

HOUSING

Disrepair at Saigon Centre linked to Manitoba Housing

Third-party manager says their hands were tied

By Sean Ledwich
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The late Ba Van Nguyen told *STREETS* in November that apartment suites in the Saigon Centre fell into disrepair under a third-party management agreement funded by Manitoba Housing from 2012 to 2019.

Nguyen was president of the Free Vietnamese Association of Manitoba (FVAM), the building owner, before his death in January. He said the Saigon Centre's 54 affordable housing units were fully occupied in 2012 when Manitoba Housing assigned third-party building management to the non-profit Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (WHRC). In 2019, when the third-party management and relationship with Manitoba Housing ended, Nguyen said the number of occupied suites

had fallen to 20. Many of the 34 unoccupied suites at that time needed significant repairs, he said.

Hien Tran, the current FVAM president, says there are 22 unoccupied suites in the building today that need repairs before they can be rented out. Much of the damage, he says, was incurred during the time that Manitoba Housing contracted WHRC to be the third-party manager.

"Before (2012), when we managed this building, whenever the tenants move out, within three days the suites were ready for the new tenants," Tran said.

WHRC executive director James Heinrichs says they were constrained by repair budget limits set by Manitoba Housing.

"We were a third-party



Owners of the Saigon Centre on Balmoral Street accuse Manitoba Housing of leaving behind a legacy of disrepair.
Photo Sean Ledwich

manager...the funding and budget and all of those things are controlled by (Manitoba Housing), because there's an agreement between the (FVAM) and Manitoba Housing."

He said if suite repairs related to tenant turnover exceeded the budget, which typically ranges from \$500 to \$1,000, then they could not be done.

"As a property manager, if you're not given the additional funds to do that, your hands are basically tied," Heinrichs said.

STREETS asked Manitoba Housing why suite repairs at

Saigon Centre were not fully funded during the time of WHRC's third-party management. In an email, a provincial spokesperson said any inquiries about the Saigon Centre should be directed to the building owners.

Nguyen told *STREETS* he was very grateful to Spence Neighbourhood Association, which has been advising the FVAM and working on finding ways to fund building repairs and

maintenance. He also issued a general appeal.

"If you can do something for helping us, not only the finance, but you can help (with) the spirit, we are very glad to welcome, and I am grateful to anyone that can help us...that helps the senior people here."

1JustCity expands hours: Two ways you can help

By Mike Maunder

1 JustCity's West End drop-in at West End Commons is increasing its winter operation to seven days a week to help fill the needs of Winnipeg's homeless population during a cold winter.

They're looking for more West End volunteers who would like to lend a hand.

Site coordinator Josh Ward explained the drop-in has been a haven for many in a winter that has so far been marked by extreme temperatures and Omicron closures.

"A lot of places that normally provide a warm place out of the cold have been limited by Omicron," he said. "We ourselves have had days where we had to close down because Omicron has created sicknesses and absences among staff."

Beginning the first week of February, the drop-in will operate seven days a week from 12:30 to 3 pm. In the last month, about a dozen people who are homeless have been able to spend a few hours out of the cold in the basement drop-in each day. Others who are not homeless are able to pick up bagged lunches to take home. Josh estimates they hand out about 100 lunches a day.

On Mondays and Fridays, from 1 to 3 p.m., there's a sharing circle and fire in the

greenspace area north of the Commons building. They also run a food bank on Mondays.

Chris Urbanski and Daryl Little are two volunteers who have found that volunteering has given them a strong sense of community and an opportunity to get to know people around them. Daryl played Santa at the drop-in's Christmas celebration and works Mondays in the food bank. Chris, who lives on Beverly, has been helped by the drop-in in the past and sees volunteering as a chance to pay it back.

Those interested in volunteering can contact volunteer coordinator Laura Everett: volunteer@1justcity.ca



Dwayne, Sylvia and Brady enjoy one of iJustCity's twice-weekly fires.
Photo Mike Maunder

Another chance to help out this winter is 1JustCity's third annual virtual race: "Beat The Cold: So Others Can Too."

In the first two weeks of February, participants are asked to create their own course with their choice of sports and location, or race a triathlon by running, skating, and biking for a minimum of 5km each. Participants can create their own triathlon by choosing at least two winter sports -skating, skiing, snowshoeing, tobogganing, or even rolling a snowball uphill. There's no minimum distance.

Participants register themselves (\$40) and can send photos and descriptions of their events. Information is available at BeatTheCold/1JustCity.

State of the INNER CITY

VIRTUAL EVENT
Feb 23, 2022 at 11:30 am

Joseph Zuken Citizen Activist Award
Honouring long-time activist Harold Dyck

Report Launch
First Steps Towards a Just Recovery & What's Going On With Portage Place?

Register: policyfix.ca/2022/01/25/sic2022

CCPA
CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY POLICY ALTERNATIVES

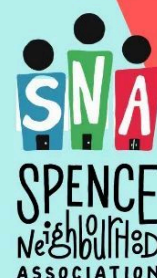
Small Containers for
Shampoo & Conditioner
ChapStick
Bar Soap
Tampons



Gloves Neck Warmers
Hats Blankets
Socks Hand/Foot Warmers
Jackets Boots
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Most Needed Items
For Our Evening Safe Space

Set drop off time
between 9am-3:30pm
Monday to Friday
with Chantel 204-688-9236
donations@spenceneighbourhood.org



Bulk Meat
Bulk Rice
Bulk Noodles
Snacks