



## COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: September 13, 2023  
Contact: Sonia Bianchi  
Contact No.: 604-829-9530  
RTS No.: 15940  
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20  
Meeting Date: October 4, 2023  
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities

FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture, and Community Services (ACCS)

SUBJECT: Recommended 2023 Grants to Support Childcare, Indigenous Healing and Wellness Space Renovations, Intergenerational Mentorship Programming, and DTES Social Enterprise Space Renovations

### Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve one Core Support Grant totalling \$10,152 from the 2023 Social Policy Operating Grants Budget to Atira Women's Resource Society to support the Intergenerational Mentorship Program (IMP).
- B. THAT Council approve one Childcare Enhancement Grant totalling \$34,313 from the 2023 Social Policy Operating Grants Budget – Childcare to Atira Women's Resource Society to support the licensed childcare program at the Seksik Early Care & Learning Centre.
- C. THAT Council approve a grant of \$700,000 to the Atira Women's Resource Society from the 2023 Capital Budget to support renovations of the retail unit at 41 East Hastings Street to enable operations of an Indigenous Healing and Wellness Centre funded by Vancouver Coastal Health.
- D. THAT Council approve one DTES Plan Implementation Grant totalling \$50,000 from the 2023 Multi-year DTES Plan Implementation Matching Grants Budget to Atira Women's Art Society to support the tenant improvements at 16 West Hastings Street for the expansion of their social enterprise East Van Roasters.
- E. THAT Council delegate its authority to the City's General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services and General Manager of Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability to negotiate and execute agreements to disperse the grants described in Recommendations A through D on terms and conditions that satisfy the City's General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services, General Manager of Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability, and Director of Legal Services.

- F. THAT no legal rights or obligations will arise or be created by Council's adoption of these Recommendations unless and until all legal documentation has been executed and delivered by the respective parties.

Recommendations A to D require 2/3 affirmative votes of all Council members under Section 206(1) of the *Vancouver Charter*.

### **Purpose and Executive Summary**

The report recommends Council's consideration of four recommended grants in support of a variety of Atira programs or services that fall outside the scope of BC Housing's ongoing review and will not be affected by the results of that review. To support Council's considerations, this report provides an update on the status of BC Housing's operational review of Atira projects arising from the Province's forensic audit of BC Housing, as well as information on Atira's own internal work.

### **Council Authority/Previous Decisions**

n/a

### **City Manager's Comments**

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

### **Context and Background**

Atira Women's Resource Society ("AWRS"), Atira Property Management ("APM"), Atira Development Society ("ADS"), and Atira Women's Art Society ("AWAS"), (collectively, "Atira") operate a wide range of services for women, children, and low-income populations across Vancouver, from childcare, to drop-in spaces, social and supportive housing, employment programming, and community development and social service programming, as well as mixed gender populations, for a total of 5,000 units of supportive housing across metro Vancouver. This is challenging work, and Atira has often stepped into complex situations to serve some of Vancouver's most at-risk populations.

With the uncertainty created by the Provincial Government's recent forensic audit of BC Housing (shared publicly in Spring 2023) and BC Housing's pause on new allocations to Atira, City staff sent a letter to Atira noting the City's intention to take the following measures until BC Housing has concluded its review and shared its assessment:

- Holding in abeyance all applications by Atira for City grants;
- Reviewing housing and social service projects in development for which Atira was selected as the non-profit operator; and
- Reviewing approved grants to Atira that have not yet been disbursed and may be impacted by changes to BC Housing funding.

On May 15, 2023, the AWRS Board of Directors announced that their Board Chair had temporarily assumed the role of Acting Interim CEO and, subsequently, Catherine Roome

assumed the position of interim CEO as of July 1, 2023. Catherine Roome will be serving as interim CEO until Atira recruits a permanent CEO.

## **Discussion**

### BC Housing Review Update

BC Housing has engaged KPMG to conduct an operational review and the results of this review are expected to take a number of months to conclude. Irrespective of the outcome of that review, staff understand that BC Housing intends to transfer some of the mixed gender Single Room Occupancy Properties (SROP) housing operations that are currently operated by Atira to different operators. BC Housing's first phase is to conduct an RFP for the Provincial Rental Housing Corporation-owned sites and have confirmed that they are midway through the process. Atira recently provided notice to BC Housing that they would withdraw from the operating agreement for the Patricia Hotel SRO and BC Housing is currently developing a strategy to transition the site to another operator.

In July 2023, BC Housing provided a letter of support to Atira for the project to develop a First Nations, Metis, and Inuit women's healing and wellness centre "Indigenous Healing and Wellness Centre" in the commercial retail unit (CRU) at Olivia Skye (41 E Hastings).

### Other Funders Update

In August 2023 Infrastructure Canada confirmed its intent to release \$2.3M to Atira for the Wellness Centre noted in this report. Over the last four months, Vancouver Coastal Health has continued to renew its operating agreements with Atira and are actively engaged in expanding partnerships in additional projects.

### Atira Review Update

Alongside BC Housing's review of Atira operating agreements and development plans, the Atira Board has issued an RFP for a management consultant to conduct a governance review for the Board. Atira shared the RFP that outlines the scope of work, which is attached as Appendix A. They specifically note that this Board-initiated review will be conducted in a manner so as to not conflict or overlap with the BC Housing review.

Given the appointment of Catherine Roome as the new interim CEO and the internal review, staff are confident that the Atira Board is taking appropriate internal steps to address any governance or other operational concerns. The Board Chair has committed to share the results of the governance review with the City.

### Recommended Grants to Support Services and Programs Unrelated to the BC Housing Review

While BC Housing's review of Atira operating agreements continues, there are several Atira grant requests to the City that have been held in abeyance that are not impacted by BC Housing's review. Accordingly, staff present these grant requests to Council in this report for consideration as these are programs or services underway and confirmation of any approved City funding is needed.

These grant recommendations seek to support services in the DTES that staff deem sensitive and of strategic importance and each of them require timely decisions.

## *Recommended Grants*

### **Seksik Childcare – Childcare Enhancement Grant (ACCS)**

*Description:* Seksik Early Care & Learning Centre is located at 321 Princess Avenue in the DTES. This childcare opened as a result of a \$960,000 CoV capital grant to improve the space, which is located next to a chicken processing plant. It currently serves an extremely high need population of children who require multiple supports. Seksik requires higher than average child-to-staff ratios because of this population's behavioural needs, and also has extra cleaning protocols to ensure program safety and needle collection in its outdoor space. The City's childcare grant would contribute to these additional costs. In addition to the Enhancement Grant, Seksik was recommended for a Focus Program Grant due to the high number of children with additional support needs, Indigenous children, and single parent families currently enrolled in the program, adding an additional \$7,313 to their base grant. Seksik is one of only a handful of toddler/3-5 programs in the DTES and staff recommend supporting this new program that is working hard to serve highly vulnerable families. Please see Appendix B for a letter from AWRS regarding the Seksik Childcare.

*Amount:* \$34,313

*Budget Source:* 2023 Social Policy Grants Operating Budget

### **Indigenous Healing and Wellness Centre – Social Infrastructure grant (ACCS)**

*Description:* Tenant improvements (TIs) for the CRU at 41 East Hastings to create a 5,000 sq.ft. First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) women-led Healing and Wellness Centre. This project is being co-led by Vancouver Coastal Health's Vice President of Indigenous Health in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority in response to the vision and leadership of a committee of local matriarchs and women leaders from local Indigenous service providers. To support the community vision, Atira agreed to offer a nominal lease of the CRU and to coordinate the renovation for the TIs. City Council approved \$700,000 in the 2019-2022 Capital Plan toward the development of an Indigenous Healing and Wellness Centre; staff had encumbered this funding with the intent to bring forward a grant recommendation to Council once the project had progressed sufficiently that a space had been identified and operating funding confirmed. The Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure, and Communities approved funds of \$2,309,309.79 for the renovations. A summary of the project and approach is included in Appendix C.

Currently, the project is within the design phase and renovations are anticipated to commence in the fall of 2023, with renovations completion expected by May 2025, and anticipated open date by March 2026. BC Housing has recently written a letter of support for the City's financial contribution to this project (Appendix D), which suggests that they do not expect to make any decisions that would have operating or financial impacts that would compromise this project's success. In July 2023, VCH senior staff confirmed VCH's financial commitment (capital and operating funding) to this project and their ongoing interest in seeing the City support the project TIs financially.

*Amount:* \$700,000

*Budget Source:* 2023 Social Infrastructure Capital Budget

### **Intergenerational Mentorship Program (ACCS)**

*Description:* The Intergenerational Mentorship Program (IMP) connects women from neighbouring Atira housing programs to foster cross-generational relationships and social inclusion based on Indigenous family support and care traditions. The program engages Imouto residents and Oneesan residents and mentors in program activities,

encourages leadership with eight mentors who take a role developing the majority of workshops and event ideas from residents. Last year 95% of workshops were inspired by ideas from participants. Staff continue to contribute to the program through facilitation and awareness-raising.

*Amount:* \$10,152

*Budget Source:* 2023 Social Policy Grants Operating Budget

**East Van Roasters - DTES Plan Implementation Grant (PDS)**

*Description:* Tenant improvements (TIs) on a 1,638 square feet CRU at 16 West Hastings Street to relocate Atira’s community-based social enterprise East Van Roasters (EVR). This new location will expand EVR operations with an additional 16-seat café, a brand new chocolate lab, and a more robust mentorship-based programming and employment training in chocolate production, barista, café support, packaging and production for women in Atira’s residential programs and women within the DTES community who experience violence and other forms of marginalization. The site is owned by BC Housing, managed by Community Impact Real Estate Society (CIRES), and sub-leased to Atira as of October 2022.

The total cost of TIs are \$244,180 and covered with contributions from CIRES (\$60,000), Central City Foundation (30,000), COV’s Special Enterprise Program (\$60,000) and Atira’s own fundraising (\$44,180). Atira applied for a 2023 DTES Plan Implementation Grant to cover the gap.

*Amount:* \$50,000

*Budget Source:* 2023 Multi-year DTES Plan Implementation Matching Grants Budget

Atira Women’s Resource Society and Atira Women’s Art Society are both charitable institutions registered with the Canada Revenue Agency.

In addition to recommending the grants above for Council consideration in October, staff further anticipate that Atira will apply for City funding through some of the fall grant program open calls for proposals. Provided that the services and programs supported by the anticipated Atira applications are not impacted by the BC Housing review (i.e., BC Housing funding or operating agreement is under review), staff will consider these applications through the associated adjudication processes as per regular operations.

**Financial Implications**

Funding is available in the grant budgets noted above should the recommendations be approved by Council.

*Table 1: Financial Overview of Recommended Grant Streams and Remaining Balances*

Rec	Grant Stream	Source of funding	2023 Budget	Previously Approved	Rec'd in this Report	Balance
A	Community Services Grants	Social Policy Operating Grants Budget	\$7,394,466	\$7,150,001	\$10,152	\$234,313
B	Childcare Enhancement Grants	Childcare Operating Grants Budget	\$2,251,289	\$1,410,889	\$34,313	\$806,087
C	Indigenous Healing and Wellness Centre – Social Infrastructure Grant	Capital Budgets	\$711,000	\$0	\$700,000	\$11,000

Rec	Grant Stream	Source of funding	2023 Budget	Previously Approved	Rec'd in this Report	Balance
D	DTES Plan Implementation Grant	Multi-year DTES Plan Implementation Matching Grants Budget	\$600,000	\$532,400	\$50,000	\$17,600
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$10,956,755</b>	<b>\$9,093,290</b>	<b>\$794,465</b>	<b>\$1,069,000</b>

**Legal Implications**

The City will not have any binding legal obligations until the City executes legal agreements with each of the grant recipients.

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## **APPENDIX A ATIRA SCOPE OF WORK**

Our rehabilitation project aims to construct a community wellness center in a built-to-suit community space, designed specifically for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) women residing in Vancouver's Downtown East side (DTES). The envisioned FNMI Women's Wellness Center will provide a safe, empowering, and culturally sensitive environment, operated, and governed by First Nations, Metis, and Inuit women. Atira's role will be to provide support as the landlord; however, operations will be fully led by FNMI women. The center's holistic approach will encompass spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional support, meeting the unique needs of Indigenous women in the community.

Situated at 41 E. Hastings Street in the heart of the DTES, the 8,000 square foot space will serve as a Gathering Space, acting as a focal point for FNMI women to access a range of essential health, social, and wellbeing programs, utilities, and services. The site's proximity to existing mental health, addiction, and other health supports ensures ease of access for its beneficiaries.

Governance and management of the initiative will primarily involve First Nations, Metis, and Inuit women, with a minimal permanent staffing presence on site. The operating model is centered around providing social, health, and wellbeing supports.

The FNMI Women's Wellness Center will consist of various facilities including a Reception Desk, the Great Hall, a Community Kitchen, Shower Rooms, and a Community Laundry. Additionally, the space will feature a multi-purpose area for Art Therapy, along with social spaces promoting community and cultural connection, such as group therapy, healing spaces, dancing, drumming, and singing. The design of the Wellness Center prioritizes health equity, incorporating sustainable strategies and an ambiance that is welcoming, supportive, empowering, and culturally expressive. The space will be designed to be accessible, without barriers, and respectful of cultural traditions and practices.

Currently, the project is within the design phase and renovations are anticipated to commence in September/October 2023, with renovations completion expected by May 2025, and March 2026 will be the official project conclusion date.

The City of Vancouver has committed up to \$700,000 towards the renovation costs, as stated in the Letter of Support issued on October 26th, 2021. The commitment was reconfirmed in a subsequent Letter from the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure, and Communities on June 21st, 2022, which approved funds of \$2,309,309.79 for the project.

The project's origins trace back to the fourth annual nēcamat Urban Indigenous Women's Village of Wellness, held on November 5, 2019. Indigenous women living in the DTES planned and delivered the event, emphasizing the need for a safe, Indigenous-led center addressing health and social inequities. The subsequent concept paper proposed a culturally designed, place-based approach to establish this vital center.

Over a five-year period, the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) collaborated on the Urban Indigenous Health Strategy (UAS), which outlined actions to address health and wellbeing challenges faced by Indigenous women. This Center will be a testament to the collective commitment and partnership among various stakeholders, ensuring the health and wellbeing of Indigenous women living in the DTES community.

## APPENDIX B SEKSİK LETTER



July 13, 2023

T 604 681 4437  
F 604 688 1799  
E [info@atira.bc.ca](mailto:info@atira.bc.ca)

201, 190 Alexander Street  
Vancouver, BC V6A 1B5

RE: City of Vancouver Enhancement Grant

Seksik Early Care & Learning Centre is located at 321 Princess Avenue is a 24-space childcare centre co-located within a mixed-use development including 60 units of social housing owned and operated by Affordable Housing Charitable Association (AHCA). This neighbourhood has very few resources for these families, who are often living with the intersectional impact of colonialism, poverty, and generational systems involvement throughout their lives. We are dedicated to providing inclusive, culturally sensitive, and anti-biased programming that meets each child's developmental abilities. However, as a childcare facility based in the DTES that supports vulnerable families, who are primarily Indigenous, we have faced what feels like unnecessary barriers from childcare licensing.

These include:

- Raising our Infant/Toddler staffing ratio from the standard 1:4 to 1:3 based on the likelihood of behavioural needs from the families we serve. This increased our staffing costs over the several months it took to get licensing approval for the additional spaces.
- Seeking out infractions related to the outside environment, including:
  - Asking us to problem solve for the tenant balconies overlooking our outdoor area with solutions such as netting, instead of finding procedural solutions;
  - Requiring us to hire vendors to provide daily power washing, raising our maintenance fees.

Atira is committed to making Seksik ECLC succeed and does so with the help of collaborative partners like the City of Vancouver. Due to these increased costs, we have requested funding through the 2023 Childcare Enhancement Grant to ensure we can provide this vulnerable neighbourhood with safe, affordable childcare that contributes to the development of the families we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "SL", is positioned above the typed name.

Sarah Louie  
Executive Director, Operations  
Atira Women's Resource Society



## APPENDIX C IHWC LETTER



July 26, 2023  
Vancouver City Hall  
453 West 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

T 604 681 4437  
F 604 688 1799  
E [info@atira.bc.ca](mailto:info@atira.bc.ca)

201-190 Alexander St.  
Vancouver, BC V6A 1B5

To the Vancouver Mayor and Council,

**Re: Commitment to Mission and Good Governance**

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Over the past 10 weeks, Atira has successfully undergone 34 Provincial government operational inspections, appointed an independent Governance Review, hired an Interim CEO, a CFO and CHRO, and welcomed a government-appointed observer onto the Board of Directors.

Internally, the organization has established new standards for our code of conduct/conflict of interest, launched a Whistleblower Security reporting line, and introduced new principles for transparency and communication.

Through all those necessary changes, the sixty-four supportive housing programs and 2,405 units of housing that Atira provides have continued to deliver needed support to more than 3,000 people.

Atira is known for working with its partners to deliver new innovative programs and services, including:

- Development of a First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women's Wellness Centre in joint partnership with Infrastructure Canada and the City of Vancouver. The Wellness Centre will draw on the Wellness Wheel Framework to ensure programming can address the four main facets of wellbeing- Mental, Spiritual, Emotional, and Physical.
- An investment in trauma-informed child education and a physical expansion of Maxxine Wright Early Care & Learning Centre's outdoor play area in partnership with PROMoting Early Childhood Outside (PRO-ECO) and the University of British Columbia. Atira will work with PRO-ECO's team to increase the time, quality, and educational value of children's outdoor play. This includes modifying the current play space, developing program policies and procedures, and offering Educator training and mentorship.

- Ese'mkwu (wrapped in a blanket) is a therapeutic vision program in partnership between the Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS) and Atira. This program is designed to strengthen the relationship between Indigenous mothers who have been separated from their children. The program hosts the Sacred Life-Givers group.
- Atira is in the final stages of confirming the Public Health Agency of Canada's second round of investment in the Vaccine Hesitancy project through the Immunization Partnership Fund. Through this project, we will continue our research to better understand how interpersonal and/or systemic violence impacts vaccine hesitancy among the women we support.

Atira has made the decision to divest several properties which were procured without funding partners, and which may make more sense in a mixed-use housing development strategy which is neither Atira's core mission nor within BC Housing's mandate.

The Society delivers exceptional work in the field of women, children, and gender-diverse peoples' support services, and the Province of BC values the impactful contributions that Atira makes in the community, not only in the housing sector but also in legal support, counselling, outreach, and health services. Atira has become a leading organization in providing comprehensive support to vulnerable individuals and families.

While a "Housing First" strategy has been a public policy focus for at least a decade, an updated approach is within our grasp. Atira sees that a new strategy must bring meaning and light at the end of the tunnel to those we serve. We believe in "Housing to Hope" and have the expertise and the commitment to this mission.

Thank you for your solution oriented partnership and compassion.

Sincerely,



**Catherine Roome**  
Interim CEO

## APPENDIX D BC HOUSING LETTER



Home Office  
1701 – 4555 Kingsway  
Burnaby, BC V5H 4V8

Tel 604-439-4109  
Fax 604-433-5915

July 21, 2023

City of Vancouver  
453 West 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Attention: Paul Mochrie, City Manager

**Re: Atira Women's Resource Society ("Atira")**

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We have been asked by Atira to write this letter to City of Vancouver with respect to the City's grant of \$700,000.00 to Atira with respect to the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Wellness Centre, 41 East Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC (the "Centre").

As you're aware, Atira is currently undergoing an operational review, the results of which are not expected for a number of months.

In the meantime, Atira continues to provide, and BCHMC continues to compensate Atira for, regular services regarding various affordable housing developments under its applicable Operating Agreements and Operator Agreements with BCHMC.

We are also aware of the new management of Atira, including Catherine Roome, Acting CEO and Paul Plater, CFO.

We generally support Atira's development of the Centre and in our view, both the above matters should be considered by the City with respect to its grant of \$700,000.00 to Atira for the Centre.

### BRITISH COLUMBIA HOUSING MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

By:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vincent Tong".

Vincent Tong  
CEO

CC: Catherine Roome, Interim CEO, Atira Women's Resource Society  
Sarf Ahmed, VP Corporate Services and CFO, BC Housing  
Teri Collins, Deputy Minister of Housing

British Columbia Housing Management Commission