

No PLACE To Go: **LOSING AFFORDABLE HOUSING & COMMUNITY**



CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT'S 2013 HOTEL SURVEY AND HOUSING REPORT

BY RORY SUTHERLAND, JEAN SWANSON AND TAMARA HERMAN

No Place To Go: Losing Affordable Housing & Community

CCAP's 2013 hotel survey and housing report

By Rory Sutherland, Jean Swanson and Tamara Herman

*Dedicated to all the Downtown Eastside residents
who need decent, affordable housing*



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CCAP acknowledges that our neighbourhood lies within the
Unceded Territory of the Coast Salish People: Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, Squamish.

The Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) is a project of the Carnegie Community Centre Association, which has about 5,000 members, most of whom live in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver. CCAP does community-based research and organizing on social housing, income and gentrification issues. Its overall goal is to create a DTES that is safe, healthy and affordable to the low-income residents who live here now.



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the findings or contents of this report.

If you find any inaccuracies in this report please contact Jean Swanson at jean.swanson@gmail.com.

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Design by Andrea Cornborough*

*Cover: Alexander Court is a gentrified hotel that is in the process of renovating
and charging higher rents that people on welfare can't afford.*

“It’s the people who make our community beautiful, and people make our community beautiful because they have soul. The Downtown Eastside is the soul of Vancouver. You know about soul food and soul music. Well, I’m talking about soul community. Many of us have lived through hard times – and survived. We know about pain, and in our pain, in spite of our pain, we reach out to each other and help each other. That’s soul. They say bodies are attracted by pleasure, but souls are attracted by pain. We are strong from the struggles we have endured. We have learned to respect each other and not to be judgemental. We have learned to work together to make things better.”

Sandy Cameron⁽¹⁾

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INTRODUCTION & HIGHLIGHTS

Seven hundred and thirty-one homeless people live in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) according to the City of Vancouver.⁽²⁾ Approximately 5000 more live on the edge of homelessness in tiny Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel rooms, with no private kitchen or bathroom, and often poor management, mice, rats, cockroaches and bedbugs. Most of these people rely on welfare and basic pension and desperately need new self contained social housing.

This year's Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) hotel and housing report found that SROs in the DTES are more expensive than ever and that fewer still are available to low-income individuals looking for rooms. Increasingly, residents looking for rooms find new forms of discrimination instead. Many hotel owners are attempting to get rid of current low-income tenants so they can renovate rooms and raise rents to the highest rate the market will allow. This means these rooms are unavailable to many on welfare, disability and basic pension. These "improved" buildings tend to cater to students and workers, advertise online only, and have intensive screening processes designed to filter out low-income individuals.

Because, above all else, cost determines low-income tenants' access to these spaces, every year CCAP surveys the privately owned and run SRO hotels in the DTES to track the number of hotel rooms that are affordable to low-income people. CCAP's sixth annual (2013) survey of privately owned and run hotels found:

- Vacancies are minimal and no rooms are renting for the welfare shelter rate of \$375;
- Last year's average hotel rent was \$452 per month and this year's average rent is \$469 per month. These figures are based on the lowest rent found in each hotel;
- This year alone, at least 236 more rooms were lost to low income people because their lowest rents increased to \$425 or higher;
- Fourteen hotels, with 614 rooms, rent all their rooms at \$500 or more;
- Along with higher rents, other barriers are preventing low-income people from renting hotel rooms. These include background checks, reference forms, online only advertising, and requirements for an explanation as to why applicants would be selected to live in the building;
- A number of hotels allow sharing but charge as much as \$375 extra when two people share a tiny room;
- New social housing construction is still totally failing to keep pace with hotel room losses. While over 200 SRO rooms were lost to higher rents this year, a mere 8 units of new self contained social housing at welfare rate opened.



The average lowest rent found for hotels surveyed by CCAP has been increasing rapidly over the past five years, leaving those subsisting on the \$610 provided for basic social assistance with less money to survive. This chart shows the decline in income remaining after paying rent, from \$212 in 2009 to \$141 in 2013. According to the Dieticians of BC, it costs \$292.31 to provide healthy food for a month for a man between 31 and 50 years of age.⁽³⁾

Overall, the rate of change of new developments for 2012, 2013 and the future is completely skewed in favor of market housing, with very small numbers of desperately needed social housing at welfare rate planned.

The year 2014 will be an important year for the DTES because the City plans to adopt a Local Area Plan (LAP) that will set the future of the neighbourhood for the next 30 years. At the time of publication of this report, only the draft LAP was publicly available. This year's CCAP hotel report includes a discussion of the

implications of the LAP, if the draft remains unchanged, for low-income residents in the DTES. The numbers provided by the City indicate that the LAP will not protect hotel room residents from higher rents or eviction by high rents. It will not provide enough new self-contained social housing to solve the DTES housing crisis within the next ten years. Furthermore, because the draft LAP will encourage thousands of new condos and market rental units, the unique assets of the DTES low-income community are at risk.

HOTEL SURVEY

Sample Information

Number of hotels checked: 81

Number of hotels CCAP got information from: 64

Percentage of hotels CCAP got information from: 79%

Rooms in hotels CCAP checked: 3319

Rooms in hotels CCAP got rent information from: 3071

Percent of rooms in the hotels CCAP got information from: 93%

RENTS

Rent is the most significant factor in low-income tenants' access to privately-owned SROs. Most hotels have rooms that rent at different rates. Without access to a hotel's books, it is impossible to know exactly how many rooms rent at which rate. In order to calculate changing affordability, CCAP's surveyors asked what the rent range was in each hotel.

For this report CCAP has conservatively grouped hotels by the lowest rent in the rent range. This means that hundreds of people actually pay higher rents than it appears by looking at our data. For example, in some cases CCAP has classified a hotel as having rents that start at \$425, despite the fact that some rooms rent at \$550 or more.

FIVE YEARS OF HOTEL SURVEY FINDINGS					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Percentage of hotel rooms where all rooms rent for \$375 or less*	29%	12%	7%	5%	4%
Number of rooms in hotels where all rooms rent for \$375 or less	777	365	235	159	126
Vacant hotel rooms renting for \$375 or less	4	2	2	1	0**
Number of rooms in hotels where lowest rent is \$425 or more	1416	1689	1567	2042	2278

*Total excludes Creekside, which does not rent to local residents.

**The 2012 survey found one room for \$300, but did not include it as a vacancy because it was barely larger than a single bed and had no outside window. Researchers found two similar rooms this year. The only difference was that the rents were \$375 and \$400.

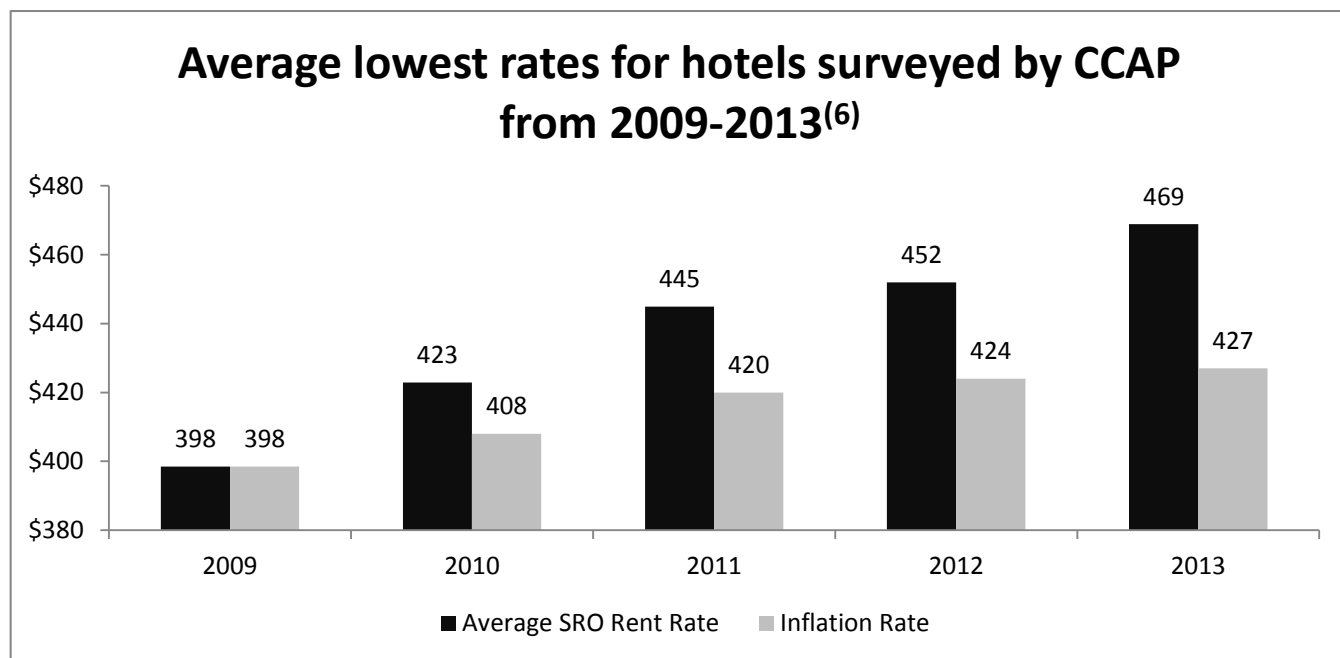
Between 2009 and 2013, the average lowest rents in hotels surveyed by CCAP increased from \$398 to \$469. As shown in the chart below, inflation only accounts for \$29 of this \$71 rent increase.

Every year CCAP tracks the number of rooms in hotels where the lowest rent is more than \$425 a month. This year researchers found another 236 rooms in hotels where rents are more than \$425.

Another troubling trend is that rents are going up past \$425 to \$500 a month and more. This year CCAP found 14 hotels with 614 rooms that rent for \$500 a month or more. The City of Vancouver itself documented 23 hotels renting at least some rooms at \$500 or more.⁽⁴⁾ CCAP's research over the years has shown that the transition to higher rents is usually gradual. It follows that the hotels that now have some high-rent rooms could be converting so that soon all rooms in these buildings will be renting for over \$500.

This research demonstrates that the housing crisis is getting worse for DTES residents on social assistance. Although the average DTES SRO has become much more expensive over the last five years, social assistance rates have not been raised beyond \$610 since 2007. The shelter allowance rate for people on social assistance is \$375 a month. For a person on social assistance, \$375 a month in rent is 61% of their income. This average increase of \$71 is an additional 12% of their income. In other words, the \$71 average rent increase means that a person on social assistance spends 73% of their income on housing.

The situation is not much better for people on basic old age pension, who can afford only about \$390 a month for rent if they are to pay 30% of their \$1300 a month pension. Both Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and BC Housing say renters should pay only up to 30% of their income for rent if the rent is to be "affordable."⁽⁵⁾



VACANCIES

Vacancy rates provide a glimpse into what options are available to low-income people who are on the cusp of homelessness in the DTES.

CCAP collected vacancy information from 55 hotels and found:

- The two vacancies at less than \$425 were tiny, windowless rooms, which are illegal;
- Nine of the 55 hotels had vacancies for rooms over \$425;
- The desk clerk in one hotel said they had one room available for rent at \$425, but applicants had to wait 24 hours for a “background check” to be completed and provide three references;
- The average rent for hotels with vacant rooms was \$532.

DOUBLE BUNKING

Double bunking is when two people share a tiny SRO room. This common practice can disguise homelessness. In 2012, CCAP found 18 hotels that allow double bunking. This year, CCAP found seven hotels that allow sharing, although it is safe to assume that many more probably do. Four of these hotels charged at least the welfare shelter allowance of \$375 for each person. Only two hotels were found to charge this much for sharing last year.

Cramming two people into one tiny room adds another level of danger to SRO life, especially for women. Double bunking pushes two people into a very small space, adding tensions to relationships already strained by

poverty and, in some cases, existing abusive dynamics. This can contribute to violence against women.

DAILY/WEEKLY RENTALS

Short-term rentals erode the low-income housing stock in the DTES because they remove rooms from the stock of rooms-for-rent on a permanent basis. Held for temporary tenants who pay higher rents, these rooms are either perpetually vacant or rent for close to \$1,000 a month to a series of shorter-term tenants.

Renting SRO rooms on a daily or weekly basis is illegal unless the hotel has exemptions from the City. The Ivanhoe and Columbia Hotels are allowed to rent certain rooms daily or weekly. This year, informants told CCAP that the Georgia Manor had a room for rent for \$90 a day and the Cobalt had rooms for rent for \$200 a week.

GENTRIFICATION

There are two kinds of SRO hotel rooms: Classic SROs, which rent to low-income residents, and gentrified SROs, which rent to higher-income and socially-mobile tenants. The City itself has acknowledged the distinction between the two types of rooms in recent research.⁽⁷⁾

Classic SROs rent to low-income residents and fulfill their traditional role as the last stop for low-income people before homelessness. People live in these buildings out of desperation, because they have nowhere else to go, not because they can stand to live in them. Classic SROs are still renting predominantly to low-income tenants, but their rents are climbing so that tenants are paying more and more of their meager incomes to rent. People whose total



Left: The Burns Block is a gentrified hotel that used to rent to people on welfare but now charges rents in the \$800-1000 range.

Below: The BC rooms on Jackson St. is a classic SRO, where low-income people still live, but their rents are still going up past the welfare shelter rate.



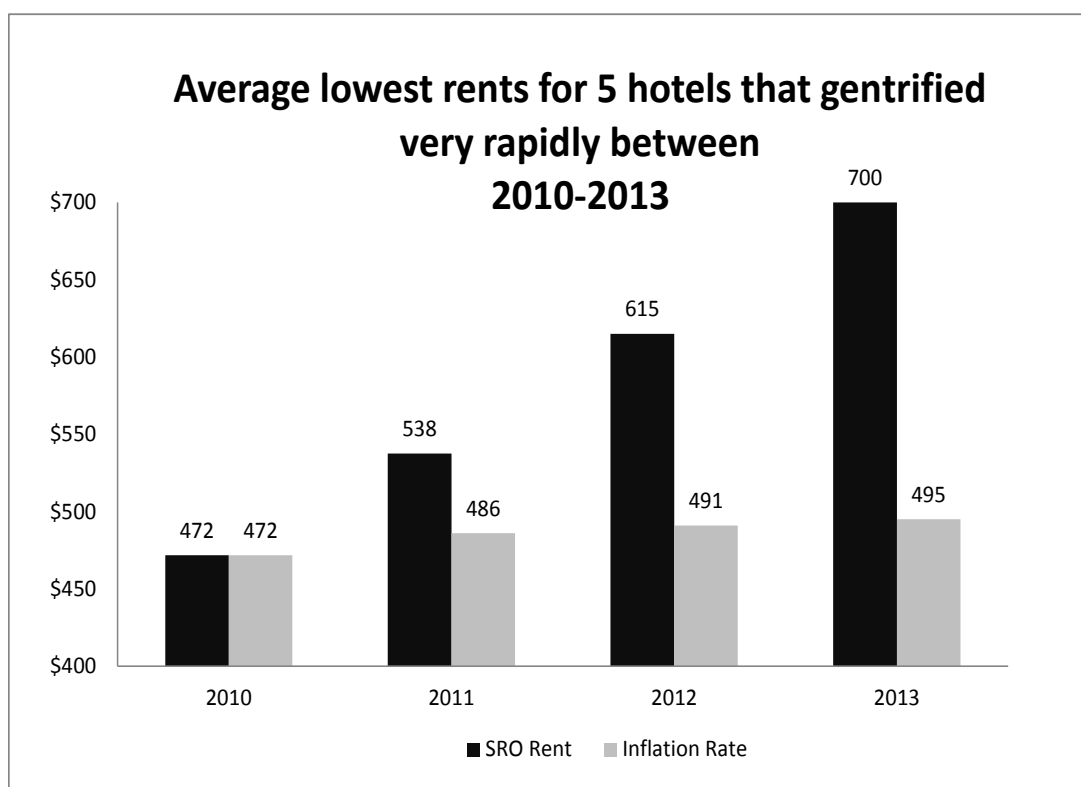
income is the social assistance rate of \$610 a month are paying \$425 to \$475 for these units.

Classic SROs are becoming unaffordable to low-income tenants because welfare rates have been stagnant for so many years and because the old buildings are expensive to maintain. They are also unaffordable because gentrification is driving up property values and property taxes. For example, the assessed property value of the Balmoral Hotel, where the lowest rent in 2013 was \$450, increased by almost half a million dollars between 2011 and 2012.⁽⁸⁾

Gentrified SROs are hotels that do not rent to low-income residents, blocking them through social exclusion and high prices. One company, "Living Balance", is responsible for much of the displacement of low-income people from the DTES. Living Balance buys hotels, gets rid of tenants on welfare, upgrades slightly, then rents the rooms for higher rents. The company currently operates several gentrified DTES hotels: Alexander Court, American Hotel, Golden Crown, Lotus, Shamrock and York Rooms.⁽⁹⁾

The manager of business development for Living Balance, Geoffrey Howes, recently commented in a YouTube interview that it is not worth it for the company to rent to "welfare individuals" because it does not make money and "the rooms get destroyed."⁽¹⁰⁾ This type of stereotyping can make it more difficult for low-income people, who already face discrimination when looking for housing, to find rooms. Howes emphasizes that "legally, we can charge any amount we want for those rooms." He agrees that people are getting priced out of the neighbourhood, but states in the interview that this is good because welfare rate housing in the DTES creates a "ghetto." He points out how well the "blended rate" of their buildings works, with some suites at the welfare rate and some above the welfare rate.

However, the company cannot legally raise the rents more than a modest amount until existing tenants move out. In fact, the Pivot Legal Society reported that a Living Balance Building manager used bribes and intimidation to force low-income residents out of their building.⁽¹¹⁾ This allows the company to then raise the rents as much as it wants between



occupancies. A recent Craigslist posting for one Living Balance building, Alexander Court, announced that when ongoing renovations are finished, the rooms will be available for \$550-\$800. In 2012, CCAP researchers were told that rooms in this building start at \$430.

The City's Single Room Accommodation bylaw allows City Council to charge a fee to landlords who convert their SRO buildings. It is supposed to protect SROs against conversion, but was passed by Council in 2003 when the main threats to SRO hotel room losses were conversions into regular-sized apartments, tourist hotels or office spaces. Because this bylaw assumed that no one except the very poor would ever agree to live in a miserable SRO room, it regulated use and tenancy-type only, not price. The gentrified SROs, unimaginable a decade ago, are overtaking the classic, low-income housing stock in 2013.

—DISCRIMINATION AGAINST— LOW-INCOME TENANTS

The strongest form of discrimination against low-income tenants is pricing. Rents in the DTES have risen much more quickly than the rate of inflation. While the average rent in hotel rooms surveyed by CCAP has increased by \$71 in the past five years, the chart displayed on the previous page shows that the average lowest rents for five hotels that have recently gentrified very quickly, have increased \$228 over just five years. The five hotels that this information is based on are the West, Georgia Manor, Lotus, Metropole, and Golden Crown (the last three are all Living Balance properties). The average lowest rent of \$700 in the gentrified hotels is \$90 more than people receive a month on basic social assistance.

Discrimination against low-income tenants takes other forms as well. Marketing and

advertising vacant rooms can serve to target specific people and exclude others. Traditionally building managers fill SRO rooms by talking to people who walk in off the street. Potential SRO residents are homeless, seeking escape from an unsafe or unhealthy living situation, or displaced into the DTES by eviction, unaffordable living conditions, or social discrimination elsewhere. They walk the neighbourhood streets and approach desk clerks asking if a room is available. Our research illustrates that many are forced to either settle in rooms they cannot afford, in conditions where they cannot be healthy or happy, or remain homeless.

The information that CCAP found this year clearly shows that economic discrimination is increasing in the hotels surveyed, but there are also other forms of exclusion that affect DTES residents who are looking for housing. Application and screening processes can allow property managers to discriminate against low-income residents. Technological features, such as security cameras and keyless entries, are subtle measures that appeal to renters with higher incomes and can deter low-income people from applying for units.

ONLINE ADVERTISING

CCAP researchers found 12 hotels that advertise rooms online. This is the only form of advertising for many of these hotels. Behind every online ad is an assumption that the people targeted are able to access the internet and have a level of online fluency. Given the difficulty of accessing the internet that many DTES residents face, it can be assumed that the apartments that are advertised online are not meant for local community members. This assumption is corroborated by housing descriptions, such as "Parisian Living" in the Grand Trunk Hotel, and the tenancy application details in these online ads.

"Artists and students are encouraged."

"Please email to arrange viewing, please include LinkedIn profile link with email. Only applicants with verified income will be considered."

Gastown Character Apartment

[CL](#) > [vancouver, BC](#) > [vancouver](#) > [all housing](#) > [apts/housing for rent](#)

Reply

bnkml-4194667036@hous.craigslist.org

flag: [miscategorized](#) [prohibited](#) [spam](#) [best of](#)

\$700 / 1br - Gastown Character Apartment (90 Alexander)

"Send me a little about yourself and why you would be chosen for our building."

"All applicants will be subjected to a credit check, criminal record check and reference check."

Hotel room for rent in trendy gastown Building

[CL](#) > [vancouver, BC](#) > [vancouver](#) > [all housing](#) > [apts/housing for rent](#)

reply

X flag

Posted: 2 months ago

\$549 / 1br - 250ft² - Hotel room for rent in trendy gastown Building (gastown vancouver)

"This building is privately owned with hand selected guests. So what you're paying for is a location which can't be beat and classy neighbours. On a street shared with up scale restaurants and Lawyers offices and on a street with Bentleys and Range Rovers parked outside"

These quotes were taken from online advertisements for buildings that have traditionally been housing for low-income DTES residents.

APPLICATION FORMS & SCREENING PROCESSES

Applications and screening processes are ways in which managers can control the type and class of tenants in a given building. Three hotels ask applicants to fill out an application form. At the New Columbia, applications are not necessary if one is able to provide a credit card, which many low income people do not possess. At the Travellers, the application involves a consent form to release personal information and 24 hours to complete a “background check.” Beyond this, Alexander Court requires that potential tenants agree to a credit check, reference check, income verification check, and a criminal record check.

The Office of the Information & Privacy Commissioner of BC (OIPC) has determined that, under the Personal Information Protection Act, it is not reasonable for a landlord to make a criminal record check a condition of renting⁽¹²⁾.

Other hotels also ask for information that the OIPC considers to be unreasonable for a landlord to require from a potential tenant. For example, the application for the Travellers asks for a driver’s license number and a social insurance number. The New Columbia requires a credit card number, another unreasonable condition of renting.

Several of the online advertisements clearly refer to an informal screening process. The Grand Trunk describes its tenants as “hand selected.” Pender Place asks that you include where you are working or studying when replying to the posting. Alexander Court asks respondents to “send a little about yourself and why you would be chosen for our building.” The posting also advises respondents to include access to their LinkedIn profile in their application. LinkedIn is a social networking website for professionals that many low-

income people would not be familiar with.

SECURITY CAMERAS

Four of the hotels that advertised online used the fact that they have security cameras as a selling point. Many people who live in the DTES know one another and feel safe in their community, but wealthier individuals who do not have this connection to the neighbourhood may be reassured by the presence of security cameras. Low-income residents also face discrimination by police and private security guards. They often feel that the security cameras are there to watch them on behalf of others.

KEYLESS ENTRY

Four of the hotels advertised online used the fact that they have keyless entry systems, with “fobs”, as a selling point. These devices are convenient, but expensive to replace and a disincentive for potential low-income renters. If an individual is subsisting on the \$610 a month welfare rate, this fee represents a devastating setback. Herb Varley, formerly a York Rooms resident, told CCAP researchers that he was charged a \$30 replacement fee when he lost his key fob. Herb had no way of replacing his key fob until he got his next cheque. Without his key fob, he had to wait for hours for other hotel residents to let him into the building.

RENOVATIONS

CCAP researchers found numerous hotels where online advertising or managers referred to recent renovations. These hotels include the American, Grand Trunk, Alexander Court, Golden Crown, Metropole, Pender Place, and Wonder Rooms. Advertising that a building is undergoing renovations sends a strong-

message to low-income DTES residents that they will not be welcome. The manager at the Wonder Rooms told a CCAP researcher how nice the building was after the renovation, and then stated that they have “got rid of all the bad apples, if you know what I mean.” As renovations take place, building

managers stereotype low-income people, “the bad apples,” and then discriminate against them. This manager gave a CCAP researcher a price of \$475 for an unrenovated room and \$575 for one that had been renovated.



The Wonder Rooms, at 50 E. Cordova, is upgrading to get rid of low-income tenants.



NEW CONSTRUCTION



The only social housing at welfare rate that opened in the DTES in 2013 were these units made from shipping containers on Alexander St.

2013 has been yet another terrible year for low income housing in the Downtown Eastside. Only eight new social housing units at welfare rate have opened. This is housing built out of shipping containers and operated by Atira Women's Resource Society. At least 236 more SRO units have been lost to rent increases at \$425 or above, beyond what people on welfare and basic pension can afford. This means low-income people are either displaced or have to spend a huge percentage of their meager incomes on rent, leaving very little for food and other necessities.

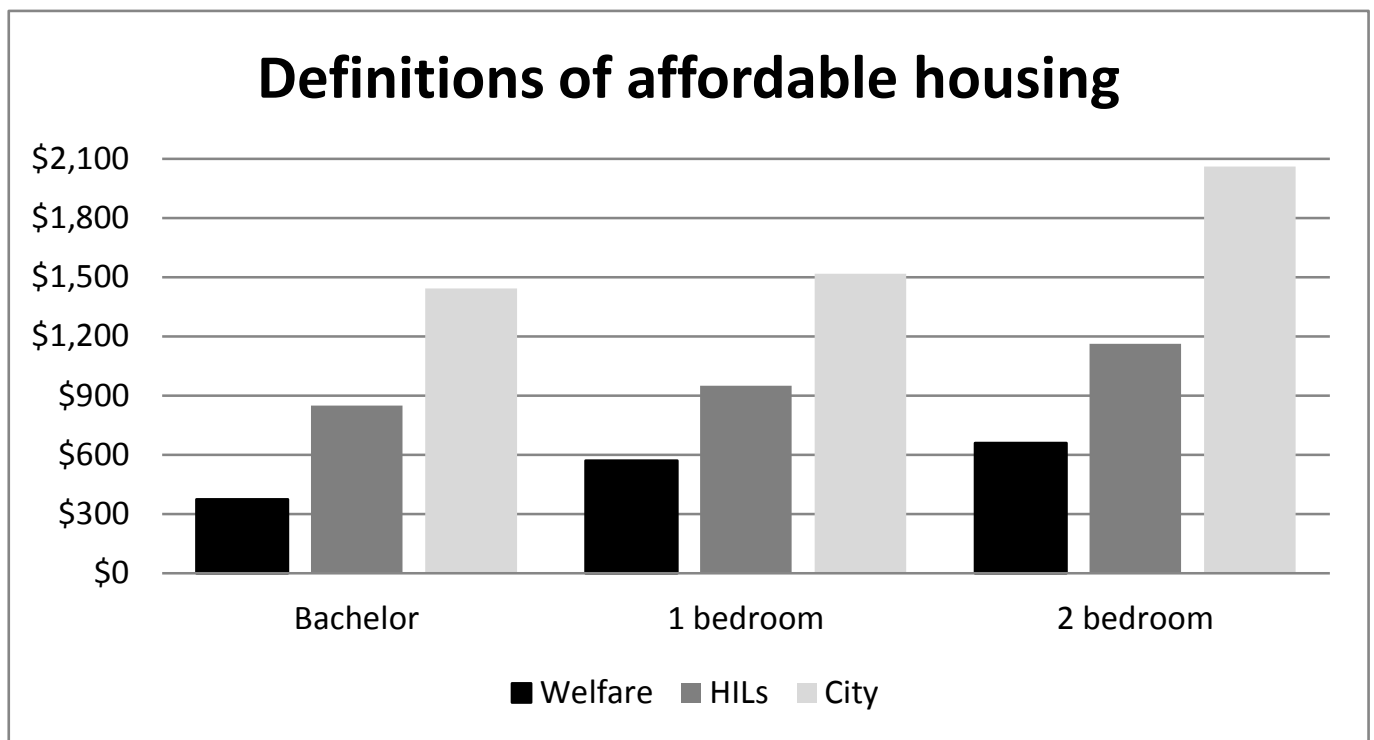
The 25 welfare rate units at the Remand Centre still have not opened, and the two new social housing buildings announced back in 2007, the Marie Gomez and the Drake Hotel site (with a combined total of 285 units), have yet to be completed. Construction on the 21 new units above the Strathcona Library has not yet begun.

Although no new condo or market developments opened in 2013 either, 1076 market units are either in the application phase, approved or under construction. The 26 condos at 217 E. Georgia are expected to open soon.

RATE OF CHANGE

The rate of market housing development compared to social housing development is called the “rate of change.” The City’s Downtown Eastside Housing Plan, adopted by City Council in 2005, affirms that market and non market housing in the DTES should proceed at the same pace.⁽¹³⁾ In other words, the rate of change should be one unit of market housing for every one unit of social housing. Rate of change is important because if market housing proceeds too far ahead of social housing, low-income people can be forced out of their neighbourhood. The neighbourhood can become unwelcoming and unsafe for the low-income people who remain.

The City defines social housing as housing that is owned by a government or non-profit organization. The city mandates that half of it should rent at income assistance or Household Income Limits (HILS), about \$850 for a bachelor unit, and the other half at “affordable market rents.” According to a November 2013 City report, the City’s definition of “affordable market rents” is over \$1,400 for a bachelor, over \$1,500 for a one bedroom and over \$2,000 for a two bedroom unit.⁽¹⁶⁾ With this definition, rents do not have to be affordable to people on social assistance, with only a \$375 a month shelter allowance, or people on the basic old age pension.



Welfare - Shelter allowance for those on Basic Social Assistance and Disability

HILs - Housing Income Limits- BC Housing's threshold for affordable housing⁽¹⁴⁾

City - City of Vancouver's definition of "affordable market rent"⁽¹⁵⁾

CCAP has divided social housing that is proposed for the future into two categories: Social housing that people on welfare/basic pension can afford and social housing that is too expensive for them. When CCAP calculates the rate of change, we use social housing that people on welfare/pension can afford because these are the people who are homeless or living in SROs. In other words, these are the people who desperately need welfare and pension rate housing.

In 2013, eight new developments were proposed as follows:

- 179 Main: 47 market rentals and 9 social housing units, with the number at welfare rate unknown (we assume 5 at welfare rate and 4 at market rate for our calculations);
- 231 E. Pender: 60 condos;
- 626 Alexander: 24 condos and 5 units of social housing at welfare rate;
- 720-730 E. Hastings: 21 units of family housing at welfare rate;
- 557 E. Cordova: 24 condos and 5 units of social housing units at welfare rate;

- 245 E. Georgia: 40 market rentals;
- 150 E. Cordova: 61 condos;
- 241 E. Hastings: 27 units for seniors (rents unknown).

Because we do not yet know how much the development at 241 E. Hastings will rent at, or even if the building will be regular housing or long term care of some sort, we have left the building out of our calculations.

The remaining seven applications submitted or approved in 2013 tally up to 256 market units, 31 units at welfare rate, and nine at an unknown rate. If five of the nine social housing units at 179 Main are rented at welfare rate and we count the non-welfare-rate units as excluding DTES low-income residents, the rate of change for 2013 applications will be 260 units for higher-income residents to 36 units at welfare rate, or 7.2 to 1. This rate is a far cry from the Housing Plan's target of 1:1.

Taking into account all the proposed and approved DTES housing developments for 2012 and 2013, as shown on the charts below and on the next page, the rate of change is 1,076 market units to 183 (assuming 179 Main rents four social housing units above welfare

RATE OF CHANGE: New Units proposed and approved in 2013		
	Market & Close-to-Market Units	Welfare & Pension Rate Units
New housing units planned in 2013	260	36
Rate of Change for 2013	7.2	1
Proposed and approved housing units planned as of 2012	1,259	461
Rate of Change 2012-2013	2.7	1
Rate of Change for 2012-2013, excluding 2 major social housing projects	7.1	1

RATE OF CHANGE: New units in 2012-2013				
Development	Name	Market Housing	Social Housing Above Welfare Rate	Social Housing at Welfare Rate
138 E Hastings	Pantages	79	9	9
211 Gore	Remand Ctr		70	25
611 Main	Ni Hao	134	11	11
955 E Hastings	Wall	282	35	35
720-730 E Hastings	Library			21
189 Keefer		81		
633 Main		151		
217 E Georgia	Flats	26		
557 E Cordova	Boffo	24		5
606 Powell	Drake			146
590 Alexander	Marie Gomez			139
245 E Georgia	Rental 100	40		
150 E Cordova	INGastown	61		
179 Main		47	4	5
626 Alexander		24		5
41 E Hastings	Bottle Depot	67	50	52
231 E Pender		60		
502 Alexander			4	8
Totals		1,076	183	461
Total Non-Welfare Rate Housing			1,259	
Total Welfare Rate Housing				461
RATE OF CHANGE FOR 2012/2013		2.7 to 1		

rate and five at welfare rate) social housing units above welfare rate to 461 social housing units at welfare rate. For low income people who depend on welfare and basic pension, the rate of change for this period is 1,259 to 461 (2.7 to 1).

Deeply concerning is the fact that without the government social housing programs that are funding the Marie Gomez and the Drake buildings, with a total of 285 welfare rate units, the rate of change would be 1,259 to 176 or 7.1 to 1. This is significant because at this time there is virtually no government funded social

housing program for the future. This rate is a likely ratio of social to market housing in the future, unless people who believe all human beings need decent housing can convince governments to fund more housing.

Because the City does not count rent increases as lost low-income SRO units, their official rate of change does not include these losses. If we want to measure the real rate of change in housing available to low income people, CCAP maintains that these losses should also be counted. For 2013, the real rate of change should be 236 affordable units lost, eight built.

DTES LOCAL AREA PLAN

In March 2014, the City is expected to pass the Local Area Plan (LAP) for the DTES. At the time of publication of this report, only the draft LAP was available. The LAP will be crucial to the survival of the low-income community in the DTES. Unfortunately, the plan is focused on implementing the City's strategy of "social mix", which it also emphasized in the 2005 DTES Housing Plan: "The integration of market housing (rental, owner-occupied and livework) can help revitalize the area and diversify the social mix".⁽¹⁷⁾

The draft LAP talks about preventing displacement and recognizes the assets of the low income community. It mentions the impact of gentrification on those assets. It also makes an important change to zoning that will protect the Oppenheimer sub-area, known as the "Heart of the DTES", from condos. Unfortunately, the actions the LAP proposes will not end the DTES housing crisis. Instead, the numbers show that the low-income community will be overpowered with more condos and unaffordable rental housing.

This section includes a look at what the draft LAP proposes for SROs and new social housing, the definition of social housing and the rate of change.⁽¹⁸⁾ It shows how these parts of the draft LAP fail to deliver what the low-income community needs. It also analyzes recent research on the impact of social mix strategies like the draft LAP on low-income communities.

——LOCAL AREA PLAN—— & SROs

The LAP calls for "revitalizing" 1,900 SROs in 10 years and 300 more in 30 years. 1,100 of these units are actually owned by BC Housing and

are already in the process of being renovated. The plan calls for these units to remain as welfare/pension rate housing for low-income people, but without private kitchens and washrooms or adequate space. The City aims to offer incentives for the remaining 1,100 units to become social housing, managed by non profit groups, and upgraded with kitchens and bathrooms. Two significant problems with this plan are:

1. In order to upgrade the SROs to contain kitchens and bathrooms, two rooms will have to be combined. This means reducing the total number of SRO units in the DTES. Self-contained welfare rate social housing units that could make up for SRO rooms lost through the upgrading are still not accounted for in the draft LAP.

2. There is no provision to prevent rents in the upgraded units from increasing and becoming unaffordable to the people who live in them now. The City is discussing using "housing agreements" to keep rents in check. In previous examples, such as the American Hotel, rents were kept at \$400 for 6 out of 42 units, but only for 10 years.⁽¹⁹⁾ The remaining 36 units are renting in the \$500 to \$675 range, out of the reach for people on welfare, disability or basic pension.

These problems show that SROs will be used by the City to implement part of its plan of social mix.

——LOCAL AREA PLAN—— & NEW SOCIAL HOUSING

One positive element of the draft LAP is a proposal that new developments in the Oppenheimer sub-area of the DTES that cover

more than 100% of the lot must be 60% social housing and 40% market rental housing. This proposal, if passed, will prevent condos from pushing up land prices in this area, and help keep hotel rents from escalating even more. It will make land more affordable for non profit groups to buy for social housing. Similar, but softer, zoning mechanisms are also proposed for Hastings Street between Heatley and Clark Drive, and the Kiwassa area east of the MacLean housing projects. In these areas, new buildings that cover more than 100% of the lot will have to include at least 20% social housing. While this will not stop condos entirely, it

will act as a disincentive and might help slow an otherwise out of control condo market in these sections of the DTES. If adopted, these proposals will be an important victory that the DTES has won through years of struggle.

—*DEFINITION OF SOCIAL HOUSING*—

One part of the draft LAP that will not help low-income DTES residents is the City's definition of social housing. The draft LAP defines social housing in the DTES as "one



The City is proposing that new developments in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer area above, that are larger than one full lot, be 60% social housing and 40% market rental development.

third at income assistance, one third up to the Housing Income Limits” (about \$850 for a bachelor), and one third at “affordable market rents” (over \$1400 for a bachelor unit). While the 2005 Housing Plan called for 5,000 self contained social housing units to replace the SROs for low-income people, the draft LAP, if adopted, calls for building 4,400 new social housing units over the next 30 years. However, because of the definition, the City’s target is to make only one third of the 4,400 units, or 1,467 units, available for low income people who currently live in the DTES in SROs, shelters, or on the streets. The draft LAP also calls for “flexibility in the definition to “maximize the delivery of social housing.” In other words, the LAP could accommodate higher rents if that resulted in more social housing units. People on welfare and basic pension would be too poor to live in most of the new social housing and would continue to be abandoned in shelters, on the streets, and in their unsafe, unhealthy, and increasingly unaffordable SRO hotel rooms.

The definition of social housing is a significant problem in the Oppenheimer district even if the 60%/40% proposal is adopted. One third of 60% is only 20% housing at welfare/pension

rate in the area which, according to the City’s 2005 Housing Plan, should take more than its share of SRO replacement housing.

—THE LOCAL AREA PLAN &— RATE OF CHANGE

While the DTES is already a mixture of homeowners and renters as well as homeless people, people living in poverty are the majority. Because of this, they are not treated as “marginal” in their own community and feel accepted and at home.

The rate of change imposed by the draft LAP would result in the obliteration of the DTES as a low-income community. It would also fulfill the City’s strategy that the DTES should be even more of a “socially mixed” community. This becomes clear when looking at the draft LAP’s proposals for new social and market housing in the area. The draft LAP (page 89) proposes 8,850 new condos, and 3,000 new rental units, for a total of 11,850 new market units in 30 years. It also proposes 4,400 new social housing units. But the City’s definition of social housing means that only 1,467 new units will be at welfare rate and available for

DRAFT LOCAL AREA PLAN PROPOSED RATE OF CHANGE OVER 30 YEARS		
	New Welfare/Pension Rate Housing	New Housing Above Welfare/Pension Rate
New market units		8,850
New secured rental units		3,000
New social housing above welfare rate		2,948
New welfare rate social housing	1,467	
Totals	1,467	14,798
Rate of change over 30 years	10:1	

Social mix in low-income neighbourhoods

Social mix is an outdated planning strategy and policy goal that is often used to justify bringing middle-income people into low-income neighbourhoods. The theory behind social mix is that the presence of higher-income people will result in benefits for all residents by drawing in investment and providing “positive behaviour models” while building a stronger sense of community. Research shows that the new investments seldom benefit low-income residents. In practice, social mix often displaces low-income residents from a neighbourhood, damaging the social networks and sense of inclusiveness for those who remain.⁽²⁰⁾

people who used to live in the SROs. When we add the two-thirds of the new social housing units that are not at welfare rate to the list of unaffordable housing list, we see that 14,798 units will be unaffordable for former SRO residents. The rate of change the City is proposing for the next 30 years is 14,798 unaffordable units to 1,467 welfare/pension rate units, or a rate of change of 10 to 1. This is far worse than the present rate of change and far, far worse than the 1:1 rate of change called for in the City’s 2005 Housing Plan.

The draft LAP predicts that in 30 years “new self contained social or supportive housing will replace SRO rooms” (page 93) while retaining 800 private and 1,100 BC Housing-owned SROs. In other words, only 800 of the 4,000 privately owned SRO units will remain in 30 years. If these 800 are the unaffordable privately-owned rooms, 3,200 privately owned SROs plus 400 government SROs will be lost. In total, 3,600 units that at one time were affordable to people on welfare and pension will be eliminated. In other words, 1,467 social housing units at welfare rent in the DTES will replace a total of 3,600 lost SROs.

In short, if the City’s plan succeeds, in 30 years the DTES will be short 2,148 units for low income people.

—OTHER DRAFT LAP— PROPOSALS ON HOUSING

The draft LAP also envisions 3,350 social housing units outside the DTES. Because the City will apply a different definition of social housing outside the DTES, none of these units will have to be at welfare or pension rents. It is very possible that residents who want to leave the DTES, or who are displaced out of the neighbourhood by the social mix policies, will not be able to afford to live in the new social housing built in other parts of the City.

The draft LAP commits to acquiring 1,650 rent subsidies. This may be a way to make buildings that have no or little government subsidy affordable to qualify as the one-third of social housing units that are supposed to be at welfare rate.

The draft LAP does talk of putting people in “scattered site” housing inside and outside the DTES but fails to specify who will pay the rent. This housing is not new units.

The draft LAP commits to allocating three City-owned sites for social housing over 30 years. It does not call for the City to acquire any new sites. This is a retreat from the 2005 DTES Housing Plan, which called for the City to buy

Problems with Rent Supplements

According to CCAP's 2006 housing report, "Solving the Housing Crisis," rent supplements have the following problems compared to actual bricks and mortar social housing:

- In the long run, construction and maintenance of social housing is less expensive than rent supplements;
- Rent supplements do not provide security of tenure to tenants;
- Social housing is an asset for the community while rent supplements leave the community with nothing;
- Rent supplements are a windfall for private developers.

In the US, rent supplements had the effect of increasing rents for non supplemented people who lived nearby. The stock of housing actually decreased as rent supplements were used.⁽²¹⁾

one site in the DTES for social housing every year. Members of the Low Income Caucus of the Local Area Planning Process Committee calculate that five sites a year are needed for the next ten years.

Over half of DTES residents have very low incomes, below about \$13,000 a year. In 30 years, if the draft LAP is achieved, only about 7,000 out of 28,000 DTES residents will have very low-incomes. This will not represent a victory in the fight to eliminate poverty. It simply indicates that people with low incomes will be displaced, along with their poverty, out of the DTES.

The majority of people living in the DTES have a shared experience of poverty and this reality should be central to its planning process. A majority of residents experience discrimination in the wider society because of race, sexual orientation, gender, mental or physical disability, addiction, low-income or a combination. But because they are the majority in the DTES, they are not marginalized. That is changing dramatically with gentrification and the City's plan of social mix.

The Benefits of a Low-Income Community

Living in a low income community has many benefits for low-income people. According to community visioning and mapping research done by CCAP between 2008 and 2010, the low-income community in the DTES has many assets, including⁽²²⁾:

- A strong sense of community;
- Low income residents feel accepted and at home;
- Residents feel connected to a rich cultural heritage;
- Arts practices involve many low income community members;
- There are many volunteer opportunities;
- Necessities are cheap or free and nearby;
- Health and social services are close, needed and appreciated;
- Many residents work for social justice.

—“SOCIAL MIX” DOESN’T— HELP LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

The 2013 CCAP housing report shows that gentrification is accelerating and deepening in the DTES as the City’s social mix policy takes a stronger hold. Over 1,000 condos are planned, and real estate values have increased dramatically, leading to a rise in SRO rents.

In short, a community that was once overlooked by developers has become a magnet for real estate interests. This situation is not caused by uncontrolled market forces alone. Economic incentives for developers, zoning controls, policies, bylaws and other planning tools determine who can live in a community.

Despite arguments that social mix will benefit DTES low-income people by bringing in more investment and income-making opportunities, examples from across the globe show that low-income people are not only excluded from the benefits but left worse-off.⁽²³⁾ Academics have long been warning policy makers to take stock of growing evidence that social mix produces more segregation, polarization and marginalization. According to scholar Loretta Lees, “Over the longer term poor people suffer more from the loss of benefits of living in a poor neighbourhood, than they gain from living in a more affluent one.” Lees maintains that the “rhetoric of ‘social mix’ hides a gentrification strategy and in that a hidden social cleansing agenda”.⁽²⁴⁾

There are many reasons why the process of gentrification harms low-income residents. The small and medium-size enterprises and the new higher-income residents who come into a gentrifying area are often much better equipped to fight for and defend their interests than the low-income residents who remain.⁽²⁵⁾ Low-income community assets are often lost:

services move, affordable stores close their doors due to higher property taxes, and public spaces become less safe for low-income people.

Marginalization, a reduced sense of belonging, increased conflict and the breakdown of social fabric are associated with social mix and gentrification. These changes can be extremely damaging to the health and well-being of low-income people, many of whom are already facing the health challenges and social exclusion that come with living in poverty.⁽²⁶⁾ Past CCAP housing reports have documented the stress and loss of community that residents in the DTES are experiencing as waves of gentrification spread.

Ultimately, gentrification leads to the displacement of low-income residents to other neighbourhoods where the assets, amenities, services and communities they have built, defended and rely upon do not exist. Too often, social mix policies fail to acknowledge or manage the displacement they produce.⁽²⁷⁾ Experience shows that the neighbourhoods that low-income residents are displaced into may not welcome them.⁽²⁸⁾

As a policy and planning tool, social mix fails to propose any solutions to address the root causes of poverty and marginalization. Social mix is an approach that facilitates private profit for business owners, developers, homeowners and other wealthier residents⁽²⁹⁾. Scholar Martine August writes: “Recent attempts to promote social mix, then, may be motivated by an economic imperative more compelling to policy makers than abstract goals of social harmony and equality. Driven by this imperative, particular assumptions regarding who has a right to the City underpin these policies.”⁽³⁰⁾

The development future of the DTES will be decided in the coming year. The draft LAP acknowledges that the unique assets

RECOMMENDATIONS

All three levels of government are responsible for dealing with the DTES housing crisis. CCAP's 2012 housing report called on the City to declare the DTES Oppenheimer District a "Social Justice Zone where people come before profit, homes come before condo sales, and the unique low income community can survive and thrive." Without housing that low-income people can afford, the low-income community members who live in SROs because they can not access social housing now will be displaced.

CITY GOVERNMENT

Change the draft Local Area Plan: For the last three years, CCAP's work in the DTES has been based on the community assets that we found through our community visioning and mapping with 1,200 residents. This process came up with a Community Vision for Change, which would improve conditions for low income people who live in the DTES without pushing them out. It appears, however, that City Council is using the false logic of "social mix" to impose a new neighbourhood where these community assets and the people who built them will be lost.

Recommendations:

1. Implement the draft LAP proposal for 60% social housing and 40% rental housing in the Oppenheimer District. Require one-third of all new housing in the Thornton Park and Hastings Corridor to be social housing available to people on welfare and basic pension and one-third available to the working poor.
2. Designate enough land for 5,000 units of social housing in the DTES to show senior governments the City is serious about solving the housing crisis.
3. Define social housing for the DTES as follows: "For the purpose of the DTES Local Area Plan, 'social housing' is non-market housing owned and run by a government or non-profit body and accessible to those living on the lowest incomes including basic social assistance shelter rate or 30% of basic old age pension." Wording specifying "accessible to" would allow the City to insure accessibility through different means after construction. Furthermore, making a housing unit accessible to someone with very low income does not mean it will be inaccessible to others with incomes within BC Housing's income limits. If a social housing resident increases their income, they should not have to move. Instead, their rent will increase as they pay 30% of their income for rent.
4. Make landlords accountable for bad conditions. Make non profit management a condition of business licences for problem slumlords.
5. Keep minimum unit sizes at 320 sq. ft. so people have a home that feels permanent.
6. Do not provide incentives to profit or non profit SRO owners to upgrade their units unless rents are maintained at welfare/pension rate.

Amend the SRA bylaw: Define SRO hotel “conversion” to mean raising rents above welfare and pension level shelter rates. Include zero-eviction conditions in all renovation and building permits.

Stop condo development in the DTES: Stopping condo development will keep property values low and preserved for social housing until SRO hotels have been replaced with safe, secure, self-contained and resident-controlled low-income affordable social housing and no one needs to sleep on the streets or in shelters.

Safe, secure and healthy conditions in SRO hotels: Develop an SRO resident organizer structure to educate, support and liaise between tenants and bylaw and Residential Tenancy enforcement bodies. Embrace a women-centered philosophy in hotels with policies and practices that ensure women’s access and safety in all spaces, especially for aboriginal women and women of colour.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Raise the rates: Raise welfare, disability and minimum wage rates substantially. No one in BC should live in poverty.

Tenant rights for all: Reform the Residential Tenancy Act to provide effective rent control by the rental unit rather than tenant. This will stop giving landlords an incentive to evict low-income people. End renovictions. Legislate the right of all tenants to organize tenant unions. Ensure that residents of all non profit social housing, including hotel rooms, supportive housing projects, and emergency shelters, have full tenant rights under the Residential Tenancy Act.

Build social housing now: Provide funds to build 10,000 units a year of low-income affordable social housing throughout the province. Replace 1,000 SRO units with self-contained, resident controlled social housing every year for five years in the DTES.

End discrimination now: Amend the BC Human Rights Code and Residential Tenancy Act to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of social condition including class, poverty and drug use. Ensure that immigration status is not a barrier to social housing.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Enact a national housing program: Provide funds to build low-income social housing in the DTES to replace 1000 SRO units per year for the next five years.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

WHICH HOTELS WERE SURVEYED?

CCAP started with the City's 2009 SRO list for the DTES. We deleted buildings run by non-profits because they are generally cleaner and cheaper: Kye7e, Sereena's Place, Cosmopolitan, Dodson, Hampton Hotel, Jubilee Rooms, Powell Rooms, Heatley Apartments, International Inn, The London, Holborn, Seaview, Colonial, Lion and Princess Rooms. Even though we did not survey these buildings, CCAP recognizes that these buildings are not secure units of low-income housing because their leases with non profits can expire. We added the Wonder Rooms, and Palace. That left us with 81 open buildings that we visited. We accessed rent information from 65 buildings with 3080 rooms. In most cases the information was provided by a manager or desk clerk but sometimes we had to rely on a tenant because managers or desk clerks were not available after several tries.

APPENDIX 2

HOW CCAP DID THE HOTEL SURVEY

For the hotel survey part of this study CCAP went door to door to privately owned and run hotels within the DTES boundaries. CCAP approached each hotel like a prospective tenant looking for a room. The CCAP surveyor usually spoke to the desk clerk or manager and asked about vacancies, rent levels, daily/weekly rentals, and student only rentals. The surveyor looked to see if there was a sign asking for guests to pay fees to visit residents and asked if there were any vacant rooms that were not being rented. Sometimes hotels were surveyed more than once by different people to test the data. CCAP (unlike the City) does not have the resources or the authority to actually inspect buildings, so this survey does not include maintenance aspects of the hotels. This information is as good as what was told to CCAP surveyors by desk clerks, managers, and in a few cases, tenants, as CCAP has no way of looking at hotel records. CCAP also analyzed City and provincial statistics about new housing being built and provincially owned hotels.

APPENDIX 3

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR RENTS TO BE LOWER THAN \$375 A MONTH

About 7000 DTES residents rely on welfare and disability income. Since 2007, \$375 a month is all single people have to pay for their rent, utilities and phone. If people on income assistance have to pay more than \$375, this money must come out of their support allowance of \$235, leaving them with not enough money to eat and pay for other necessities. The DTES also has about 3000 seniors. Many of them rely on a basic pension of only about \$1300 a month. For these seniors, rents at or below \$390 a month (30% of their income) are considered affordable.

APPENDIX 4

RESIDENTIAL HOTEL ROOMS ARE NOT HEALTHY OR ADEQUATE ACCOMMODATION

The City's DTES Housing Plan (p. 5) recognizes that the SROs are not good quality housing and calls for them to be replaced "with new self-contained social housing for singles," with supports for some residents. CCAP believes that DTES hotel rooms are not proper housing because they are tiny, about 10 by 10 feet. Residents usually have to share bathrooms with everyone on their floor and people don't have kitchens. How can low-income people eat cheaply without the means to cook? In addition, the buildings are old and don't meet current earthquake standards. Many are poorly managed, filthy, and pest ridden. Although not all DTES residents have health issues, many have told CCAP that living in a decent self contained apartment is part of feeling respected and can be an important part of managing health issues. In addition, SRO hotels are fundamentally unsafe spaces for women. A woman resident of the Regent Hotel explained, "When women leave their rooms at night to take a leak in the common bathroom we wonder if there is a man behind our door. We wonder if there is a man in the bathroom. And when we come back we wonder if there is a man waiting for us in our rooms. We feel locked up in our own rooms."

APPENDIX 5

SROs MUST BE RETAINED AS AN AFFORDABLE LAST RESORT

While hotel rooms are not proper places to live, they are the housing of last resort for low-income people. Even though CCAP wants all the rooms replaced, it is crucial that they remain open and available at \$375 a month until replacement housing is available and until the homeless people in the DTES have homes. If the hotel rooms don't stay open and available to low-income residents, homelessness will increase.

APPENDIX 6

WHAT CAN CURRENT DTES RESIDENTS AFFORD TO PAY FOR RENT?

What can current DTES residents afford to pay for rent? The vast majority of current DTES residents are low-income people according to the Statistics Canada definition of the Low Income Cut Off (2011) line where a single person is considered low-income if they have less than \$23,298 a year. Of course, many people who have less than \$23,298 a year, really do have a lot less. A person on welfare gets only about \$7,320 a year; on disability, \$10,872; on old age pension and guaranteed income supplement, about \$15,000, on full-time minimum wage of \$10.25, about \$21,320 gross. Shelter costs are not supposed to take up more than 30% of income, according to federal and provincial governments. This means that the amounts people in these categories have for rent are as follows:

Income Source	Amount of Rent Low-Income People Can Afford Based on 30% of Net Income
Welfare	\$375/month allocated by the province
Disability	\$375/month allocated by the province
Basic OAP and GIS	\$390/month
Minimum Wage (full-time)	\$533/month
Poverty line earnings	\$582/month
Average rent for 1BR apt in Vancouver	\$965/month

While not everyone in the DTES is on welfare or disability, it is crucial for the City and province to recognize that people working at minimum wage and pensioners cannot afford average rents for even bachelor apartments. Even someone making \$10.25 an hour could only afford rent at \$533 a month, which hundreds of single DTES rooms are renting for.

APPENDIX 7

HOTELS WHERE THE LOWEST RENT IS \$425 OR MORE:

- | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Afton Hotel | 14. Cobalt | 27. Lotus | 40. United Rooms |
| 2. Alexander Court | 15. Danny's Inn | 28. Metropole | 41. Vernon Apts |
| 3. American Hotel | 16. Decker | 29. New Columbia | 42. Vet's Rooms |
| 4. Arno | 17. Empress | 30. Palace | 43. West Hotel |
| 5. Asia | 18. Georgia Manor | 31. Pender Lodge | 44. Wonder Rooms |
| 6. Astoria | 19. Glory | 32. Pender Place | 45. Woodbine |
| 7. Balmoral | 20. Golden Crown | 33. Persepolis | 46. York Rooms |
| 8. BC Rooms | 21. Grand Trunk | 34. Regent | |
| 9. Belmont | 22. Harbour Rooms | 35. Ross House | |
| 10. Brandiz | 23. Hastings Rooms | 36. Shamrock | |
| 11. Burns Block | 24. Hildon/Bourbon | 37. St. Clair #2 | |
| 12. Cathay Lodge | 25. Ivanhoe | 38. Traveller's | |
| 13. Chelsea | 26. Keefer Rooms | 39. Triple Six | |

HOTELS WHERE THE LOWEST RENT IS \$500 OR MORE:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Alexander Court | 8. Grand Trunk |
| 2. American Hotel | 9. Lotus |
| 3. Burns Block | 10. Metropole |
| 4. Cathay Lodge | 11. New Columbia |
| 5. Danny's Inn | 12. Pender Place |
| 6. Georgia Manor | 13. Triple Six |
| 7. Golden Crown | 14. West Hotel |

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