

Title: “When you help a woman, you help her whole family”

Teaser: Soroptimist International Vancouver reimagines affordable housing for women with Vancity’s help. Our Kira Gerwing and Soroptimist’s Carla Busnardo explain.

Image



Content

The Soroptimist Apartment House (SAH) in Vancouver was built to provide vulnerable women an affordable home more than 60 years ago. Today, [Soroptimist International Vancouver](#) is on a journey to redevelop the land so they can serve even more women.

“When you help a woman, you help her whole family,” says Carla Busnardo, board member of the non-profit organization leading the development committee.

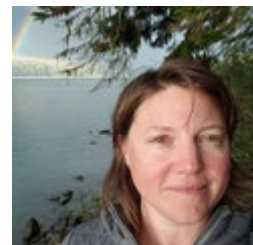
Located at 546 West 13th Avenue, the current SAH is a 21-unit apartment building that’s nearing the end of its useful life, meaning maintenance and improvement costs are now exceeding replacement costs. To solve for that, the organization is pursuing a 13-storey stylish redevelopment that will offer 135 units of long-term social housing for single mothers and their children, women in the workforce and senior women.



“We want to break the stereotype that affordable housing can’t look nice,” says Carla (pictured left).

Soroptimist has been contemplating doing more with their land, so they participated in a feasibility assessment with the Urban Land Institute in spring 2017. It was during that process when Soroptimist, Vancity and Purpose Driven Development joined forces. Fast forward to now and the City of Vancouver is [reviewing the rezoning application](#).

“This is what we do,” says Kira Gerwing (pictured right), Senior Manager of Community Investment, at Vancity. “The SAH is just one of 68 affordable rental housing projects Vancity has supported by lending more than \$24 million for pre-development costs from our Affordable Housing Accelerator Fund. Our approach is to work hand-in-hand with all of our partners to come up with solutions like this.”



“We do this because supporting community housing organizations like the Soroptimist to deliver affordable rental housing is a smart and sustainable long-term solution to the affordable housing challenges in our region,” Kira continues.

For Carla, Vancity took away the worry that comes with projects of this scale. “We feel calm not only because Vancity is there for us financially, but also because they have our best interest in mind,” the volunteer of almost 30 years shares.

Soroptimist’s real estate partner Purpose Driven Development is bringing together a team of women from different disciplines to deliver the project, making this a project for women, by women.



“We’re excited to be part of a project that’s addressing the glaring gap of housing needs for women and providing spaces in the building like a rooftop garden [artistic rendering below] to help women connect and thrive,” says Carla Guerrera (pictured left), Founder and CEO.

The project is currently being considered by the City of Vancouver. Both Carlas hope this project will support more people in need and inspire landowners to do more with their property.



Artistic rendering of SAH's rooftop garden, one of the outdoor spaces to help women connect and thrive.