



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Greater Victoria Rent Bank secures key funding
from BC Rent Bank and United Way Greater Victoria**
Pilot project helping renters extends for one year

Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ territories | May 12, 2021 — Renters in low- to- moderate income households in the Greater Victoria region now have longer-term access to a rent bank in their community. Started as a pilot program operated by the Community Social Planning Council, this project has been extended to March 2022 with ongoing funding by BC Rent Bank (a project funded by the provincial government), and new funding from United Way Greater Victoria.

This funding will enable the Community Social Planning Council to support hundreds of households in the region with loans and/or support services, such as mediation, advocacy, referrals and help with accessing government programs. Households eligible for rent bank services are renters who are struggling to pay rent and/or utilities due to a short-term crisis or unanticipated income shortages. The need for this type of program for the community has grown dramatically in light of COVID-19.

Since early 2020, United Way has worked in its capacity as convener and community facilitator to turn the concept of a rent bank into reality. In February 2021, the Greater Victoria Rent Bank opened its doors as a three-month COVID-19 pilot program, using seed funding and operational support from BC Rent Bank by way of the provincial government.

Though Rent Banks are only a small piece of the homelessness prevention puzzle, they fill an important gap for tenants in short-term crisis. “The demand for the COVID-19 pilot program was overwhelming, with over 200 households applying in the first ten weeks,” says Diana Gibson, Executive Director of the Community Social Planning Council. “It shows that this new phase of Greater Victoria’s rent bank program – that we’re announcing today – will be stepping in to meet a critical gap in the region going forward.”

Rent banks focus on housing stability and homelessness prevention for low- to- moderate income renters. They provide various support services that help to stabilize a person's housing, including financial assistance; navigation with understanding and accessing benefits and other community supports; financial literacy; mediation between landlords and tenants; and advocacy for tenant rights.

“Forty-eight percent of households in Greater Victoria are housing insecure, with one in five households paying more than 50 percent on housing – and we know that rent banks provide much-needed services, which is the reason we are building the foundation of a provincial network that is making a real difference in renters’ lives right here in Greater Victoria,” says Melissa Giles, BC Rent Bank’s Project Lead.

The Greater Victoria Rent Bank continues to actively seek long-term funding partners that will become part of

homelessness prevention housing solutions, ensuring that tenants can retain their housing and landlords can be paid.

The loans provided by rent banks are small and interest-free, with eligibility assessed on renters having the ability to repay loans over a six- to 24-month period. Where funding allows, these may be complemented by grants.

QUOTES

Melissa Giles, Project Lead, BC Rent Bank

“We’re so incredibly grateful to be working with the United Way Greater Victoria and Community Social Planning Council – because it is through partnerships with local organizations doing good things on the ground that we’re able to advance our mandate of all renters in B.C. having access to rent bank support.”

Diana Gibson, Executive Director of the Community Social Planning Council

“We are grateful to the United Way Greater Victoria and BC Rent Bank for recognizing the critical gap this program fills and making this year’s Rent Bank program possible. We are working to expand this to include a grants program this year and to build stable long-term funding for the program going forward.”

Mark Breslauer, CEO, United Way Greater Victoria

“Given the impact of COVID-19 on families and individuals in our community, we believe the Rent Bank is a strong solution to provide stability for households in need. We are proud to be a foundational supporter and invite others to join us to help more residents in our region to reach their full potential. Thank you to the BC Government for leading this important initiative.”

David Eby, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing

“Part of addressing our homelessness crisis means preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. Rent banks have been proven to be successful in helping people in financial distress keep their homes. We couldn’t take these actions to support people without our community partners. I’m so grateful to the Community Social Planning Council for its role in helping us to deliver this vital service and to the United Way Greater Victoria for stepping up to be a funding partner. Together, we are working to prevent homelessness and offer renters security.”

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About the Community Social Planning Council

The Community Social Planning Council is a non-profit community organization that has been leading housing and homelessness, antipoverty and broader community development initiatives across the region for over 80 years. Regional programs include the Homelessness Prevention Program, the Point in Time Homeless Count and the Low-Income Transit Assistance Program. For more information visit www.communitycouncil.ca.

About the United Way Greater Victoria

United Way Greater Victoria is a trusted leader, influencer and catalyst for change. United, we accelerate change to improve the lives of our neighbours who need it most, making our local community stronger. We believe everyone in Greater Victoria should have the opportunity to reach their potential. Our priorities are focused on assisting isolated seniors, families in need, and individuals struggling with mental health challenges and/or addictions. Our vision is to build a safe and inclusive community where diversity and belonging connect us. Last fiscal year, United Way raised \$6.2 million thanks to over 7,000 donors and 200 workplaces opening their offices to run employee giving programs. Through our community partnerships, over 125,000 people on southern

Vancouver Island received support. Show your local love today by making a gift to United Way at www.uwgv.ca.

About BC Rent Bank

BC Rent Bank is a project of VanCity Community Foundation and funded by the Province of BC. The mandate of the BC Rent Bank is to support the funding of existing rent banks; to provide support and seed funding for the establishment of new rent banks in B.C.; and, to create the infrastructure necessary to support a potential future province-wide rent bank system or service. For more information or to find your local rent bank, visit <http://bcrentbank.ca>.

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