

Operation Phoenix timeline: Milestones on the road to improvement

By Elaine O'Connor, The Province January 19, 2010 7:27 AM



Minister of Housing and Social Development Rich Coleman at the opening of the refurbished Beacon Hotel in September. Coleman was appointed B.C.'s homelessness czar in March.

Photograph by: Jason Payne, PNG, The Province

OPERATION PHOENIX TIMELINE

Some of the key developments affecting the Downtown Eastside since Operation Phoenix was launched nearly a year ago:

Feb. 2: Operation Phoenix begins.

Feb. 2: **Streethome Foundation** launched. The non-profit aims to help end homelessness with funds raised from private donors. Inaugural projects are the renovation of 25 units at the London Hotel and creation of 16 rooms at the Aboriginal Mothers Centre on Dundas Street. **Streethome** president Jae Kim said the organization plans to add new housing, not merely preserve the current inventory. It also plans to build supportive housing outside of the Downtown Eastside in other parts of the city.

Feb. 4: The Rainier Hotel at 309 Carrall Street opens. The 41 units are made up of 21 supportive housing units for women and 20 beds for a residential treatment program for

former sex-trade workers. It's the ninth social housing building designated for women-only in the Downtown Eastside.

Feb. 5: Vancouver Police Chief Jim Chu releases a 59-page report called Project Lockstep and calls for the appointment of a "director for the most vulnerable" people in the area. Chu said the new "MVP director" should have the authority to coordinate services among agencies -- including health, criminal justice, housing and police -- facilitate information-sharing and hold agencies accountable to measurable targets.

Feb. 16: In his throne speech, Premier Gordon Campbell offers up new commitments to combat poverty, homelessness, mental health issues and drug addiction in the Downtown Eastside.

Feb. 17: A three-month Province investigation reveals that in 2007, the three levels of government and private donors spent about \$360-million -- or nearly \$1 million a day -- providing housing and support in the community. The provincial government was the biggest spender, forking out \$200 million in services, payments and projects.

Mar. 3: Housing minister Rich Coleman is appointed B.C.'s homelessness czar with a mandate to integrate housing, health and income-assistance services for chronically homeless people in Vancouver, Victoria, Surrey, Kelowna and Prince George.

Mar. 4: The Pivot Legal Society calls for fines to be imposed on notorious slumlord families, the Sahotas and Laudisios, for violations at their Downtown Eastside SROs.

Mar. 5: B.C. Auditor-General John Doyle slams the province's homelessness record. There is no comprehensive plan in place, he says. Goals and objectives are unclear and there is no overall measure or target in place to define success.

Mar. 18: Vancouver police abandon new quotas for increased ticketing and street patrols in the June 10: The city closes down the Downtown Eastside.

March: The city's Hastings Street Renaissance Program, which aims to fill vacant, boarded-up retail spaces between Cambie and Gore, is implemented. It covers renovation costs of up to \$50,000 per facade. Six storefronts signed up.

May 29: Vancouver city hall orders the owners of three of the Downtown Eastside's most rundown hotels, the Balmoral, Lucky Lodge, and Keefer Rooms, to bring their buildings up to code or they'll be taken to court.

-- Cheryl Chan, Staff Reporter

- is included.

Downtown Eastside's historic The Only Sea Foods cafe after a police investigation leads to charges of drug trafficking on the premises of the circa-1924 restaurant and officers testify the narcotics were packaged on site in a way that could have contaminated food.

June 15: Construction begins on the \$2.3-million Oppenheimer Park revitalization project. Some residents protest as a fence goes up and they lose the amenity for the duration of the project. Completion is likely before the Olympics. A new field house for community activities
June 17: The Carnegie Community Action Project activist group releases its 2009 report on the state of SROs and hotel rooms which concludes that at least 1,583 rooms are renting at more than \$425 per month, \$50 more than the welfare shelter rate.

June 18: The Walton Hotel, one of the Downtown Eastside SRO properties bought by B.C. Housing and closed for more than a year for \$4.6 million in renovations, reopens as a 48-unit building run by the Lookout Emergency Aid Society.

June 29: The city closes a 38-bed HEAT (Homeless Emergency Action Team) shelter on Granville St. after public pressure from False Creek North residents complaining of crime and street disorder. It later reopens.

July 8: A new heroin trial, the Study to Assess Longer-term Opioid Medication Effectiveness, (SALOME), makes the news with a four-year-trial set to launch with 322 addicts after the Olympics. It will determine if the legal narcotic hydromorphone, or Dilaudid, is more effective than methadone for keeping addicts off heroin.

July 23: The body of Downtown Eastside sex worker Lisa Arlene Francis, 41, is found floating in the Fraser River near Bentley St.

She had been reported missing July 17. The murder remains unsolved.

- Timeline to be continued tomorrow.

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