FOUR SISTERS HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

Notes to the financial statements
as at 31 August 1989

Note 1 - Significant accounting policies

The Co-operative has adopted generally accepted accounting principles except for those noted below:

a) Depreciation

Under the terms of an agreement with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, depreciation is provided annually in amounts equal to the principal reduction of the mortgage on the housing project. The amortization period of the mortgage is thirty-five years and accordingly the project will be depreciated over that period.

b) Furniture and equipment

Furniture and equipment, other than replacement reserve items and the initial appliances, are expensed to operations in the year the expenditure is incurred.

c) Replacement reserve fund

In order to provide for replacement of capital improvements, the terms of the agreement with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation provide that a replacement reserve fund be established by charges to operations and transfers annually of \$47,750 to a separate bank account until a total of \$477,500 plus interest thereon is accumulated.

d) Subsidy surplus reserve fund

Under the terms of the agreement with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, excess federal assistance payments received may be retained in a subsidy surplus fund maintained in a separate bank account, up to a maximum of \$76,500 (\$500 per housing unit) plus interest. The funds in this account may only be used to meet future subsidy requirements of income-tested occupants over and above the maximum federal assistance.

e) RRAP Grant

Funds received under this program are shown as a reduction of the cost of the Co-operative's building.

Change in SRO and Non-Market Housing in the Downtown Core: *Back to 1988*

In 1996 (June)	Between 1991 – 1996 (June)	
12,191 units	Increase of 240 units Between 1991 and 1996 the total low-income housing stock increased from to 12,191 units	7,481 SROs + 4710 Non-market = 12,191 units 647 Non-market units produced - 407 SRO units lost - 240 units
Since 1996 (June)	Non-market housing produced 132 units produced Homer Place 90 units Bantlemon Court 15 units Victory House 27 units	SRO units lost 652 units lost Hotel California 135 units Royal Hotel 90 units Austin Hotel 121 units Niagara Hotel 100 units Dominion Hotel 67 units Cambie Hotel 41 units Grand Trunk Rooms 25 units Clarence Hotel 40 units Plaza Hotel 33 units
As of Feb. 1998	11,671 units Back to 1989 levels	652 – 132 = 520 Non-market housing in progress: Portland 86 units, Woodwards 200 units, VanCity 50 units, Bridge 47 units, Bruce Erickson 35 units, Chinese Benevolent 44 units = 462 units (not included in calculations)

Sources: 1996 Survey of Low-Income Housing in the Downtown Core (Jan 1997, City of Vancouver)
Change in the Downtown Core SRO Stock 1970-1994 (Nov.1995, City of Vancouver)
CCAP observations

Almost 65% of your income is spent on a room with no bathroom or kitchen.

A single person on welfare receives \$500 per month, of which \$325 is allotted for shelter.

Nearly half of all the hotel units in the Downtown Eastside and Granville St. neighbourhoods rent above what a GAIN recipient receives to pay rent. This forces hotel residents on GAIN to put money from their basic allowance toward their rent. For most, this means making do with even less than \$6 a day.

For example, the **Winters Hotel** charges \$400 / mth. and the **Chelsea Inn** charges \$425 / mth. for a room that faces the street and \$350 / mth. for an internal room with no window.

Victory Square and the Downtown South neighbourhoods are experiencing the greatest decrease in rooms renting at \$325 / mth. There is tremendous pressure from the City to "revitalize" these neighbourhoods, and development is very intense.

"Revitalization" means that rents increase and people cannot afford to live here anymore. We are being displaced.



Activists and tenants protested in November 1997 outside the Hotel California. Before an anti-homelessness bylaw could be passed, the Hotel California and the Royal Hotel evicted over 200 tenants, effectively choosing profits over people.

5 ways to pass an anti-homelessness bylaw with some teeth...

- 1. We need a zero displacement policy that recognizes shelter as a human right.** Residential hotels are homes to those who are most vulnerable to homelessness.
- 2. The by-law must be applied to the entire city, not just to the Downtown Eastside.** Hotels and rooming houses exist throughout Vancouver, not just the Downtown Eastside. A bylaw that applies to one area of Vancouver will only increase competition for accommodation in protected residential hotels and rooming houses. An area-specific policy does not go far enough towards preventing homelessness or gentrification.
- 3. The by-law should include residential hotels and rooming houses which have converted since July 1997.** The City has the power to impose a levy on hotels which have converted since July 1997, when the Province made an anti-homelessness bylaw possible.
- 4. The by-law needs to include a one-for-one replacement policy.** This requires that there be either a suitable replacement for every lost unit, or pay-in-lieu fees which provide a pool of money large enough to cover the costs of new low-income housing. For example, since 1991, the San Francisco pay-in-lieu fees equaled 80% of the replacement cost of a comparable unit plus the costs of acquiring the land for new units.
- 5. In order to truly prevent homelessness, the bylaw must go hand in hand with other measures to stabilise housing and services for low-income residents.** These include zoning policies that encourage the viability of inner city, low-income neighbourhoods, incentives to renovate and upgrade existing residential hotels, providing better services and amenities to lower income people as well as a range of affordable housing options. We need the federal government to re-instate funding for social housing and community development,

Here's what you can do...

March 1998 -- Art against Homelessness

In March of 1998, a collective of community activists and artists will be holding a series of concerts, readings, murals, street art and performance, gallery shows, and information open houses to draw attention to the housing and homelessness crisis in Vancouver.

We are looking for people and organizations interested in contributing their art, writing, street theatre ideas, or organizing experience. You don't have to be a professional artist to contribute.

For more information call the **Urban Youth Alliance @ 681-3676**.

Also sponsored by the **Gallery Gachet** and **Carnegie Community Action Project**.

Youth Housing Forum on Homelessness and Gentrification

March 5th, 1998 from 1 - 5pm

@ Aboriginal Friendship Centre, 1607 E. Hastings
call Urban Youth Alliance @ 681-3676

Let City Council Know.

Your letters to council go a long way to preventing further homelessness. Tell Mayor Owen and Council that we need an effective anti-homelessness bylaw immediately. The City of Vancouver now has the opportunity to avoid the massive homelessness seen in other cities.

write to:

Mayor and Council
453 W. 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC
V5Y 1V4

mayorandcouncil@city.vancouver.bc.ca

p: 873-7273

fx: 873-7419

No Room @ the Inn.

In the past 2-3 years, numerous SRO hotels and rooming houses that used to accommodate long-term residents have converted to backpacker hostels and tourist hotels.

These include:

- The New Backpackers' Hostel (formerly the Hartney Apartments @ 347 W. Pender) -- 20 units
- Grand Trunk Rooms (55 Powell St.) -- 25 units
- Cambie Hotel (312 Cambie St.) -- 41 units
- Clarence Hotel (515 Homer St.) -- 40 units
- Dominion Hotel (210 Abbott St.) -- 67 units
- Hotel California (1176 Granville) -- 135 units
- The Royal Hotel (1025 Granville) -- 90 units
- The Austin Hotel (1221 Granville) -- 121 units
- The Niagara Hotel (435 W. Pender) -- 100 units
- The Patricia Hotel (403 E. Hastings) -- 140 units

With a near zero vacancy rate, the remaining residential hotels have few rooms to accommodate the number of residents being evicted due to conversions.

Let your money talk.

Choose accommodation in hotels and hostels that have not converted to tourist use. Choose hotel bars and pubs that have not evicted residents. Many of these residential hotels depend on revenue from their bars and pubs.

For more information call:

Carnegie Community
Action Project
689-0397

the Urban Youth Alliance
681-3676

Supported by:

Downtown Eastside Seniors' Centre
Downtown Eastside Residents' Assc.
Downtown South Residents' Assc.
Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society
The Gallery Gachet
Lookout
Lower Mainland Network for Affordable Housing
Main and Hastings Community Development Society
Native Health Society
Neighbourhood Helpers Project
The Portland Hotel Society
Political Response Group
RayCam Community Centre
Tenants' Rights Action Coalition
United We Can