

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

4. **Emergency Actions to Protect SRO Tenants from Displacement to Save Lives**

Submitted by: Councillor Swanson

WHEREAS

1. Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels constitute housing of last resort before homelessness for many of the city's most vulnerable residents;
2. A variety of factors are currently leading to rapid displacement of tenants from several SRO buildings, including atrocious conditions, fire, extreme vulnerability of some tenants, and development pressures;
3. Two SRO hotels (Winters and Gastown Hotels) recently closed due to a massive fire in Gastown, and it is not clear if section 4.8 (a) of the SRA Bylaw requiring a contribution to an SRA replacement fund applies to hotels that have been destroyed by fire;
4. One SRO hotel (Cobalt Hotel), near the St Paul's hospital development site, is being purchased by a hotelier for the purposes of conversion;
5. The SRA Bylaw conversion fee was designed to pay for one unit of replacement housing, but the current cost to replace one unit of social housing has increased significantly above the bylaw fee of \$230,000/room to \$300K to \$500K;
6. In the context of development pressures related to the St Paul's hospital project, the current SRA conversion fee is not sufficient to disincentivize conversion;
7. Tenants who lose their housing at this site may be unsettled temporarily or permanently;
8. Two SRO hotels (Lucky Lodge and Vogue Hotel) were recently emptied after vacancy control was put into place, despite the best efforts of advocates and the RTB investigative unit;
9. Vacancy control is slowing the purchase of SROs by owners aiming to turnover the rooms for a higher rent, but vacancy control does not prevent more easily-evictable tenants from being replaced with new tenants at the same rent;
10. Vulnerable tenants do not cope well with the impact of forced moves, which create negative impacts on their mental health, especially during the poison drug crisis and the intergenerational trauma of colonialism that is taking a huge toll on SRO tenants;

11. Tenants from the Winters were able to be relocated to the Columbia Hotel, meaning that other currently homeless people cannot be located there;
12. Tripartite government partners are meeting to develop a proposal for an SRO Acquisition and Rehabilitation planning process for privately-owned SROs to reduce homelessness, but even once the planning process begins, it will take a long time to complete;
13. Urgent action is need to prevent evictions until an SRO strategy is in place; and
14. The Provincially mandated emergency eviction freeze during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic helped to stabilize tenants' occupancy in SROs.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council ask staff to urgently revise the SRA Bylaw to ensure that the conversion fee applies to hotels destroyed by fire;

FURTHER THAT Council ask staff to revise the SRA bylaw to increase the conversion fee to a rate that is adjusted regularly to reflect the actual cost of building one new social housing unit for every one unit lost;

FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to report back with proposed amendments to the SRA By-law to better guarantee that SRO tenants are re-housed in self-contained social housing at shelter rate before SRO rooms can be demolished or converted;

AND FURTHER THAT Council request the Mayor to urgently advocate to the province for an emergency eviction freeze until the SRO Acquisition and Rehabilitation Process starts providing the units people need.

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