

WHAT WE LEARNED

Downtown Eastside Housing Implementation Engagement Summary

July 2025



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1. Introduction

Project Overview

The City of Vancouver is proposing policy changes to increase housing options in the Downtown Eastside (DTES), including for those living in Single Room Occupancy buildings (SROs).

This follows City Council direction to explore policy updates that would make it easier for governments, non-profits, and the private sector to build social housing and accelerate SRO replacement. These proposed changes align with the vision of the 2014 DTES Plan to:

- build diverse housing options for various income levels, including more market rental; and
- create a mixed income community and enhance the quality of life for low-income residents.

Timeline



2. Engagement Process

This report is a summary of what we learned through an engagement process that involved in-person public information sessions, focused interest holder meetings that were held in-person and online, and an online comment form.

Engagement Activities

From April 23 to May 21, 2025, Staff provided a diverse range of engagement opportunities aimed at increasing awareness and collecting feedback on the proposed policy changes. The combined activities generated over 5,000 engagement touch points, including both the public and individuals representing interest holders in the DTES.

Event/Platform	Event Date(s)	# of Touchpoints
Vancouver Heritage Commission	May 5, 2025	10 Members
Sessions with DTES Organizations & Service Providers	May 6, 2025 (in-person) May 14, 2025 (virtual)	49 Attendees/ 32 Organizations
Non-Profit Housing Provider Session	May 7, 2025	7 Attendees/ 7 Organizations
Urban Indigenous Session	May 8, 2025	46 Attendees
Public Information Session	May 12, 2025	185 Attendees
SRO Collaborative Session	May 15, 2025	40 Attendees
Private Developer Session	May 21, 2025	7 Attendees/ 7 Organizations
Landowner Survey & Office Hours	April 23 to May 16, 2025	10 Attendees 14 Surveys Received
Online Comment Form	April 23 to May 19, 2025	853 Forms Received
Shape Your City Website	Launched April 23	2,700 Visitors
Social Media	April 23 to May 16, 2025 (24 posts)	130,000 Impressions 5,700 Post Engagements
Traditional Media	April 23 to May 16, 2025 (24 posts)	9 Print, Radio, or Television Pieces

In addition to these sessions, Staff have continued to meet with interest holders after the formal engagement period. These interest holders include the BC Non Profit Housing Association, Chinatown societies and associations, and Staff from Vancouver Coastal Health and BC Housing. Feedback from the July 7, 2025, follow-up meeting with the Vancouver Heritage Commission is included in this report.

Who We Connected With

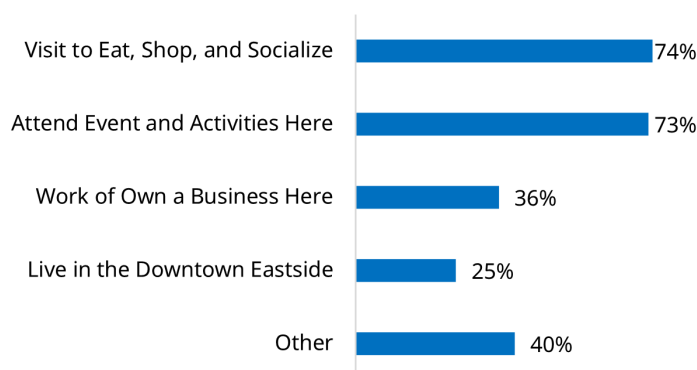
In addition to focused interest holder events with specific community members, a broad range of individuals provided feedback on the draft policy proposals through online submissions and in-person events. Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis as part of the on-line comment form and is summarized in this section. These demographics are also referenced throughout the report to attribute quotes and highlight responses from different groups.

Survey respondents reported a variety of connections to the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

- Nearly one-quarter of survey responders live in the neighbourhood.
- 37% of survey responders work or own a business in the neighbourhood.
- Most survey responders visit the neighbourhood for events or to access local businesses and services.

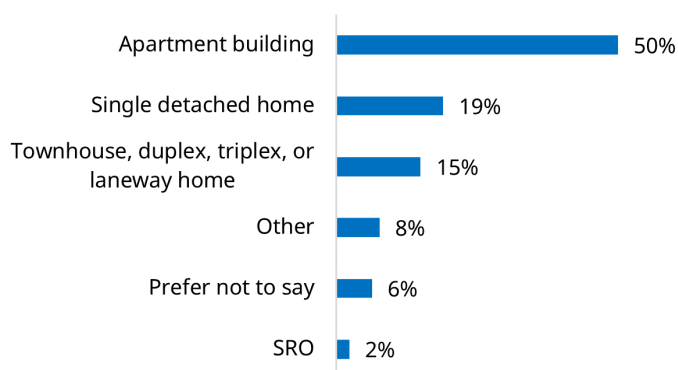
Relationship to the DTES

(n = 852 survey respondents)



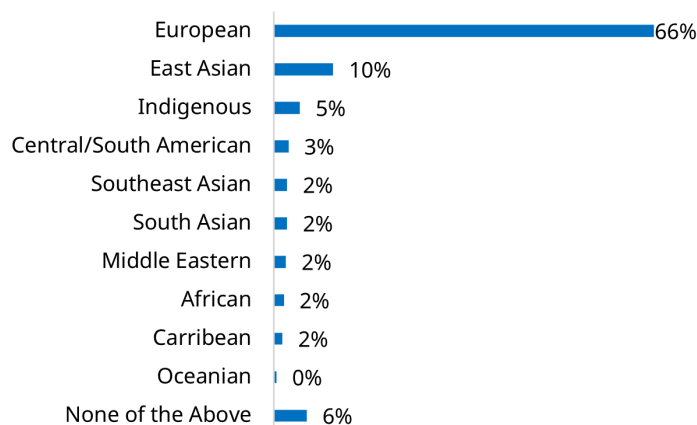
Current Housing Type

(n = 825 survey respondents)



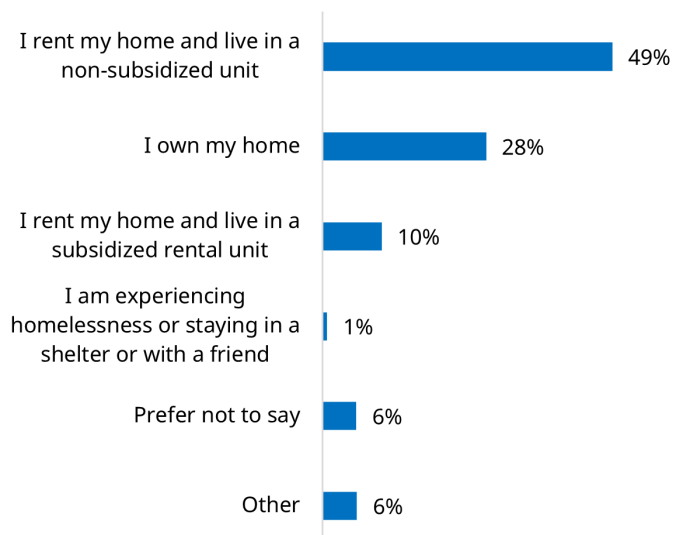
Ethnicity

(n = 852 survey respondents)



Current Housing Tenure

(n = 828 survey respondents)



To ensure participation by residents who may be most impacted by proposed changes, City Staff reached out directly to tenants of Single Room Occupancy housing (SROs). While not all survey respondents disclosed their current living arrangements, 19 individuals that responded to the survey currently live in SROs and seven additional responders are currently experiencing homelessness.

All survey participants were asked additional voluntary questions on their ethnicity and current living situation.

- Two thirds of respondents consider European to be their main ethnic origin or that of their ancestors, 10% East Asian, 6% Southeast Asian and 5% Indigenous.
- Nearly 60% of respondents rent their home with a majority of those living in non-subsidized units. A quarter of respondents own their home.
- Half of all respondents live in an apartment building, 19% in a single detached home, and 15% in a townhouse, duplex, or laneway.

What We Learned

Feedback from the public and community members in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) was mostly critical of the proposed policy changes. While most participants of the online comment form, in-person event, and interest holder meetings agreed that changes are needed in the neighbourhood, there were varying opinions on what those changes should be.

Many participants fear that the proposed policy changes will result in gentrification and displacement of current residents. Of particular concern was the reduction in shelter-rate units required for social housing projects, and the introduction of privately-owned below-market rental housing. Across most of the engagement opportunities, participants expressed a mistrust in private development and a call for more equitable, community-led housing solutions citywide.

While there were varying opinions on building heights and densities, it was often agreed that more density was good, conditional on there being more affordability. It was widely suggested by most advocates, organizations, and residents that there needs to be more senior government fundings and increased advocacy efforts with the Provincial and Federal Governments.

In the survey, residents and those working in the DTES consistently raised alarms about affordability gaps, displacement risks, and gentrification. Many opposed reducing shelter-rate requirements for social housing and reducing the 1:1 SRO replacement requirement, fearing these changes would further marginalize low-income residents and erode community supports.

Through the survey and the dedicated in-person workshop, current tenants of SROs emphasized the need for more shelter-rate housing, skepticism about the City's proposal to align social housing with Provincial funding programs, and a strong desire to remain close to services and community networks both in their buildings and in the broader community. Many SRO residents were deeply skeptical of the City's tenant relocation process, citing concerns that developers would not follow through on their obligations and fail to find suitable relocation options.

Service providers and other community serving organizations emphasized the importance of delivering net new supportive, shelter-rate housing in the neighbourhood and expressed concerns that the proposed changes would result in less shelter-rate housing overall and no housing for residents experiencing homelessness. There was concern that introducing private market development at this scale would lead to conflict between low- and higher-income residents, and risk displacing existing affordable retail.

Similarly, participants of the Urban Indigenous Session raised strong concerns about gentrification, displacement, and the erosion of community support networks, especially around mixed-income housing and changes to building forms. While there was conditional support for aspects of the proposal that would increase social housing built in the area, there was widespread skepticism toward private developers and a strong call for more Indigenous- and non-profit-led housing, family-oriented units, and integration of Indigenous culture in design. The importance of tenant protections was emphasized, particularly for vulnerable Indigenous residents in SROs, with a need for trauma-informed relocation strategies and clear communication.

Private developers appreciated the added flexibility and potential for new options but warned of economic viability challenges without additional financial incentives or significant public funding. While they agreed that private development should be part of the solution, they expressed a preference for partnerships with non-profits to operate low-income units and take on tenant relocation, and expressed the need for additional incentives like property tax waivers and swing-site housing.

Some non-profit housing operators supported the flexibility provided through the proposed changes to maximum building heights and the social housing definition, but underscored the importance of early non-profit involvement in the redevelopment process, stronger tenant protections, and preserving affordability through long-term covenants. They expressed concern about relaxing the 1:1 SRO replacement rule and called for attention to broader community supports, including public space and community-serving retail.

Members of the Vancouver Heritage Commission were generally supportive of reducing heritage review requirements in the area, where appropriate, to enable new affordable housing development, with a recommendation that four heritage properties be reclassified to

Key Topics

maintain their required heritage review.

Five major topics emerged regarding the proposed policy directions. These topics are summarized below and are detailed in the Summarized Feedback section.



Social Housing Definition & Inclusionary Model

Social housing refers to social, supportive and co-operative housing owned by non-profits or the government. Inclusionary social housing involves a private developer building a portion of a building as social housing and giving it the City or a non-profit provider to own and operate.



Below Market Rental

Below market rental is rental housing offered at lower rates than market rentals. They are built by the private sector in exchange for increased density and are permanently secured at below market rate, even when tenants change.



Tenant Relocation & Protection Policies

In addition to provincial tenancy laws, renters are entitled to tenant assistance and protection under City policies. This assistance may include financial compensation, moving expenses and help finding new housing, among other supports.



SRO Replacement

The City's existing policy is to replace Single Room Occupancy (SRO) rooms with self-contained units on a one-for-one basis to maintain affordable housing for low-income residents.



Form of Development & Heritage

The form of development includes how buildings are physically built, such as height and densities, and the protected public views that shape development. The Vancouver Heritage Register (VHR) is an official list of historic buildings recognized by City Council for their heritage value.

3. Summarized Feedback

Staff received a variety of comments from the various engagement actives listed in the Engagement Process section. These comments were coded by Staff and are summarized below. The feedback is organized by topic area throughout this section.

Comment Form

An online comment form was open from April 23 to May 19, 2025. The comment form included six open ended questions to help shape the proposed actions. Summaries of the responses, along with quotes from various respondents, are included in the following sections.



Social Housing Definition & Inclusionary Model

Questions:

- *What do you think of the proposed changes to the definition of social housing within the Downtown Eastside?*
- *What do you think of the proposed changes to the inclusionary housing requirements within the DEOD and Thornton Park areas?*

The overwhelming sentiment is that the proposed policy change is inadequate, inequitable, and harmful. Many respondents strongly opposed the changes to the social housing definition, particularly the reduction of units available at income assistance rates (from 33% to 20%), citing fears of increased homelessness, displacement of vulnerable residents, and gentrification. Others supported the changes, arguing that aligning with the Community Housing Fund would make projects more viable and allow for a greater mix of incomes in the neighborhood. A common concern among opponents was that \$1,450/month is unaffordable for many DTES residents, while some supporters emphasized the need to modernize the area and promote development. Most respondents urge the City to prioritize deeply affordable, social housing in the DEOD and Thornton Park areas and maintain community-based planning principles.

General Opposition to Changing the Social Housing Definition

There is strong opposition to reducing the social housing requirement from a minimum of 33% of units at the shelter rate of income assistance to 20%. Many respondents were concerned that this change will lead to less deeply affordable units, rising rents, more homelessness, displacement of low-income residents, and ultimately more negative impacts in the DTES, given the current housing crisis combined with the urgent public health challenges. Many respondents want to maintain or increase the current requirement for units at shelter rates. Some comments pressed the City to increase advocacy efforts for more funding to support a social housing definition that caters more to the local needs of residents in the DTES.

About 12% of respondents expressed support for the proposal, citing several reasons: the belief that changes are needed and long overdue; that the proposal would facilitate the delivery of social housing projects; the potential to diversify the neighbourhood by offering a broader range of housing options; the increased benefits to local businesses; and improved integration of the DTES with the rest of the city.

"This decrease of units affordable for people on income assistance from 33% to 20% is cruel and harmful and will increase the unhoused population, exacerbate open substance use, theft, property damage. We need more truly affordable housing, not less."

- DTES renter and worker

"I think the proposed changes could be detrimental to those on Income Assistance or PWD Assistance because of the reduction in units for Income Assistance. I think it should be half and half. This reduction will displace many homeless individuals in the DTES."

- DTES renter

Lack of Affordability

It was widely expressed that the proposed below-HILs units are not affordable enough for a broad segment of the DTES population. Many respondents raised concerns about lower-income residents being squeezed out because of unaffordable rents, leading to the erosion of the existing community and gentrification of the neighbourhood, which would be especially detrimental to the most marginalized

groups living in the area. Respondents expressed a strong desire to see more shelter rate units to meet the needs of low-income populations.

"Do you really think people who need to access social housing can afford to pay \$1450 per month? I already know families who cannot even access those at \$500 per month due to the lack of availability."

- DTES resident and worker

"No way! \$1450 isn't affordable for a lot of people - let alone the DTES population. This kind of a change will bring in an entirely different demographic that will not care about the community in the same way."

- DTES worker

Social Housing Requirement Should be Applied City-wide

Many respondents expressed that requirements for units at shelter rate or at/below the HILs should be expanded citywide, rather than being concentrated in the DTES. While the reasons varied, there was a shared view that the current concentration of social housing in the DTES is unfair and should not be further intensified. Instead, respondents called for a more equitable distribution of social housing across all neighbourhoods, allowing people greater choice in where they live and ensuring that all communities share responsibility for housing affordability.

"Expand one third shelter rate requirement to whole city so social housing does not exclude low income people."

- DTES renter and worker

"The proposed changes might make it easier for non-profits to build housing, which is good in theory, but without a broader strategy to distribute supportive housing more evenly across the city and province, the DTES will continue to bear the brunt of a provincial crisis. Social housing should be built in all communities, not just concentrated in one. Equity means sharing both the responsibility and the support across BC."

- DTES renter

Widespread Opposition to the Proposed 20/80 Mix

A majority of respondents, including those living in subsidized rental units and in the DTES, oppose reducing social housing from the current policy of 60% to 20%. The proposed shift is seen by many as gentrification that will displace low-income residents, particularly those in SROs who are reliant on income assistance. Many view the change as developer-driven that is not in the best interest of the existing community.

"20% social housing to 80% regular rental is not a social housing model and prioritizes investor profit over people and communities. This must not be approved, it is inhumane and greedy."

– DTES renter in subsidized housing

"While I understand the intention of making it easier and less costly to build housing, the shift toward 80% market rental units in areas that have historically provided affordable housing could lead to more displacement, especially for those who rely on SROs as their last option before homelessness."

– DTES renter

Concerns About Displacement, Homelessness, and Inequity

Respondents consistently raised alarm that the policy would exacerbate homelessness, increase trauma, and remove essential supports for vulnerable populations. Several note that reducing social housing access in the DTES, which has long been a refuge for marginalized individuals, amounts to erasure and exclusion.

"Why push low-income folks from the community they have fought to make for themselves?"

– DTES renter in subsidized housing

Desire to Maintain or Increase Social Housing Provisions

Many advocate for keeping or returning to the current 60% social housing requirement or modifying to something more balanced like 50/50 or 40/60. A number of comments call for 80%+ social housing, particularly to match current need and support income assistance rates (currently \$500/month for singles). It was expressed that Rent-Geared-to-Income rates under the current HILs standard are not affordable enough and out of reach for low-income residents.

"This seems like an extreme desire to move poor people out of DTES (and then where will they go?) If there's a need for more profit, why not even a 40/60 split?" – DTES renter that works in the neighbourhood

"The proposed changes are too extreme. I can understand a 50/50 split, but the changes would be harmful to the community." – Renter of subsidized unit

Suggestions for a Broader, Citywide Approach

Some respondents support the idea of dispersing social housing across all neighborhoods in Vancouver to address the need for low-income housing citywide. Others emphasize the need for more housing of all types, but not at the expense of the most vulnerable.

"This is acceptable only if we are applying these rules to areas beyond the DTES as well."

– DTES resident

"Social housing should be built in all communities, not just concentrated in one. Equity means sharing both the responsibility and the support across BC."

– DTES renter

Minority Support for the Policy

About 10% of survey respondents support the policy change, citing the need to unlock more housing development, bring economic diversity to the DTES, and make mixed-income housing financially viable.

These voices emphasize that the current 60% social housing requirement is not economically viable for development.

"I support the proposed changes. Reducing the required percentage of social housing and allowing more rental units makes it easier and more financially viable to build."

This could help bring in more development, reduce vacancy, and create more diverse, mixed-income communities rather than concentrating high levels of social housing in one area. It's a step in the right direction."

– DTES renter



Below-Market Rental Model

Question:

- *What do you think of the proposed change to allow privately owned, below-market rental housing in the DEOD and Thornton Park sub-areas?*

While there is recognition that new housing solutions are urgently needed, the proposal to allow private, below-market rental is viewed by many as insufficient, inequitable, and potentially harmful to the community it aims to serve. Respondents overwhelmingly call for higher affordability targets, stronger oversight, and protection of the most vulnerable residents as essential conditions for any such policy to succeed.

Mixed Support with Significant Concern

While some respondents support the change in principle, most express strong reservations or outright opposition. Specifically, there is widespread skepticism toward private developers playing a central role in delivering or managing affordable housing. Many view the policy as a threat to equity, long-term affordability, and public accountability.

"I don't agree with privately owned below market rental housing. Not enough oversight. Supportive services must be built into every housing location."

– DTES renter

Affordability Gaps Remain

The proposed rent level (\$809/month) is widely viewed as inaccessible to individuals on income assistance or fixed pensions, who typically rely on shelter-rate housing (\$500/month). Many respondents argue the policy fails to serve the population currently most in need, including those living in SROs or experiencing homelessness. Some respondents suggest tying the rent level to another metric, such as household incomes.

Below-Market Minimum Seen as Insufficient

The proposal's 10% requirement for below-market units is seen as much too low given the scale of housing need. Respondents suggest increasing this target significantly—to 20%, 30%, or even 50%.

Displacement & Gentrification Risks

A major concern is the potential loss of deeply affordable housing stock and the displacement of low-income residents during redevelopment. The shift toward mixed-market developments is seen by many as facilitating gentrification, not inclusion. There is concern that without interim housing or return guarantees, current SRO tenants will be left without viable options. There is strong opposition to relaxing the 1-for-1 replacement of current SRO units.

"There should be more than 10% of units going to below market rates. The people living in the DTES deserve affordable housing, not to be displaced in favour of gentrification."

– DTES renter

"This is unacceptable. SRO's cannot be replaced with market rate housing!"

– DTES renter

Conditional Support Dependent on Strong Oversight

A minority of respondents support the proposal if paired with strict affordability guarantees, transparency, and long-term enforcement.

Suggested safeguards include permanent affordability covenants, public or non-profit management models, tenant protections and right to return, and design and amenities that promote dignity and inclusion,

"I would support this proposal if a strong regulation and policy is developed to manifest the changes and expectations."

– SRO tenant

Broader Critiques of the Housing System

Some respondents express concern that privatizing affordability erodes public responsibility for housing vulnerable populations. Others highlight the need for coordinated regional responses, more public/non-profit housing investment, and deeper affordability standards. There were also several comments questioning why changes are concentrated primarily in the DEOD, arguing for broader citywide solutions.

"I would like more below-market rental housing to be distributed throughout the city and not just on the DTES"

– DTES homeowner



Tenant Relocation & Protection Policies

Question:

- *What do you think of the proposed policies for tenant relocation and protection?*

The majority of survey respondents felt that the proposed tenant relocation & protection policies did not adequately address the impacts of displacement. Among most respondents, there was a lack of trust in the City's ability to enforce the policies. Many respondents cited few affordable housing options to accommodate displaced tenants as a barrier to implementation and a flaw of the proposal. There was overwhelming preference for existing tenants to be offered permanently affordable housing options within the community over temporary housing options predicated on the right to return to the new building.

Opposition to Displacement

Many respondents opposed displacement caused by redevelopment, stating that tenant protection policies should focus on preventing evictions rather than relocation.

"This is a bandaid on a knife wound. Stop the evictions in the first place."

– DTES homeowner

"I think these can be good policies but I do not think they should be used to justify increased evictions. Tenant protections should focus on limiting evictions and displacements first and then we can try to smooth over this process."

– Vancouver renter

1-year Eligibility Requirement too Exclusive

Many respondents were opposed to the proposed 1-year minimum tenancy required for eligibility under the tenant relocation and protection policy. There was concern that this requirement would result in pre-emptive evictions to reduce tenant relocation and protection obligations.

"I think it's crucial to delete the eligibility requirement that tenants have to have lived in the building for 1 year before the redevelopment application. Landlords know this clause, so they buy or push out long-time tenants so they can turnover the pre-demolition or pre-renovation units to new tenants who they won't owe anything to"

– DTES renter

Preference for Staying in the Community

Many respondents wanted assurances that existing residents could have the choice to be rehoused within the DTES, emphasizing the importance of preserving social networks and access to supportive services within the community.

"Why are we relocating people from their home communities where they are connected to life saving resources? How will you ensure that folks who are needing their housing to be protected in the community will be brought back home? Community connection and familiarity is life-saving, not to mention the freedom to exist in a community where you are not under scrutiny from higher income neighbours gentrifying the area."
– DTES renter

Preference for Permanent Housing Options

There was widespread preference for permanent affordable housing options offered through the tenant relocation process, rather than an offer of an interim housing option while tenants wait to return to the new building. Participants cited concerns about the suitability and sustainability of the interim housing, long development timelines, and distress caused by moving as reasons for preferring one move over two.

"Temporary relocations can drag on for years, leaving tenants in limbo. Ultimately, the focus should be on ensuring that relocation leads to stable, long-term housing that is truly affordable."
– SRO tenant

Mistrust of TRP Enforcement

A majority of respondents were skeptical that landlords and developers would adhere to tenant relocation and protection policies, especially in light of changing economic and political environments and a perceived lack of enforcement mechanisms. Some participants warned that the language in the proposed policies was too vague, and wanted assurances on specific scenarios.

"We've seen in other plans like the Broadway Plan how these kinds of policies are often skirted or poorly enforced in practice. Without a properly resourced, independent renter advocacy office and a restorative process to address conflicts between landlords and tenants, this proposal risks becoming yet another example of promises without real protections. Many tenants in the Downtown Eastside face significant barriers: poverty, trauma, disability, and discrimination. The idea that they'll be helped to find new housing at the same rent means little if the units simply don't exist or if landlords can pressure them out using legal loopholes or through harassment."
– DTES homeowner

Lack of Affordable Relocation Options

Many respondents said there were no affordable housing options for tenants to be relocated to within or outside the DTES, and that more shelter-rate units are needed in the DTES and across the city to facilitate SRO replacement. Others expressed concern that the SRO replacement units, namely in privately-owned below-market rental buildings, would not be affordable to existing SRO tenants returning to the new building.

"Helping tenants find 'better' housing is great in theory, but in practice, 'better' often means higher rents or stricter terms. The right of first refusal is a good gesture, but \$809/month for a studio is still a steep increase for those paying \$500 or less now."
– SRO tenant



SRO Replacement

Question:

- *What do you think of the proposed changes to Single Room Occupancy (SRO) replacement?*

The overwhelming majority of respondents recognize the deep need and urgency to replace SROs, especially those in very poor condition, with self-contained and livable housing. However, the proposed changes to SRO replacement—particularly the reduction of unit size to 200 square feet in SRO conversions and relaxation of the one-for-one replacement requirement—elicited strong and mostly critical feedback from respondents. While some participants expressed support for these changes, the majority raised serious concerns about the impacts on low-income and vulnerable residents, the role of private developers, and the adequacy of proposed unit sizes for conversions.

Strong Opposition to 200 sq ft Minimum Unit Size

The majority of respondents expressed opposition to reducing the minimum size of units to 200 square feet through SRO conversions. Respondents felt that these housing units would be unacceptably small and undignified. Respondents also asserted that many SRO residents have disabilities, mental health challenges, or mobility needs and require more space to live safely and with dignity.

*"200 square feet is not a humane living space. I strongly oppose this proposal."
- DTES resident*

*"SROs aren't ideal, but they're often the only roof between someone and the street. The smaller the unit, the more risk we face of repeating the mistakes of the past: isolating vulnerable people in tiny boxes, rather than building community-oriented, trauma-informed housing."
- DTES business owner*

Opposition to Relaxing the One-for-One Replacement Rule

There is widespread concern that relaxing the 1:1 SRO replacement policy will reduce the overall stock of deeply affordable SRO rooms in the DTES. Respondents consistently raised alarm that changing this policy will increase homelessness and worsen housing availability and the affordability crisis.

Several respondents urge the City to uphold or increase the current 1:1 policy to meet the immense and growing housing needs in the neighbourhood. DTES residents in particular feel that the related policies to increasing market housing in the neighbourhood, coupled with removing the 1:1 SRO replacement policy will lead to gentrification in the area.

*"By removing the one-for-one replacement requirement, the City would no longer guarantee that every lost SRO room will be replaced with a new, self-contained unit. That means for every aging SRO redeveloped, fewer units could be built, and the total supply of low-barrier housing would shrink, even as demand rises."
- Vancouver homeowner*

*"Reduced One-for-One Replacement Undermines Housing Supply Relaxing the one-for-one replacement requirement risks a net loss of deeply affordable units, especially if replaced with below-market rental rather than social housing"
- DTES homeowner*

Distrust in City and Developer-led Approaches, Strong Preference for More Social Housing

Many respondents feel that the proposal prioritizes developer interests over those of DTES residents. There were concerns that private developers may not uphold promises for affordability or maintenance, and could convert SRO units to market or short-term rentals later on.

Respondents in turn advocate for significant investments in shelter rate, supportive, and deeply affordable social housing to address the significant housing needs in the DTES.

"SROs aren't ideal, but they're often the only roof between someone and the street. If new builds don't guarantee replacement units at shelter rate or below 30% of income, we're not upgrading, we're displacing"
- DTES business owner

Concerns about Displacement and Tenant Relocation Protections

Respondents voiced deep concerns that the proposed changes could displace low-income SRO residents—many of whom rely on the social supports and community networks within the Downtown Eastside. They emphasized the acute shortage of affordable housing options elsewhere in the city, and many assert that forced relocation could have devastating impacts on many residents who live in SROs as a housing of last resort.

"Pushing folks to communities outside the DTES is harmful; displacement from social networks and resources can completely upend someone's mental health."
- Vancouver renter

Minority conditional support for proposed SRO changes

A minority of survey respondents indicated conditional support for the proposed changes, but only if they lead to improved livability in existing SRO rooms and creating self-contained units including kitchens and bathrooms. Some respondents expressed the need for flexibility in SRO regulations to improve living conditions, while also stressing the importance of tenant protections and added social supports to ensure housing stability.

"I support replacing aging SROs more quickly, many of these buildings are in terrible condition and not fit for anyone to live in. Allowing smaller unit sizes might be acceptable if it means people are moving into safer, cleaner, and self-contained housing"
- DTES renter



Form of Development & Heritage

Question:

- *What do you think of the proposed changes to built forms (higher streetwall and tower forms), protected public views, and the new heritage framework?*

Survey responses revealed a wide range of opinions regarding the City's proposed changes. While many respondents expressed support for increased density and streamlined processes to address the housing crisis, this support was largely conditional on ensuring affordability, community inclusion, and good urban design. A significant number of respondents expressed deep concern over the potential displacement of vulnerable residents. Some respondents were concerned about loss of public view corridors, and weakening of heritage protections. There was also notable distrust toward developers and skepticism that the changes would result in genuinely affordable housing.

Support for Height and Density Increases

Many respondents acknowledged that increased height and density are necessary to address Vancouver's housing shortage, especially in urban cores like the DTES.

"I do not have any issue with higher buildings, but if these buildings are not being developed to be affordable and with the neighbourhood and community in mind, then I would not support these changes."
- DTES worker

Concerns About Livability and Design

There were significant concerns about how high-rise towers and tall streetwalls would affect light, airflow, and the overall pedestrian experience. Many feared these forms would decrease livability and be socially isolating.

"Streetwall buildings should NOT be massively tall... otherwise they are too depressing of the environment around them."
– DTES renter

Preservation of Public Views

Respondents were divided on view protections. Some believed views are secondary to housing needs, while others emphasized their role in public wellness and city character.

"While I'm not strictly opposed to streetwall building, I do think it's imperative that we protect public views."
– DTES renter

"Nobody's dying because they can't see the mountains. People are dying because they have nowhere safe to live."
– DTES worker

Few Heritage Framework Concerns

While there were fewer comments overall on heritage, those that commented on it were worried the proposed heritage framework would lead to demolitions or neglect of historically significant buildings. Others urged a more inclusive approach to heritage that respects Indigenous and non-colonial histories.

"Heritage buildings should be protected at all costs, or at a minimum the facade kept and incorporated into an architecturally cohesive design. Heritage protections should not be eroded."
– DTES renter

"I fully support scrapping the heritage register. We're on stolen land and the heritage register is protecting what?"
– Vancouver renter

Gentrification and Displacement Fears

The threats of gentrification and displacement of current residents was one of the most common and urgent concerns. Many respondents feared that the changes would exacerbate gentrification, displace low-income residents, and increase inequality.

"Allowing 32-storey high rises with only tiny percentages for shelter rate will gentrify the neighbourhood."
– DTES renter

"Rezoning for up to 32 story buildings will skyrocket land values, incentivizes gentrification, pushing the current residents out of the last somewhat affordable neighbourhood in the city."
– DTES renter

"Ultimately the DEOD neighbourhood residents need accessible housing, and redeveloping according to the plans above would not achieve this goal."
– DTES renter

Conditional or Nuanced Support

Some supported the proposed changes in principle but only under specific conditions—such as guaranteed affordability, mixed-income buildings, design quality, and access to green space and services.

"I think this could work as long as things that make city life tolerable, like trees, green spaces and decent views are not comprised. Poor people deserve to live in aesthetically pleasing neighbourhoods, too, and I am well aware that the dtes is not fully that at the moment."
– DTES renter

"Bigger building are fine but not if the housing being built isn't 100% social housing."
– DTES homeowner

Distrust of Process and Frustration

A sizable number of responses reflected mistrust toward the development process, believing it is overly influenced by private interests and not reflective of community needs.

"Money grab. This is just about gentrification. Please call it what it is."
– DTES renter

"Why are you pushing a plan aimed at housing developers? This has absolutely nothing to do with increasing the quality of life for DEOD residents."
– DTES Renter

To gather input from specific groups in the DTES, Staff met with various interest groups to share the proposal. The sections below summarize each of these sessions and the key themes and feedback received at each.

Urban Indigenous Session

An Urban Indigenous engagement was held on May 8, 2025 which marked a significant milestone as the Planning Department's first dedicated engagement with Urban Indigenous communities. It was designed to ensure that Indigenous voices are not only heard, but meaningfully reflected in the City's housing planning and decision-making processes.

Recognizing that many Indigenous people live in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and that many other Indigenous Peoples have deep roots and long-standing connections to the area, the event was created to give Indigenous Peoples in Vancouver a culturally safe space to share their input and lived experience on the proposed changes to DTES housing policies. The goal was to listen carefully and involve Indigenous Peoples in a thoughtful and respectful way, as these changes would have a big impact on the future of the neighbourhood.

The objectives of the event were to:

- share public engagement materials related to the DTES Housing Implementation;
- provide space for questions, feedback, and dialogue on proposed policy and zoning changes;
- accurately capture community concerns and ideas to inform City Council and influence final policy decisions;
- build stronger relationships with Urban Indigenous residents; and
- begin the process of centering Indigenous ways of knowing in the City's planning practices.

Event Overview

The event brought together 46 Indigenous participants including elders, youth, SRO tenants, Downtown Eastside residents, and others with strong ties to the neighbourhood. While many attendees had previously taken part in the City's UNDRIP-related engagements, the event was also successful in reaching new voices—particularly individuals who are not often involved in City processes.

Participants were invited through targeted outreach by the City's Indigenous Relations Office, which included contacting an Urban Indigenous mailing list and connecting with Indigenous organizations based in and serving the Downtown Eastside. To support accessibility, Staff provided follow-up via text and phone calls to Elders, offered honoraria, and reimbursed transit, taxi, and childcare costs to remove barriers to participation.

The day began with breakfast and a traditional Squamish welcome, song, and opening by Sheryl Rivers. Annita McPhee followed by introducing the purpose of the gathering, outlining participation guidelines, and framing the discussion within the context of the City's housing policy work. A brief presentation from City Staff explained the proposed housing changes in the DTES. This was followed by a World Café-style workshop, where City Staff facilitated topic-specific table discussions. Staff recorded and summarized key points, then reflected them back to participants to ensure clarity and understanding.

To conclude the event, Sheryl utilized Squamish protocol of inviting witnesses from the participants to share reflections and summarize what they witnessed at this event. The event concluded with a shared lunch and a musical performance by Dr. Winston Wuttunee, which brought everyone together in a spirit of culture and connection.

What We Learned



Topic 1: More Mixed-Income Housing



Participants were concerned that changing the definition of social housing in the DTES will increase land values, gentrification, and displace low-income residents from the neighbourhood. Participants highlighted the importance of the strong support systems and social networks that underpin the neighborhood, with many expressing apprehension about how such changes might disrupt these vital connections.

Some participants expressed conditional support for mixed-income housing and housing provided by non-profit housing operators. They saw potential benefits such as faster housing delivery, a more inclusive neighbourhood, and improved living conditions including private washrooms, kitchens, and shared amenities like rooftop gardens and amenity rooms.

Some expressed concerns that mixed-income buildings can be hostile or isolating to residents with low incomes and highlighted the importance of supporting residents to maintain housing stability. Calls were made to build trust between developers and the DTES community, and to ensure tenants' rights and social cohesion are prioritized.

General distrust and skepticism about the ability and willingness of private developers to provide and uphold affordable, secure housing, with some suggesting the affordable units should be transferred to non-profits to manage.

Participants wanted more non-profit and Indigenous-led housing, and a return to the original 60/40 affordability model to address the housing need in the neighbourhood.



Topic 2: Changes to Building Forms

Participants expressed deep concerns about gentrification and displacement and emphasized the importance of prioritizing welfare rate housing. Some expressed skepticism that tall, mixed-income buildings will meet the needs of the DTES.

Strong need for livable family-sized units to support multi-generational Indigenous households.

Safety was a major concern: fire hazards, seismic safety, and evacuation challenges for elders and people with mobility issues in high-rise buildings.

Several participants stressed that existing infrastructure (schools, clinics, green space) is already lacking in the DTES and the area can't absorb additional population without investment.

Emphasis was placed on centering Indigenous art, culture, and design in new buildings, including spaces for people to gather, hold ceremonies, and placemaking opportunities.



Topic 3: SROs and Tenant Protections

Participants expressed fears that tenant protections, especially for vulnerable tenants, may not be implemented with the necessary compassion and effectiveness by private developers. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of ongoing support for vulnerable tenants, particularly during transitions from SROs or shelters to independent housing units.



Participants urge supportive, tailored, and trauma-informed relocation strategies for Indigenous tenants in cases where tenant relocation is necessary. Clear and ongoing communication, autonomy, and choice in where tenants are relocated were highlighted as important components during tenant relocation.

Some participants supported redeveloping aging SRO buildings but emphasized the need to prioritize low-income and Indigenous tenants, not private profit.

Concerns were raised about the current one-for-one replacement policy, some questioned its effectiveness and suggested exploring more flexible approaches.

Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge that this engagement took place on the unceded ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation). We are deeply grateful to Sheryl Rivers for opening and closing the event in accordance with Skwxwú7mesh protocols, and for generously sharing her songs, teachings, and spiritual guidance throughout the day. We also extend our sincere thanks to Annita McPhee (Tahltan Tlingit First Nations) for her skilled facilitation, which helped create a safe, welcoming space for meaningful dialogue. Our appreciation goes to Dr. Winston Wuttunee Nehiyow (Cree from Red Pheasant SK) for sharing his music and spirit, and for encouraging everyone to gather with confidence, joy, and connection through song and dance.

We thank the 46 participants and 4 witnesses who attended and contributed their voices, experiences, and testimonies to this important conversation. Finally, we acknowledge that this marks the first Urban Indigenous engagement led by the Planning Department, and we offer our thanks to the Indigenous Relations team for their invaluable support and partnership in co-creating the engagement plan grounded in xʷməθkʷə́yəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətał ceremony and protocol.



A workshop with tenants of SROs in the DTES was held on May 14, 2025, organized with the SRO Collaborative. Forty participants provided feedback on the proposed changes. A table was available at the event with translation in Cantonese for participants to make comments.



Social Housing Definition

The majority of tenants were opposed to the idea of reducing the proportion of shelter rate units required in new social housing projects, emphasizing that this type of housing is already in short supply. Several tenants expressed a lack of trust in the City's priorities, suggesting that low-income tenants are not being prioritized in this idea. Other tenants questioned why the City is aligning its policies with Provincial funding requirements when it should instead advocate for the province to adjust these requirements to fund more shelter rate housing.



Delivery of Social Housing through Private Development

Most tenants felt that the proposed inclusionary and below-market rental models would create buildings with too many market rental units and not enough affordable units. Many tenants questioned whether owners/developers would stay true to their commitments to build affordable units and maintain this affordability over time, emphasizing the need for strict City oversight. Tenants were generally critical of bringing more market development to the neighbourhood due to fears of gentrification, displacement, and overall change to the DTES community. Several tenants suggested thinking outside the box to find alternative ways of funding development, outside of private development.



SRO Replacement

Several participants were concerned about the potential loss of SRO rooms in replacement projects, noting that this wouldn't be fair to the community, while one tenant suggested this was a reasonable trade-off to deliver more new low-income housing. Many participants also observed that only smaller SROs could be fully replaced through the proposed models, raising questions around larger SRO buildings and whether these communities would be split up.

Tenants also pointed out that not all SRO buildings require replacement; some buildings are in reasonable condition and could be stabilized through renovations.

The vast majority of tenants supported the idea of spreading social housing development across the city, as it would give low-income residents more choices. However, they emphasized that this housing must be near to shops and services.



Form of Development & Heritage

While some tenants weren't opposed to taller buildings, many were concerned about the hazards they associated with this, particularly increased local temperatures and earthquake risks. Several tenants recalled the 2021 heat dome event, which resulted in many lives lost in the DTES. Tenants were also concerned about reduced views of the skyline; one tenant suggested that tall buildings be spread out to preserve local views. Other comments were related to reduced light in Oppenheimer Park, the preference to keep buildings shorter than Woodward's, and the importance of ensuring amenities, infrastructure and parks are included in plans.



Rent Mix



The majority of tenants did not like the idea of mixed-income buildings, while a smaller proportion were open to this idea. Tenants mainly expressed fears that they would be harassed and judged by higher income tenants. Notably, many tenants warned that potential fear or shame around substance use in such buildings could lead to tenants using substances in private, which would increase their risk of drug overdose.

Several tenants suggested that a smaller proportion of high-income tenants could help reduce the above challenges. However, participants also predicted that higher income tenants wouldn't be interested in renting units in buildings where people are living with mental health or addiction issues.



Community, Belonging and Support in the DTES

Many tenants emphasized the importance of the DTES as a place that provides community, belonging, meaningful relationships, and essential services not found elsewhere. This extends inside SRO buildings, where tenants are often part of close-knit communities that offer social support, help with daily activities and harm-reduction. Tenants indicated that being separated from these support systems would be traumatic for many tenants, even putting lives at-risk, particularly seniors and those with addiction challenges.



Tenant Relocation

When it came to the proposed TRP, tenants expressed distrust in the City, landlords and developers. There were fears that the TRP would be less protective once fully developed, that developers would not follow the TRP, and that the policies may weaken with government changes. Tenants urged the City to provide clear and objective policies that leave no room for unkept promises, which multiple channels of communication (including translated documents) to clarify the process with existing tenants. Most importantly, they want the guarantee that everyone will be found a suitable new home.

As the TRP is further developed, tenants want to be in the driver's seat. They stressed that the TRP must deeply consider tenant needs related to family, health, lifestyle, and supports -- during and after moving -- especially for more vulnerable tenants.

Crucially, the TRP must give tenants the freedom and agency to choose where they will live. For many tenants, the right to return to the redeveloped building was a priority, while others only want to move once to permanent housing that meets their needs, making the right of first refusal less relevant. It was also noted that some tenants may not live long enough to execute their right of first refusal, given the average age of residents in the DTES and the long timelines for new development.

If they had to move, tenants strongly emphasized moving with their existing tenant communities, noting the added comfort and safety in staying together. Tenants described being relocated to safe, secure, clean, and self-contained units in buildings without restrictive rules. While many prefer to stay in the DTES, others were open to moving outside the DTES to other non-wealthy neighbourhoods. Crucially, tenants' housing must be close to either their existing support providers or to new ones.



Concerns around Homelessness

Tenants expressed concern, however, that a lack of available or suitable relocation options could leave some people homeless. Modular housing was suggested as a way of providing additional homes until tenants can return to their redeveloped buildings.

Overall, tenants worried that the proposed plans could worsen the homelessness crisis or at least fail to take this issue into account.

Private Developers

A workshop with private developers was held on May 21, 2025. Participants provided feedback on the proposed changes, including anticipated uptake of the inclusionary and below-market rental options and challenges with implementing the proposed policy changes.

While participants appreciated the options provided and felt that private development options should be part of the housing mix in the area, they emphasized that economic viability would remain a challenge, and early non-profit partnerships would be necessary to bring projects to fruition.



Economic Viability Remains a Challenge

Even with the proposed addition in height and density, developers anticipate economic viability will remain a challenge given lower area rents and low-income housing costs. Participants said that the proportion of market rental would not be sufficient to offset low-income housing costs, and senior government funding and operating subsidy would still be necessary. They also highlighted the potential difficulty of renting up the market rental units.



Need for Flexibility

Participants recommended flexibility & providing options to improve economic viability, and to account for funding program changes or misaligned funding program requirements. They suggested property tax waivers or exemptions, flexibility on ground-floor commercial space, off-site replacement of SROs units or providing cash-in-lieu options.



Issues with Tenant Relocation

Developers emphasized a lack of non-market housing units to relocate low-income tenants to. Regarding rehousing low-income tenants in the market rental stock, they expressed some concerns that market housing is not suitable for tenants needing additional supports, and the interim rent top-up would compromise economic viability. Participants suggested using a City-owned “swing site” to rehouse tenants during construction while they wait to exercise their Right of First Refusal and move into the new building.



Non-Profit Partnerships are Necessary

Participants indicated that partnerships with non-profit housing providers would be necessary to improve project viability and deliver on Tenant Relocation & Protection Policy obligations. These partnerships must be formed early in the development process for non-profits to assist with tenant relocation, inform building design, and bring in additional funding.



To access non-profit funding for development, developers preferred the establishment of subdivisions or airspace parcels prior to construction, rather than providing the turnkey social housing to the City after construction, because non-profit title is a requirement of most funding programs.



Lack of Interest in Operating Low-Income Units

Given challenges with managing low-income units and requiring operating subsidies, there was a general preference for options where the private developer was not responsible for the operation of low-income units. Developers generally preferred the inclusionary option for these reasons, or for the below-market rental option, to maintain ownership while providing the units to a non-profit operator through a long-term lease.

Non-profit Housing Providers

A workshop with government and non-profit housing operators was held on May 7, 2025. Participants provided feedback on proposed policy changes impacting the delivery of social housing within the DTES.

Participants were generally in support of providing flexibility to social housing development and emphasized that non-profit involvement in private-led development is necessary to support low-income residents.



Support for Flexibility in Affordability Requirements

Non-profit housing operators were generally supportive of changes to affordability requirements in alignment with the Community Housing Fund. They emphasized the need for flexibility if funding programs change, and some operators suggested removing affordability requirements for social housing, noting that non-profit housing operators will always try to achieve deeper levels of affordability in accordance with their mandate. Others were concerned that the amount of shelter-rate housing delivered through the Community Housing Fund is insufficient, and that the City should not reduce its affordability requirements to align with insufficient, time-limited funding programs.



Support for Increasing Building Heights

While financing remains a barrier for achieving the maximum building heights proposed, there was support for added flexibility in social housing development. For inclusionary housing projects, participants noted that taller buildings are needed to provide enough market housing to offset development costs, and to build enough social housing units to relocate existing tenants.



Tenant Relocation & Protection Concerns

There was general support for the additional TRP policies proposed, but participants raised concerns regarding enforcement and implementation, including:

- A lack of affordable housing to rehouse low-income tenants.
- Difficulties implementing the Right of First Refusal, including possible evictions from the interim housing & preference for finding permanent housing.
- Preventing landlords & private developers from evicting tenants, or offering Mutual Agreements to End Tenancy, to reduce their TRP obligations.
- Tenants relocated
- Private developers need support from non-profits to relocate low-income tenants.

Participants also acknowledged trade-offs between addressing SRO replacement & homelessness, noting that vacant units offered to SRO tenants through the TRP would not be available to people experiencing homelessness.

Participants suggested using a City-owned “swing site” to rehouse tenants during construction while they wait to exercise their Right of First Refusal and move into the new building.



Support for Private & Non-Profit Partnerships



For inclusionary housing projects, non-profit housing operators said forming partnerships with developers early in the development process allows them to pool funding resources, provide input in building design, and provide support to existing tenants through the TRP.

Mixed Opinions about Community-Serving Retail

For 100% social housing projects, participants requested relaxations on ground floor retail requirements (e.g. providing amenity space), citing a lack of senior government funding to develop retail space.

For inclusionary housing projects, participants emphasized the importance of encouraging retail that supports low-income residents, and cautioned against displacing existing affordable businesses. They said rents collected from ground-floor commercial space can help non-profit housing providers recuperate operating costs, if delivered to the non-profit by the developer.



Concern around 1-for-1 Replacement Relaxation

Participants expressed concerns around the relaxation of 1-for-1 replacement of SRO rooms in private developments, suggesting it may increase land values by making private development more attractive, and noting challenges with offering the Right of First Refusal to existing tenants.



Concerns with Market Housing Development



Non-profit housing operators noted the amount of market rental housing introduced through the inclusionary & below-market rental options would lead to significant neighbourhood change, raising concerns about gentrification, and a lack of trust in private developers to operate low-income housing units.

Other Work Needed

Given the lack of public space in the area and the proposal to reduce minimum unit sizes for SRO conversions, participants emphasized the need for a public space plan. Participants identified a need for further work on other aspects of the Uplifting the DTES Council motion, including community economic development and service provision.

DTES Organizations & Service Providers

There were 2 workshops held with service providers and other community-serving organizations operating in the DTES:

- an in-person session on May 7, 2025, and
- a virtual session on May 14, 2025.

There were 32 organizations in attendance, including advocacy groups, BIAs, non-profit housing providers, and healthcare providers.

Among attendees, there was overwhelming opposition to reducing the proportion of shelter-rate units required in social housing, and concerns over displacement. Participants urged the City to prioritize permanent rehousing options within the community through the Tenant Relocation Policy, and to address gentrification concerns in light of market housing development.



Opposition to reduced shelter-rate requirement

Participants emphasized that housing affordable to people on income assistance is the level of affordability most desperately needed in the community, and that reducing the proportion of shelter-rate units required in social housing would result in fewer shelter-rate units being built. Participants were opposed to aligning affordability requirements with Provincial funding programs that do not sufficiently fund the amount of shelter-rate housing needed. Further, they said that shelter-rate units should be required in social housing projects across the entire city to compensate for reduced requirements in the DTES.

Homelessness not addressed

There was widespread concern that reducing the proportion of shelter-rate units required in social housing & prioritizing SRO replacement would not result in any net new shelter-rate housing overall, and therefore not provide any new housing for existing homeless residents.



Tenant Relocation & Protection Concerns

Participants emphasized the distress caused by displacement, and that existing residents should have the opportunity to be relocated with their neighbours to housing within the community. There was concern that relocating residents to areas outside the DTES would sever social supports and make supportive services inaccessible. There was overwhelming preference for permanent relocation to affordable housing within the community over interim rehousing options. Participants also said that Mutual Agreements to End Tenancy are often used by landlords to reduce tenant relocation & protection obligations, and noted concerns that the private development options proposed would worsen this issue.



Need for an SRO Replacement Strategy

Given distress arising from uncertainty, participants wanted a thorough strategy for SRO replacement, providing residents with redevelopment timelines and indicating where the replacement units will be. Participants suggested leveraging City-owned assets, namely the Balmoral Hotel, to begin moving existing SRO tenants and avoid displacing residents from the community while they wait for their buildings to be redeveloped.



Opposition to Relaxations on SRO Replacement

Participants opposed relaxation of the 1-for-1 replacement of SRO rooms, citing that it would result in the net loss of shelter-rate units in the area. There was also concern that the proposed minimum unit sizes for SRO building conversions (200 ft²) is too small.



Private Developers Unfit to Deliver Affordable Housing

There was widespread mistrust of private developers being able to build and maintain social and below-market rental housing given their profit motives. There was also concern that affordable housing delivered through private development would undercut other much needed community amenity contributions that would otherwise be required of private developers.



Concerns about Mixed-Income Community

Participants were concerned that market rental development would lead to conflict between existing resident and new higher-income residents, attract retail that is unaffordable to low-income residents, and displace affordable businesses. Conversely, some residents were in favour of mixed-income development, citing successful examples.



Importance of Preserving Affordable Retail

With many affordable businesses in the community closing, and gentrifying pressures introduced through private development, participants said that preserving affordable retail needs to be addressed alongside these changes.

Need for Additional Government Funding

Participants identified that SRO replacement and increasing social housing delivery would be better addressed through increased funding from senior government, and expressed the need for more advocacy from the City to senior government. Some participants noted that while the proposed policy changes are aimed at increasing social housing delivery, many non-profits housing providers struggle to find sufficient operation funding.

The project team presented the draft Heritage Framework to the Vancouver Heritage Commission on May 5th, 2025. The presentation outlined an approach to identify which of the 54 Vancouver Heritage Register (VHR) - listed buildings in the DEOD and Thornton Park sub-areas could be redeveloped without requiring further heritage review. The framework is intended to support affordable housing delivery by identifying buildings suitable for redevelopment based on heritage value, physical condition, and redevelopment potential.

On July 7th, 2025, the team returned to the Heritage Commission with a proposed pre-reviewed list of buildings categorized as follows:

- Group 1 – 27 buildings recommended for redevelopment with no future heritage review
- Group 2 – 27 buildings recommended for rehabilitation with continued heritage review



Heritage Framework and Building Heights

Commissioners supported the reduction of heritage review requirements where appropriate, especially in support of new affordable housing. They emphasized the importance of incorporating the histories of equity-denied communities and cultural amenities into the framework. One member expressed concern that the proposed building heights may not reflect the character of the neighbourhood.

The Commission passed a motion expressing general support for the framework but recommended reclassifying four buildings from Group 1 to Group 2 due to their cultural heritage value: 237 East Hastings Street (Phoenix Hotel); 249-2251 East Hastings Street (Afton Hotel & Oualtine Cafe); 304 Dunlevy Street; and 526 East Cordova Street (Webster House).

The motion also urged careful consideration of any redevelopment in the 300 and 400 blocks of Powell Street, recognizing this area as the heart of historic Japan Town.



Concerns about the Inclusionary Model

Some Commissioners raised concerns about the inclusionary housing model, particularly the reliance on private developers to deliver turnkey social housing. One member questioned the high proportion of market rental units and emphasized that non-profit operators are often better suited to manage social housing than either private developers or the City.



Support from Vancouver Heritage Foundation

The Vancouver Heritage Foundation submitted a letter endorsing the Heritage Framework. The Foundation supported the approach of reducing heritage review requirements to facilitate affordable housing while maintaining a balanced consideration of heritage retention.

Landowner Survey & Office Hours

Two-hundred landowners in the DEOD and Thornton Park areas were informed about the proposed changes by mail. The mailout included a short survey on future redevelopment plans & an offer to meet with City Staff during “office hours” to ask questions about the proposed changes.

Fourteen landowners replied to the survey. Six indicated they had plans to renovate or redevelop their property within the next five years, three of which planning to sell their property afterward.

Staff met with 10 landowners individually during the office hours, including both social housing providers and private building owners. The social housing providers were interested in how the proposed zoning changes could enable them to increase density on their sites, with some expressing concerns about limitations due to solar access constraint, or frustration that the proposed form of development changes did not apply outside of the DEOD or Thornton Park areas. The private owners were generally positive about the private housing options, but emphasized the challenges with managing buildings in the area, with some looking for options to sell their property.

Public Information Session

On May 8th, 2025, the City hosted a public information session at the Japanese Language School. The event drew 185 attendees, including residents, advocates, and representatives from DTES-serving organizations. The session included informational boards, Staff available to answer questions and clarify the proposals, and an opportunity for residents to provide feedback.

The event became a focal point for community concern and debate regarding the future of housing in the neighbourhood. Several community members staged a protest during the event, voicing strong opposition to the proposed changes and expressed the importance of listening to the concerns posed by the community. The feedback received from residents aligns closely with the survey results. Below are the key themes that emerged during the public information session:



Concerns about Gentrification and Displacement

Many attendees expressed strong fears that the proposed policy changes would accelerate gentrification, leading to the displacement of low-income residents.



Social Housing Definition

There was significant opposition to the proposed changes to the definition of social housing, with concerns that it would weaken the delivery of deeply affordable shelter rate housing.



Single Room Accommodation (SRA) Bylaw Changes

The proposal to relax of the one-for-one replacement requirement for room conversions raised concerns about the potential loss of affordable units.

Reduction of minimum unit size to 200 square feet was criticized for enabling unlivable homes for SRO residents.

Homelessness and Precarious Housing Needs

Attendees emphasized that the proposals did not address homelessness and unstable housing situations, especially in SRO buildings. These remain urgent issues that private market development alone cannot adequately address.

4. Next Steps

Feedback from the public and interest holders along with other inputs will be used to inform recommended housing policy changes. Proposed changes is anticipated to be presented to City Council for consideration by the end of 2025. Stay up to date with the project by visiting the project website: shapeyourcity.ca/dtes-housing or contacting the project team at housingpolicy@vancouver.ca

