

**DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE STAY IS ENLIGHTENING, TROUBLING FOR MLA
Lorne Mayencourt finds insight, room for improvement in Eastside hotels**

After five days living on the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver-Burrard MLA Lorne Mayencourt has emerged with new ideas and a new determination to improve the living conditions of Vancouver's poorest citizens. "I've seen so much desperation over the past few days, but I've also found a vibrant community whose people are eager for some positive change and fresh ideas," says Mayencourt.

The City of Vancouver's recent closures of the Marr and American hotels, home to several dozen Vancouverites living in poverty, made Mayencourt wonder about the alternatives to simply evicting poor tenants. Living anonymously, without spare money or outside assistance, he set out on August 21st to get fresh insight of what it's like to live in the Eastside. "I did it the way many residents of this neighborhood are forced to: I ate when the missions and soup kitchens were open, I slept where I could find dry spaces. It's had an enormous impact on me."

Says Mayencourt, "I needed to get an idea of how all the different living options look from the inside, if only for a little while. I found a way to experience all three of the main choices for a poor person living down here. I spent two nights in a Single Room Occupancy Hotel, another two sleeping on a piece of cardboard under a trailer in a park, and one more night in a shelter. By far, staying in the SRO felt the most safe and comfortable, and I think that's one area where we need to invest far more time and energy."

After his experience, Mayencourt says he's certain that closing hotels like the Marr and the American is the wrong choice for Eastside residents. "I have no doubt that the Marr, and probably the American, are badly run and not particularly safe. Unfortunately, we've got 10 or 12 hotels in similar condition in the Downtown Eastside. Closing them all would put 800 or 1,000 people onto the streets, where they'll be at far greater risk than in those substandard SROs. Our focus needs to be on bringing those places up to standard, not kicking people out."

Mayencourt says that innovative, cost-effective solutions are right in front of us, noting, "I was involved in a project at the Silver/Avalon hotels, where all three levels of government collaborated to upgrade the building and bring a trained social worker. This person has stabilized the lives of dozens of people at minimal cost, by helping them keep to medication, making sure that they get the social assistance they're eligible for, building community by organizing group activities, and so much more. That's just one example of the kind of step we need to take to truly help people on the Downtown Eastside. Simply evicting them is the cruelest thing we can do; every Vancouver resident deserves better."

For more information, please contact Lorne Mayencourt's office at (604) 775-2484, or visit his new weblog at www.lornemayencourt.com