



# Living in Community

November 15, 2021

Mayor and City Council, City of Vancouver  
453 W 12th Ave  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Sent via email: [Kennedy.Stewart@vancouver.ca](mailto:Kennedy.Stewart@vancouver.ca), [Jean.swanson@vancouver.ca](mailto:Jean.swanson@vancouver.ca), [christine.boyle@vancouver.ca](mailto:christine.boyle@vancouver.ca), [adriane.carr@vancouver.ca](mailto:adriane.carr@vancouver.ca), [pete.fry@vancouver.ca](mailto:pete.fry@vancouver.ca), [michael.wiebe@vancouver.ca](mailto:michael.wiebe@vancouver.ca), [rebecca.bligh@vancouver.ca](mailto:rebecca.bligh@vancouver.ca), [melissa.degenova@vancouver.ca](mailto:melissa.degenova@vancouver.ca), [lisa.dominato@vancouver.ca](mailto:lisa.dominato@vancouver.ca), [colleen.hardwick@vancouver.ca](mailto:colleen.hardwick@vancouver.ca), [sarah.kirby-yung@vancouver.ca](mailto:sarah.kirby-yung@vancouver.ca), [paul.mochrie@vancouver.ca](mailto:paul.mochrie@vancouver.ca), [sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@vancouver.ca), [allison.dunnet@vancouver.ca](mailto:allison.dunnet@vancouver.ca), [ag.minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:ag.minister@gov.bc.ca)

CC: [dtes.sro.collab@gmail.com](mailto:dtes.sro.collab@gmail.com)

Dear Mayor Stewart and Vancouver City Council,

I am writing to you on behalf of Living in Community (LIC), a provincial non-profit organization that is based in Vancouver. Centering sex workers' rights, Living in Community convenes diverse stakeholders in order to: understand a range of experiences and perspectives about sex work; inform sex work-related policies and practices of governments, service providers, and community organizations; and provide education and training to support these goals. We focus on root causes including colonization, capitalism, racism, criminalization, and discrimination that create systemic vulnerability for sex workers as well as other community members. Living in Community's staff and Board of Directors include individuals who are experiential in sex work, and our work is driven by the needs and voices of sex workers.

We are writing in support of protecting tenants of Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) in the Downtown Eastside by implementing vacancy control. We understand that by the end of 2021, City staff will be presenting Council with options for a municipal vacancy control mechanism, and that in December 2019 and September 2020 Council unanimously approved motions asking staff to investigate how to protect tenants of SROs. Thank you for your work on this file over the past few years.

It is widely understood that SROs are a last resort before homelessness. Rising rents mean that many of these units are being lost, directly contributing to homelessness and tent cities. Furthermore, building replacement social housing would cost governments approximately \$500,000 for each lost unit. And while replacement housing is the long-term goal, the housing system cannot currently cope with the rapid loss of the remaining 4,000 affordable SRO units. Before replacement with new housing, we need protection for the existing units and tenants. Voting in favour of vacancy control is the cheapest and fastest way to prevent homelessness now.

Several of the organizations that Living in Community works with serve those in and around the Downtown Eastside. From the work of these organizations, including WISH Drop-In Centre Society, PACE Society, and the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre, we know that street-based sex workers continue to experience high degrees of vulnerability, stigma, and barriers to accessing services including housing. For these sex workers, having a safe place to live in and rely upon has a massive impact on their health and wellbeing; it allows them more choice over their work and their clients, it ensures they can sleep solidly and safely, and it provides stability and security. Moreover,

Indigenous individuals are overrepresented in both street-based sex work and in SRO occupancy; according to the DTES SRO Collaborative, approximately one third of SRO tenants are Indigenous. Advancing reconciliation includes preventing unnecessary homelessness for these tenants.

We urge you to prevent an increase in homelessness by supporting vacancy control in all SROs, with the following in mind:

- Do not delay: do not give landlords a window to rapidly evict tenants into homelessness prior to this policy coming into effect.
- Ensure there are no loopholes: end the economic incentive to evict vulnerable tenants into homelessness by tying rent to the unit, not to the tenant, and by ensuring there will be no allowable rent increase in between tenancies.
- Implement proactive monitoring and education.
- Implement sufficient penalties to discourage violations.
- Do not believe landlords who say they won't be able to make repairs, especially because they can now apply to the Residential Tenancy Branch to cover eligible capital expenditures or expenses to a residential property up to the maximum 3% rent increase.<sup>1</sup>

Implementing vacancy control in the SROs to prevent more homelessness and stop the loss of this last resort stock of housing is a popular, inexpensive, and effective action that demonstrates your commitment to improving housing conditions and preventing homelessness for all Vancouverites. We cannot afford to lose any more units of housing and we need to do everything we can to stop homelessness. Thank you for taking this important step to protect vulnerable tenants in our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Halena Seiferling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Halena Seiferling  
Executive Director, Living in Community  
[director@livingincommunity.ca](mailto:director@livingincommunity.ca)

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<sup>1</sup> “Additional Rent Increase,” Residential Tenancy Branch: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/during-a-tenancy/rent-increases/additional-rent-increase>