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COMMUNIQUÉ

NEW HOUSING INITIATIVE LAUNCHED WITH OPENING IN DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

VANCOUVER – October 12, 2005 - The first pilot housing project completed under the Vancouver Agreement officially opened today. The Honourable Stephen Owen, Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State for Sport, on behalf of the Honourable Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour and Housing, the Honourable Ida Chong, Minister of Community Services and MLA for Oak Bay-Gordon Head, and Deputy Mayor of Vancouver, Councillor Ellen Woodsworth, officially opened the Silver and Avalon Hotel. This project provides 86 units of affordable housing for those at risk of homelessness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

The Vancouver Agreement is an urban development initiative involving the federal, provincial and municipal governments that promotes partnerships between the three levels of government, community organizations, and business to make Vancouver a health, safe, and sustainable place to live. The Silver and Avalon Hotel was a partnership initiative between the three levels of government and the Angelicola family, who has owned the hotel for 30 years.

Under the agreement, the Government of Canada contributed \$1.1 million to upgrade the building through CMHC's Residential Rehabilitation Program (RRAP), as well as \$36,000 through Western Economic Diversification Canada for the first phase of the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Building Managers Training Program. The provincial government, through BC Housing, provided \$255,000 for the on-site support worker provided by the Lookout Emergency Aid Society. The Vancouver Agreement provided \$36,800 for the second phase of the SRO Building Managers Training Program.

"The strength of our communities rests on housing. The Government of Canada is working on many fronts to address the housing needs of all Canadians," said Minister Owen. "We are pleased to work in close cooperation with our partners, through the Vancouver Agreement, in order to provide for those who need it most, safe and affordable housing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside."

"We're committed to working with other levels of government and the local community to help at-risk area residents," said the Honourable Ida Chong, Minister of Community Services. "We know that investing in stable, affordable housing is critical, and the Vancouver Agreement is proving to be an effective way to make that happen."

One of the objectives of the Vancouver Agreement is to improve living conditions in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside by enhancing the quality of accommodation and supporting the long-term tenure of residents in SRO hotels, many of whom deal with addiction and mental illness. Based on the success of the Silver and Avalon, plans are underway to expand the program.

“This is a good example of how working together can bring results,” stated Deputy Mayor Ellen Woodsworth. “Creating stable, affordable and safe housing is vital to sustaining healthy and inclusive communities and cities.”

In addition to receiving a new electrical and plumbing system, common bathrooms and kitchens, an elevator, and sprinklers, each unit in this heritage building was renovated. Twenty of the 86 units are accessible for persons with disabilities. As well, tenant health and stability within the hotel are improved with the provision of the outreach worker and hotel management training through the new SRO Building Managers Training Program. Ron and Tina Konkin currently manage the Silver and Avalon Hotel.

“We are thrilled to have had the opportunity to participate in this project. Our family is thankful that the Vancouver Agreement partners recognize the needs in the Downtown Eastside and are working to improve the housing situation” said Ron Konkin, Manager of the Silver and Avalon Hotel. “This means not only renovating buildings, but providing support for the tenants who often require assistance with basic nutrition, taking medication and other personal care needs.”

“The partnership facilitated by the Vancouver Agreement between government, our non-profit society and the private owners of the Silver and Avalon Hotel has been successful in effectively and affordably meeting the long-term housing needs of people with a history of homelessness,” said Karen O’Shannacery, Executive Director of the Lookout Emergency Aid Society. “The residents repeatedly state that they feel safer and more supported in the Silver and Avalon, which contributes to their health and stability.”

BC Housing is the provincial crown agency that develops, manages and administers a wide range of subsidized housing options for British Columbians in greatest need. The provincial government has increased funding for housing programs to nearly \$172 million for the 2005/2006 fiscal year, the largest ever level in British Columbia.

The Government of Canada, through CMHC, spends close to \$230 million in British Columbia annually primarily in support of some 74,000 lower-income households, including ongoing financial support for the many non-profit and cooperative housing projects. In addition to providing funds for lower-income households, the programs also help emergency shelters and transitional housing for victims of family violence, seniors, persons with disabilities and Aboriginal people repair their dwellings to minimum health and safety levels.

A backgrounder is attached.

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BACKGROUNDER

Partners and Funding:

- The federal government, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, provided \$1.1 million through the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP)
- The federal government, through Western Economic Diversification Canada, provided \$36,000 for Phase 1 of the SRO Building Managers Training Program
- The provincial government, through BC Housing, provided \$255,000 to fund the provision of a resident support worker through the Lookout Emergency Aid Society to ensure tenants have access to community services.
- The Vancouver Agreement provided \$36,800 for Phase 2 of the SRO Building Managers Training program.

The Vancouver Agreement

Signed on March 9, 2000, the Vancouver Agreement is an urban development initiative of the governments of Canada, British Columbia and Vancouver. The first focus is the city's Downtown Eastside because of the serious economic, social and public safety challenges found in the community, which is Canada's poorest neighbourhood.

The goals of the Vancouver Agreement are:

- To increase economic development in the Downtown Eastside
- To improve the health of area residents
- To increase public safety

Four strategies, each with an array of projects and initiatives, were developed to achieve these goals.

1. Economic development and job creation.
2. Dismantle the area's open drug scene.
3. Turn problem hotels, particularly those that offer single-room-occupancy housing, into safe, clean places to live.
4. Make the community safer for those most vulnerable, particularly women, youth and children.

Silver and Avalon Hotel Residential Support Services Program

The Lookout Emergency Aid Society, through a grant from BC Housing, provides on-site, daily support services for 35 of the hotel's residents. Lookout staff works with residents to assess their needs and to assist them in accessing needed health and social services to meet their housing and health needs. The tenant support worker provides services such as assisting residents in managing their medications and finances, teaching life skills through, for instance, assisting residents with shopping, cooking and attending appointments, as well as encouraging good personal hygiene and room cleaning. The worker liaises closely with appropriate medical, psychiatric and dental care and other community services, including home support, to help residents improve their health and their quality of life.

All of the residents in the program have a history of unsettled living. Most have come from shelters, hospitals or unsafe living situations and have never accessed support services in their community. Length of tenancy, since the renovations and implementation of the support services, has increased providing residents the opportunity to stabilize their lives.

The Government of Canada's Renovation Programs

The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) offers financial assistance to low-income homeowners and landlords of affordable housing occupied by low-income households, to repair their dwellings to a minimum level of health and safety, and undertake modifications for persons with disabilities.

RRAP has been in existence for 30 years and is a cornerstone of Canada's national housing policy. The extension of funding for three more years is part of the Government of Canada's national housing strategy, which includes a \$1 billion investment in affordable housing by 2007-08.

In 2004, over 1,600 units were assisted in B.C. under RRAP and related programs.

The Shelter Enhancement Program (SEP) assists in the repair, rehabilitation, purchase or construction of shelters for victims of family violence.

The Emergency Repair Program (ERP) offers assistance to low-income households to undertake emergency repairs required for the continued safe occupancy of their home.

The Home Assistance for Seniors Independence (HASI) program assists low-income seniors to make minor home adaptations to extend the time they live in their own homes independently.