

Vancouver Tenants Union 2019 Annual General Meeting Minutes

Feb 24, 2019

The Russian Hall (600 Campbell Ave.)

Unceded and occupied territory of the sə́lilwətaʔt̓/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh),

Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw

(Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations.

12:45pm - 3:00pm

Chair: Sydney

Minutes: Neil

Item 1: Determining Quorum

- For an AGM Quorum is 5% of members in good standing (must be at least 40 members for this meeting)

58 members in good standing in attendance. Quorum is met, meaning the proceedings of the AGM are valid.

Item 2: Territorial Acknowledgement & Community Agreements

Community Agreements are:

1. One-mic - means to respect each other's speaking time.
2. Speak Up/Listen Up - means that people who are comfortable should step up on their listening skills and people who tend not to speak should step up speaking more.
3. Break It Down - explaining words or phrases that are unclear/ inaccessible.
4. Respect Each Other - oppressive behaviour will not be tolerated.
5. Challenge Ideas, Not People - disagreements should be expressed with what people have said and not the people themselves.
6. Be Present
7. Take Care Of Yourself - do what is best for your physical and emotional well being

Item 3: Approval of the Agenda

The Chair reads over the agenda, moves to approve the agenda.

In favour: 58

Opposed: 0

Abstentions: 0

The motion is carried.

Questions:

- Member asks about the Steering Committee (SC) election process
 - The chair clarifies that the SC election results may not be available today
- Member asks if SC nominees will make statements
 - Chair affirms that time can be made for nominees to read their statements aloud

Item 4: Financial Statement

Co-treasurer (Neil) reviews through the Financial Statement

[NOTE: [Financial Statement can be found here](#)]

Co-treasurer notes that the current SC approved a budget of \$5000 for the current Convention and AGM costs.

Questions:

- Does the VTU have a definition for a fiscal year?
 - Co-Treasurer: The reporting period is between the last AGM and the month that the current one is being held. Bylaws state that periods between AGMs are a maximum of 15 months.
- Has the current financial surplus been allocated?
 - Co-Treasurer: Part of the surplus will go to the Convention/AGM costs, the remaining surplus will be allocated by the newly elected SC for future actions and campaigns
- Member congratulates VTU on renovations campaign. Wondering if there will be a demovictions campaign
 - Co-Treasurer: Other working groups can speak to the question of how the VTU is dealing with demovictions at this AGM and during convention workshops.
- The convention was budgeted for, are other campaigns and expenses budgeted for, or are VTU finances just 'spent as we go'?
 - Co-Treasurer: Currently all spending is relatively ad-hoc, because the VTU does not have a consistent source of revenue. We try to give members a snapshot of our finances when asking members whether or not to approve financial commitments over \$1000 (as per our bylaws. We are also trying to encourage annual dues paying members to begin monthly dues/donation commitments if they can. This helps the VTU to have a consistent source of revenue so that financials can be planned. Currently sustainer donors creates about \$350 per month.

Murray moves to accept the financial statement. Seconded by Liam

In Favour: 58

Opposed: 0

Abstentions: 0

Motion is carried.

Item 5: Steering Committee Presentation

Sydney describes the work of the Steering Committee, including:

- Holding weekly meetings
- Approve spending under \$1000
- Provide feedback and direction for Working Groups
- Plan and hold General Meetings and Annual General Meetings
- Operates on a consensus model

Things that happened this year with the Steering Committee:

- In October 2018 four new members of the Steering Committee were elected by general membership in a By-Election to replace the seats of SC members who stepped down from their positions. We welcomed Joey Doyle, David Hendry, Vince Tao, Sue Robinet
- Membership voted to:
 - support registering under the BC Societies Act,
 - the VTU Rental Housing Task Force Recommendations,
 - Campaign for Vacancy Control,
 - VTU Dolores Project (Organizer Training), \$2000 for the VTU Dolores Project (Organizer Training), the Network of Inner City Community Services Society (NICSS) as a sponsor for the VTU Dolores Project,
 - City We Need Platform,
 - Motion for new Union Made VTU T-Shirts,
 - The Renters' Report Card and covering Additional Costs for the Renters' Report Card Campaign
- In 2018 the VTU stood in solidarity with and joined the following groups:
 - Our BC Acorn Moratorium on Demovictions,
 - BC Poverty Reduction Coalition,
 - Homes Can't Wait Coalition,
 - Canada Postal Workers (CUPW) Day of Action,
 - Pledge to stand with Unist'ot'en blockade,

- Members are encouraged to suggest solidarity actions the VTU can take at any General Meeting.

Item 6: Working Group Presentations

- Outreach and Advocacy Team (OAT) - Stephanie
 - OAT has met on a regular basis - twice a month, learning the skills of tenant organizing and advocacy and chapter building. Much of our work is centered around responding to tenants in need - however as we got more experience we also began proactively working in buildings and then neighborhoods more broadly.
 - VTU receives requests for help weekly and have worked to streamline a process for responding. Many of these requests can be answered quickly or referred to other organizations for guidance. However, our top priority is responding to threats of eviction and particularly when whole buildings of tenants are threatened.
 - In early 2018 we received word that three separate buildings owned by the infamous Sahotas were under foreclosure and that over 160 units could be sold and all of the tenants evicted. This started an organizing drive that included many new organizers learning the ins and outs of door knocking and tenant rights.
 - We responded to a member's request to help in a 60-unit building in Cloverdale - where all tenants received reno-eviction notices. Many tenants in that building became co-applicants in a dispute at the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) - led by one of OAT's legal advocates. This was won and the tenants got to stay in their building.
 - Other OAT legal advocates have helped - and continue to help - with RTB disputes with individual and multiple tenant applicants in Vancouver and New Westminster. This legal advocacy work at the RTB is some of the most demanding volunteer work that OAT does. We are very thankful and proud of our volunteer legal advocates who help defend tenants at the RTB.
 - OAT members were heavily involved in organizing tenants in multiple buildings run by VS Rentals which had engaged in an aggressive buyout campaign to get rid of existing tenants - in particular long term tenants. This required OAT volunteers to door knock in the many buildings run by VS Rentals - so that -

communication between tenants was established through a Google Group; lead tenants in the buildings are found; tenant meetings are organized; and ongoing support is provided. Outreach and advocacy volunteers continue to work together to support tenants when nefarious property managements companies and owners seek to get rid of long term tenants or apply evictions to entire buildings.

- The Dolores Tenant Organizer Training Project in the summer of 2018 was a significant project for OAT. With the financial help of a number of partners OAT brought organizers from the Dolores Huerta Foundation up to Vancouver to train tenant organizers. From this training the first VTU Renters Report Card was developed and the development process and ultimate report was a critical tool in engaging renters to vote in the last municipal election. OAT is very proud of this work and the Dolores Project served as an important volunteer training opportunity. Thank you to Unite Here Local 40, BCGEU, HEU, TSSU and all the individual donors for their help.
 - OAT also successfully partnered with the Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre (TRAC) to provide a number of education sessions on basic renters rights throughout last year. These sessions also served to help train law students who are interested in learning more about the ins and outs of helping defend tenants at the RTB level. Thanks to Zuzana at TRAC for her ongoing support. These TRAC/OAT education/training sessions for our general membership continue.
 - Chapter building was also a key focus of OAT this past year. We created a proposed structure for VTU chapter building - with suggested guidelines and we are pleased to say that we now have a number of chapters developing in Vancouver - in the neighborhoods of Mt Pleasant, the Westside, the Downtown Eastside, Hasting-Sunrise, and the WestEnd. Also the NWTU started as a VTU chapter.
- Policy Working Group/Real Rent Control Campaign (Sydney)
 - In the spring the BC Government asked the VTU to submit recommendations to the Tenancy Act as part of their Rental Housing Task Force. The benefit of this was producing 50 recommendations for the Rental Housing Task Force that came

directly from VTU advocacy and member experiences. The Government consultations are largely a waste of time, but it was really beneficial having this document produced and being able to take stock of all the ways small and large the Residential Tenancy Act (the BC law that regulates all renters) is biased towards landlords and against tenants, and how even small procedural items can make all the difference between someone having a home and being ripped from their neighbourhood.

- Membership approved the 50 recommendations at our 1 Year Anniversary in April with the very top recommendation being Vacancy Control, a method of rent control that would stop landlords from being able to raise the rent in between tenants.
 - Because Vacancy Control is such a good policy, we took it to membership to vote to launch a campaign and make our fantasy a reality. Imagine, a policy that: enables tenants to feel secure in their housing because landlords have less/no profit incentive to evict/renovict, slows the rise of rents and makes a real contribution to ending poverty!! Wow, so good. So now we are campaigning to win back vacancy control in BC.
 - The Rental Housing Task Force Recommendations came out in Dec 2018. If you haven't seen them yet, the government recommended explicitly NOT TO TIE RENTS TO UNITS (yes, in capital letters), but also said they want to stop renovictions. We say, you can't do that without vacancy control. It mostly proved to us that the government cares more about not upsetting landlords than tenants.
 - The Real Rent Control BC campaign is now in the stages of rolling out big community education plans, seeking out allies, building a coalition, and consulting with other groups who have waged wars for rent control. Trying to learn from these battles, like Prop 10 in California, because the developer and real estate industries will come down hard. But we are in this for the long haul.
- City Hall/Municipal Election Organizing
 - VTU's City Hall working group emerged as a continuation of the work that started before the election in the form of Renter's report card. Once we had managed to convince a large group of renters that they had an interest in getting involved in City Council election and voting for renter friendly politicians, we needed to showcase

how exactly we could work through the City Council to win victories for renters.

- Only two weeks after the election, VTU put together one of our largest and most successful rallies to date; we had hundreds of people show up to the doorstep of VS Rentals - a shady renoviction company - in downtown Vancouver and in the middle of the day on a Friday. We held a mock trial, complete with an “octo-”landlord representing companies like VS Rentals and the multiple tactics (tentacles) they employ to prey on, intimidate and push out vulnerable tenants. At the rally, councillor Swanson announced her first motion to the council, which would be to put a stop to renovictions through strengthening the City’s “tenant relocation and protection policy”.
- Motion B10, “Protecting tenants from renovictions and aggressive buy-outs” was the first motion put forward by COPE councillor, Jean Swanson, after winning the election. She worked closely with Berkeley Tower tenants in West End who had been going through an outrageous renoviction case and all they asked was that renovations should not be a cause for eviction. They didn’t want to lose their homes.
- Inspired by Berkeley Tower tenants letter writing campaign, VTU embarked on a major mobilization campaign to support motion B10 that aimed to achieve exactly that: if tenants agree to accommodate renovations, there is no cause for eviction (as already outlined in the RTA). We had several hundred emails written to mayor and council in support of the motion and close to 100 people registered to speak in support of it. We also held two rallies outside of City hall in the pouring rain, brought tenants out to voice their grievances and practice council speeches.
- After several weeks of working hard on mobilizing support for the motion and lobbying the councillors to gain their vote, on Dec 5th council voted to unanimously approve the motion - although parts of it were referred to staff (to report back by the end of March), including extending protection for basement suite tenants and implementing vacancy control (tying rents to the unit) at the City level as the ultimate defence against renovictions.
- After the passing of the motion, an adhoc City Hall working group emerged to continue to advocate for the parts of the motion that weren’t passed. However, it didn’t remain constrained to those

issues. Since the beginning of the year, VTU has been consistently making appearances at the City Council and wherever possible speaking on behalf of tenants under threat of displacement through rezoning projects, and in support or opposition to motions that we deem as pro or anti-displacement and pro- and anti- affordability.

- Some of the policy issues we advocate for at the City Council:
 - Supporting fixing the City of Vancouver's definition of affordability.
 - Supporting the implementation of rental only zoning as a tool for encouraging construction of new rentals, and coupled with anti-renoviction/demoviction policies, a tool for protection of tenants against speculation and condo construction.
 - Advocating for vacancy control - tying of the rents to the unit - in all new constructions as a step toward long term affordability.
 - Opposing projects coming for rezoning under the City of Vancouver's Rental 100 program, a program that gives incentives to developers to build luxury rentals, including permission to destroy existing affordable rental stock and displace long term low-income working class tenants.
 - Opposing demovictions and advocating for tenants being able to return at the same rent to the new units and low-income/vulnerable tenants being accommodated in the meantime.
- Since the creation of a renter's office in the City of Vancouver, the City has reached out to the Tenants Union to formalize relations, seek our consultation on what this office should do, policy changes they should seek and on the implementation of the B10 motion. We are working to explore our options further in establishing relations with the City, while at the same time remaining firmly committed to representing the voices of and lifting up of the low-income vulnerable tenants through our actions and advocacy
- Membership/Admin Working Group (Neil)
 - The Membership Working Group was requested to form by the Steering Committee in February 2018 in order to oversee member relations, volunteer outreach, as well as manage the member database. This administration work has been largely carried by Kell,

Shazia, Sydney, myself, and a handful of other volunteers on an ad-hoc basis.

- In 2018 the VTU roughly doubled its membership from 700 to 1400. Last summer we also oversaw our first membership renewal drive, which had very limited success, due mainly to a lack of volunteer personnel needed to follow up with 700 members.
 - Only about 15% of 2017 members actually renewed their dues in 2018, however, virtually all of those members who did give generous donations. Members who are now behind on their dues remain on the VTU email list, however we now have sign-in systems in place at meetings in order to ensure that only members in good standing can vote. The low dues renewal rate presents our challenge of articulating and communicating the value of VTU membership to existing and potential members. We look forward to working with the new Steering Committee on this, as well as any members that are interested to get involved or offer suggestions.
 - More recently there have been discussions about the Membership Working Group also acting as the main drive of fundraising efforts for the VTU. Encouraging members to become monthly sustainers would mean putting the VTU on a path that keeps the union member-funded and fully independent.
- Datatools Working Group (Bryan)
 - We work to use data and computers to complement the work of the VTU and add to our shared story.
 - Formed in September with an inaugural Hackathon.
 - Primarily a web based group that is project oriented.
 - We've taken up 3 main projects since forming.
 - Data Scraping
 - Story Collection
 - Rental/Eviction Mapping
 - Data Scraping
 - We created an automated system for collecting rental postings from the internet.
 - We have collected 90-100k postings over the last 5 months.
 - We can sort these postings by municipality and neighbourhood.
 - We can analyse these postings to answer questions about the rental market.

- Story Collection
 - We have created the VTU - Renter Stories website.
 - It will allow members to share their stories anonymously.
- Rental/Eviction Mapping
 - By summer we hope to launch another website for tracking evictions.
 - Users will be able to upload photographic evidence to verify the veracity of the data they input.
- We welcome new members of all skill levels to join our team.
- We hope to host Hackathon#2 + MemeJam in the spring.
- Questions:
 - Does your data include pet information? Yes, where available.
 - Can you deploy your scraping solution to other cities or districts? Yes, with minimal effort. (Update: we have since begun collecting postings in Victoria and Kelowna.)
- Farsi Working Group
 - Farsi-Speaking Working Group started its work from October 2018. The core group started to communicate ideas on how to build capacity and to mobilize Farsi-speaking community support for issues related to rental housing. In a series of private and public meetings the group came up with a rough strategy to proceed. While the strategies seemed promising in one way or another, there were some barriers to act upon them:

Strategy	Barriers
1- Translating the existing VTU Documents	Lack of direction, shortage of time and human resources
2- Reporting VTU's activities to the Farsi-speaking community (events, Farsi-language Media, social media, door knocking, personal contacts...)	Lack of a strategic plan to share resources, Lack of human resources Lack of training
3- Recruiting more volunteers	Lack of a defined vision to communicate with the new members (why is this

	important and what we are going to achieve)
4- Defining projects and setting common goals	Lack of a statistically informed knowledge of the community, especially of renters (what are the priorities) Lack of direction from VTU
5- Sustaining the relationship with VTU through defining common goals	Lack of a common vision and proper communication

- Despite the challenges and barriers, while working on identifying ways and gaps to proceed, the group used its capacity to be actively involved in different projects:
 - Campaigning for the City Council Election by translating and canvassing with the VTU report card
 - Working for the Pro-rep referendum in partnership with VotePR's Persian Community Outreach Group, making educational movies, canvassing, phonebanking.
 - Spreading awareness in the Persian community about motion B10 (Protecting Tenants from renovation)
 - Bringing the Persian New Year (Nowruz) motion to the Vancouver City Council (passed), bringing awareness to the City about the large number of Persian speaker residents, working with the City staff to plan the first ever Nowruz celebration at the City of Vancouver (to be held on March 14th).
- Future considerations: While the Farsi-working group was a great space to bring a group of passionate Iranian activists together, lack of a unified and defined vision was a challenging barrier to take the potentials and assets of the group into action. This could be resolved by being directed toward a more clear vision by the steering committee. Also before starting a working group there is a need to analyze the existing discourse in the targeted community in order to be able to tailor the vision within the scopes of the community.

Item 7: New Business

Chair asks members present if there is any new business to discuss.

- None presented

Item 8: Steering Committee Election

Chair invites nominees to come up and read their statements of intention.

[NOTE: [See nominee statements here](#)]

Chair briefly explains the voting process and members vote.

Chair calls the AGM to a close at 3:00pm

[NOTE: [Election results can be found here](#)]