

## Developing Story: Fire hall to include social housing

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June 24, 2014 01:50 PM

• [Vancouver Courier](#) • (news)



Supportive housing for low-income women and their children will be built above the new Fire Hall No. 5. This rendering of the proposed design is a view from the corner of 54th Avenue and Kerr Street.

A plan to build a new Fire Hall No. 5 at 3090 East 54th, which includes 31 supportive housing units for low-income women and their children, is the subject of an open house June 25.

The project is a joint initiative between the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services and YWCA Metro Vancouver.

The total budget is \$19.3 million — \$10.13 million for the replacement of the fire hall and \$9 million to build housing.

The city is contributing \$5.5 million, while the YWCA is providing \$2.2 million and \$1.3 million is coming from other fundraising.

The YWCA is also committing to raise \$1 million for an endowment fund to cover operating expenses for the housing.

Arthur Mills, vice president of housing services for YWCA Metro Vancouver, said the six-storey building will include four floors of housing above the fire hall and will feature two and three-bedroom units.

“It’s a great location for families because it’s near elementary schools, grocery stores and a community centre,” he said. “Our work aims to address the systemic causes of poverty and social inequality. Our particular clients are single mothers and their children, so we’re trying to provide some safe and affordable housing for that client group.”

Mills said the YWCA will establish an application process six to eight months before the building is completed, which is expected to be in the winter of 2017.

Mills said women head about 80 per cent of single-parent families in Vancouver.

“They have the lowest income and the highest poverty rates and many barriers to economic independence,” he said. “They also have great difficulty in finding affordable housing.”

As the economic climate has changed, organizations have had to become increasingly creative to build more affordable housing units in B.C., according to Mills.

The [YWCA is involved \(http://www.vancourier.com/news/developing-story-social-housing-library-eyed-for-strathcona-1.696931\)](http://www.vancourier.com/news/developing-story-social-housing-library-eyed-for-strathcona-1.696931) with the city and the Vancouver Public Library in another housing project in Vancouver at 729-730 East Hastings. A six-storey building is being built on the city-owned site, which will include two floors for the library topped by four floors of social housing, dubbed Cause We Care House and designated for single mothers.

Mills said the last project he was involved with that was entirely paid for by B.C. Housing was in about 2003. He opened two projects two years ago, of which B.C. Housing funded the great majority of costs, including operating funding, but municipalities had to provide the land and the YWCA had to raise \$1 million towards capital costs for each project.

“If you want to build social housing today, you’ve got to be in with municipalities... So if the city is building the fire hall and the land component is free, that helps to defray some of the costs in making the housing happen,” he said. “But you’ve got to get creative today if you want to be building housing because the days of B.C. Housing having a deep pocket are just not there anymore. They’ve been very, very good supporters of us — they’ve come to the table with some capital grants, but that seemingly unlimited funding that they had in the past is just not there anymore.”

The open house runs from 5 to 8 p.m. June 25 at 3090 East 54th Ave.

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