



REPORT

Report Date: June 22, 2021
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Meeting Date: July 20, 2021
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TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services (ACCS) in consultation with the General Manager of Real Estate and Facilities Management

SUBJECT: Nominal Lease of City-Owned Capital Asset to Atira Women's Resource Society for the provision of a Temporary Women's Shelter

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council authorize the Director of Real Estate Services, in consultation with the Managing Director of Homelessness Services and Affordable Housing Programs, to negotiate and execute a Lease ("the Agreement") with the non-profit, Atira Women's Resource Society ("Atira" or the "Society") at a nominal rent for up to three (3) years, on the basic terms set out in the attached Appendix A, for the lower floor in a City-owned property situated at 342 Alexander Street (the "Premises"), legally described as:

Parcel Identifier: 015-605-469
Legal Description: Lot 9, Block 40
District Lot 196
Plan 196

The Agreement will permit the Society to continue operating a shelter for women experiencing homelessness with approximately 21 beds on the lower floor of 342 Alexander Street with operational funding provided by the British Columbia Housing Management Commission ("BC Housing").

The Agreement is to be based on the City's Precedent Lease for Non-Profit Entities (Nominal Rent), drawn to the satisfaction of the Director of Real Estate Services, the Director of Legal Services and the Managing Director of Homelessness Services and Affordable Housing Programs.

As the rent under the Agreement for the Premises will be below the applicable market rate, Recommendation A constitutes a grant in lieu of rent valued at approximately \$88,000 per annum and requires 2/3 affirmative votes of all Council members, pursuant to section 206(1) of the *Vancouver Charter*.

- B. THAT, pursuant to Section 206 (1) (j) of the *Vancouver Charter*, Council deem Atira as a non-profit operator of the women's shelter to be an organization contributing to the health and welfare of the city, in addressing the needs of women experiencing homelessness; and
- C. THAT no legal rights or obligations be created by the approval of Recommendation A and B until all legal documentation has been fully executed to the satisfaction of the Director of Real Estate Services, the Director of Legal Services and the Managing Director of Homelessness Services and Affordable Housing Programs.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report recommends Council authorize staff to enter into a nominal lease for the lower floor of the Premises with Atira, as tenant, on the terms and conditions set out in this report. BC Housing is providing funding to Atira to operate the 21 shelter beds for self-identified women experiencing homelessness.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Pursuant to Section 206(1) (j) of the *Vancouver Charter*, not less than two-thirds of all members of Council must approve a resolution for a grant to any organization deemed by the Council to be contributing to the culture, beautification, health or welfare of the city. A lease of City-owned property at less than market rent is considered to be a grant.

Housing Vancouver Strategy 2018-2027 and Housing Vancouver 3 Year Action Plan 2018-2020:

The Housing Vancouver Strategy (2018-2027), as well as the Housing Vancouver Three Year Action Plan (2018-2021), outline goals to work with partners to create temporary shelters to provide immediate support to homeless individuals while transitional and permanent social housing is made available to foster pathways out of homelessness.

Homelessness is one of the most significant issues facing Vancouver today. The City, together with its partners, has made significant progress in taking action to address homelessness, including increasing the supply of social and supportive housing, interim Housing First housing (temporary modular housing), and ensuring access to emergency low-barrier services such as temporary shelters, warming centres, and homeless outreach to connect people to income, housing, and supports. Council policy is to maintain services for the homeless and at-risk individuals, while working on a Poverty Reduction Strategy, with the awareness that a major underlying cause of homelessness is poverty.

Women's Equity Strategy 2018-2028:

The Women's Equity Strategy, along with the Housing Vancouver Strategy, identifies specific service gaps for women, especially those fleeing violence.

Women fleeing domestic violence and trauma sometimes find it impossible to secure housing in the highly competitive and expensive Vancouver market. A low income context can escalate risk of homelessness for women. The City has committed to gather a better understanding of the extent of women's hidden homelessness. A means of doing this is creating spaces where women can connect to services (i.e., homeless shelters).

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background and Context

Homelessness

The 2020 point-in-time count identified 2,095 people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver; comprised of 1,548 sleeping in shelters and 547 sleeping on the street or other outdoor locations unfit for human habitation. While only 21% of respondents identified as women, research has shown that women are more likely to couch surf and stay with friends, or family or unsafe situations and are therefore hidden in that they are more difficult to find to survey for the count. The pandemic has also disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, including women who have faced increased violence and harm.

In Vancouver, there are over 980 permanent, year round shelter beds for people experiencing homelessness. Since 2009, the City of Vancouver, in partnership with BC Housing, has opened additional temporary shelter beds over the winter months to accommodate those sleeping outside during the coldest, wettest months of the year. Initially temporary shelters operated seasonally, but since March 2019, BC Housing has extended funded so that these important shelter spaces are available year round. Of the approximate 350 temporary shelter beds now open in Vancouver, sixty (60) of them, including the Atira shelter in this report, are dedicated to serving women.

ATIRA Women's Resource Society

Atira Women's Resource Society, incorporated in 1983, is a not-for-profit organization committed to the work of ending violence against women through providing direct service, as well as working to increase awareness of and education around the scope and impact on our communities of men's violence against women and children.

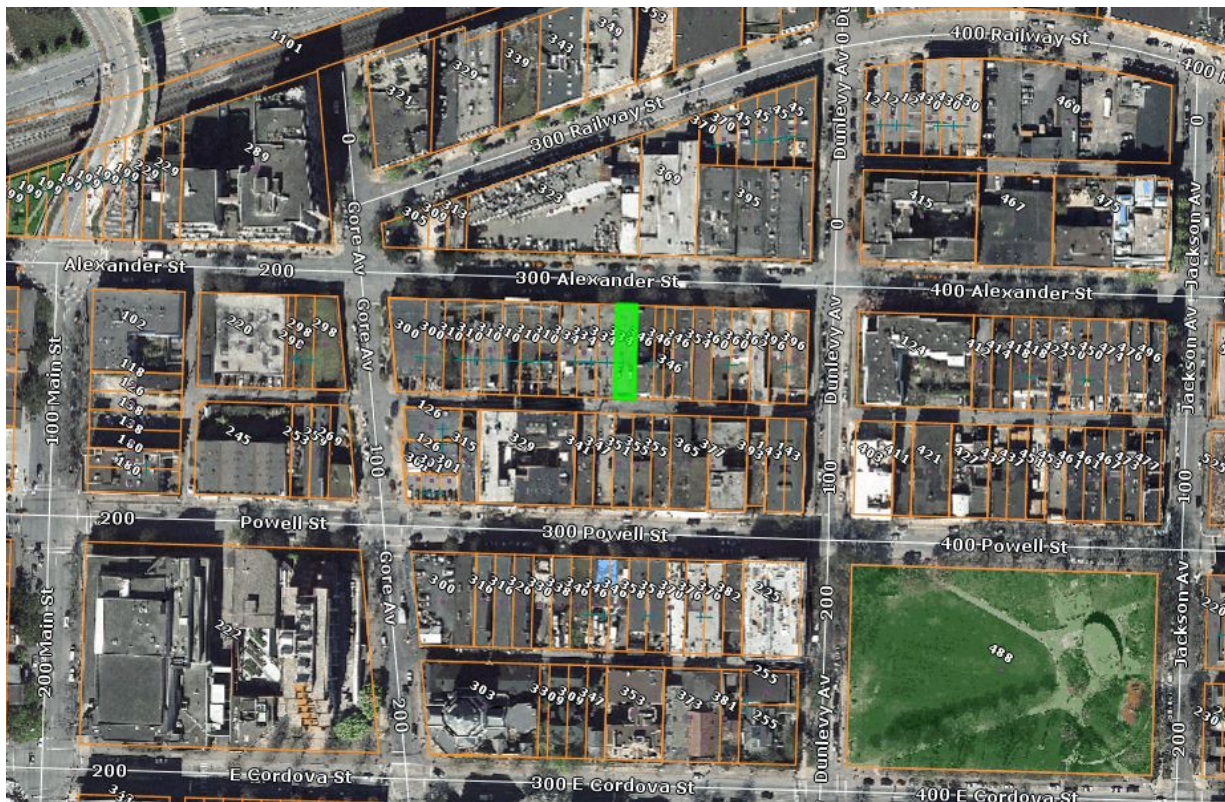
Atira serves women of the DTES through programming Sister-Space (16 bed shelter), Sister-Square (an outdoor space for women), and numerous supportive housing buildings in close proximity to 342 Alexander.

The Premises

342 Alexander Street is an 8,000 sq. ft. two-storey City-owned building (see Figure 1). Through a partnership with BC Housing, the upper floor of this building has provided much needed shelter beds for women experiencing homelessness and involved in sex work. On March 19, 2019 Council (RTS 12930) approved a nominal lease and funding for tenant improvements for WISH to activate a 40 bed temporary shelter on the upper and lower floors of the building. As a result of operational considerations, WISH proceeded with opening 23 women's shelter beds on the upper floor only and currently holds a licence agreement with the City for use of this space. This left the space on the lower floor at 342 Alexander available to host an additional women's shelter.

Impact of the Pandemic

All shelters had to reduce their capacity to meet physical distancing requirements as a result of COVID-19. In addition to opening Emergency Response Shelters, the City collaborated with BC Housing to open additional temporary options to enable people to come inside. The lower floor of 342 was identified as an opportunity to create dedicated and much needed, safe women-service shelter spaces. The City, in partnership with BC Housing, and in consultation with WISH and Atira activated the 21 beds on the lower floor last fall to respond to the need for additional shelter spaces for women exacerbated by COVID. The City entered into a short-term license agreement at the time and Staff are now bringing this report forward seeking Council approval of a nominal lease for a grant in lieu of rent, estimated at \$88,000 per annum for up to three years.



Strategic Analysis

Increasing Services for Women Experiencing Homelessness

Staff have had on-going community and stakeholder discussions with organizations such as WISH, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, Atira and BC Housing over recent years to better understand the extent of women's homelessness, as well as how to improve access to secure safe, accessible, and relevant services for women. Reoccurring themes of the discussion highlight the insufficient number of safe shelter spaces for women. Throughout the City's public consultations for the Women's Equity Strategy, the recurring themes that emerged and were identified as priorities to ensure women's full inclusion in the life of the city included the need to address safety, and violence against women, and to create more safe and affordable housing.

A pivotal report, *Getting to the Roots, Exploring Systemic Violence against Women in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver*, published in 2014 by the Women's Coalition, offered key findings on women's sense of safety. The report notes that for women to be safe, they need access to safe spaces and need to be freely able to move between these spaces¹.

342 Alexander: Additional Women's Shelter beds in the DTES

Providing a nominal lease of the Premises to Atira for the operation of a temporary shelter for women with approximately 21 beds responds to the ongoing need for services for women experiencing homelessness in the DTES. Staff have confirmed that BC Housing operating funding is currently in place until March 31, 2022, which will be reviewed for possible extension early in the new year.

The Premises are particularly well-situated for a shelter given its proximity and accessibility to other women's services in the neighbourhood, including WISH's existing drop-in centre, the DEWC Centre, Atira Women's Resource Society-operated housing, Empress Rooms, Sereena's, and Sisterspace Temporary Shelter.

In creating opportunities for women's serving organizations to work in close proximity to one another, the City is supporting an increase in capacity of these organizations and spaces that ensure women's safety.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk

Financial

This report recommends a nominal lease to Atira for up to three (3)-years subject to continued BC Housing operating funding. The recommended nominal rent would be set at \$10 per annum. The foregone rent on the three-year lease has an estimated value of \$88,000 per annum. As the rent under the Lease for the Premises will be below the applicable market rate, the nominal lease rent represents a grant valued at approximately \$88,000 per annum.

Legal

Legal Services, in consultation with REFM and ACCS will prepare the Agreement based on the City's Precedent Lease for Non-Profit Entities (Nominal Rent), and on terms consistent with the basic lease terms set out in Appendix A all to the satisfaction of the City. REFM, in consultation with ACCS, will oversee the negotiation of the Agreement, as well as ongoing management.

CONCLUSION

This report recommends that Council authorize staff to enter into an Agreement for a nominal lease with ATIRA for the Premises to enable the continued operation of 21 shelter beds for women. Preserving the Premises as a women's shelter increases women's safety and access to safe spaces which is a priority of the City of Vancouver, the community and women's serving organizations.

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¹ <http://wish-vancouver.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Getting-to-the-Roots-final-Nov-2-2014.pdf>

Appendix A: Basic Lease Terms

The Lease will be based on the City's Precedent Lease for Non-Profit Entities (Nominal Rent), drawn to the satisfaction of the Director of Real Estate Services, the Director of Legal Services and the Managing Director of Homelessness Services and Affordable Housing, amended as necessary to incorporate the following terms:

- Term: up to 3 years, commencement date to be determined
- Rent: \$10/year, including for any renewal terms, payable at the beginning of each term;
- Permitted Purpose: Operation of a women's temporary shelter with approximately 21 beds;
- Termination: The City may terminate the lease at any time during the Term, or on 30 days' notice, if the Tenant fails to continuously operate, or ensure operation of the Premises as a women's shelter, with approximately 21 shelter beds in the Premises;
- The Tenant, Atira, is responsible for all aspects of shelter operation and management, including entering into and administering operating agreements;
- Lease to be a fully net lease;
- Tenant to obtain and maintain Tenant's insurance satisfactory to the City of Vancouver;
- Tenant to be solely responsible for all non-structural repairs and maintenance to the Premises identified in the Tenant/Landlord Service Level Agreement, to be appended to the Lease;
- Tenant has right to sublease to a non-profit operator for the Permitted Purpose, with prior written approval from the City of Vancouver;
- Tenant shall be wholly responsible for the costs of any and all utilities at the Premises;
- Any and all work, renovations or alterations to the Premises are the sole responsibility of the Tenant, including obtaining all permits and licenses; with the exception of certain tenant improvements to the Premises that the City has agreed to pay for. These tenant improvements will be outlined in the Lease and shall include minor updates to the space that have been accounted for in the ACCS Homelessness Services budget
- Other terms and conditions acceptable to the Director of Legal Services, the Director of Real Estate Services and the Managing Director of Homelessness Services and Affordable Housing Programs.