

From: "Johnston, Sadhu" <Sadhu.Johnston@vancouver.ca>
To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"
CC: "City Manager's Correspondence Group - DL"
"Singh, Sandra" <Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca>
Date: 9/28/2020 4:22:39 PM
Subject: Update - Re: VTU Urges you to Implement Municipal Rent Control in Private SROs

Dear Mayor and Council,

Staff will be providing Mayor and Council with a progress update on SRO Revitalization at the Council Standing Committee on October 7th. The report will provide an update on the state of SROs and actions undertaken to revitalize and replace the stock, and will seek Council approval of a number of recommendations to accelerate SRO replacement, mitigate speculation and loss of affordability, and protect existing SRO residents from displacement and homelessness. A key concern for community advocacy groups, including the Vancouver Tenant's Union and the SRO Collaborative, is the continued loss of affordability and displacement of low-income residents from private SROs.

The upcoming report will address the VTU and SRO-C's concerns and, more specifically, will respond to Council's 2019 motion "Slowing the Loss of the Last Low Income SROs in Vancouver", which directed staff to continue to advocate to the Province to take regulatory action on limiting rent increases, as well as to explore the potential use of City tools to achieve this goal if Provincial action is not forthcoming. Council members and the public can review the report in its entirety when it is public.

Please note that once the report is public, staff will respond to the VTU and other community organizations to encourage them to make their views known by participating in the Council process.

Best,
Sadhu

Sadhu Aufochs Johnston | City Manager
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Pronouns: he, him, his



The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

From: Vancouver Tenants Union [<mailto:info@vancouvertenantsunion.ca>]
Sent: Wednesday, September 23, 2020 10:19 AM
To: Stewart, Kennedy; Swanson, Jean; De Genova, Melissa; Wiebe, Michael; Dominato, Lisa; Kirby-Yung, Sarah; Carr, Adriane; Fry, Pete; Boyle, Christine; Bligh, Rebecca; Hardwick, Colleen
Cc: Johnston, Sadhu; Singh, Sandra; Dunnet, Allison; SDPR.minister@gov.bc.ca; MAH.minister@gov.bc.ca;

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Subject: VTU Urges you to Implement Municipal Rent Control in Private SROs

Dear Mayor Stewart and Vancouver City Council,

We, at the Vancouver Tenants Union, are writing to urge you to utilize the City bylaws to implement rent control tied to units in privately owned Single Room Occupancy Hotels and stem the rapid loss of this last resort housing. As the case of New Westminster's anti-renoviction bylaw and the attached legal research compiled by the SRO Collaborative shows, this is well within the City's powers.

As a reminder, you approved a motion on December 10, 2019 for City Council to 1) ask the province for vacancy control in the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units and 2) investigate ways that the city can control rents if the province fails to take action, in order to slow the rapid loss of affordable housing in this stock and protect vulnerable Vancouver residents. VTU thanks you for this unanimous approval.

SROs are around 100 square foot rooms with no kitchens or private bathrooms. They are typically renting at welfare and old age pension rates and are considered the housing of last resort for very low income Vancouverites before homelessness. SRO housing must be preserved at the lowest rents possible until the housing and homelessness crisis is over.

While acknowledging the province's responsibility in this matter, the **Vancouver Tenants' Union strongly urges the Mayor and Council to take matters into their own hands, as voted to do in December, by immediately legislating rents tied to the unit and not the tenant in all Single Room Occupancy hotels.** We understand that the City has the jurisdictional power through the Business License bylaw to impose penalties on landlords who raise rents between tenancies. For landlords that are found in violation, the Vancouver Tenants' Union urges the council to impose hefty fines. Further, should the fines go unpaid, the city should put unpaid fines on the landlords' tax rolls and eventually move to expropriate the landlord's property should the rents continue to not be lowered nor the fines paid.

Since February 2019, the City of New Westminster has been successfully using this method to significantly slow the loss of affordable rental units in that municipality. The BC Supreme Court recently upheld the municipality's right to control rents using the Business License Bylaw. **We urge the City of Vancouver to muster the political will to follow this successful model.** See details on how this applies to the Vancouver context in the attached briefing.

Moreover, we recommend the city seek the help of Downtown Eastside tenant support organizations such as the SRO Collaborative, rather than relying on city staff, to monitor for and report violations. This can also alleviate concerns about the costs of implementation.

Failing to take strong and swift action will result in a rapid increase in homelessness. The rents in these SROs are rapidly climbing. The SRO landlords have no restrictions on how much they can raise rents once tenants leave or are evicted. As a result, low-income tenants can no longer afford to rent them at the new rental prices. For example, at the Arlington Hotel, rents have increased \$375/month to \$625/month between tenants. At the Vogue Hotel, rents are increasing from \$500/month to \$750/month. At the Keefer Cabins, from \$375/month to \$1,100/month; that is an almost threefold increase in rent. For the "20,000 households citywide earning under \$30,000 (that) are spending over 50 per cent of their income on housing" ([SRO Revitalization action plan page 4](#)), these margins may mean the difference between being housed and being homeless. Dozens of tent city encampments are on the horizon if nothing is done to fix this problem, fast.

The top issue concerning Vancouverites according to the city's recent survey is homelessness and housing affordability. No doubt, this will be the number one issue that will determine the legacy of this council. **Implementing rent control in the SROs to prevent more homelessness and stop the loss of this last resort stock of housing is a popular, cheap, and effective action that demonstrates your commitment to**

improving housing conditions for all Vancouverites. Please do the right thing, now.

We are happy to sit down and discuss this matter further with you.

Sincerely,

Sara Sagai & Fraser McGee
And the entire membership of Vancouver Tenants Union

Cc:

City Manager and senior staff
BC Ministry of Housing
BC Ministry of Poverty Reduction
Jenny Kwan, MP
Melanie Mark, MP
Union of BC Indian Chiefs,
Vancouver District Labour Council,
BC Government Employees Union,
UBC Social Justice Centre,
Teaching Support Staff Union,
Tenants Resources Advisory Centre (TRAC),
DTES SRO Collaborative,
BC Poverty Reduction Coalition,
Strathcona Residents Association,
Members of the press