

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE



The purpose of this series is to highlight examples of how BC Housing has worked with non-profit providers to facilitate redevelopment of affordable housing sites, as well as capture some of the lessons learned from those experiences. These case studies can spark ideas for non-profit housing providers in B.C. and across Canada who may be considering redevelopment of their sites.

Redevelopment Case Study Series: New Fountain Shelter, Vancouver

Background

The New Fountain Hotel was built in 1899 at 27 West Cordova as a 2-storey walk-up with single rooms serving a clientele of seasonal workers in fishing and logging industries. Adjacent Hotel Stanley, built in 1906 as a 3-storey hotel, shares a wall with New Fountain, making the two buildings appear to be one.

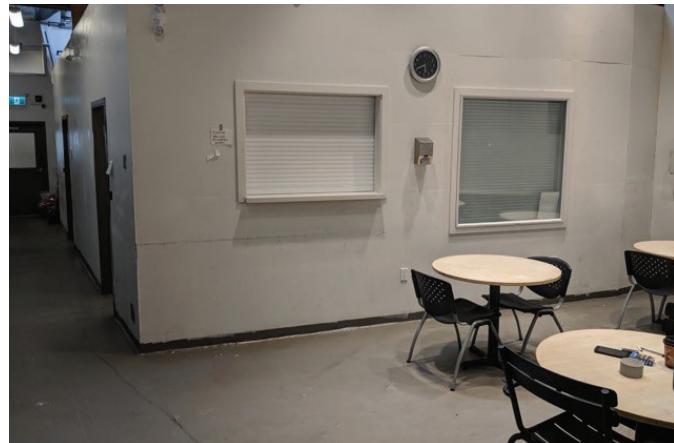
Hotel Stanley and New Fountain were in poor condition, requiring upgrades to modernize plumbing and electrical systems. The two structures were rebuilt in 1970-71 and renamed the Hotel Stanley New Fountain. The ancillary area behind the hotels was developed by Westbank Corporation (Westbank) and named Blood Alley in 1972, and the property address became 36 Blood Alley Square.

In 2001, PHS Community Services Society (PHS) purchased the Hotel Stanley New Fountain from the Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation (now Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation) as a home to many people who had occupied the vacant Woodward's building prior to its redevelopment.

Ownership of the building changed hands between 2001 and 2015, but management of residential and shelter facilities remained with PHS.



Sleeping area at New Fountain shelter



Common seating area at New Fountain shelter

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Timeline

2013	Westbank purchases shelter site at 36 Blood Alley for redevelopment
March 2015	BC Housing and PHS begin focussed discussions on how and where to relocate New Fountain shelter beds and SRO units
April 2016 to December 2016	Residents of 80 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units at 36 Blood Alley relocated to other PHS facilities
August 2015	BC Housing initiates review of possible site locations and options for the shelter beds
January 2016	BC Housing purchases 356 E Hastings, a former auto glass repair store built in 1947, to shelter 60 guests in low-barrier, harm reduction facility
April 2016	Initial plans for 356 East Hastings are submitted to City of Vancouver by BC Housing; City does not require a change in zoning despite change-in-use, waives public hearing component
August 2016	City of Vancouver issues Development Permit for 356 East Hastings
July 2016	Renovation – including structural upgrade to seismic standards of 356 East Hastings begins
Aug 2017	Renovation completed. Typical shelter agreements have a term of 3 years, but during negotiations between PHS and BC Housing regarding the redevelopment of the Blood Alley site, BC Housing's Real Estate department agreed to a 5-year lease term for the new shelter with an option of renewing
August 2017	First day of operation for New Fountain at 356 E. Hastings. Two sites operated simultaneously for two weeks to allow guests to learn about new location and make transition. The transition phase also allowed time for staff to be trained and orientated on the new site's building systems; develop safety and other policies and procedures for the new site

Financing

\$2,175,000 Purchase price 356 East Hastings
\$2,290,000 Renovation/construction of new site

Stakeholder Contributions

BC Housing

- › Purchased the site
- › Worked with PHS on the shelter design
- › Engaged architect to design the shelter and assist with obtaining City of Vancouver permits
- › Worked with local businesses to ensure the design fit with the community

PHS

- › Operated New Fountain shelter at its old location as well as the new location;
- › Actively contributed to the design of the purpose-renovated shelter at 356 East Hastings;
- › Worked with local businesses to explain the project and gain community acceptance.

City of Vancouver

- › Enforces building standards
- › Issued development and occupancy permits



Catalyst for Change

After more than 100 years of service, Hotel Stanley and the New Fountain Hotel at 36 Blood Alley Square were in poor condition and infested with pests. Portland Hotel Society managed both the shelter and short-term housing as a minimal barrier facility, serving guests and residents who were often turned away from other facilities because of their pets, drug use, disruptive behaviour, or participation in the sex trade.

The New Fountain shelter facility was far from ideal. Entrance to the shelter was via a flight of 26 steps, presenting an immediate obstacle for people with mobility issues. Once inside, guests faced a row of rooms on a long hallway with few amenities. Some areas were closed off due to air quality concerns. Washrooms presented health, safety and privacy issues, and there were concerns about moisture ingress.

Redevelopment

In early 2015, BC Housing and PHS looked in earnest for an alternative location to serve the shelter and housing residents using the 36 Blood Alley Square facility. In the midst of an opioid crisis and unprecedented fatalities from overdoses, the need for a safe shelter to replace the 56-shelter beds and rooms for 80 low-income units provided at 36 Blood Alley was critical.

PHS operates other housing developments in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Over nine months, PHS gradually relocated Stanley New Fountain SRO residents to their other buildings as vacancies occurred. It was fortunate at the time vacancies were needed, construction projects at three PHS buildings were completed and resulting in a number of vacancies for the resident relocation. All residents were relocated to units that were in better condition than the Stanley New Fountain units. Some of the new units were fully self-contained units with washrooms, kitchens and attractive common areas.

BC Housing purchased 356 East Hastings in January 2016. Built in 1947 as an auto glass repair business, the building featured an open floor plan with high ceilings, three skylights and street-level access. Located within the Downtown Eastside, the building is within walking distance of the original New Fountain shelter.

BC Housing and PHS began planning a purpose-renovated sheltering space as a replacement location for the New Fountain shelter, employing an architectural firm with a certified professional to assist in securing City of Vancouver building and occupancy permits.

The new space would meet City of Vancouver guidelines for homeless shelters, employing design elements to address the unique needs of guests who may have complex medical needs, use opioids, have pets, need storage for personal belongings or have other needs not typically accommodated in emergency shelters.

City of Vancouver permits were acquired August 2016. The City asked that a retail component be included in the development to retain appeal to the broader community and that the shelter renovation design reduced the need for incoming shelter guests to congregate on the sidewalk. The retail component is approximately 75 per cent of the building's storefront.

The retail operator is not yet in place in the designated retail space, but there are plans for a social venture or training facility, which would occupy most of the shelter's storefront. The remaining portion of the building's storefront is a secure indoor area where guests can queue prior to admittance to the shelter to reduce sidewalk traffic.

Design and Construction

Designing a renovated space to meet the needs of shelter guests with complex needs was achieved through cooperation among BC Housing, PHS and the City of Vancouver. PHS was involved from the beginning ensuring the renovations supported or enhanced the programs and services they could provide. Together the partners ensured the shelter design accommodated harm reduction, design principles, wheel-chair accessibility, energy efficiency, health and safety and other unique needs of clients with multiple barriers to securing long-term housing.

Design considerations ranged from measures to inhibit pest infestation and facilitate cleaning, guest privacy, and approaches that recognized the unique challenges of people who use opioids either through injection or inhalation.

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Design Features	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Plywood rather than drywall for interior walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Durable and difficult to smash ➤ Reduces guest evictions for property damage ➤ Fewer repairs required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ramped flooring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ With no seam at the wall, insect infestations are less common and cleaning is easier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Guest intake area off-street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reduces queuing outdoors and associated impacts on neighboring businesses ➤ Protection from weather for guests and staff ➤ Space for guests to sort through belongings prior to entering shelter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Washrooms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doors swing outward • lights on timers • occupied/vacant switch • stalls are fully enclosed • frosted glass on doors • panic buttons • drains in each stall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Toilets are often a point of conflict in shelters. Outward swinging doors improve safety in the event of a drug overdose. Rather than slumping against a closed door – which is then almost impossible to open – an unconscious person leans against a door that swings out and can be rescued. In addition, violent encounters in toilet stalls are possible as the attacker can wedge themselves against an inward opening door and prevent escape or rescue ➤ With lights-on motion detectors and clear indicators that a stall is in use, staff are alerted to danger if a door is locked but the light is off ➤ Frosted glass allows light to pass through, but maintains personal privacy for the occupant ➤ Fully enclosed stalls give guests privacy often providing the only opportunity in the day to be alone and free of disturbances ➤ Each stall has a dedicated drain, making cleaning easier ➤ Panic buttons make stalls safer in the event of a medical emergency or threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Women-only sleeping area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Additional privacy and safety for those women who request it, the women-only area has showers and washrooms inaccessible from the general area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Quiet room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For guests who expect to be working or attending important appointments the following day, the quiet area has reduced tolerance for noise and disruption compared to the general sleeping area ➤ This innovation helps working people maintain employment and improves attendance at medical, court or other appointments

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Design Features	Benefits
➤ In-shelter medical treatment	➤ Health care workers provide medical care on-site, reducing missed appointments and improving compliance with medical advice and treatments ➤ Treatment is provided by health care staff familiar with addiction and mental health issues, reducing reluctance to access health care services ➤ Making initial access to health care as comfortable and easy as possible encourages and promotes further care
➤ Storage for personal belongings	➤ Secure storage literally unburdens guests of the need to carry their belongings around all day. Reducing the threat of theft or loss of personal goods reduces stress and the physical work required to meet the demands of the day
➤ Partitions and night lights	➤ With partial walls and floor plans that physically mark out bed spaces, guests have a degree of privacy not typically seen in shelters. This degree of privacy may reduce the potential for conflict ➤ Nightlights are directed towards the user or the floor and do not shine on other guests
➤ Multi-use space	➤ Food service, supervised drug use and other activities are facilitated by a multi-use space that can accommodate training programs. The warming kitchen where meals are heated and served adjoins the multi-use space and allows staff to dispense supplies for safe injection and to monitor guests' activities

Successes

The purpose-renovated facility is a vast improvement over the original shelter, providing a safer, cleaner and more accessible service to vulnerable clients. While the majority of shelter guests use the open-floor co-ed room, a women's-only section and quiet area support are important additional amenities.



Kitchen space at New Fountain shelter



Challenges and Mitigation

The relocation and renovations of New Fountain Shelter faced and addressed the following challenges:

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Maintaining services for vulnerable clients during shelter relocation to avoid service gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › To ensure new site could be repurposed as quickly as possible BC Housing and PHS took the following steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selected a site already owned by BC Housing • renovated an existing building rather than demolishing and building a new structure • hired a consultant to liaise with City around rezoning and permitting • worked with the City to secure discretionary rezoning rather than going through a potentially lengthy public hearing, which saved a lot of time • the new site was selected in part because of the proximity to the original site, which meant guests would be able to find the new site easily and would have continued access to supports and services in the neighborhood • the original shelter remained open for the first two weeks of the new shelter's operation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Renovating an older facility rather than redeveloping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Existing features such as concrete floors, high ceilings and skylights were amenable with shelter needs for easy-to-clean surfaces, good air quality and natural light › Three original skylights were retained and provide natural light. The original high ceilings were retained and contribute to a sense of spaciousness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Located in a commercial area, the new shelter site is required to include a retail element 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Three-quarters of the building's street frontage will be occupied by a social enterprise, likely providing food services. Further work is required with community partners to develop and initiate a viable social enterprise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Sidewalk traffic has increased with the opening of the new shelter, which requires ongoing management by the operator to reduce potential impacts on retail locations within the site and neighbourhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › An indoor-intake area was created so incoming guests could be interviewed and admitted. Guests are also able to reserve a bed for up to 30 consecutive nights, providing stability for them and shortening the intake process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Maintaining good air quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The new facility has very high ceilings and a high capacity HVAC system that completely refreshes indoor air 12 to 14 times per hour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › New site at 356 East Hastings was built in 1947 as an auto glass shop and did not meet modern seismic standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The building was refurbished to meet modern seismic standards including installation of perimeter and demising shear walls, 23 mini-piles to depth of 25+ feet installed on west wall, concrete grade and upstand beams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Local Business Improvement Association (BIA) and a nearby business voiced concerns about a new shelter in the area (e.g. people loitering, esthetics, substance use) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › PHS, as well as BC Housing Operations staff, met the business owner to allay concerns. The new shelter is located on the same block as another emergency shelter, an SRO, and the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users/drop in, as well as a BC Housing regional office



Lessons Learned

- › Working in collaboration with PHS and other partners in the early stages of design, BC Housing was able to design the renovation for the unique needs of clients facing multiple barriers to accessing emergency shelters
- › The auto glass space, with its open space, high ceilings, and concrete floors, proved workable as a space that could be repurposed into an emergency shelter
- › Selecting a site with an open floor plan, such as an auto glass space, allowed for easy incorporation of design features that are known to ensure a safe, comfortable and functional space
- › Selecting a location and a design that allows for discretionary rezoning allowed the site to be repurposed more quickly
- › Hiring a consultant to liaise with the City helped ensure permitting and rezoning could happen efficiently
- › Selecting a new site close to the old site helped ease the transition for guests, as the new location was easy to find and there would be no disruption in guests' access to nearby services and supports
- › Neighbourhood concerns were reduced by selecting a site nearby, retaining the majority of the storefront for a business to fit in with the rest of the block, and including an indoor space for intake to limit queues on the sidewalk
- › Met with the local Business Improvement Association to address any questions or concerns



Storage area for guests belongings at New Fountain shelter



Washrooms at New Fountain shelter

More Information:

Visit BC Housing's Research Centre at www.bchousing.org to find the latest workshops, research and publications on the key challenges and successes in building and operating affordable, sustainable housing.

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