

VTU 2020 AGM Minutes

Steering Committee:

Jen Efting, Eliot Galán, Mazdak Gharibnavaz, Mariah Gillias, David Hendry, Bryan Jacobs, Evan Morien, Roger Newell, Sara Sagai, Sue Robinet, Rocco Trigueros

Documents Referenced:

[MEETING AGREEMENTS AND NORMS](#)

[AGENDA](#)

[CITY GRANT VOTING INFO](#)

[STEERING COMMITTEE NOMINEES](#)

[VTU CODE OF CONDUCT](#)

Meeting Start Time: 2:00pm

Call to Order: 2:03

Number of Attendees: 70

Chaired by Mazdak Gharibnavaz

Minutes by Helena Krobath

1. Quorum

For an AGM Quorum is 5% of members in good standing (must be at least 48 members for this meeting) 70 members in good standing in attendance

2. Territorial Acknowledgment:

- We are on the unceded and occupied territory of the *səlilwətaʔ*/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations.

3. Opening comments from the Chair:

- Instructions for participation and question submission (info@vancouvertenantsunion.ca)
- Meeting Agreements and Norms
- Code of Conduct (VTU and Zoom)

4. Roger Newell (Financial Presentation):

- VTU is doing well according to the numbers
- We've seen a significant shift from day-to-day contributions to more regular contributions, which has been a goal.

- We've been able to rent the space down in Chinatown.
- One thing to consider -- we're not doing as many public events. We need to think about fundraising (saved funds by having no convention but lost in not fundraising)
- Biggest expenses are related to our website and digital campaigns and taking on a bigger toll this year. I think we're in fine shape as far as money goes and people still have confidence in our work.

5. Jen Efting: Report on Steering Committee activities over 2019 and 2020:

Spring 2019

- VTU organized a forum at Or Gallery on Capital and the City w/ Samuel Stein and local community organizers
- April 9 - Collaboration with the Mexican consulate on workshop for Spanish speaking tenants at Britannia Library.
- April 13 - Solidarity with Solheim Place organizing work
- May Day Billionaire Bash - VTU spoke
- May 4 - DOXA panel with VTU speaker
- Mobilized Solidarity with SROC to expropriate hotels
- May - Alice Saunders Block Party, organizing low income seniors fighting renoviction in Hastings Sunrise.
- Over the Spring, we door knocked for tenants who were facing displacement in the Metrotown area. We outreached to 8 rental buildings to encourage people to attend events organized by ACORN at Burnaby's city council where they passed new renters protections.

Summer 2019

- Emergency housing summit - many VTU members attend and many VTU leaders spoke
- On the tech side, in the summer of 2019 we set up Gsuite for nonprofits, which increased the efficiency of the VTU's internal operations
- July - Pact for a Green New Deal - a Tenant's Town Hall on centering renters in discussions of climate change
- July - Language Access Fund passed. Members passed a motion to establish this fund and less than a month later a portion of the fund was distributed to allied tenant organizations for multi lingual organizing work.
- Summer 2019- Eviction observatory launched

Fall 2019

- Invested in organizing work by purchasing chapter kits - outreach materials and tools
- Put together an internal process for preparing application for city of Vancouver renter services grant. Submitted grant in October 2019.
- Organized a phone bank and other solidarity efforts w/ VTU members to encourage them to attend UNITE HERE events in solidarity with striking hotel workers

- Members of Steering Committee and OAT participated in organizing training seminars by Jane Mackeley, labour organizer who wrote No Shortcuts
- At the November GM we held a discussion and reading of Red Women Rising with members about the recommendations within the report, for us to talk about an anticolonial approach to housing justice that centres Indigenous women

Winter 2019

- Fundraising social event in December, Megan Milton shared her comedy. This event increased our number of sustainer donors.
- Brought a proposal to membership to rent an office in the Sun Wah Building, which membership voted to support.
Began collaboration with the Vancouver District Labour Council Housing Task force

Spring 2020

February - Open house at our new office

COVID Era

- March - Carried out and won a campaign to get an eviction ban in BC.
- Early April - Renter's Rights under COVID Toolkit - at BCrentcrisis.ca
- Package included work by many members of the VTU, working under the difficult conditions of the COVID pandemic.
- All this work was done in collaboration with members from the communications and OAT.
- Joined the national call to ban evictions and provide tenant support with tenant organizations across Canada.
- Joined another coalition with civil societies to call on the prime minister to suspend rents and mortgages during the COVID 19 crisis. This idea had 72% support among Canadians.
- We turned this into our #cancelrent campaign for April and May.
- The government didn't respond to our #cancelrent campaign, and we're moving to our campaign under the demand - #cancelrentdebt - and you can find out more about that at norentdebt.ca

Ongoing

- continued to work in collaboration with tenant unions across North America through the ATUN
- Continued to be a member organization of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Future outlook

- Pandemic is still with us, people are building up rent debt, evictions are going to ramp up again.
- We're expecting a huge need for organizing to grow, including VTU chapters and working groups.
- The organization is still young. There's still a lot to be written about the role of the organization in fighting for tenant rights and fighting greedy landlords.

- We need to review and bring concrete proposals to membership to update our constitution to reflect the work we do and our structures.
- The work of the VTU is critical. thank you to current and former steering committee members, thank you to all the organizers, legal advocates, phone bank volunteers, tech workers, food volunteers, data entry volunteers, every member of every working group. We are only getting started.

6. Confirm approval of AGM agenda

7. Evan Morien Explanation of online voting procedure and introduction of Steering Committee candidate speeches

8. Candidate Statements (see Nominations Info Page)

- **Lillian Deeb**
- **Yi Chien Jade Ho 何宜謙**
- **Abbey Piazza**
- **Luis Octavio Porte Petit Campo**
- **Christian Pollock**
- **Vince Tao**
- **Joey Thall**

9. Evan Morien explanation of acclaim vote

10. Email form/ballots distributed

11. Acclaim Vote: passed

12. Rocco: Presentation on City of Vancouver Grant

- Grant facts from Steering Committee
- On Feb 26, Vancouver City Council approved our application for Renters Services Grant
- They want us to use this money to organize volunteer resources, increase support with other organizations, build access to renter services, build capacity, provide education.
- Meant to enhance not simply maintain an organization.
- Mandate was to apply and then VTU votes whether to accept
- We won \$40,000 for 2020

- City terms: city will monitor and approve funding on a quarterly basis (means our commitment is 4 months at a time); affiliation required for city-funded print materials
- How the money could be utilized: we are thinking it is important to have a part-time organizer position, honorariums, costs like printing, food, workshops, etc. The total budget came to \$42,473.

13. Q&A about City Grant

14. Dani Presentation for Real Rent Control Working Group

- Connections with SRO collaborative, more activity earlier in the year
- But things have slowed down (losing 5 key members and during COVID).
- Key updates: Wrote a toolkit for vacancy control that was near finalized when pandemic happened. Unfinished, but this document is valuable for other groups organizing for tenant protections beyond vacancy control.
- Break down of the term 'vacancy control'

15. OAT Presentation from Lisa Descary: Summary of actions:

- VTU knocked on doors across the city and as far as Burnaby.
- Organized some buildings to fight against landlord attacks. Some include: Alice Saunders renoviction and non-profit housing rights; 326 Nanaimo fighting a demoviction for over a year and supporting each other to stay as long as possible and negotiate the best deal possible and highlight weak demoviction protections; TRP/toilet paper demo -- TRP (tenant relocation protection) has no protection; Marpole/Oak tenants organize against demoviction (they lost by one vote);
- COVID19 lockdown meant door-knocking was suspended; we had more than 50 tenants responding to VTU survey about organizing buildings and bargaining with landlord; not all were successful (hard to organize tenants over Zoom); but some were able to organize their buildings, which is OAT's main work
- Alongside organizing work, VTU advocates supported tenants at tenancy board and answered countless emails from tenants in crisis. Really thanks to Jen Efting and Sara Sagai for help preparing, this was a contingency presentation after some changes.

16. Evan Presentation on Coms Working Group

- Before COVID19, Coms members did social media support for last year's membership drive and anti-renoviction flea market
- worked on/drafted/created member handbook
- did coms support for some the campaigns you've heard about in previous presentations; highlights included campaign to fix TRP, Oak St. demovictions; actions at 326 Nanaimo; helped campaign against Berkeley Tower Renovictions
- created a paper newsletter
- worked on a podcast with VIVO Media arts center featuring stories of renters
- maintained the social media channels on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

- Since COVID we've been doing one action per month, sometimes two.
- With OAT group we launched information pages on website to make sure renters know rights during pandemic
- created/distributed a toolkit for COVID19 renters rights
- did a call for renter stories, a countdown to rent-debt campaign and when that campaign finished we started the no-rent debt campaign (ongoing).
- Our plan now is to target the Finance Minister of BC about the debt-repayment schema.
- Volunteership has been down since pandemic started; call for volunteers

17. Sara Sagai Presentation on City Hall Working Group

- Origins of WG in 2018 when VTU took a motion to City Council to stop renovations and earned a unanimous vote out of the council.
- That overhauled the city's tenant relocation and protection policy.
- Supporting Berkeley Tower tenants in the West End. That building had brought forward the B-10 motion, but unfortunately they just got their last eviction date in the end of June and that building is now empty
- since pandemic we have opportunity to go online and have discussions and see what we can do within limited access; we have started supporting the tent city at Crab Park and worked on with Jean Swanson the motion to defund the police, which is actually at the council right now. They've heard from close to 400 speakers on this motion. We try to build relations with different groups that would be interested in certain motions that we'd want to support and mobilize speakers and build support through building op-eds and putting things out on social media and whatever tools we can use. Also working with SROC to support a motion to bring vacancy control for SRO hotels, tying rents to units so we can save these last affordable homes in the DTES so the population of homeless people doesn't keep increasing by 30% every year. Giving floor to Christian:

18. Data Tools Report by Victor:

- Overview: We collect data from Google Form submissions, Craigslist, RTB data,, individual renter data, etc. -- working on improving ways of doing this
- Going forward: continue to build up scraping infrastructure. We need to make things more reliable; Need to consider how to make this data more available and explore ways of crowdsourcing.
- Will continue to provide assistance to other parts of the VTU. If you have a dataset, come talk to us about making use of it. Need to focus on recruitment.
- Find us on the Slack on #OpenData [confirm?]

19. Presentation on Membership Working Group: Mariah:

- Membership overview: Day-to-day administration work; answering emails, setting up new members
- Fundraising is another aspect of this group; discussion of separating fundraising to another group, but more volunteers would be needed. Let us know if you're interested.

- First fundraising event: Anti-Renoviction Flea Market. Raised \$200 but learned a lot for future iterations.
- Second fundraiser Dec 7. Featured comedy by Meghan Milton and raised new monthly sustaining donors going from 24 - 72 sustainer donors.
- We've organized tabling at community events (car free day, 420, many more).
- Signed up 425 new members and have gained 766 since [? confirm] 967 total.
- This year, we can focus on more direct outreach to make sure members stay engaged and renew. We need to find new ways to integrate new volunteers into working groups since pandemic changes.

20. Voting on Code of Conduct

21. Ballots distributed

22. Voting Results:

- For the question of acclaiming the Steering Committee members, we had a total of 60 votes. 55 yes, 1 no, and 4 abstentions.
- For our city grants, we had a total of 57 votes. 46 yes, 6 no, and 5 abstentions.
- For our code of conduct results, we had a total vote of 49. 43 being yes, 6 abstentions.

23. New Steering Committee: Lillian Deeb, Jade Ho, Abbey Piazza, Luis Octavio Porte Petit Campo, Christian Pollock, Vincent Tao, Joey Thall

24. Chair's Final comments, thanks to all volunteers, former SC.

Meeting ended at 4:32