



Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 2, 2021**

VIRCS Terminating Lease Agreement for Oak Bay Welcome Houses

The Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) and the District of Oak Bay have agreed to terminate the lease agreement for the Oak Bay Welcome Houses, located at 1531 Hampshire Road and 1538 Monterey Avenue effective May 7, 2022.

The Welcome House project was the first project to provide interim affordable housing for refugees on Vancouver Island. It has been a successful initiative, supporting 10 refugees to transition to long-term housing all over the Island. The project also supported community building in Oak Bay with the Oak Bay Rotary Club. However, over the course of the past year:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has forced our organization to re-evaluate our programs vis-à-vis available funding, to ensure that VIRCS continues to fulfil its mandate well beyond the pandemic.
- The Welcome House project was identified as a program that will no longer be supported, having accomplished the purpose for which it was established. This will allow VIRCS to focus on other high priority and high-risk needs especially exacerbated by the pandemic.

We are very appreciative of all the support we have received from individuals, the community, and the District of Oak Bay to implement this initiative.

Quotes

“While the Welcome House initiative has been successful, the costs borne by VIRCS have made the project unviable due to the prior administration having an expectation of funding that was never realized. Since the start of the pandemic, we have had to make tough decisions about the future of our organization, and upon review, have identified far greater foundational and risk-reduction needs that must be prioritized to ensure the sustainability of our organization”.

- Karen Hira, Executive Director

“The District greatly appreciates the projects and supports provided by VIRCS and would welcome future partnerships. Council is aware of community interest in the property, which will

be explored further when the District undertakes a Village Area Planning process in 2023 to examine land-uses on the properties to be vacated by VIRCS and the surrounding Oak Bay Avenue area.”

- Mayor Kevin Murdoch

Quick Facts

- 10 refugees supported (one family and five individuals)
- Over 500 volunteer hours by Odd Fellows, community, skilled professionals, and VIRCS Board members supported upgrades to completely refurbish both homes
- \$100,000 value of (infrastructure) upgrades (reroofing, refinishing all floors, rebuilding deck, etc.) donated by Arise Construction
- Over \$40,000 raised to support essential needs for a Syrian family
- Over 50 volunteer hours by Oak Bay Rotary Club supported residents to learn about, and connect to, their community
- One home provided a site for our Welcome Gardens program
- Over 50 settlement and integration workshops attended by residents
- Residents were supported to gain quality employment experience and skills via the BC Settlement and Integration Services (BC SIS) program and the Pathways to Professions, Trades, and Entrepreneurship (P2PTE) program
- Over 100 staff hours supported residents to navigate social services and COVID-19 regulations and information; fill out housing applications; access legal information; provide translation services in Spanish, Arabic, and Farsi, etc.

For more information on VIRCS please visit: www.vircs.bc.ca

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