

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Foundation plans to add 2,000 housing units



No cash announced yet for 10-year project to fight homelessness

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A group of Vancouver business leaders tackling homelessness say they will aim to provide 2,000 units over the next 10 years, which they say is enough permanent housing to get everyone off the streets.

The **Streetohome Foundation**, whose high-powered board includes people such as mining magnate Frank Giustra, developer John Mackay and condo marketer Bob Rennie, has been working for the last 18 months to figure out which piece of the homelessness puzzle it should tackle.

However, it did not announce any financial commitments as it launched its 10-year plan yesterday, which included a target of 600 units by 2012.

Streetohome Foundation spokesman Don Fairbairn said that's because the group wants to start the process of educating the community before asking for money for specific projects.

"We're not launching the campaign," Mr. Fairbairn said. "We're sending the plan out into the community. You need to start the dialogue."

The plan, which focuses on permanent housing over shelters, puts the foundation at odds with Vancouver's current political leaders, who, facing a situation where the province's 1,100 new permanent housing units will not open for another two to five years, are focusing on shelters and transitional housing to get people off the streets in the short term.

There has been intense debate behind the scenes about where exactly foundation money should go. For the past few weeks, there's been much talk of it committing as much as \$25-million to housing projects.

However, there's been a disagreement on whether it should go to help the province pay for eight social-housing sites that are planned but unfunded or to help the city of Vancouver with temporary-housing solutions.

As well, existing non-profit groups have expressed concerns about the foundation competing with them to get donations for housing.

Mr. Fairbairn acknowledged that different levels of government have different ideas about what the foundation and its board of about two dozen business leaders should do.

"Governments may not agree, but we're not here to serve the interests of the province or the city," he said. "We're here to solve the problem."

The foundation started in 2008 as then-mayor Sam Sullivan and his city manager, Judy Rogers, looked for ways to get other partners involved in tackling the homelessness problem as part of their Project Civil City.

The idea was that business leaders would form a more effective lobby group than traditional housing advocates. As well, the city had hired former deputy premier Ken Dobell to lobby the federal government for tax changes that would give additional write-offs to anyone donating money for homelessness projects, a move that they hoped would attract more business donors.

The federal government turned down it down, but the foundation continued its work anyway.

Mr. Fairbairn said it's key that top business leaders, not just governments and non-profit groups, be seen to be leading the charge to combat homelessness.

"There's a better level of confidence and understanding that what's being done is the right thing," he said.

The foundation's 10-year plan also focuses on motivating community involvement and prevention - to help young people before they end up on the streets.

The foundation has already committed \$2.1-million to four city initiatives: \$500,000 last December to the first of Mayor Gregor Robertson's emergency-shelter programs; \$250,000 to a project for the chronically homeless at the London Hotel; \$500,000 for a native mothers' centre; and \$860,000 for a demonstration research project at the Bosman's Hotel with the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/foundation-plans-to-add-2000-housing-units/article1427903/>