



Greater Victoria Commission to End Homelessness Announced

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — A new regional commission to spearhead implementation of the *Mayor's Task Force on Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Addictions and Homelessness* action plan to house 1,550 homeless in Greater Victoria over five years was announced by co-chairs Mayor Alan Lowe and the Province's former Conflict of Interest Commissioner, Ted Hughes. The *Greater Victoria Commission to End Homelessness* will drive the community's commitment to meet action plan targets and develop additional strategies to end homelessness.

The Commission will foster collaboration and coordination among funding agencies, governments, service providers and key stakeholders including the faith, Aboriginal and business community.

"This organization may be the most important piece of the puzzle in terms of bringing resources and commitment together on our region's most pressing issue," noted Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe. "The Greater Victoria Commission to End Homelessness will transform how we work towards one shared goal, to end homelessness in our Region."

"We are extremely fortunate to have the experience and passion, not to mention the integrity, Honourable Ted Hughes brings to this venture as my co-chair," added Mayor Lowe. "Ted is a long-time advocate for the rights of children and the Aboriginal community, and will be an esteemed partner on this journey we are about to embark on."

"I am honoured to be a part of this exciting movement underway in Victoria. There is no greater work one can do, than to invest in the community they live in and feel passionate about," said Ted Hughes. "The strength of the community has got us to this point and the ongoing commitment of the community will see us succeed."

The first community in British Columbia to do so, Victoria joins Calgary and Ottawa, and over 300 cities in the United States that have created community commissions to implement long term plans to end homelessness. A delegation of representatives from Victoria recently visited Portland, Oregon to learn about the success they are seeing in the first three years of their 10-year plan.

The Downtown Victoria Business Association will contribute \$100,000 to the Commission to assist in creating new programs to help homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless.

"I want to ensure that we are a part of the solution and as business leaders and partners with the City we need to address the street issues that are affecting our businesses and our region at large," noted Darlene Hollstein, Chair of the Downtown Victoria Business Association.

"The Downtown Victoria Business Association is making a plea to other business groups in our community to step forward and be a part of the solution and likewise commit much needed funds towards making this vision to end homelessness a reality."

Both the Vancouver Island Health Authority and the Capital Regional District (CRD) will also contribute \$150,000 each to support the work of the Commission.

"I am delighted to see our work to address homelessness in 2007 has grown into a broad community commitment," added CRD Chair, Denise Blackwell. "This issue affects our whole region, and I am proud that, as the regional government, the CRD is contributing both financially and through the energy of staff and Board of Directors to help find solutions to this challenge facing Greater Victoria."

Since the Mayor's Task Force report released in October, progress has been made in several key areas:

- BC Housing and the City of Victoria announced an expedited plan to introduce more than 170 new and upgraded housing units to reduce homelessness, including the relocation and expansion of the Streetlink emergency shelter.
- The first of four outreach teams to be funded by Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Victoria Integrated Community Outreach Team, initiated by the Victoria Police department, hit the streets in January to engage people who have significant mental illnesses or addictions, who do not have access to permanent housing, and who have had little or no involvement with the mental health system.
- The First 50 Committee, established in early December, has been actively working to find units to house 50 people by March 1, 2008. In partnership with the Housing Action Team, made up of nine different agencies including VIHA, BC Housing, Downtown Service Providers, the CRD, and a dedicated group of realtors, developers and business owners, over 100 potential new units have been identified in the past six weeks, and housing providers have found units for 65 people since October.

"I have been doing this work for years in Victoria, and I have never seen a community rally behind a cause in the way Victoria has responded to the Mayor's Task Force action plan," said Reverend Al Tysick, from the Our Place Society and Chair of the Downtown Service Providers. "Our community is on a roll and this Commission is the key piece to keeping the right people and the money focused on this issue. We're on the cusp of something great here."

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