

NOTICE OF COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

4. Preserving Single Room Occupancy Stock Surrounding New St. Paul's Hospital Site

Submitted by: Councillor Swanson

WHEREAS

1. The new St. Paul's Hospital development at 1002 Station Street is a \$1.9 billion hospital and health care facility that will include institutional, office, residential, hotel, and retail uses spanning 1.68 million sq. ft of floor area and that will eventually employ more than 10,000 people serving 174,000 patients each year. The 2017 "New St. Paul's Social Impact Assessment Summary" identified "increase[d] demand for housing" as a potential impact of the new site;
2. This new site is a 18.4-acre lot just south of Chinatown, within walking distance of the DTES and Downtown South and located within the Downtown core, which contains the highest concentration of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) rooms in the city;
3. Nearby SROs include the Ivanhoe, Cobalt, and Arno hotels, which provide a total of approximately 230 units;
4. SROs are an essential part of the City's housing stock. As per the City's 2017 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Revitalization Action Plan: "In the context of few adequate housing options available to those on limited or fixed incomes, Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels play a critical role in Vancouver's low-income housing stock as a last resort before homelessness for many of the city's most vulnerable tenants.";
5. Despite the Single Room Accommodation (SRA) By-law (2003), which was enacted to discourage speculative investment and slow the loss of affordability in the SRO housing stock, the level of affordability in SROs has declined, putting a growing number of SROs out of reach for low-income residents. Furthermore, various city policies—including the Downtown South SRO Replacement Policy (1991), DTES Housing Plan (2005), Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2012–2021), DTES Local Area Plan (2014), and Housing Vancouver (2017)—which require one-to-one replacement of SRO units with self-contained social housing, have been insufficient to maintain housing options for low-income residents;
6. Since the 2014 changes to the definition of social housing, most social housing has not been affordable to people on social assistance and basic pensions; therefore, one-to-one replacement of SRO units with social housing is insufficient to maintain housing options for low-income residents. One-to-one replacement can also be bypassed with a SRA replacement fee of \$125,000 per unit by the owner, subject to Council approval;

7. Because of gentrification in the DTES, SROs that were previously affordable to low-income residents have increased rents and no longer contribute to the low-income housing stock. According to the “Replacement, Renewal, and Change: 2015 Survey of Single Room Accommodation & Non-Market Housing in the Downtown Core” report, the proportion of private SRO rooms renting at or below the \$375 shelter less has decreased by half [since 2009]. Meanwhile, the proportion of private rooms renting at \$451 or more has nearly tripled.”;
8. The 2017 “New St. Paul’s Social Impact Assessment Summary” suggested that Providence Health Care mitigate potential impact on SROs by “includ[ing] a hotel on-site to meet the demands of patients, families and visitors”; this was maintained in the City’s 2017 Policy Statement and subsequent rezoning approval. However, because this mitigation was linked to the potential impact of “increas[ing] demand for short-term accommodation,” it will be insufficient in protecting SROs from the increased demand on and gentrification of all housing in the area;
9. Real estate agencies are already advertising SROs like the Arno as “lucrative investment” opportunities due to their proximity to the new St. Paul’s Hospital site (<https://listingsprod.blob.core.windows.net/ourlistings-can/9c0b5f49-51a6-4f62-a7af-dca61e949457/48ac1ebb-b99f-49e8-a570-63dd5b47c018>);
10. The 2017 impact assessment summary also recommended that the City “seek to secure private SROs.”;
11. If city policies are not strengthened, the social and economic impacts of a massive developments like St. Paul’s could be catastrophic for low-income residents living in nearby neighbourhoods and could contribute to a growing number of homeless people in the city.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to report back before construction begins on the new St. Paul’s Hospital on how to prevent gentrification and loss of low-rent SROs and other low-income housing within walking distance of the new Hospital site and include consideration of:

- a. A public database of SROs and other low-income housing currently being rented, including rental rates;
- b. Increasing the SRA replacement fee as detailed in section 4.8(a) of the SRA By-Law;
- c. Mechanisms for establishing restrictions on the rate of change of low-income housing other than SROs, such as the Fan Tower and East Hotel.

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