

NOT WITHOUT A FIGHT!

SOLUTIONS FROM THE STREETS

The low-income neighbourhood of Whalley is being devoured by a many-headed beast: Surrey City Council, BC Housing, social work agencies, and developers, all working in tandem.

We cannot let them destroy 46 units of non-market housing without a fight. The loss of Nickerson Place not only hurts the handful of people still living there; it impacts dozens of former tenants who have already been evicted onto the streets, hundreds of homeless people who were never housed in the mods, and everyone who will become homeless in the months to come, especially as the current eviction moratorium draws to an end.

We need housing that is run by and for tenants, not for profit or as a warehouse for the poor. We need universal housing for all working class and Indigenous people.

Universal housing means nobody is homeless, nobody is evicted, and nobody has to hand their wage over to a bloodsucking landlord. It means an end to the unacceptable choice that homeless people are forced to accept between being on the street or being institutionalized. It means redistributing stolen wealth back to Indigenous nations in the form of homes that Indigenous people are disproportionately denied.

If we organize, we can begin to wrench the housing we need out of the market and the grip of social work agencies.

Coming together to resist the closure of the TD mods is part of a broader struggle for free, tenant-run, universal housing in Surrey and beyond. The housing we need will not come as a gift from politicians or non-profit organizations. It will be hard-won through our own self-activity, militant resistance, and collective power.

RED BRAID ALLIANCE

We are a revolutionary working class and Indigenous organization active on lands occupied by BC, Canada.

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RESIST THE CLOSURE OF THE TD MODS

FIGHT FOR TENANT-RUN HOUSING

In the midst of a global pandemic and spiralling economic crisis, Surrey is demolishing one of its few non-market, welfare-rate housing developments.

A 46-unit modular housing building, officially called Nickerson Place, but more commonly known as the "TD mods," is scheduled to close on August 19th, even though there are more than a thousand people on the streets of Surrey who need affordable housing.

Nickerson Place residents are being cleared out so that Bosa Properties, a high-end real estate developer, can reclaim the lot and build 1,200 luxury condo units where the modular housing currently stands.

The City of Surrey has subsidized and incentivized the condo development, despite strong opposition from modular housing residents and members of the street community.

The City of Surrey and BC Housing always intended Nickerson Place to be a temporary site, but promised that permanent housing would be built in time to rehouse residents. Now they are shutting the mods down quietly, without so much as acknowledging that the closure means the loss of 46 welfare-rate units, which are, in the immediate term, being replaced by nothing but condos for the rich. They expect the low-income community to silently pay the price for their broken promises.

Lookout Society, which runs the TD mods on behalf of BC Housing, has been working to empty the building ahead of the August 19th deadline. Without any new housing to move tenants into, Lookout has been shuffling people around and evicting them onto the streets.

Over the past few months, Lookout has emptied dozens of rooms, boarded them up, and let them sit vacant while people languish in the streets.

The handful of tenants remaining at Nickerson Place face uncertain fates. Megan Kriger, Director of Health at Lookout, said, "We have outreach workers who are willing to work with people to look for housing, and rent subsidy dollars available if people need help making ends meet."

In other words, the tenants are being abandoned to the inadequacy, precarity, and scarcity of market housing, to compete with others for what little low-income rental housing stock still exists.

THE CITY OF SURREY SIDES WITH DEVELOPERS AGAINST THE POOR

The City of Surrey is closing 46 units of welfare-rate housing, not because the units are no longer needed, but because City Council has decided to prioritize developer profits over the needs of low-income people.

This decision follows the aggressive gentrification scheme known as the Surrey City Centre Plan, approved by Council in 2017, which charts the “bold transformation” of a low-income, suburban town centre into a high-density, high-end downtown.

The gentrification of Whalley is not natural or inevitable. It is a top-down process, organized by a City Council that serves the wealthy.

At the public hearing for the Bosa condo development, Mayor Doug McCallum dismissed opposition from the low-income community. He explained, as though lecturing petulant children to be patient, that the City of Surrey is committed to delivering 250 permanent modular homes to replace Nickerson Place and two other temporary sites. But the permanent modular housing is too little, too late. For recently-evicted and soon-to-be-homeless residents of Nickerson Place, the promise that new housing will be built over the next several years is no consolation for being thrown into the streets today.

The promised 250 permanent units are slated to replace 46 units at Nickerson Place and another 112 units at two other sites. But there are well over a thousand homeless people in Surrey, and more people are becoming homeless every day. The construction of 250 new units does not come close to justifying the closure of 160 existing units. When added together, the new and existing units would house only a third of Surrey's homeless population.

Instead of demolishing non-market housing, the City of Surrey should be building more.

The City of Surrey's response to the crisis of homelessness is to take one step forward and ten steps back. They built Nickerson Place in 2018, only to tear it down two years later, and replace it not with permanent non-market housing, but luxury condos. We are losing far more than 46 units of welfare-rate housing. The City is actively destroying low-income housing stock by incentivizing developers like Bosa to move into the predominantly low-income City Centre, where they drive up property values and drive out the poor.

SO-CALLED "SUPPORTIVE HOUSING" ADVANCES GENTRIFICATION

While Bosa Properties and the City of Surrey are conspicuous culprits in the Nickerson Place shutdown, Lookout Society is just as guilty.

The non-profit housing provider has worked hand-in-hand with the City for years, advancing gentrification and developer profits. In 2018, when the City and BC Housing cleared the 135A Strip, “cleaning up” the neighbourhood for massive investment, they contracted Lookout Society to run the trailer housing they needed to justify the displacement and warehouse the poor.

Lookout Society runs Nickerson Place, as well as two other temporary modulars in Surrey, according to the “supportive housing” model, which criminalizes and pathologizes the poor. Under this model, staff enter tenants' rooms without permission, restrict guest access, set arbitrary rules, give police information and access to tenants' rooms, and punish anyone who complains.

Supportive housing providers like Lookout produce “homeless people” as a group outside society and disconnected from broader working class and Indigenous struggles – a group that needs to be either controlled by social workers or locked up in jail. This lie justifies and continues the project of displacement and disorganization, sabotaging the collective resistance of low-income working class and Indigenous people.

Supportive housing does not solve the crisis of homelessness. All it does is shut visible poverty behind closed doors, so that low-income neighbourhoods can be rebranded and sold off to the rich.

The closure of Nickerson Place exposes the particular dangers of temporary modular housing, which is promoted as “transitional,” but ultimately transitions tenants to nowhere.

Developers and municipal governments band together to make money off of poor people's neighbourhoods, and supportive housing providers like Lookout Society make money off of managing poor people.

These three players – corporations, government, and non-profits – are three legs of a stool. They rely on one another to maintain poverty, commodify Indigenous land, and keep low-income Indigenous and working class people isolated, stigmatized, and desperate.