

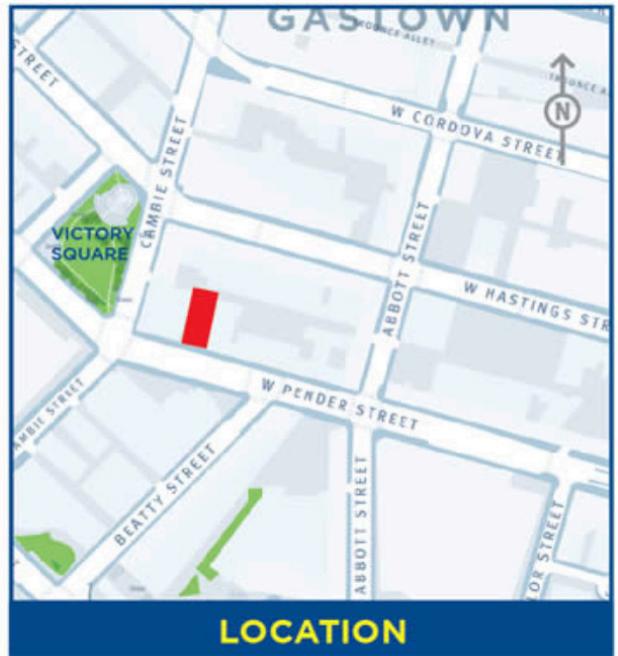
NEWSLETTER



Photo: Jon Hernandez/CBC

ANALYSIS ON THE NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY AND CITY HOUSING STRATEGY, AN UPDATE ON 177 W. PENDER, AND VANDU ON VPD'S 'DRUG CONTAINMENT FACILITY'

CITY COUNCIL APPROVES ZONING FOR TINY UNITS AT 177 WEST PENDER



The City of Vancouver has received an application to rezone 177 West Pender Street from Downtown District (DD) to CD-1 (Comprehensive Development) District. The proposal is for a new 10-storey residential building, including:

- 90 social housing units;
- a floor space ratio (FSR) of 6.93;
- a building height of 32 m (105 ft.); and
- one level of parking with 68 bicycle parking spaces, one loading space and no vehicle parking stalls.

City Council approved the rezoning of 177 W. Pender for 90 units of social housing on December 6, 2017. Only 30 of them will be for people who are on welfare or basic pension. Rents for the rest of the units will be at about \$1000 a month or even low end of market rents.

Most of the units will also only be 250 sq. ft, a really small social housing unit. The building will be owned by the city and probably managed by a non profit operator. The city says it will try to find money to increase the number of units that rent for welfare/pension rate.

CITY HOUSING STRATEGY COULD HELP IF WE GET A MANSION TAX

With over 200 pages, the City's new housing plan is likely to have something for everyone. The important questions, however, are: Is there enough housing for the people who need it the most? And, is there enough money to pay for it?

HOMELESSNESS:

The City does not propose to end homelessness in this plan. It talks only about "action to prevent homelessness", creating "pathways to housing stability" and "addressing the needs of the homeless population." We can end homelessness by building cheap and fast modular housing for every homeless person, while real social housing is being built. This is what the City needs to aim for starting now.

RENT CONTROL:

A huge problem facing renters across the city is outrageously high rents, averaging over \$2000 a month for a one bedroom apartment according to data collected by PadMapper. \

The City's strategy, to its credit, calls for re-examining the annual allowable rent increase or 4% next year. But the big rent increases come when tenants move out of apartments and landlords can raise rents as much as they like. In spite of this the city is only asking the province to stop rent increases between tenancies in Single Room Occupancy Hotels. This is not enough. Low income tenants all-over the city need rent control to be tied to the unit.

Who Pays For It All? According to the plan the City will aim to build 12,000 units of social, supportive and co-operative housing over the next 10 years for residents who earn under \$50,000 a year. The problem is, the report doesn't say who will pay for them.

The Federal Housing Strategy has already failed to allocate enough funds for social housing. Will the City challenge the strategy on its failures? Or will they comply with the Liberals' National Housing Strategy even when it means Vancouver's low income residents will go without housing?

MANSION TAX:

The plan discusses working with senior governments to consider "applying differential property tax rates on residential properties depending on property value and ownership type." This is planner-ese for "let's get the Province to consider a Mansion Tax."

It depends on what kind of Mansion Tax, gets approved, but it could be enough to build 1,160 units of social housing a year in the following years. With the revenue from the Mansion Tax, plus some help from the Province and the Feds, the City could really start working on those 12,000 units of housing for homeless and low income people.

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CITY HOUSING STRATEGY COULD HELP IF WE GET A MANSION TAX

SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY (SRO) HOTELS:

The City is recommending the creation of a \$200M fund to acquire and upgrade SRO hotels. This would be a good idea: a refurbished SRO hotel would last longer than modular housing and we definitely need upgraded accommodation for SRO residents until decent affordable housing is built. However, the plan doesn't guarantee the rents will stay at the welfare shelter rate. This is an absolute necessity for SRO residents. Also, there is no mention of who will provide the money. Again, the Mansion Tax could help.

Funding the SRO collaborative and the Vancouver Tenant Union, which is suggested in the plan, is an excellent initiative, provided the City doesn't use the money to try to muzzle the two groups who work to get tenants their rights. Increase funding could allow these group to hire tenant organizers to reach out to the 300,000-plus renters who need representation in our city.

Improving the Tenants Protection and Relocation policy is also a good idea. The City should require all landlords seeking to renovict tenants to allow them to return to the renovated unit at the same rent.

THE BIG QUESTION:

Will there be enough housing in this plan that the people who need it the most can

afford? We still don't know because the city only has targets, not actual numbers of housing units that it intends to see built. Will we have the money to pay for what is needed? Maybe, if we get a Mansion Tax.

Private developers won't build housing for low income people. Having just completed an analysis of the Federal Housing Strategy, we're convinced they wouldn't solve our local housing crisis either. And we haven't seen any budget numbers from the Province that indicates they would help enough.

We believe our best hope is the Mansion Tax and public housing. We need to break out of the trap of market-oriented false solutions being pushed by the development lobby.

UBC professor of Urban Design Patrick Condon has suggested Vancouver aim to have non-market housing for at least 40% of wage earners in the city. This is not pie in the sky - Vienna has 60% social housing. We need to use the Mansion Tax plus anything we can scrape together in order to get as much housing as possible out of the market. Housing is a human right, not a commodity. It will take political courage and bold action to reverse the rampant commodification of housing in Vancouver and build the city we need.

BY JEAN SWANSON & SARA SAGAIL

\$700,000 'DRUG CONTAINMENT FACILITY' FOR VPD WASTEFUL AND UNNECESSARY

The Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) opposes the proposed budget increase of \$11 million (4.2%) for the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). In particular VANDU is outraged at the VPD's request for \$700,000 to build an unnecessary 'drug containment facility'.

For many years the VPD has continued to increase their budget despite falling rates of violent crime. Advocates for poor people contend that the increased budget is used to over-police and criminalize poor people and pursue failed drug war policies.

"The City of Vancouver keeps pouring money into policing when our communities need economic and social supports not more police," says Aiyanas Ormond, a community organizer with VANDU. "We are over-policed and under-protected. More funding for police means more criminalization for us. In 2016 we saw record numbers of arrests for drug possession in Vancouver, continuing the failed war on drugs policies, even in the context of a horrible overdose epidemic."

The \$700,000 for a 'drug containment facility' is particularly upsetting for VANDU, given the need for resources to deal with the overdose epidemic and the negative role that the police continue to play by criminalizing people who use drugs.

"A \$700,000 drug containment facility is wasteful and unnecessary," says Ormond. "A July 2017 statement by the American

VANDU



College of Medical Toxicology states that the risk of clinically significant exposure to fentanyl for emergency responders is extremely low. They outline how that low risk can be managed with low-tech nitrile and n95 respirator. Drugs are being tested for fentanyl by health care providers on a daily basis without such costly and unnecessary infrastructure."

"We need public education, health services and economic supports, not more police," says VANDU Vice-President Hugh Lampkin. "This money could be put toward services to help people who use drugs survive this OD epidemic. It could be used for real drug education and support programs for young people. It could be used for housing or other economic supports for our communities."

SIX POINTS ON THE LIBERALS' NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY



Jean Swanson, CCAP community organizer, speaking on the National Housing Strategy at the rally on November 25, 2017.

In late November the federal government released its long awaited National Housing Strategy which is a huge disappointment for people who were hoping the feds would help end homelessness and build lots of social housing for lower income people.

1. THERE IS NOTHING IN THIS STRATEGY ABOUT ENDING HOMELESSNESS FAST

There is only a vague promise of cutting chronic homelessness (about 2-20 percent of all homeless people) by 50% in 10 years. This is a criminally slow target. Homeless people have half the life expectancy of housed people. Too many precious lives will be lost by then.

2. THIS IS NOT A HOUSING STRATEGY, BUT A RE-ELECTION STRATEGY FOR THE LIBERALS

Very little of the money promised in this plan will flow before the next Federal election.

3. THE STRATEGY EMPHASIZES MIXED-INCOME DEVELOPMENTS, MAKING IT INTO A NATIONAL GENTRIFICATION STRATEGY

Mixed-income is a failed experiment when imposed on low-income neighbourhoods. These developments increase property values, taxes and nearby rents resulting in gentrification and displacement. They don't involve a mix at all: they have a rich door and a poor door, rich amenities and poor amenities. Making the announcement of the release of the national housing strategy from the abhorrent Woodward's complex -- the symbol of gentrification in Vancouver DTES -- speaks volumes about the true direction of this strategy.

4. THE DEFINITION OF AFFORDABLE IS NOT AFFORDABLE AT ALL

The plan defines affordable as “30% of units having rents at or less than 80% of median market rents, for a minimum of 20 years”. So, for example, if the median rent is \$2000 a month, 80% of it would be \$1600. You need to make about \$65,000 a year to afford this amount of rent. The people who need housing the most have much lower incomes.

They could be left out of this housing strategy because financing homes for higher income people is so much easier. Saying that the “affordable” units only have to be affordable for 20 years is also bad for low income people who could be priced out of their homes after that period. This is a really unaffordable rate for a pretty short time.

5. RENT SUPPLEMENTS ARE BASICALLY LANDLORD SUPPLEMENTS

This strategy uses rent supplements as a solution to the crisis of affordability. US studies have shown that the impact is to increase rents for all low income people, not just people who get the supplement; it is not a good tactic when you have a very low vacancy rate and virtually useless rent control like we have.

6. MOST OF THE FUNDING ANNOUNCED IN THIS STRATEGY COMES WITH LOTS OF STRINGS ATTACHED

\$11.2 billion of the \$15.9 billion promised is in loans, not investments. This makes it unlikely that non-profit groups will be able to finance housing for low income people as they will have to repay their loans and interest as well as pay for land, construction and operating costs. Private developers are eligible for loans if they meet minimum requirements, meaning they can use government money to subsidize their profits and help them benefit from property appreciation.

Much of the remainder is slated for “co-investment” and contingent on being matched by another level of government. The plan says:

“...contributions from other partners could include provincial, territorial and municipal lands, inclusionary zoning provisions, accelerated municipal approval processes, waiving of development charges and fees, tax rebates, and other government loans.”

This is deeply troubling, as it would allow municipal governments to be coerced into agreeing to terms of development in order to receive Federal funding.

To get us out of the housing crisis, and to implement a Housing as a Right policy we should be using government money to get land and housing out of the private market where it is a commodity, not help developers get control of more land and market housing.

CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT | 11:15 AM EVERY FRIDAY

The Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) is a project of the board of the Carnegie Community Centre Association. CCAP works mostly on housing, income, and land use issues in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver so that the area can remain a low income friendly community. CCAP works with english speaking and Chinese speaking DTES residents in speaking out on their own behalf for the changes they would like to see in their neighbourhood.

Join us on Fridays 11:15 am for our weekly volunteer meetings! Downtown Eastside residents who want to work on getting better housing and incomes and stop gentrification are welcome to attend. Lunch is provided!

CARNEGIE AFRICAN DESCENT GROUP | 11 AM EVERY 2ND TUESDAY

The Carnegie African Descent Group (CADG) is pleased to invite you to a bi-weekly lunch gathering at the Downtown Eastside Neighborhood House. Come, cook, talk and enjoy African dishes with us. The lunch will take place every Tuesdays, from 11:00 am till 1:30 pm. The group has the same mandate as CCAP, but with particular focus on issues that Black and African Descent community members experience. DTES community members who identify as Black and or as of African Descent are welcome to the lunch. For more information, contact: lmugabo75@gmail.com

唐人街關注組 | CHINATOWN CONCERN GROUP

— 大多數是唐人街華裔居民
— 加麗基社區中心協會屬下的其中一組
— 我們看到華埠現在變化很快。華埠越來越不像華埠，而在華埠的華人社群將被邊緣化。所以我們組織一起，透過開會、討論及行動來保護唐人街
— 我們關心華埠的未來可負擔性及想見更多低收入房屋及長者屋在唐人街
關注組組員領袖每週會開小組會來討論我們的項目、華埠消息和建立我們對社區事件的分析。我們歡迎有意參與關注組的人士來一齊參與這些小組會。詳情請聯絡我們。小組會主要用廣東話舉行，有時候會用普通話翻譯。chinatownconcerngroup@gmail.com | chinatownconcerngroup.wordpress.com
加麗基社區中心 — 401 緬街 『緬街圖書館』二樓，溫哥華，卑詩省，V6A 2T7 加拿大

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