

COUNCIL MEMBER'S MOTION

5. **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 building conditions, fire, extreme vulnerability of some tenants and development pressures;
3. One Hotel (Winters) recently closed due to a massive fire in Gastown, and it is not clear if section 4.8 (a) of the Single Room Accommodation By-law allowing a permit condition that requires a contribution to an SRA replacement fund applies to hotels that have been destroyed by fire;
4. One SRO hotel (Cobalt), near the St Paul's hospital development site, is being purchased by a hotelier for the purposes of conversion;
5. The SRA By-law 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 by-law amount 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 charge 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 despite the best efforts of advocates and the RTB investigative unit;
9. Vacancy control is slowing the rate of increase in rents but it is unfortunately clear that existing civic and provincial legal and policy instruments are still insufficient to prevent mass displacement and homelessness of some SRO tenants;
10. Vulnerable tenants do not cope with the impact of forced moves, which create negative impacts on their mental and physical 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 empty Columbia Hotel, meaning that other currently homeless people can't 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

- A. THAT Council direct staff to report back with proposed amendments to the SRA By-law to better ensure that the conversion charge applies to hotels destroyed by fire.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to report back with proposed amendments to the SRA by-law 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 SRA unit lost.
- C. 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 or in suitable market housing with owners topping up the shelter rate if necessary, before SRO demolition or conversion permits are issued.
- D. 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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