

GENERAL INFORMATION ON SINGLE ROOM ACCOMMODATION BY-LAW: QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. What is the SRA By-law?

The Single Room Accommodation By-law regulates the conversion and demolition of low-cost accommodation in the city's downtown core.

2. What is single room accommodation?

Single room accommodation includes residential hotels (or SROs), rooming houses and other buildings with rooms less than 320 square feet that have been identified in the *2003 Survey of Low-income Housing* that is published bi-annually by the City's Housing Centre.

3. Why only the downtown core?

Staff considered a number of options with respect to the geographical scope of the By-law and recommended the By-law apply to the downtown core since it contains the vast majority of the City's low-cost housing stock and the City monitors the stock.

4. Why did the Council pass such a By-law?

Council has numerous housing policies that seek to protect low-income tenants, including the elderly, people with mental health issues and others at risk of becoming homeless. SRA is often the last resort for an individual before homelessness. The City of Vancouver is also a signatory to the 2010 Bid Book which commits the City to the goal of ensuring that no evictions will occur as a result of the 2010 Games. The SRA By-law is one tool to help ensure that goal.

5. They City has had the ability to enact this By-law since 1997 - why has the City waited so long while this housing stock continued to be lost?

Over the past ten years, the creation of replacement singles housing has basically kept pace with the loss of SRAs. While there are a number of additional non-market housing projects underway, or being planned for the downtown core, the future production of non-market housing is uncertain given the cancellation of the provincial Homes BC program which funded the creation of replacement singles units. As a result, it is important that a tool be put in place that will help manage the rate of change in the stock - the SRA By-law is one such tool.

6. What does the By-law mean for me, an SRO hotel owner?

Owners that want to convert their buildings to tourist use or other non-residential uses must first apply to Council for an SRA conversion or demolition permit. Council will consider whether or not to grant a permit based on a number of factors including: the supply of low-cost accommodation, as well as other factors such as significant heritage or economic opportunities that would result from the conversion or demolition of SRA rooms. In addition, Council may

attach certain conditions to the issuance of the permit including a fee of \$15,000 per room.

7. The By-law will decrease property values and fossilize poor quality housing. Why would the City do this?

The aim of the By-law is not to fossilize the stock. The City acknowledges that many of the existing buildings are getting older and are more difficult to maintain. The By-law will manage the rate of change in the stock. Staff are also exploring other ways to provide incentives for owners to maintain and provide decent housing to their tenants. In fact, a number of initiatives are already underway. For example, the SRO Management Plan has recently been extended through the Vancouver Agreement. The program is aimed at upgrading the skills of SRO managers - not only in how to deal with tenants, but also in the physical maintenance of the building. Managers receive training on how to maintain buildings, as well as skills training in dealing with tenants. Another example is the one year pilot project being launched through the Vancouver Agreement. The project will bring together a private sector hotel (the Avalon), a non-profit (Lookout) and the RRAP program. The Avalon will be upgraded/renovated (work to be done in two phases so tenants temporarily move on site, or off site) and Lookout will provide support to owner in dealing with tenants. The aim of the project is to demonstrate how a private sector hotel can be well managed and run with some assistance from government. Finally, another excellent example is the heritage incentives the City has offered owners. Over the 5 year period there will be upwards of \$55 M of incentives (façade grants, property tax exemption and bonus density) provided in Gastown, Chinatown and Hastings Street which in turn will motivate, at minimum, an equal but more likely a greater amount of private investment.

8. I am hotel owner and I rent to tourists - not tenants - so why am I on the list?

We have used the 2003 Survey of Low-income Housing in the Downtown Core to generate our list of buildings and designated rooms. We have included buildings in which most, if not all rooms may have already been converted to transient (tourist) use, but they remain on the list because they may include rooms rented to permanent residents all or part of the year even if their primary focus is tourist use.

Only rooms used primarily for permanent resident accommodation are intended to be captured by the By-law. If you provide accommodation to tourists or have units that are greater than 320 square feet, you may request that these rooms be removed from the list of buildings with designated rooms.

9. How do I get off the list?

Upon enactment of the By-law, owners whose buildings contain rooms that provide tourist (transient guest) accommodation may apply to have their buildings removed from the SRA list by providing the necessary documentation demonstrating that these rooms have not been primarily used for permanent residential accommodation.

Owners will be asked to complete an application form and submit the necessary documentation to the Director of Planning. The documentation requested will include all or some of the following as staff may deem necessary to exempting the SRA designated rooms:

- (a) Floor plans showing rooms larger than 320 square feet (29.73 sq. metres).
- (b) Hotel Guest Registration Act or Hotel Room Tax Act records;
- (c) Property tax assessment records;
- (d) Sales tax records;
- (e) Notarized receipts for daily rent;
- (f) Notarized guest ledgers; and
- (g) Other proof including relevant permits demonstrating that the designated rooms should not have been included on the list in the first instance.

It is important to note that the following reasons will not be considered sufficient for seeking to have the By-law amended to deleted rooms from the list of properties that provide Single Room Accommodation:

- The SRA building is licensed as a hotel or rooming house (unless providing documented transient guest or tourist accommodation). Both licensed hotels and rooming houses can currently provide permanent residential and transient guest accommodation. Council was granted the specific authority to define SRA and the definition is distinct from other By-laws.
- The SRA building has been closed because of fire or enforcement of City by-laws such as the Fire By-law or the Standards of Maintenance By-law; or the building and SRA rooms therein have been left vacant. Vacancy or closure is not a valid reason for an amendment to the By-law to remove SRA designated rooms -amendments to the By-law will be based on the last use of the SRA rooms before the enactment of By-law.
- The SRA building owner has signed a Housing Agreement or Heritage Revitalization Agreement before the enactment of the By-law.

Owners should call 604.871.6198 or 604.873.7975 for more information on the exemption application process.

10. What if I can't get off the list, what do I have to do under this By-law? Affected property owners will be required to post notice of the SRA designation in a conspicuous location such as the lobby, or behind the front desk. Owners will also be required to maintain guest ledgers and rental receipts that must be made available to inspectors upon request.

11. I want to convert my designated rooms to tourist use. How do I do that?

Owners wanting to convert or demolish a designated SRA room(s) to another use (including conversion to short-term, seasonal transient guest or tourist use) must submit an application to the Director of Planning.

Owners should call 604.871.6198 or 604.873.7975 for more information on the application process.