

Downtown Eastside Changes Underway



Fall 2002



Vancouver Agreement major funding sources

All three levels of government have provided funding for projects under the Vancouver Agreement.

Canada

Government of Canada



Government of British Columbia

(includes Vancouver Coastal Health Authority)



City of Vancouver

(includes Vancouver Police Department).

Complex issues require comprehensive solutions



The public drug dealing, drug use and public disorder that mark the historic intersection of Main and Hastings Streets illustrate some of the problems facing the Downtown Eastside. Under the Vancouver Agreement this corner has been redesigned and a Health Contact Centre has been located next to the Carnegie Centre. These first steps are part of a larger strategy to improve access to health services, reduce the impact of the drug market locally and improve neighbourhoods for business.

DTES at a glance

The DTES comprises several distinct neighbourhoods, including Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona and Victory Square. For purposes of the Vancouver Agreement, the DTES is bounded by Clark Drive (east), Richards Street (west), Burrard Inlet (north) and Terminal Avenue (south).

Update on the Vancouver Agreement's work in Downtown Eastside

The federal and provincial governments and the City of Vancouver signed the Vancouver Agreement on March 9, 2000. This urban development agreement created a mechanism for governments to work together to support sustainable economic, social and community development in Vancouver. The initial focus has been the Downtown Eastside, where the need is greatest. *Changes Underway* reports on the progress of the Vancouver Agreement to date.

Meeting challenges with cooperation and coordinated efforts

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) includes Chinatown, Gastown, Strathcona, Victory Square, and the Hastings Street Corridor. (See map below). People living and working in this historic area face significant challenges from economic decline, poverty, crime, public health crises, and an open drug scene. Addressing these challenges is the first focus of Vancouver Agreement partners, who are committed to ensuring this area becomes a safe, healthy and vibrant part of the city once again.

Over the past two years, Vancouver Agreement partners, along with the Vancouver Police Department, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, and the community, have worked to better coordinate their efforts and focus their funds towards for supporting economic development, reducing crime and improving public spaces, housing and health care.

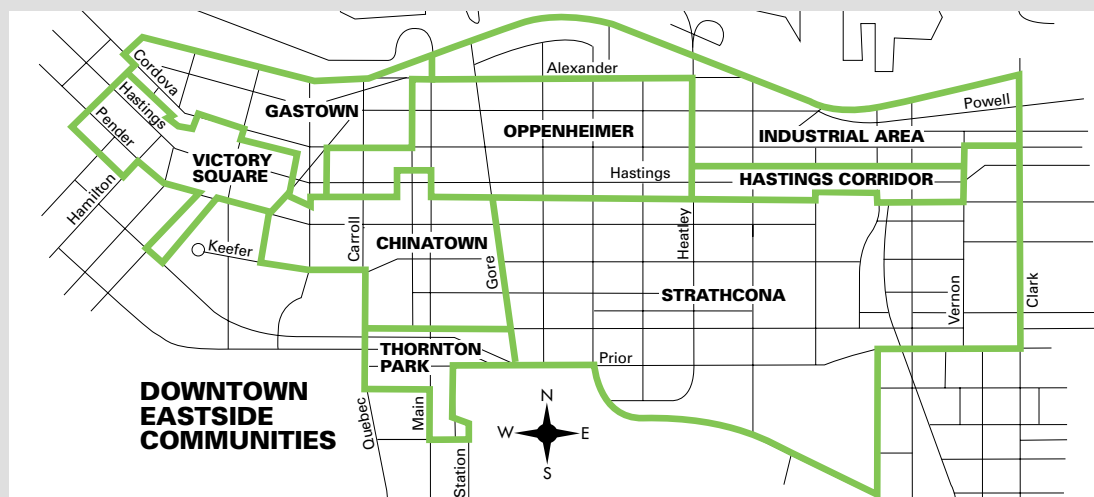
Vancouver Agreement partners believe that achieving success in community health and economic independence depends on a comprehensive and integrated approach. They also recognize that it takes time to produce visible signs of success. Business decline, drug use, crime, poor health, unemployment, poverty and inadequate housing are intertwined problems in the DTES, so solutions must also be inter-connected. Achieving lasting results is complex and time-consuming, but signs of success are beginning to appear.

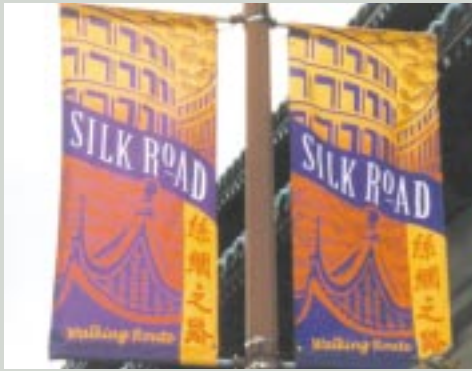
- Since 1999 there have been 108 applications for city business licenses in the DTES. New businesses have opened and many are getting ready to open.

- The incidence of violent crime has decreased by 30 per cent and property crime has declined by 30 per cent.
- The business licenses of more than 30 "problem premises" – premises where illegal activity or unruly behaviour, including fights, occur – have been suspended, two problematic Single Room Occupancy Hotels have been closed, and derelict buildings have been demolished.
- Streets, sidewalks and lane ways are cleaned more frequently and thoroughly. Many public spaces have been, or soon will be, upgraded and beautified.
- Health care services are being expanded and more and different types of treatment are being made available. The health care system is also working in a more coordinated fashion with enforcement efforts.
- More than 650 units of housing have been built – and an additional 365 units are on the way.

All of these projects are essential to creating a safer, healthier, more sustainable environment for businesses and residents. All of them, whether undertaken by governments solely or in partnership, have benefited from funding, expertise, support and cooperation under the VA partnership. However, a great deal of work is still required to bring the neighbourhood closer to its full potential and consolidate the gains that have been made.

For more details on these and other initiatives under the Vancouver Agreement, call 604-873-7372.





Chinatown heritage projects

City and National Crime Prevention Centre staff and the Chinatown Revitalization Committee are developing a long-term vision for the future of Chinatown and preparing plans to make it happen. The Vancouver Agreement is building on this work by constructing (with contributions from all levels of government, the community and the People's Republic of China) the Chinatown Millennium Gate, bringing to Shanghai Alley a replica of a 2,200-year old bell, beautifying the walkway and installing nine history-telling panels. The Chinatown Memorial Square, a public work of art commemorating the role of Chinese Canadians in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway and in World Wars I and II, will be installed at the intersection of Keefer and Columbia Street. New paving stones and improvements have been made to make the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Courtyard a better venue for cultural events. Some 25 community groups worked together to help select the style and colour of 90 new decorative lampposts (funded under the VA) in Chinatown that were first lit on March 28, 2002.

A walkway between the Vancouver Public Library and Chinatown has been named the 'Silk Road', after the route across Asia that linked Rome to China. The first phase marked the route with banners and signage. In the next phase story-telling panels will be installed along the route.



Guangzhou bell in Shanghai Alley

Building businesses and creating jobs from within

Creating an environment in which business can flourish is key to revitalizing the whole Downtown Eastside. With the help of more than two dozen projects undertaken in the past two years supporting business growth and job creation in the DTES, the environment for new local enterprises has improved. Projects range from supporting business start-ups to providing job-hunting skills, training and opportunities for residents to pursue advanced education. The primary focus of these projects is developing business opportunities from within the community. The success of these programs is demonstrated in the willingness expressed by some DTES landlords and business owners to pledge to renovate and re-invest in their properties and businesses.

PEACH (Partners in Economic and Community Help) is a good example of how the Vancouver Agreement is helping the community build from within. PEACH is a non-profit society with three funds: one from each of the federal, provincial and city governments. Through a community steering committee, PEACH coordinates support for economic and community development initiatives by providing loans and loan guarantees to help retain businesses and attract new small businesses to the DTES.

Many new businesses activities are still in the planning stage, but the following are a sample of those already up and running.

- Call n'Post, operated by the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), provides computer graphics services, voice mail, and mail boxes, to help residents of Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SRO) and the homeless keep in touch with family and potential employers. (16 West Hastings)
- First Nations Creations Artists Co-op operates a workshop and gallery space in Gastown and offers mentoring and training opportunities for First Nations youth. (20 Water Street)

- With a business development loan from PEACH, a High End Furniture Manufacturer that designs and builds custom furniture and provides interior renovation is moving to new quarters on Alexander Street this summer. The owner is working with Tradeworks to identify potential employees. Tradeworks provides skills training for people on income assistance.

- reBOOT Vancouver will train DTES residents to repair, sell and service donated computers for non-profits and charitable groups. The new service is modelled after reBOOT Canada and led by Tradeworks.



Call and Post at 16 W. Hastings

low-income DTES residents, Vancouver Police, EasyPark, ICBC and SecuriGuard, the project aims for self-sufficiency.

- The Interurban Project has renovated a vacant storefront at 9 East Hastings Street and is creating a community-based gallery, including art workshop space, meeting and rehearsal rooms.
- Funding assistance enabled Vancouver Co-Operative Radio to move to a highly visible location in the Sunrise Hotel, which recently won an award for its renovation of a formerly notorious licensed premise at 101 E. Hastings (at Columbia). CFRO 102.7 FM features a wide variety of local arts and cultural programming.

- Neighbours First is a community-based program focussed on making DTES neighbourhoods more attractive and welcoming. Trained, uniformed volunteers provide information services to residents and tourists, paid staff help clean local streets, and awareness programs will help businesses and residents eventually become part of a DTES "block watch" program. A joint effort of the Gastown and Chinatown Business Improvement Associations, Gastown and Chinatown Community Policing Centres, organizations representing

Building community capacity

Creating an environment for economic growth and building a community's capacity to meet its own needs go hand in hand. Community Directions, funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre, helps more than 600 low-income residents and 40 community organizations work together to improve conditions for all residents in the DTES. Through information sharing and problem solving, the Chinatown Revitalization Committee helps all people who live, work or visit Chinatown identify issues and work towards revitalizing Chinatown.

The VA-funded Future Search Conference and follow-up, held March 2000, brought together government officials and people who live and/or work in the Downtown Eastside who are seeking solutions to the many difficult issues facing the area. Many of the ideas generated at the conference – including Historical Markers, improved lighting in Gastown and Chinatown, Neighbours First and improvements to Victory Square Park – have already been implemented.



Beautifying shared spaces

Making parks, sidewalks, lanes and streets more appealing can have a big impact on a community, and the DTES is no exception. With VA support, new lighting in Victory Square Park was installed in spring 2002 to improve safety and usability of the park while celebrating its history. New lights in Chinatown add heritage value and make the area more attractive for evening shoppers. Mosaic tiles installed in sidewalks now form the Historical Markers walking tour through the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, and Strathcona. The 17 mosaics, along with banners and a guidebook, depict local history, places, and people. Designed by local artists and created by residents, these mosaics are part of a life skills training and community pride project managed by the Carnegie Centre.



Victory Square Park

Cleaning up the streets and lanes

Volunteers are using paint, materials and expertise provided by City Engineering for graffiti removal in Chinatown. United We Can, a locally run non-profit society, has undertaken graffiti clean-up on Hastings Street and in

Gastown. Sidewalks and gutters in the heart of the DTES are cleaned seven nights a week and streets are flushed five nights a week. About a dozen of the dirtiest lanes in Chinatown, Gastown and the DTES are cleaned by hand and flushed up to seven times a week. A number of agencies including VANDU, DEYAS, and Street Youth Job Action are conducting regular needle sweeps on streets, lanes, and parks throughout the DTES. Needle disposal containers have been installed outside the Carnegie Centre and in Oppenheimer Park.



Gastown heritage projects

The Gastown Heritage Management Plan, a City of Vancouver initiative recently approved by Council, will create a strong heritage conservation plan with administrative and financial incentives to facilitate building renovation. Property owners and residents are developing a plan to restore Blood Alley, an important public space, as a focal point for the community. Several major community sponsored public events in the last year have attracted thousands of people to the area to celebrate Chinese New Year, see local fashion and listen to the Bach Choir.

Other projects include renovation and improved security in the Gastown Parkade; redevelopment of the Cordova Parkade to accommodate the West Coast Historical Experience, and a proposed major tourist attraction portraying the authentic history of inner city neighbourhoods. Re-paving Water Street with distinctive red bricks has also helped to rejuvenate Gastown: this investment by the VA partners has sparked the return of the Steamworks Tour de Gastown annual cycle race, cancelled nine years ago because the road was too uneven and unsafe for cyclists.

Making the DTES a safer place



Much of the crime in the DTES is related to drugs and/or alcohol, and many of the people responsible are not from the area. While crime remains a problem in the DTES, violent crime is down by 30 per cent and property crime has declined by 31 per cent since 2000.

A combination of improved enforcement and economic revitalization is beginning to make a difference. Improved cooperation among police, City and provincial government staff, plus stepped-up law enforcement targeting non-addicted drug dealers and violent crime, is starting to improve community safety in the DTES.

- More Vancouver Police patrol officers have been deployed and existing officers re-deployed to increase contact and visibility in the community. The drug unit responsible for the DTES has more than doubled in size, from 5 to 12 members.
- Coordinated enforcement efforts with City and provincial government staff have also reduced illegal drug-related activity in many pubs and Single Room Occupancy hotels. There has also been a significant reduction in drug dealing and visible drug use west of Columbia Street.

- The City has suspended 30 business licenses over the past two years, closing pawnshops, second hand stores, restaurants and corner stores that directly or indirectly supported the illegal drug trade. All new licenses for retail grocery stores now require police background checks. Checks are also more thorough, with applicants now required to provide a business plan.
- Changes to public spaces and regulations, including the redesign of the Main and Hastings corner, improved street lighting, and the creation of no-parking and no-stopping zones in known drug trafficking areas are all designed to further reduce drug activity.
- Other initiatives have focused on reducing the sale of rice alcohol and limiting the hours of operation of area businesses.

Improving community health

Vancouver Agreement partners support the four-pillar approach described in the Vancouver Coalition for Crime Prevention and Treatment's Framework for Action: A Four-Pillar Approach to Vancouver's Drug Problems. Vancouver Agreement partners stress the importance of rehabilitation and economic revitalization along with the four pillars of prevention, treatment, enforcement and harm reduction. Health and safety programs and services increase contact with drug users, offer improved health services, provide more and different treatment options; and ensure more treatment services in other parts of the region. Access to jobs and the resources needed to start and maintain businesses helps to improve the effectiveness of recovery from addiction. The following examples highlight the efforts to enhance health care and treatment:

Improving contact with clients

- Indoor Health Connection Programs operated by the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA) help to improve contact between those with addictions and the health care system. These programs provide frontline health and substance misuse referral services, recreational programs, and life skills training. They are monitored by a community-based program advisory committee and a neighbourhood liaison committee.
- The Health Contact Centre works in conjunction with the Carnegie Outdoor Street Program to provide basic health care, basic life skills training and referrals to other health sites region-wide. (166 E. Hastings Street)

- The Pender Community Health Clinic provides health services to people addicted to drugs, and primary care for other local residents. Staff and operations were relocated from the Gastown Clinic and other health offices around the area in December 2001. (59 W. Pender Street)
- The Downtown Community Health Centre provides basic health care, addiction treatment, counselling, mental health and nutritional support services in a new and larger facility opened in January 2002. Services are available for individuals and families from the entire community. (569 Powell Street)
- The Life Skills Centre serves clients looking for access to skills, job training, and connections with the broader community. (412 E. Cordova Street)

Expanding treatment options

In addition to the treatment services listed below, addiction treatment is available at Community Health Centres serving Kerrisdale, Downtown, DTES, South Vancouver, Grandview-Woodlands and other neighbourhoods.

- Ambulatory Detox Services expand VCHA's capacity to treat substance misuse in the DTES. People addicted to drugs need time to detoxify before they can undertake sustained treatment programs. Ambulatory detox, or "daytox," is more cost effective because it allows clients to live at home and visit a facility during the day. Daytox programs link to sobering, outreach, and residential treatment for DTES residents.
- Community Supported Detox: Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is expanding home/outreach programs for people addicted to drugs who cannot attend "daytox" facilities.



Health Contact Centre at 166 E. Hastings St.

The program includes home visits and partnerships with emergency shelters to extend options to homeless people throughout the region. Home/outreach programs are a responsive and cost effective way to provide withdrawal services. Like ambulatory detox, this service focuses more on detox as a process than a place.

- Dual Diagnosis Recovery Beds: Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is establishing recovery beds in drug and alcohol facilities outside the DTES for men and women diagnosed with both mental health and addiction problems (dual diagnosis).
- Cordova Detox has expanded to 30 beds and linked to post-withdrawal services and support in the community. (119 East Cordova St.)
- Drug Treatment Court is an alternative to the criminal justice system for people with a recognizable drug addiction who are facing non-violent drug-related offenses. Using a combination of treatment and court monitoring, Drug Court aims to increase public safety by reducing drug addiction and the crimes committed to support a drug habit.

Creating more and better housing

Providing housing for low-income people both within and outside the DTES and encouraging the development of market housing is a primary objective of VA partners. Since the Agreement was signed, there have been 557 new or converted housing units for low-income and/or hard-to-house singles in the DTES. There are currently some 292 units of short-term/transitional accommodation in development for families, seniors, Aboriginal women, and low-income singles.

There has been considerable effort to improve living conditions in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels. These are now inspected every four months, and there is increased enforcement to ensure livability, especially with regard to cleanliness, room maintenance and shared spaces such as washrooms. A pilot course is being created to help SRO owners and operators improve their abilities to maintain buildings and manage tenants.

New DTES housing units since 2000

- Regal Place (146 W. Hastings Street) -39 units for low-income urban singles
- New Portland Hotel (20 W. Hastings Street) 86 units for hard-to-house core need singles with mental, health and/or substance abuse related problems
- The Oasis (40 E. Hastings Street) 84 units for low-income urban singles
- J.C. Leman Building (27 W. Pender Street) 98 units for low-income urban singles
- Bridge Housing (103 E. Cordova Street) 48 units for core need single women living in DTES
- Bridget Moran Place (668 Powell Street) 61 units for low-income urban singles
- New World Hotel (396 Powell Street) converted from SRO with 110 units for low-income urban singles
- Somerville Place (377 Powell St) 31 units for low-income singles



Bridge Housing at 103 E. Cordova St.

- Salvation Army Crosswalk emergency shelter facility operated the "Mat Program" at 108 W. Hastings Street, starting March 2002
- Lore Krill Co-op East (239 E. Georgia St.) has 97 units for families, seniors, and low-income urban singles, occupied March 28, 2002

Projects in process as of March 2002

- Pennsylvania Hotel (412 Carrall St) 41 units for low-income urban singles
- Lookout Emergency Aid Society (Powell St.) Phase 1 was the purchase of a SRO hotel to retain housing at risk; Phase 2 is conversion to second stage housing as spaces become available, at which time support services will be introduced to residents and shelter users
- Triage Emergency Service will buy a renovated hotel (Princess Rooms) for second stage housing for emergency shelter clients
- Lore Krill Co-op West (65 West Cordova St.) will offer 106 units for families, seniors, and low-income urban singles
- Katherine Sanford Project (375 Jackson St.) will house 36 units for supportive seniors
- YWCA/Sheway (533 E Hastings St.) 12 units for short-term and transitional accommodation for pregnant aboriginal women or single mothers with children
- Grace Christian Mennonite (596 E. Hastings Street) 89 units for low-income seniors living in the downtown area
- Union Gospel Housing (361 Heatley) 81 second stage housing units for graduates of Union Gospel residential rehabilitation operation (Housing Centre)

What happens next?

Vancouver Agreement partners have created a detailed strategic plan that includes new initiatives to continue its work towards increasing economic development, improving health, and increasing public safety in the DTES. The strategic plan will be publicly released this fall.



For more information

This newsletter provides an overview of some of the initiatives undertaken by the Vancouver Agreement partners.

For more information on these projects or to obtain a detailed report on all the initiatives underway, please visit: www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/dtes.

or write to us at:

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