

The Downtown Eastside Community

Gentrification. Displacement. Homelessness. Poverty. These are just a few of the challenges we face every day in the Downtown Eastside.

Public policy has a direct affect on our lives. It can make the problems we face worse or it can improve the community.

Often the voices of residents and community organizations are ignored by policy makers. Their final decisions do not always reflect our community's needs.

We have identified 6 necessary measures for an equitable, healthy, and sustainable Downtown Eastside community. These measures either reinforce, supplement or challenge the emerging policy positions being taken by the City on the proposed Housing Plan for the Downtown Eastside.

The Downtown Eastside Community Housing Plan has been endorsed by more than a dozen local organizations who work directly with those who live here. These include:

- Carnegie Community Association
- Downtown Eastside Seniors Centre
- Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society
- Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
- First United Church
- Lookout
- Lower Mainland Network for Affordable Housing
- Tenants Rights Action Coalition
- Main & Hastings Community Development Society
- Vancouver Native Health Society
- Portland Hotel Society
- RayCam Community Association
- Triage
- United We Can
- Urban Youth Alliance

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Measure 1

Eastside Pride


Past, present and future ...
The Downtown Eastside as a Low-income community


For decades now, the Downtown Eastside has been a highly stable and diverse low-income neighbourhood. The length of residency here is one of the highest in the City!


The City predicts that if trends remain the same, the Downtown Eastside could see a doubling of market units over the next 10 years. We want to ensure that no low-income residents are displaced as a result of these market units.


We're proud of our community and its history as a low-income neighbourhood. We want to maintain the Downtown Eastside as a low-income neighbourhood and avoid any division between "desirable" and "undesirable" low-income residents.

The promotion of Eastside Pride includes:

 **Accessible public space.** Public space in the parks, on the streets and other community amenities must remain accessible to low-income residents.

 **No net loss.** The City must agree to a policy of no net loss to the existing stock of low-income housing which is over 10,000 units. Assuming that our 4,000 units of social housing are secure, we still face the challenge of securing, maintaining and replacing the remaining 6,000+ SRO units.

 **More new low-income housing.** We need a renewed commitment by the City, the Province and the Federal Government to continue and expand their participation in the production of new low-income housing.

 **Safety for low-income residents.** We need the City to stand behind a policy of Zero Tolerance towards the harassment of low-income residents in public spaces. This includes a call for the Attorney General to enact regulations governing private security guards, and for the City of Vancouver to repeal its anti-panhandling by-law.

Action Promote Eastside Pride through city policy, including accessible public space, no net loss of low-income housing and safety for low-income residents.

Create an Anti-homelessness By-law

Measure 2

Protecting residential hotels and rooming houses prevents homelessness

In 1970 Vancouver had over 13,000 residential hotel units in over 430 buildings in the Downtown Core. Today only half remain. In the past 2 to 3 years alone, more than 700 units have been lost to conversion and demolition.

Residential hotels and rooming houses are the last stop before the street. **The conversion** and demolition of residential hotels in this community is displacing residents from their homes, and threatens to push many people into homelessness. We need a City by-law to control or stop the conversion and demolition of hotels. "Anti-homelessness legislation" prevents homelessness by preserving the homes of residents living in residential hotels and rooming houses.

In July 1997, at the request of the City of Vancouver, the Provincial government passed legislation allowing Vancouver to create a hotel conversion and demolition control by-law. The City needs to enact a hotel conversion and demolition control by-law before it's too late.





For over 17 years, San Francisco has had this kind of a by-law. It works!...since 1990, no residential hotel in San Francisco has legally converted to tourist use.



"It's been absolutely vital."

Randy Shaw -- Tenderloin Housing Clinic
In reference to San Francisco's Conversion and Demolition Control by-law.

To be effective the by-law must:

-  Be based on the principles of Zero Displacement.
-  Apply to the whole city, not just the Downtown Eastside.
-  Affect hotels which have converted since the time that the City was first given the power to enact the by-law (July 17, 1997).
-  Include a policy of one-for-one replacement of lost suites, or a pay-in-lieu fee of 80% of the cost of replacing the housing PLUS the cost of buying the land for replacement housing.

If there is a high vacancy rate for SROs, why should we worry about securing the SRO stock?

The vacancy rate of SROs does not reflect a lack of demand...just look at the number of people turned away at our emergency shelters, or the years-long waiting lists for social housing! Even the City admits that vacant SRO units tend to be concentrated in a few buildings that are either unliveable or too expensive for low-income residents.

The Plaza Hotel (at Robson and Richards) will soon be demolished to make way for



A one-for-one replacement policy would require that one new unit be built for every hotel room that we lose due to demolition or conversion.

A one-for-one replacement policy can be established in two ways:

Area-wide one-for-one replacement policy	Site-specific one-for-one replacement policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotel being converted or demolished by owner or developer • Developer not responsible for replacing lost units • City and Province responsible for replacing lost units. The public ends up footing most of the bill, and the replacement units may never get built at all <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example:</i> Downtown South</p> <p>Since 1995, this one-for-one replacement policy for lost low-income housing units works on an area-wide basis. New social housing is funded through a city/provincial partnership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotel being converted or demolished by owner or developer • Developer is directly responsible for replacing lost units • Developer profits from destroying low-income housing and so must pay to replace it <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example:</i> City of San Francisco</p> <p>Since 1979, this policy only allows demolition or conversion of residential hotels through direct provision of one-for-one replacement units OR paying 80% of construction costs of replacement units.</p>

A one-for-one replacement policy needs to be site-specific

An area-wide one-for-one replacement policy has no teeth. The Downtown Eastside advocates a 'site specific' one-for-one replacement policy, which makes it the owner's responsibility to replace any lost SRO units.

Action Create a demolition and conversion control by-law with a site-specific one-to-one replacement policy.

3

Livable Replacement Housing

CREATING REPLACEMENT HOUSING FOR RESIDENTIAL HOTELS THAT IS SAFE, SECURE AND LIVABLE...

Since the withdrawal of federal government support for social housing, the challenge of producing new affordable housing in the Downtown Eastside has forced housing advocates to review alternative ways of producing low-income housing. This has included various cost-saving measures such as reducing the size of a self-contained unit, reducing the amount of amenity space or increasing the number of units (e.g. to 200 - 300 units).

There is strong support amongst the signatories of this Community Housing Plan for the following policies related to replacement housing in the Downtown

Maintain Existing City Standards

The City of Vancouver must maintain its existing standards for minimum suite size. Currently a dwelling unit must have a minimum floor area of 320 ft², which is relaxable by the Director of Planning to 275 ft².

What about proposed housing projects below City standards?

Units smaller than 320 ft² can be considered in cases where a target group wants this kind of housing. Community agencies/organizations serving the target group would be required to be involved. Approval would be on a case by case basis and subject to "test criteria" as well as an evaluation process. However, units under 320 ft² are not seen as an acceptable pattern for general housing or large-scale developments.

Test Criteria for projects below 320ft²

- Project developed by or operated by a non-profit housing society
- Target groups must want this smaller unit size, consider it to meet their needs, and be involved in the design
- All units to have their own bathroom
- All units to have food heating or cooking and food storage capability, as defined by the target group
- Significant amenity space on site (e.g. food service, communal kitchens, TV lounge, large lobby, quiet area)
- Maximum 50 to 70 units if it is a "stand alone" project (i.e. not a mixed unit size project)
- Should be part of a mixed unit size and a mixed tenant population (i.e. a mix typical of the neighbourhood)
- Paced with more traditional, standard low-income housing projects (i.e. social housing)
- All projects to have program staff or life skills staff built into the funding formula
- All projects to develop management training and management standards or certification
- Rents for all units at shelter allowance levels
- No units built below 200 ft²

Density and Small Suites

There is strong concern amongst housing advocates over the concentration of small suites in one housing project. Thus, the following principles should apply in higher density housing projects.

Any project over 70 units needs additional program staffing. Projects over 100 units need to prove they can work by providing a workable mix of people, skills, and ages, and by having sufficient staffing and amenity space to facilitate the building of community. As well, adequate staffing and service agency partnerships must be built into the funding formula to ensure that the intended housing recipient (target group) is eligible on a long-term basis.

Action

Maintain dwelling unit size standards (320 ft²), and commitment by City to relax this standard only when test criteria are met.

4

Enforcing Standards of Maintenance and Good Management

Measure


STRICTLY ENFORCING the EXISTING STANDARDS OF MAINTENANCE BY-LAW AND CREATING MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES


Vancouver has some of the best standards of maintenance for hotels and rooming houses in Canada. The tools exist: now we need to ensure that they are more strictly and effectively enforced so that buildings are maintained and tenants don't suffer.


Even though building inspectors have issued numerous repair orders, some hotels have been neglected over time to the point that the building is a health and safety hazard. We need to amend the Enforcement and Penalties section of the Standards of Maintenance By-Law.


The City of Vancouver must give building inspectors stronger enforcement tools, and increase fines and penalties for non-compliance. These include:

 **A shorter time frame** for compliance of inspectors orders.

 **Fines** if no work is done after 3 inspections.

 **Strict warnings** to owners where a building has deteriorated due to "deferred maintenance."

 **Unpaid tickets** or fines would be placed on the property owner's tax bill.

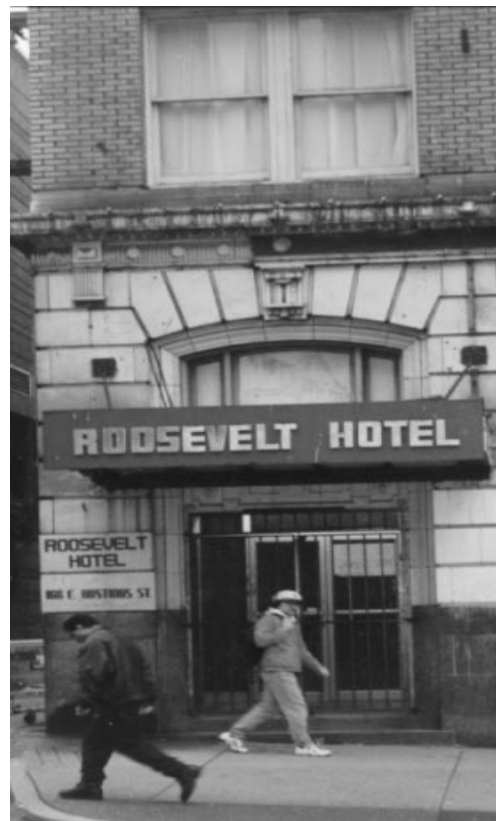
 **Stiffer penalties** -- including increased fines, ticketing for repeat infractions or business permits suspensions.

What about standards of management?

The deterioration of a SRO hotel or rooming house has as much to do with the owner's management practices as it does with the level of cleaning and maintenance. For example, the recent closure of the Roosevelt Hotel (June, 1997) for health and safety reasons was largely the result of mismanagement by its owner. (See picture below)

The Standards of Maintenance By-Law should be amended to incorporate Standards of Management guidelines for SROs. These guidelines should specify basic good management practices, including compliance with the Residential Tenancy Act.

Enforcement of standards of maintenance and management alone risks evictions and closures. Together with a city-wide conversion and demolition control by-law the risk of evictions and closure is reduced by ensuring that units are secured for low-income residents.



The recent closure of the Roosevelt Hotel (at Hastings and Main) may have been prevented had there been Standards of Management guidelines in place for SROs.

Action

Amend the Enforcement and Penalties section of the Standards of Maintenance by-law and create Standards of Management guidelines for SROs.

5 Measure

Zoning for Community Goals

Achieving opportunity and stability through zoning
for the Downtown Eastside Community

Housing and community amenities catering to low-income residents remain unstable in the wake of declining government support and development pressures that either promote disinvestment or 'upscaling' within the Downtown Eastside.

Zoning can help governments and the development industry meet community goals, and encourage stability and opportunity. Such zoning measures could include:

A requirement that developers construct affordable housing units, not just set aside the land. The developer could either rent the units at affordable rents or turn them over to the City or a non-profit for management. (For example, the rezoning for the Edge development on Alexander St.).

Surcharges on rezoning. Rezoning land from low-cost industrial to residential use results in windfall profits for the landowner or the developer. A percentage of these profits could go towards funding affordable housing, or the City could take a percentage of the new units for affordable rental tenure.



Linkage Fees could be applied to Vancouver's new Trade and Convention Centre, where over 1.5 million sq.ft. of new hotel and convention facilities are to be built. Greystone Properties, Marriot International, Vancouver Port Corporation and the Provincial Government are the developers.

Linkage fees. Widely used in the United States, 'linked development programs' take into consideration the fact that large-scale developments cost city governments because they require the public funding of new infrastructure. Vancouver does this to a degree through its Development Cost Levy policy, but it could go further. For example, under a linkage program, the developer (Greystone) of the new Convention Centre (below left) would pay a surcharge for each square foot of new development, a portion of which would go to fund new housing.

Linkage fees in San Francisco

When an expanding trade and convention business threatened to displace the Tenderloin, a low-income neighbourhood, hoteliers agreed to support a variety of mitigation efforts including:

- Funding a variety of community activities such as a child care centre, a seniors centre, a neighbourhood park and rezoning study.
- Donating over \$1.5 million to a Tenderloin Community Fund
- Creating a housing subsidy fund through a \$.50 a night occupied room charge, producing \$5.4 million.
- One new hotel provided \$1.1 million loan and ongoing rent subsidy for SRO development.

Tax increment financing. Zoning can be used to create a development district where monies can be borrowed against future increased tax revenues which result in the rezoning that encourages more valuable and intensive land use. Money borrowed can be used to develop affordable housing projects.

Downzoning to encourage affordable, low-income housing projects. Similar to the already in place zoning in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (DEOD), which encourages non-market housing by restricting residential development densities on housing projects that do not include non-market housing.

Action

Adopt zoning regulations which promote community goals.

6

Community Development Initiatives

There is more to housing than just 'bricks and mortar.'

Promoting and securing housing for low-income residents requires special initiatives that cover broader aspects of community life, such as business and employment opportunities.

All levels of government working together are needed for this measure. However, the City of Vancouver should take a leadership role in promoting the following initiatives in the Downtown Core:

Establish a Community Development Corporation (CDC). Widely used in the United States, CDCs have proven essential in mobilizing the financial and community development partners necessary for the production of low-income housing. This is especially critical at a time when funding for housing is increasingly requiring the pooling of public, private and philanthropic funds.

Start a Downtown Housing Preservation Program. This program would look at ways to finance the purchase and renovation of residential hotels and rooming houses (for example, New York City has a SRO Loan Program). This program should include federal support such as the Rooming House Rehabilitation Program (RRAP).

Require pre-employment skills, training and development programs on all new construction in the Downtown Core. Programs of this type could be made a requirement of rezoning and development permit approvals in the Downtown Core.

Action Create community development initiatives, with leadership from the City.

A C T I O N S

Promote Eastside Pride through city policy, which includes commitment to accessible public space, no net loss of low-income housing and safety for low-income

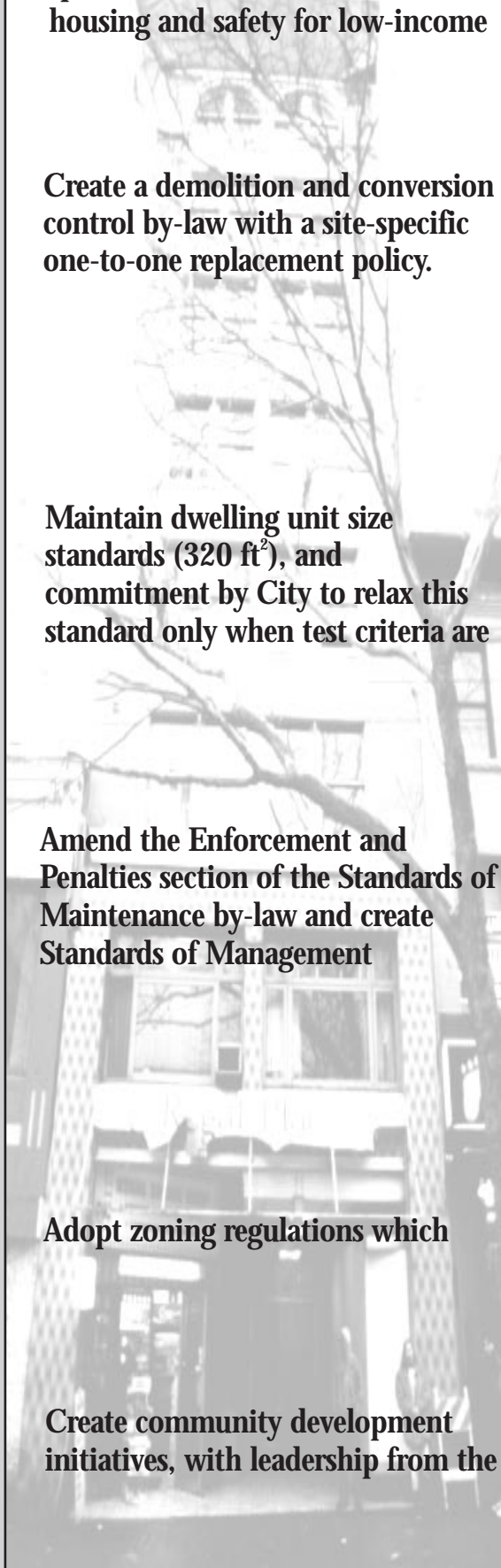
Create a demolition and conversion control by-law with a site-specific one-to-one replacement policy.

Maintain dwelling unit size standards (320 ft²), and commitment by City to relax this standard only when test criteria are

Amend the Enforcement and Penalties section of the Standards of Maintenance by-law and create Standards of Management

Adopt zoning regulations which

Create community development initiatives, with leadership from the



More info?



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ASSOCIATION**

**DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE
SENIORS CENTRE**

**DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE
YOUTH ACTIVITIES SOCIETY**

FIRST UNITED CHURCH

LOOKOUT

**LOWER MAINLAND NETWORK
FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**TENANTS RIGHTS ACTION
COALITION**

**MAIN AND HASTINGS
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIETY**

**VANCOUVER NATIVE HEALTH
SOCIETY**

PORTLAND HOTEL SOCIETY

**RAYCAM COMMUNITY
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UNITED WE CAN

URBAN YOUTH ALLIANCE

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