

Still waiting at the altar: Vancouver 2010's on-again, off-again, relationship with social sustainability

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Pivot Legal Society and the Impact of the Olympics on Community Coalition

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Paper identifies key precursors to successful introduction, at the bid stage, of commitments to marginalized residents promising housing and other legacies, as well as promising 0 displacement and 0 increased homelessness due to the games. Key missing elements, including enforcement abilities by the IOC to ensure promises are realized, even in the face of a change in government and government priorities, are identified to ground recommendations that will assist on building Vancouver's efforts to ensure social sustainability.

Executive Summary

Vancouver, like most major cities across Canada, has been significantly impacted by cuts at the provincial and federal level to what was once a robust social housing and income assistance regime. As a result, the street homeless population in the city has doubled between 2003 and 2005, and is now believed to exceed 2,000 people. The increase in the homeless population in Vancouver has led to increased public and government interest in protecting SRO housing, representing the last low-income privately owned rental housing in the city. Most of this housing is located in the city's notorious downtown eastside ("DTES"), also known as North America's largest open drug market, Canada's poorest postal code, and site of an ongoing public health emergency due to HIV and Hepatitis C infection rates. Vancouver's downtown is located on a peninsula which has largely been built out, and the DTES is the last significantly under-developed area left. As a result, the area is subject to incredible gentrification pressures.

As part of Vancouver's bid process, advocates for the DTES community pushed hard during a referendum campaign for commitments to ensure the inner city would benefit from the Games. Specific promises were extracted from government and were contained in an unprecedented social sustainability commitment statement called the Inner City Inclusive Commitment Statement (ICI Commitments). The ICI Commitments explicitly promised to ensure Vancouver's inner-city residents would have meaningful input into the processes surrounding the 2010 Olympiad, would experience no undue hardship including homelessness or displacement as a result of the Games, and would enjoy housing and other legacies that would contribute to their community as a result of the Games. The Commitments were to be policed by an independent watchdog, funded in part by the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC).

In February of 2007, reports that property speculation had increased exponentially and that developers were renovating and increasing rents, or simply closing SRO buildings due to costs and difficulties in running these aging buildings, led to the purchase by the provincial government of 10% of the remaining SRO stock in the city in April of 2007. Unfortunately, no funding was in place to improve the quality of the housing provided or to provide support for residents. When advocates attempted to link this increasing speculation on, development of and risk to the remaining SRO housing pool with Olympic related projects, government reacted by demanding proof of a link. Because funding for benchmark studies by the independent watchdog, or any party, had never materialized, advocates were unable to make their case except anecdotally.

A change in municipal government from centre/left to centre/right was a major blow to social sustainability efforts. The new municipal government immediately cancelled housing legacy projects at the Athletes Village, slashing planned low-income legacy housing and eliminating planned moderate income legacy housing entirely. Now only 25 of the 1000 housing units that will result from the Athletes Village are guaranteed to be available to low-income singles, those most at risk of homelessness and the most common profile of residents in the DTES. Further pushing social sustainability goals aside, a beautification project called "Project Civil City" was also announced by the new mayor. The mayor placed a former provincial Attorney General at the head of the project, whose mandate was to eliminate "street disorder" by 2010. Key initiatives include a bylaw banning sitting or lying down on sidewalks, increased use of beat police officers, increased use of surveillance cameras, locking of dumpsters through which the poor searched for returnable beverage containers, and a public awareness campaign on the dangers of giving money to panhandlers.

Even where the ICI Commitment promises worked as planned, advocates were stonewalled in their efforts to reach social sustainability. A remarkably inclusive roundtable process involving

government, the private sector, the non-profit sector, and community representatives produced a unanimous set of recommendations calling for a significant remedial process to prevent adverse effects on the low-income community in Vancouver. The response of VANOC and the host governments was to ignore the report, and reintroduce a measure to spend \$500,000 on a temporary homeless shelter that would close once the Games were complete. Further roundtables were indefinitely postponed, including a promised civil liberties roundtable that would have addressed many of the issues surrounding the Civil City project.

With just 30 months to go before the torch is lit for the 2010 Olympiad, the vast majority of the ICI commitments have yet to transform into realizable benefits for the community. Housing legacies are scant and not secured, promises of economic benefits are still being negotiated, and promised consultation on security and civil liberties issues have yet to be completed despite security plans nearing finalization. Predictable patterns of “beautification” at the expense of low-income residents are recurring despite public protestations to the contrary by host government officials.

To aid in building on Vancouver’s successes in ensuring that social sustainability is an important consideration in holding a mega-event, key precursors are identified in the conclusion of this paper that encouraged Vancouver’s bid to include social sustainability commitments. These key precursors include a community referendum, and strong community opposition to the bid, coupled with a constructive engagement process aimed at leveraging benefits for the community. Missing elements are also identified in the conclusion that prevented these commitments from becoming reality. The most important missing element identified is the total absence of any accountability mechanisms for VANOC or the host governments for promises made in the bid process through the IOC, or any other party. As a result, a change in government at the city level completely undermined hopes of a socially sustainable games. At this stage, Vancouver is poised to follow historical trends of displacement due to the hosting of the 2010 Olympic Games.

Getting to know you: Vancouver and its Olympic hosts

Vancouver is a thriving young city located on the west coast of Canada, in the province of British Columbia. Historically little more than a lumber camp, observers now recognize Vancouver as having successfully transitioned from a resource-based economy to a service economy based on tourism, mining, forestry, and technology jobs, as well as acting as the economic capital of the province and the 8th largest municipality in Canada.

Vancouver is a charter city governed by three distinct levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal. Of relevance to this discussion, the municipality has responsibility for transportation, infrastructure, policing, fire, building standards, and city planning. Funds are generated for the city primarily through by-law enforcement and property taxes, taking approximately 8% of each tax dollar paid by Vancouver residents.[1] The city also operates a limited amount of low-income rental housing in partnership with the Province. City politics in Vancouver are party-based, and the current party with control of 6 of the 11 available city council seats, including the mayor, is the Non-Partisan Association (NPA), a centre-right party. Vision Vancouver, a centre-left party, holds 4 seats, and the Coalition of Progressive Electors, a social-democratic/labour party, holds 1 seat.[2]

The Province, among other roles, has responsibility for administering the vast majority of the social housing portfolio in British Columbia through a crown corporation called B.C. Housing.[3] Apart from social housing, the province also administers the majority of the criminal justice system including prisons and courts. In addition, the province is responsible for health-

care delivery, including mental health and addiction services, as well as the income assistance or “welfare” programs for all provincial residents. The provincial legislature is currently controlled, and has been for the last 6 years, by the provincial Liberal party, a centre-right party which holds 46 of the 79 seats.

Finally, the federal government plays largely a funding role with respect to programs delivered by the province in the areas of housing, health care and education. The federal government drafts all criminal law, including the Controlled Drug and Substances Act, and administers prisons where individuals have been sentenced for two years or more in custody. The federal government is also responsible for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a constitutional document that guarantees basic freedoms and rights for Canadian citizens. The federal parliament is currently a minority parliament, with the governing right-wing Conservative party holding 124 seats, the centrist federal Liberal party (distinct from the provincial Liberals) holding 103 seats, and the separatist Bloc Quebecois party splitting the remaining 81 seats with the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

Vancouver’s bid committee, established by the three levels of government, has transformed into the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee or “VANOC.” VANOC currently has 400 employees, and by games time is expected to grow to 1,400 paid staff and 3,500 temporary staff.[4] VANOC follows a traditional corporate board system, and has a number of vice-presidents, including a vice-president responsible for “sustainability” both social and environmental. The VP sustainability has primary responsibility for realizing the environmental and social sustainability commitments.

Getting to know you: Housing in Vancouver

Vancouver, like most major cities across Canada, has been significantly impacted by cuts at the provincial and federal level to what was once a robust social housing and income assistance regime. In the early 1990s, the federal government as part of a series of austerity measures made more than \$2.5 billion in cuts to the Canada Assistance Plan, a program that funded welfare delivery in the provinces.[5] As a result of those cuts, the federal government cut their social housing program, leaving behind funding only for maintaining current housing stock and emergency shelter programs.[6] Cuts at the provincial level followed quickly after the federal cuts, causing homeless populations in most major Canadian cities, including Vancouver, to expand significantly. In January of 1999, the self-identified “big-city mayors” in Canada, including the Mayor of Vancouver declared homelessness a national disaster.[7] There was no federal or provincial response to this declaration, and homelessness has continued to rise. Waiting lists for social housing in Vancouver are 5 to 7 years long.[8] The street homeless population doubled between 2003 and 2005 from just over 600 homeless individuals to 1,291 street homeless. Current estimates are that Vancouver’s street homeless population is well over 2,000 individuals, and predictions are that homelessness will triple before the 2010 Olympiad.[9]

Despite the significant growth of Vancouver’s homeless population, Vancouver was spared many of the exponential homeless population increases seen by other major cities due to a significant rooming house stock in the form of “residential hotels” built mostly in the early to mid-1900s. Called Single Room Occupancy (SRO) or Single Room Accommodation (SRA) buildings, this accommodation is defined by shared kitchens and washrooms and rooms that rarely exceed 100 square feet in floor space, these buildings were constructed for resource and railway workers who would return to Vancouver on days off for access to the bars and fun of the big city.

Vancouver’s rental housing vacancy rates have hit historic lows, with recent Canada Mortgage

and Housing Centre statistics indicating vacancy rates of just .9%.[10] When coupled with social assistance shelter rates that were stagnant for the last 10 years at \$325 CDN, and an increase this year to only \$375 CDN, landlords have little incentive to maintain their accommodation or open new accommodation for social assistance recipients, given that average bachelor apartment rents in the city are \$701/mo.[11] In fact, many landlords have begun renovating to provide accommodation for low-wage workers and international students, who are able to pay more rent, and are typically better tenants than the historical residents of these accommodations. Vacancy rates in Vancouver's SROs are estimated to be functionally zero.[12]

In the area of market housing, Vancouver is consistently rated one of the top 3 cities in the world in which to live. Part of the reason for these continually positive ratings is an internationally recognized model of urban planning called "Vancouverism." This model of urban planning places high-density residential housing in the downtown core with store and amenity space at street level to discourage population growth in the suburbs. Based on avoiding the increases in traffic and infrastructure associated with the suburban model of development, Vancouverism has been incredibly successful. Vancouver's downtown population has expanded significantly in the last 15 years, driving up property values by over 100% in the last five years.[13] Centred on a peninsula, the downtown core is becoming "built out", with few remaining sites available for condominium project developers to exploit the ever-increasing demand for downtown living.

Getting to know you: Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

Like a car stalled on the train tracks, Vancouver's downtown eastside (DTES) has stood as the last bastion of downtown low-income rental housing in a market increasingly beholden to the freight train of condo development. Home to 16,000 residents, the DTES is notorious Canada-wide for being Canada's poorest urban postal code, and until recently Canada's poorest postal code period. Family income in the area is \$21,000 annually, even when more prosperous neighbouring areas are included, compared to the \$58,000 annual family income average across the rest of the city. Most residents are low-income singles.[14]

Of the estimated 8,000 injection drug users in Vancouver, an estimated 4,700 reside in the 16 blocks of the DTES.[15] Of these injection drug users, current estimates are that 30-40% of the population is HIV serotype positive. Greater than 90% of the using population are also infected with Hepatitis C, giving Vancouver's DTES one of the highest, if not the highest, population infection rates for both diseases in North America. These statistics led to the chief public health officer of the province of British Columbia declaring a public health emergency in the area in 1996.[16] 3,000 of these injection drug users are poly-drug users, using crack cocaine as well as crystal methamphetamine, and injecting cocaine and heroin.[17]

Census data indicates that 10% of the population of the area consists of off-reserve aboriginal or first nations people, however, community estimates put that number at approximately 1/3 of the population.[18] By either calculation, the aboriginal population of the downtown eastside is the largest off-reserve aboriginal population in British Columbia.

The vast majority of the remaining SRO housing stock is concentrated within the DTES. A significant proportion of the B.C. Housing social housing stock is also contained in the neighbourhood. Services catering to this multi-barriered community have also been concentrated in this neighbourhood, due as much to the practicalities of ensuring accessibility to target populations, as the effects of NIMBY-ism in surrounding residential areas.[19] Available services include: food distribution, free showers, a safe injection site, needle exchanges, low-barrier health clinics, detox facilities, mental health support and treatment centres, and day-treatment centres.[20]

The challenges faced by the population resident in the DTES have paradoxically been the population's saviour in enabling the community to resist gentrification forces. Until approximately 2006, in complete contradiction to all other trends in Vancouver, the real-estate market in the DTES was completely stagnant. What once was the main drag of a vibrant downtown entertainment area, Hastings Street East, may now cause a well-traveled visitor to draw comparisons to Cuba, stuck as it is in time. Tourists in the area should not be surprised to find signs advertising "discos" or wall murals advertising long-gone businesses. A fully intact vaudeville theatre remains boarded up in the area. Neon signs of the type popular in the 50s still dot the landscape, although rarely do all of the letters light up. Cafes unchanged for decades are used as sets for Vancouver's burgeoning film and TV industries. The SROs themselves have become heritage treasures through neglect, sporting mosaic tile floors, soaring ceilings, massive wood beam construction, and stunning brick and stone facades untouched for years.

The question of why the DTES should resist the gentrification trends of the rest of the city is quickly answered by a view of the streetscape, which is dominated by the human wreckage of years of government neglect of social programs, mental health programs, addiction treatment programs, and housing. Hastings Street is home to what is commonly known as North America's largest open drug market. Illicit drug dealing and use is rampant and far beyond the control of the city police force. Attempted crackdowns have simply pushed the problems of the area into surrounding neighbourhoods, as well as increased risks of HIV transmission and fatal overdose.[21] The political consequences of those crackdowns have resulted in de facto police policies of containment and control in their place, with occasional "projects" by the local constabulary to quell the complaints of residents outside the area affected by those fleeing crackdowns.[22] A 10 block area is the most heavily policed area in Vancouver, with 14 beat police officers working in the area, 24 hours a day under a special enforcement team ironically named the "Citywide Enforcement Team." [23]

Many of the challenges of the DTES are popularly attributed to the mass de-institutionalization of the majority of residents of a large mental health facility called "Riverview" in the late '80s.[24] Expressed as a government response to the demands for more humane treatment of those suffering mental illness combined with a response to more effective mental health treatment, insufficient social supports were put in place in the community to accommodate the needs of the hospital's former residents. Many of Riverview's former patients ended up in the DTES. No shortage of other reasons are given for why the DTES appears as it does today, including: the residential school system imposed on aboriginal peoples until the late 1970s; the introduction of crack cocaine; the effects of crystal methamphetamine use; the dismantling of the welfare safety net; the concentration of services for poor and marginalized people; the closure of a major retail anchor in the area that decimated the middle-class street traffic; failures in the provincial child-protection system; failures in surrounding areas to provide necessary services for low-income people; Vancouver's status as a port city; and Vancouver's moderate climate when compared with the rest of Canada. Likely all of these factors have played a part.

Beyond the fear engendered in the middle and upper classes of Vancouver when the DTES is mentioned, another factor stalling the freight train of gentrification as it points towards the DTES that must be mentioned includes local, and recently provincial, government recognition that the SROs that house these many poor and often sick Vancouver residents are, currently, an essential form of low-income housing. In response to this recognition, the municipal government in 2003 enacted a by-law requiring all developers who wish to convert SRO buildings to some other use to appear before Council in a public hearing on the development plan.[25] A flexible policy of requiring 1-for-1 replacement of demolished or converted SRO rooms is in

place; however, the goal of 1-for-1 is rarely realized. Fees applied to developers for converting SRO rooms were, until recently set at \$5,000 per room. Recently, fees have been increased to \$15,000 per room. To date, not one application for conversion has been refused by City Council, largely because applicants have replaced lost housing or have been converting buildings that have been closed for years. The provincial government, in April of 2007, purchased 10 SRO buildings in Vancouver for renovation and establishment of supportive housing programs.[26] While critics point out that those purchased are, by and large, the best maintained of the buildings and those least likely to close, the purchase does reflect a long-overdue recognition of the critical role of these buildings in preventing increased homelessness.

Getting to know you: Provincial and municipal housing regulation

There are three key pieces of legislation affecting low-income housing in Vancouver: the Single Room Accommodation By-Law (SRA By-Law), which regulates the conversion of SRO buildings as described in the previous section; the Standards of Maintenance By-Law, which regulates the minimum living conditions in low-income rental housing; and the Residential Tenancy Act, a provincial law that regulates relations between landlords and tenants and establishes a board of arbitration for disputes between those parties.[27]

All of these laws have been hard-fought for by housing advocates and the DTES community. Until 2003, the Residential Tenancy Act did not apply to the SROs. The buildings were treated as “hotels” and the tenants had no security of tenure. The SRA By-Law is only 4 years old. Until then, there were no restrictions on conversion of SRA buildings to other uses, resulting in continuing erosion of low-income rental stock. The Standards of Maintenance By-Law is the oldest of the group of the applicable regulations; however, the local government has only recently, and reluctantly, agreed to examine the application of this By-Law to the SROs, in particular the government’s power to do repairs to ensure habitability where the landlord will not do necessary repairs, and bill the landlord for the cost.[28]

Shall we dance? Obtaining concessions from the bid committee for social sustainability

In 2002 when Vancouver presented its first drafts of the bid book for the 2010 Winter Games, the advocacy community in the Downtown Eastside was alarmed. Recognizing the potential for “beautification” at the expense of DTES residents, an organization called “Impact of the Olympics on Community Coalition”, or IOCC, formed. Consisting of a broad coalition of grassroots environmental and social activists, as well as academics from the local university, the IOCC pushed hard for documents that would support social and environmental sustainability. Rather than assume an anti-Olympic stance, the IOCC assumed a neutral stance on the Games, arguing that their most effective role was to leverage the greatest possible benefits from the games for the environment and for inner city residents.[29]

The moderate coalition that the IOCC represented was successful in advocating for a referendum on the Games, a process that required a great deal of public debate and discussion. This referendum and a list of recommendations from the IOCC led to commitments by the “Yes” side, which included the then bid committee, to community benefits from the Games which included the Inner City Inclusive Commitment Statement (“ICI Commitment Statement”).[30] These promises were ultimately incorporated into Vancouver’s bid documents for the 2010 Games, and were believed by all involved to be binding on the host governments and the organizing committee in the event of a successful bid.[31] Informal commitments were made to the IOCC concerning funding for benchmark studies and funding for evaluation of the Games impacts on the inner city. In response to questions from skeptics who suggested that the com-

mitment statements were unlikely to be implemented, the bid committee reassured them that the IOCC was to be the “official watchdog” of the 2010 Olympics, guaranteeing the implementation of the promises made by the bid committee.

Key promises made in the ICI Commitment Statement were:

- Ensure all inner-city residents’ continued access to public spaces before, during and after the Games and provide adequate notice of any restrictions of the use of public space/facilities and prominently display alternate routes and facilities
- Commit to a timely public consultation that is accessible to inner-city neighbourhoods, before any security legislation or regulations are finalized, subject to lawful and legitimate confidentiality requirements
- Create training and a continuum of short and long-term employment opportunities for inner-city residents to encourage a net increase in employment
- Protect rental housing stock
- Provide as many alternative forms of temporary accommodation for Winter Games visitors and workers
- Ensure people are not made homeless as a result of the Winter Games
- Ensure residents are not involuntarily displaced, evicted or face unreasonable increases in rent due to the Winter Games
- Provide an affordable housing legacy and start planning now
- Provide inclusive representation on the Bid Corporation’s and Organizing Committee’s Board structures and all relevant Bid Corporation and Organizing Committee’s work groups

The referendum on the Games passed with 64% voting in favour of Vancouver hosting the games. Commentators attributed the successful vote to a combination of significant corporate funding for the Yes side, amounting to \$1 million dollars of free advertising from a Canadian media corporation, along with the concessions made by the bid committee to ensure social and environmental sustainability benefits, which undermined many of the No side’s arguments. The “No” side was significantly demoralized by the result. Surprisingly, although one could argue that the IOCC had been the most successful party in the referendum, the organization lost a great deal of momentum in part due to its success. By the time Vancouver won the bid, key IOCC organizers were drawn into city politics or other opportunities and the organization, apparently believing that the campaign for commitments had been successful, went into hibernation. The IOCC quickly became, instead the successful balance of grassroots activists and academics that had won key concessions from the bid committee, an organization that consisted mostly of academics who were anticipating funding for research projects to set benchmarks for the Games’ social impacts as promised by the bid committee.

In short, organized opposition to the Games had been broken by the referendum process and organized accountability organizations had been co-opted by promises of funding and support by the bid committee. Disagreement between grassroots organizers who had supported the moderate IOCC stance and the grassroots organizers who had supported the “No” side in the referendum divided the community. With 6 years to go before the games, there were no clear contenders for the position of Olympic watchdog, and the progressive community was divided on whether they had won, or lost, the referendum.

Trouble in paradise: Proving displacement due to Olympic-related speculation

Despite the inactivity of the IOCC, grassroots organizers and community advocates in the DTES, along with Games opponents had begun to observe the early effects of the Olympics on the DTES and were ringing the alarm bells. In April of 2007, Pivot Legal Society reported that Olympic-related speculation was driving unprecedented increases in property values in the DTES, and that developers were purchasing many of the SROs in the area, with one developer alone purchasing 8 SRO properties. That same research indicated that 1 in 5 rooms in the DTES had been sold or put up for sale in the preceding twelve months.[32]

Two key types of conversions were observed at this time by community advocates, reflecting the remarkable innovation of the private sector in avoiding protective legislation. First, SRO buildings were renovated and rents were increased, displacing the traditional community of the DTES. Neither the municipal nor the provincial legislation protected against rent increases when empty units were rented to new tenants. It was this type of eviction that led community advocates to report on the first “official” Olympic evictions of the 2010 Games when an SRO owner declared on television that he was evicting his tenants so that he could renovate, raise rents and make room for Olympic workers.[33] The developer who had purchased the 8 SRO buildings announced his intention, to community advocates, to renovate the buildings and increase rents.

In the second type of eviction, buildings were emptied by landlords who evicted tenants in preparation for sale. Developers and property speculators who purchased the buildings had no interest in repopulating them. Welfare rates were so low, and tenant needs so high, that it was actually more profitable to simply evict tenants and close buildings rather than attempt to maintain an operating building in the face of significant soft costs and limited revenues. In the most egregious example of this type of eviction, the Burns Block building, located directly on the “Carroll Street Greenway” beautification project, was closed with only 45 minutes notice to tenants when the landlord refused to make repairs Ordered by the fire inspector.[34] The building was put up for sale the following day and ultimately sold at auction where the landlord realized a profit in excess of \$500,000 CDN. The building remains vacant. Although provincial tenancy legislation protected against this type of eviction, it did not enable advocates for the residents of that building to seek an order that the tenants be allowed to remain in the building, nor did it permit hearings to be held earlier than three weeks after the evictions occurred. Most of the tenants became homeless or found alternate accommodation both in and outside the DTES.

The issue of homelessness was given significant prominence by local media outlets, albeit without a significant Olympic focus. In response to community advocacy in the media on the issue of housing affordability and the need to protect the SROs for low-income residents to prevent homelessness, one major success was realized. In April of 2007, the provincial government purchased 10 SRO buildings in the DTES with money left over in their year-end budget. Tempering the celebration was that no funding was set aside to renovate or improve the building or provide support services to residents, and the buildings continue to operate now as they did before the government purchased them; namely, not very well. Further moderating the community’s satisfaction at this outcome were the facts that: only 10% of SROs were protected by the government’s initiative; that the buildings purchased were by and large those in the best condition and the least likely to close; that the provincial government promptly counted the SRO purchases as “new” social housing units; and that there were no commitments by government to replace the SROs with real social housing. Ironically too, advocates noted that the massive purchase of SRO properties by the government had driven up

prices of surrounding, but unprotected SROs, increasing incentive for landlords to sell their buildings to developers.

Despite the success of community advocates in ensuring that at least some SRO buildings passed from private, for-profit control and into government protection, advocates came under fire for linking the gentrification trends to the Olympics. Shortly after the SRO purchases, the municipal and provincial government lines changed to one that challenged community advocates to prove that evictions that were taking place were related to the Olympics.[35]

The difficulty in “proving” an eviction is related to the Olympics when few owners were as foolish to announce to the media that an eviction was related to the Games, proved impossible for advocates. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the “official” watchdog of the 2010 Games, the IOCC, had still had not received anything other than verbal promises of funding from VANOC. There was no benchmark to establish rates of change or purchase shortly after the bid was made to compare with current real estate speculation. All that existed was community anecdotal evidence that something big was happening in the neighbourhood, and that wasn’t enough to convince a suddenly skeptical media. This public relations offensive by the host governments was well received by local media, especially those sponsoring the Olympic Games, who gave prominence to statements made by the host governments and VANOC, without noting the fact that VANOC had refused to fund any study that might suggest that the speculation was, in fact, related to the Olympics – despite their commitments to do so.[36]

The break-up: A change in government changes everything

It is difficult to overstate the significance that the 2005 municipal election had on the willingness of the host governments to accommodate and follow-through on the commitments made to the inner city during the bid phase. Before the 2005 election, Vancouver’s council was controlled by a majority of left/centre-left councilors. Despite their well publicized feuding on Council, this progressive coalition still managed to realize a number of significant steps towards realizing the goals of the commitment statements. For example, the Athlete’s Village facility was planned to incorporate a 1/3 market housing, 1/3 moderate income housing, 1/3 deep core need housing when it reverted back to a housing development after the Games were complete. The mayoral candidate for the coalition in the 2005 election, Jim Green, was one of the authors of the ICI Commitment Statement, and was a former member of the IOCC before he had become a city councilor. He had been the executive director of the Downtown Eastside Residents’ Association. It is unlikely he would have turned his back on the Commitment statement; it is far more likely he would have been a champion of a socially sustainable, inclusive Games. Unfortunately, the public feuding of the progressives created an opening for the centre/right Non-Partisan Association to take control of council.

In one of the first acts of the new council, Vancouver’s newest mayor eliminated the 1/3 moderate income housing and cut the deep core need housing in the Athletes Village to 25% of the final units from 33%.[37] The latest numbers being released on the Athletes Village complex indicate that only 25 of the 1000 units will be dedicated for deep-core need low-income singles – in other words, for the residents of the inner city. It remains unclear how many of the remaining 225 units slated for what is now alternatively called “social housing” or “affordable housing” or “low-income housing” will actually be operated as non-market rental housing. The projected income from the first phase of the project for the city is approximately \$65 million CDN.[38]

Beyond simply cutting existing low-income housing projects, more pressing for many was an announcement made in late November of 2006 by the new mayor that he would be introducing an initiative he called “Project Civil City”. [39] The project required a new office, headed by a commission-

er, whose goal was not to ensure participation and benefits for the low-income community in Vancouver, but was rather to address the issue of “public disorder” and “crime” in the city – despite continually falling crime rates and the insistence of the Chief of Police that such a position was not required.*

A former provincial Attorney General was appointed to head up the project. Geoff Plant, the new “Civil City Commissioner” had been, in his prior career, the first Attorney General ever to be the victim of a non-confidence vote by the Law Society for his massive cuts to legal aid and the provincial human rights commission. His government was also responsible for introducing many of the welfare barriers attributed to the increase in homelessness in Vancouver, including a three week job search requirement and a two-year independence rule that limited access to emergency funds for rent and food. Critics wondered whether he would be able to call for reform to policies his government had initiated.[40] He is to be paid \$192 an hour.[41]

When the project was first announced in late November of 2006, the details were not publicly available, but city staff were directed to prepare a report on how to tackle “nuisance and annoyance complaints.” A vague, but glossy, brochure advertising the project and released through the Mayor’s office highlighted complaints taken from the community through a web-based survey. Comments that called for a law and order response from Council to issues of poverty were given prominence. For example, the following quote from a survey participant was the first quote listed in the section of the report titled, “Community impacts of poverty and addiction”:

We must have law and order in our city. Council should encourage mandatory sentences for repeat offences including aggressive panhandling, theft from home/business, sleeping on public property, open drug abuse, etc.[42]

The mayor’s smiling photo also appeared in the full-colour brochure. Beside his picture was the quotation: “We have a tremendous opportunity to use the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games as a catalyst to solve the public disorder problems that affect our city.”[43] All of the implementation dates set for the Project Civil City were 2010. Both the federal and provincial ministers responsible for the Olympics were listed as charter members of the Project Civil City Leadership Council.

In March of 2007, staff reported back on the Civil City initiative, listing 73 unique steps that could be taken by the city to respond to public disorder.[44] Each of the 73 initiatives were evaluated for what steps needed to be taken in order to realize the target, for example, “Seek provincial legislative reform” or “Seek funding from the federal government.” The recommendations varied from the banal to the extreme, and included:

Under the heading of “Drug / Panhandling / Nuisance”

- Increase the number of existing beat police officers. (#26)
- Expand the downtown ambassador program (#29) – Downtown ambassadors are a uniformed private security presence funded by a combination of business improvement associations and the municipality.
- Introduce closed circuit television cameras (#37) – The report noted that: “There is opposition to this by both the provincial and federal privacy commissioners. Work needs to be done to garner their approval”
- Introduce no sit, no lie bylaw (#58) – This bylaw would prohibit sitting or lying down on sidewalks, or lying down on public park benches.

Under the heading of “Panhandling”

- Conduct public awareness campaign on the negative impacts of providing money to panhandlers (#60)

Under the heading of “Drugs”

- Reconfigure the four pillars coalition to ensure that public order becomes a main area of focus (#43) – The four pillars is a metaphor for Vancouver’s approach to controlled substances. The four pillars are: harm reduction, enforcement, prevention, and treatment.
- Establish new drug treatment program targeting chronic offenders (#44)
- Institutionalize the very mentally ill (#45)

Under the heading of “Nuisance”

- Develop program for locking of “problem commercial waste containers” (#51)
– Increasing numbers of people in Vancouver are “binning” or digging through garbage cans to recover empty bottles, cans, and other objects to return for deposits or to sell. This proposal aims to lock garbage cans that are frequently targeted by “binners.”

It is likely not a coincidence that the announcement of the Project Civil City initiative coincided with the massive upswing observed in multi-unit residential property speculation in the downtown eastside and reported in April, 2007. To its credit, the report acknowledged a desire to reduce homelessness by 50% by 2010 as well; however, all of the plans to deal with the program required provincial, federal, or private funding to achieve the stated goal.

Coupled with this initiative were public musings by the premier of the province about his feeling that deinstitutionalization, or the closing of Riverview, had been a mistake.[45] The mayor began to make similar calls for Riverview, a massive dorm-style institution, to be re-opened, linking the re-opening of the hospital directly to efforts to beautify the downtown eastside.[46]

It’s not you, it’s me: The dangers of an inclusive process

As recently as November of 2006, VANOC was still going through the motions of following the ICI Commitment Statement. A housing roundtable was held where private sector landlord representatives, the homebuilding industry, NGOs and government staff were brought together to discuss how to minimize the impact of the games on the DTES community. Thanks to an energetic response by the NGO sector to the opportunity to draft a critically important report, and thanks too to B.C. housing representatives who chaired the tables, the report turned out to be a remarkably powerful document, with unanimous support for the recommendations by the private, public and civil society sectors.[47] During the table’s pendency, VANOC backed off a plan to spend \$500,000 on a temporary homeless shelter during the games after community advocates insisted that it was the purpose of the table to avoid the need for such a shelter. In all, the entire process was a remarkable and innovative process.

The silence that greeted this completely unique accomplishment of compromise and negotiation between three groups that rarely agree on anything was deafening. The report was not posted on VANOC’s website. No news release was issued. Finally, an investigative reporter found the report on a community organization’s website and published it with the headline “\$1bn Olympic Housing Challenge” and asked questions about whether or not money had been set aside to implement the recommendations made by the table.[48]

Rumours abound that due to embarrassment associated with that newspaper article, both VANOC and the government are loath to host any further roundtables. Other rumours, which also have yet to be substantiated, indicate that the inner-city commitment file has been moved from the community services ministry to the premier’s office. Whatever the reason, the civil liberties roundtable, more relevant than ever due to the implications of Project Civil City, is not scheduled. Local groups pressing for a date for the consultation have been told it may be replaced with one-on-one meetings. This

failure to schedule such an important consultation is compounded by the fact that the consultation was promised to be completed before security plans were finalized. It is almost certain that the consultation will now happen, if it does happen, long after any date when a real impact on the planning process could take place.

The provincial and federal governments are scheduled to report on their response to the housing roundtable's recommendations in June of 2007. In the meantime, none of the recommendations – unanimous as they were – has been implemented as of today's date, save for the purchase of the SROs, noted earlier. To keep the heat on, a local community group, the Carnegie Action Project, has had 109 separate organizations endorse what is now known as the ICI Report.[49] The ICI Report may yet become the centre of the analysis of what could have been relating to social sustainability in the 2010 Games. In recent media, VANOC – perhaps recognizing that no steps will be taken to deal with street homelessness before the games – has again announced their intention to use the \$500,000 budget line to build a temporary homeless shelter during the 2010 Olympics, and to close it after the games.[50]

Waiting at the altar: Analysis on what worked, and what didn't

Following the Vancouver experience, it is now safe to question whether self-regulating commitments to social sustainability are a realistic approach to ensuring that marginalized residents of Olympic or mega-event host cities experience positive benefits, rather than negative impacts of these types of events. Vancouver clearly had, and possibly still has, the greatest opportunity to innovate and realize the promise of social sustainability. The potential for the remarkable transformation of the Olympics from a vehicle for profits for the few at the expense of the most marginalized into a vehicle for the realization of cooperation and a true Olympic spirit of participation by all members of a society, was Vancouver's to grasp. A number of key precursors had to exist in order for this opportunity to present itself:

1. Vancouver had a strong, neutral, Olympics-focussed organization that aimed to leverage benefits for low-income residents from the bid process;
2. Vancouver also had a strong "No" community voice that required the bid committee to cooperate with the "neutral" organization and make concessions in order to ensure a successful result from a community referendum;
3. Vancouver had a community referendum on holding the games;
4. Commitments, written down and signed, were created with explicit promises to the inner-city community.

On analysis, a number of key elements were missing that may cost Vancouver the opportunity to realize a socially sustainable Olympics, many of which are simply elaborations on or extensions of COHRE's Multi-Stakeholder Guidelines on Mega-events and the Protection and Promotion of Housing Rights, namely:

1. The absence of written funding commitments to a neutral "watchdog" group that can establish benchmarks and measure impacts, avoiding difficulties in "proving" that evictions or displacement is Olympic related;
2. The absence of dedicated budget to implementation of social sustainability recommendations made through whatever community consultation process is established;
3. The absence of dedicated government representatives, with authority and mandate to bring forward necessary legislative amendments as required, participating in all consultation processes;
4. The presence of dedicated budget to anticipating the failure of social sustainability commitments;
5. Insufficiently precise social sustainability commitments that are difficult to measure; and, most importantly,

6. The absence of any enforcement mechanism in the event of a total disregard of the commitment statements by the host governments and/or VANOC.

Of all of the missing elements, the most important is number 6, which deals with enforcement. A right without a remedy is no right at all. Without any means for the community to ensure that promises made to it by government are enforced, short of electing a new government, the inner-city inclusive agreement is simply a public relations exercise undertaken to secure the bid for Vancouver. Residents must depend on the goodwill of the organizing committee and the host governments to ensure the commitments are met and implemented, and too often the focus of those organizations is influenced by factors other than the needs of inner-city residents. The IOC must ensure some means of accountability for bid promises in order to ensure true social sustainability. Anything less will result in more Vancouver relationships: telling the community whatever is required to get the bid, but then leaving the community at the altar come Games time.

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