



DTES low-income housing being emptied through harassment and intimidation

For immediate release

August 22, 2013

Vancouver – Low-income residents of the York Rooms in the Downtown Eastside are facing escalating harassment, intimidation, and evictions since new management took over the single room occupancy hotel in July. Over the last two months at least seven residents have lost their housing through eviction or by being paid to leave.

According to the City of Vancouver website, the York Rooms are a low-income asset that must be preserved in order to “protect low-income tenants from becoming homeless.” The by-law put in place by the City to protect SROs, however, fails to protect against the type of conversion happening at the York Rooms and the City’s SRO task force is not protecting residents from threats, bribes and illegal evictions.

“They’re trying to kick us all out. I haven’t done anything wrong, but I feel like they’re gunning for me,” says Sherman VanderBos, resident of the York Rooms. “I don’t know where I am going to go. I’m scared I’m going to be sleeping in the park next month,” he added.

Pivot Legal Society and Downtown Eastside housing advocates are calling on the City of Vancouver to live up to their commitment to preserve low-income housing and protect low-income residents from being forced out of their homes and threatened with homelessness.

“The City of Vancouver needs to step in and investigate the human rights violations that are happening at the York,” says Pivot lawyer DJ Larkin. “New affordable housing for students and artists must not be developed on the backs of people most at risk of becoming homeless and most in need of real low-income housing options.”

These evictions are occurring at the same time as the City is asking Downtown Eastside residents and organizations to sign onto their proposed “Local Area Plan” which will dictate housing development in the neighbourhood for at least the next 10 years. “Respectfully, the City of Vancouver must commit to a definition of social housing that is clear and which protects low-income residents on income assistance and disability income. Without that we fear this plan may be predicated upon ambiguity substantial enough that makes it unlikely to succeed, or insufficient enough to protect vulnerable people living in welfare rate housing,”

says J Stewart, Manager of Community Engagement with the Union Gospel Mission.

Housing advocates in the low-income neighbourhood have seen the same conversion happen to other buildings. “The York Rooms are the most recent example of a landlord flouting the City’s SRO conversion bylaw,” says long time DTES housing advocate Wendy Pedersen. “Gentrification and displacement is speeding up in the DTES. The York is now being advertised on Tumblr (<http://thenewyorkrooms.tumblr.com>) as a hip, artistic rental space for moderate-income residents.”

SRO residents will join Pivot lawyer DJ Larkin and DTES housing advocate Wendy Pedersen for a press conference this morning at 11AM in front of the York Rooms at 259 Powell Street.

What: Press Conference on evictions at York Rooms

When: Thursday, August 22, 2013 at 11:00 AM

Where: In front of the York Rooms at 259 Powell Street

Who: SRO residents, DJ Larkin, and Wendy Pedersen

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