



# FIRST UNITED

# Redevelopment

Frequently Asked Questions

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

### **Who is FIRST UNITED?**

First United Church Community Ministry Society (commonly known as FIRST UNITED) is an inner-city ministry of the United Church of Canada. Committed at its heart to the struggle for social justice, we offer essential services, advocacy and healing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). We have been operating in the DTES for over 140 years, providing community, connection, and care.

### **Are your services exclusive?**

FIRST UNITED is a low-barrier service provider. Our services are accessible to low income, under-housed and homeless individuals living in Vancouver's DTES, regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, ability, or faith. Our programs will continue to serve all demographics and community members' in the Downtown Eastside. We believe that housing is a human right for everyone and will continue to advocate and support members in the DTES to fulfill our vision for a neighborhood where everyone's worth is celebrated and all people thrive.

### **Why is redevelopment necessary?**

We offer direct services to meet the immediate needs of our community, but in the face of the housing and homeless crisis, overdose crisis, and affordability crisis, those needs have outgrown our facility at 320 E Hastings. Originally built as a church in 1965, the facility's increasing maintenance needs presented a drain on our resources and a further constraint on our ability to meet the urgent needs of our Downtown Eastside neighbours.

### **What is the overall plan for redevelopment?**

We are partnering with Lu'ma Native Housing Society to redevelop our site into a multi-storey, purpose-built space that will offer four floors of community amenities, programs and services (administered by FIRST), as well as 103 units of below-market rental housing for Indigenous Peoples (administered by Lu'ma). FIRST UNITED's First Forward Campaign will raise the \$37 million in funding needed to complete FIRST's portion of the project.

### **What other companies and organizations are involved in the project?**

We are thrilled to be working with a strong community of partners and advisors on this project. Our First Forward redevelopment project already has strong buy-in from municipal and provincial governments and agencies. Our Redevelopment Advisory Team includes some of the city's top developers, community engagement specialists, and consultants, including representatives from Martha Burton Management Consulting, BJW Investments, NSDA Architects, Arcadis Group, Ideospace, CitySpaces, Norton Rose Fulbright, and Manning Elliott. We are particularly grateful for the participation of Chief Ian Campbell, and for the insights of Indigenous consultants Luugigyoo Dr Patrick Stewart and Cory Douglas.

### **How will you ensure you can deliver/complete the project?**

FIRST UNITED has been granted bridge funding which will enable our redevelopment project to proceed and be completed on schedule. Thanks to very low interest rates, we are able to welcome gifts in the form of multi-year donations, bequests and other planned giving over the coming years to support the project's capital costs.

### **How long will it take to complete the project?**

Demolition work began in June 2022 following the relocation of our emergency services to other locations in the DTES. We broke ground in November 2023. Construction is scheduled to complete in early 2026.

## **How will the new building better serve FIRST's mission?**

We envision a neighbourhood where everyone's worth is celebrated and all people thrive. Regardless of circumstance, all people deserve the dignity and care that a safe, purpose-built space can provide. Our facility can, and should, reflect that vision. For decades we've found creative ways to provide vital services by adapting our facilities to serve the DTES. Imagine the level of care and connection we can offer in a space that is three times larger than that in which we currently operate, and that is purpose-built to our work and the needs of our community.

## **What will the entire project cost?**

The total cost of the redevelopment of 320 E Hastings is approximately \$92 million. FIRST UNITED's portion of the project, comprising the first four floors of the building, will cost approximately \$37 million.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS**

### **What steps has FIRST UNITED taken to engage in consultation with relevant communities and stakeholders?**

FIRST undertook numerous studies and community consultations to understand the needs of the community we serve and to gauge the level of public and government support for the project. These included:

- A Sensitive Listening Study with the DTES community conducted by CitySpaces in 2017
- A Redevelopment Feasibility Study conducted by CitySpaces in 2018
- A process of Community Engagement with the assistance of CitySpaces in 2019/2020
- Regulatory Engagement conducted by Ideaspace in 2020
- A Capital Campaign Feasibility Study performed by Waller & Associates in 2020
- A Community pop-up session (held outdoors) to present our Development Permit application to the community we serve in 2020

Thanks to this work, we are thrilled to say that this project received overwhelmingly positive feedback from our community when presented at the pop-up session and has also received unanimous support from the Urban Design Panel, Vancouver Heritage Commission and the Development Permitting Board.

### **How might the project support awareness and education efforts around reconciliation?**

FIRST UNITED honours that we do our work on the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh (MST) peoples. We solemnly acknowledge the interconnected histories of colonization and systemic racism that affect generations of Indigenous people living in this territory and urban Indigenous peoples from other territories, including members of the FIRST UNITED community. Our deep commitment to reconciliation has informed the planning, implementation, and design of our project in ways that we hope will inspire how others approach development and community projects in the future. We have:

- Performed extensive consultations with the FIRST UNITED community and added new services and spaces to address their needs
- Incorporated Indigenous cultural elements into the design of the building in a culturally respectful and appropriate way informed by direct consultation and input from Luugigyoo Dr. Patrick Stewart, Nisga'a architect, and Xalek/Sekyu Siyam Chief Ian Campbell
- Ensured that the building's dedicated Sacred Space and Outdoor Gathering Area are suitable and welcoming for traditional Indigenous ceremonies
- Partnered with Lu'ma Native Housing Society to maximize the potential of our site and provide safe, secure, below-market housing for Indigenous peoples
- Partnered with Indigenous-led HOST Consulting to facilitate public art calls and consultations and to strengthen relationship-building with the host nations

## **How are the needs and issues of FIRST community members being addressed in the redevelopment?**

Based on extensive consultation with our DTES neighbours, this project is informed by the community for the community, and we are excited to build a space that provides the healing, connection, and care that our community needs. Among the issues identified by our community were the lack of safe outdoor spaces in which to congregate, socialize, sit, or rest during the hours in which SROs and shelters are closed. To address this, our new facility will include an outdoor rooftop where our community can safely gather, socialize, hold ceremonies, or simply sit with a cup of tea. We've also included new day sleeping facilities, where our community can rest, and private counselling spaces where they can go for private moments of respite or connection with FIRST ministry and program staff.

## **LU'MA HOUSING QUESTIONS**

### **When housing is such a need in the DTES, why is FIRST UNITED only focusing on Indigenous housing needs?**

Nearly 40% of residents of the DTES identify as Indigenous, as opposed to only 2-4% in the Greater Vancouver Area. Rebuilding a church was not possible without building housing (required by the City of Vancouver). As FIRST was committed to providing as much charitable housing (as opposed to just low-income/affordable) as possible and for the most vulnerable, the Board made a decision to align an organizational priority of reconciliation with building housing for urban Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is not only a strategic priority at FIRST and of the national United Church, it is also a Government priority, and as such FIRST is able to leverage various funding agreements to reduce the capital cost of providing affordable housing for urban Indigenous peoples.

### **Why is Lu'ma Native Housing Society the operator at 320 E Hastings?**

By partnering with Lu'ma, this ensures the housing will be designed by Indigenous members of the community with their needs in mind, and managed by an Indigenous organization with a decades-long history of providing culturally safe housing.

### **How much will these below-market units cost to rent?**

Of the 103 total spaces, 60% will be affordable and 40% will be supportive. This includes 54 studios (20 supportive, 34 affordable rentals) and 49 one-bedroom units (15 supportive, 34 affordable rentals). Supportive units will be subsidized at shelter rates while affordable units will follow a rent-geared-to-income model. Though monthly rents won't be finalized until closer to completion, affordable unit rents are anticipated to be set at the income-assisted rate of approximately \$500/month for both studio and one-bedroom units.

### **Will housing residents access the building through FIRST?**

No. The main entrance for FIRST UNITED will be on the corner of East Hastings and Gore Avenue. FIRST UNITED will retain the 320 E Hastings address, while the residential component will become 438 Gore Avenue. The residential entrance will be on the southwest corner of Gore Avenue.

### **Will members of the FIRST community be eligible for housing in the Lu'ma units?**

Eligible community members will be able to apply directly to Lu'ma and tenant selection will follow Lu'ma's organizational processes and procedures in compliance with BC Housing affordable and supportive housing operating agreements. FIRST UNITED's case managers will be able to make referrals but not guarantee housing to community members seeking other services at FIRST.

### **Will residents have access to FIRST services and programs?**

Yes! As our services are open to the community, all residents in Lu'ma housing will have access to the programs and services offered at FIRST UNITED. And supportive housing residents will receive meals from FIRST UNITED as part of our partnership with Lu'ma. We're in the process of exploring other explicit partnership programs as we construct the building.

## **How does someone apply for housing?**

Housing applications are handled directly by our housing partner, Lu'ma Native Housing Society. You can review their application process and download the application form on their website at <https://lnhs.ca/luma-native-housing-society#apply>.

Prospective tenants need to complete this application as well as a Supportive Housing Registry application with BC Housing. Prospective tenants need to meet the housing criteria of being homeless or at risk of homelessness, meet the income requirements set out per BC Housing, and self-identify as Indigenous (at least 50% of the applicant's family must be of Indigenous ancestry).

## **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES QUESTIONS**

### **Where will you ensure continuity of service during the construction phase?**

Our current services have been relocated to satellite locations and will continue to operate from these locations until construction is complete. Our services can currently be found at:

- Community Ministry – 360 Jackson Avenue
- Community Help Desk and Tax Program – 501 E Hastings Street
- Legal Advocacy – 542 E Hastings Street
- Kitchen Services – 620 Clark Drive
- Community Meals - Food truck at Hastings and Gore (see below)
- Administration – 368 Powell Street

Our emergency shelter has been relocated to a newly renovated site at 467 Alexander Street and will continue to operate from that location moving forward.

### **Will there still be a shelter space in the new FIRST?**

No. The Emergency Shelter will continue to operate off site moving forward. FIRST has made the conscious decision to focus on operating / enabling permanent housing rather than temporary shelter, as stability in housing has been clearly linked to greater stability and well-being for individuals. This does not, however, change the fact that there is a need for temporary shelter in our community. Our new facility will provide a dedicated women's day sleeping area, which will offer a safe place to sleep when shelters, SROs or other spaces are closed during the day.

### **How is the meal program going to be managed during the construction?**

We are incredibly excited to have launched a new initiative that will enable us to serve hot, nutritious meals to our community in the DTES during the building redevelopment and beyond—the FIRST UNITED food truck program! Our commissary kitchen has been temporarily relocated to Clark Drive. Meals are prepared at this location and then distributed to DTES residents via our new mobile food truck fleet, which consists of a minivan, a cargo van, and a fully-equipped food truck. On weekdays, we average 250 meals at lunchtime, usually served in under an hour!

### **What new services are being added once the new facility is open?**

We're thrilled to be offering several new services and facilities including a new library and computer lab; expanded washroom and shower facilities; dedicated space for day sleeping while shelters are closed; private counselling spaces; and a roof-top deck with a covered smoking area, Indigenous landscaping, and space for outdoor gatherings and ceremonies.

### **Do you have any programs specifically for women?**

There is a concerning lack of safe services for women in the Downtown Eastside, which has been intensified by the recent closures of several women's drop-in services. Responding to the urgent need to prioritize women's safety in

current and future community infrastructure, we are creating three self-identifying, women-only programming spaces in our facility. These include a dedicated day sleeping room, which will provide a safe environment for daytime rest for up to 18 women including trans women, and an adjacent daytime drop-in space with a 40-person capacity. Both spaces will be converted into an extreme weather response and overnight shelter for self-identified women when needed. We plan to partner with women-centred organizations and Indigenous community groups for the operation and programming of these spaces.

## **BUILDING AND REDEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS**

### **Why not just renovate the existing building?**

Our current building was constructed as a church in 1965 and was never meant to be used for the frontline work that now constitutes its primary function. For decades we found creative ways to adapt our facility to serve the DTES, but as our building fell into disrepair it presented hazards for our community and constituted a drain on vital financial resources. Problems included a leaking roof, boiler issues, heating issues, and ongoing structural maintenance. Renovating our existing building into functional spaces would have been difficult, costly, and would not have enabled us to increase our available program space. The redevelopment further presents an opportunity for FIRST to maximize the potential of our site, address the homelessness crisis, and affirm our commitment to reconciliation by utilizing our available air space to enable the creation of 103 below-market housing units for Indigenous peoples in the DTES.

### **How will the new building support the expansion of FIRST services and program?**

The new building will offer close to 40,000 square feet of program space, nearly triple that of our previous facility. Many of the rooms and spaces are designed to be multi-functional, enabling us to adapt to the urgent needs of the community we serve.

### **Will the new building be environmentally sustainable?**

The United Church of Canada and FIRST UNITED are committed to being climate leaders. Beyond the building's obvious contribution to cultural and social sustainability, the project has been designed to high environmental standards. This includes the integration of solar shading technology, a highly insulated building envelope, a green roof, and high efficiency mechanical and electrical systems to meet or exceed City of Vancouver requirements and the 2019 BC Housing Design Guidelines.

### **What about climate change? Is the building equipped to cope with extreme weather events?**

Over the last several years, extreme weather events—heat waves, cold snaps, flooding, and wildfire smoke—have become increasingly common. These events are particularly challenging for those who are under-housed or homeless and without protection from the elements. Recognizing this, we amended the building's design in 2022 to include a state-of-the-art HVAC system. During extreme weather events, our level one drop-in centre can act as a warming, cooling or filtered air refuge for up to 200 people.

### **What is the longevity of the building?**

The expected life of the building is a minimum of 60 years.

### **Will anything from the building's heritage be maintained?**

While a church has been located at 320 East Hastings since 1892, the existing church was built in 1965. Though an iconic structure in the DTES, it is not on the Heritage Registry. To recognize the long history of FIRST UNITED, the Vancouver Heritage Foundation memorial plaque on the existing building will be integrated into the new structure. Opportunities to re-use and re-purpose items like the old church cross are being explored.

### **Why is the iconic roof of the FIRST UNITED building not being preserved or recreated?**

Unfortunately, the roof isn't consistent with today's construction codes or guidelines. A flat roof is needed for

elevators and mechanical/electrical systems. Constructing an angular roof would also take away an important outdoor rooftop amenity space for residential tenants. There are nods to the angular roof line in the new design, and our new building will be iconic and innovative in its own right. The iconic roof also lives on as part of our logo.

### **What is the Indigenous / ancestral history of the FIRST UNITED site?**

The site of our building is part of an area known by the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh (MST) as K'emk'emelay, meaning “place of broadleaf maple trees.” It was once a rich and vibrant trading area which sustained Indigenous peoples with an abundance of wildlife, marine life, forests, and marshlands.

### **How is the Indigenous culture and history of the site being incorporated into the design?**

We are extremely grateful for the guidance that Luugigyoo, Dr. Patrick Stewart, Nisga'a architect, and Xalek/Sekyu Siyam Chief Ian Campbell have offered in the design of the new FIRST UNITED building, and we are proud to be incorporating the following:

- The sloping wall of FIRST UNITED on Gore Avenue will be a copper-coloured metal wall laid in a horizontal pattern alluding to the traditional plank houses of the Coast Salish. Copper is an important material to many northwestern Indigenous cultures, especially in the north and central regions of BC
- Three house posts carved by MST carvers will be placed at the main entrance to FIRST UNITED
- Vertical sunscreens on our western elevation will have custom fabricated panels featuring laser-cut Indigenous images
- The entrance to the residential tower will have commissioned artwork panels designed by an MST artist
- Art installations by MST and urban Indigenous artists will be commissioned for interior spaces, including in the building's sanctuary and dining hall
- A woven brickwork pattern designed by Musqueam artist Debra Sparrow will wrap the outdoor deck and adorn the building's light well
- Building colours have been chosen in consultation with our Indigenous consultants to reflect traditional colours used by the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples

### **What other revitalization efforts are taking place on the corner of Gore and Hastings?**

Orange Hall on the northwest corner has been refurbished, and a new building was constructed on the southwest corner that is a combination of retail, shelter rate, and mixed secured rental housing. The site at 301 E Hastings on the northeast corner of Hastings and Gore is owned by Vancouver Coastal Health. Redevelopment plans are in the works but nothing has been formalized or publicly announced yet.

### **What about climate change? Is the building equipped to cope with extreme weather events?**

Over the last several years, extreme weather events—heat waves, cold snaps, flooding, and wildfire smoke—have become increasingly common. These events are particularly challenging for those who are under-housed or homeless and without protection from the elements. Recognizing this, we amended the building's design in 2022 to include a state-of-the-art HVAC system. During extreme weather events, our level one drop-in centre can act as an official Vancouver Coastal Health warming, cooling or filtered air refuge for up to 200 people. Many other areas of the building, including our Women's Day Sleeping Room and Drop-in, Sacred Space, and several multi-purpose and meeting rooms, are fully heated and air conditioned and are connected to the HVAC air filtration system. These areas enable us to expand wildfire smoke and weather refuge to approximately 470 people across all four floors.

## **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

### **Who owns the land at 320 East Hastings?**

We do! The Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the United Church of Canada transferred the property at 320 E Hastings to First United Church Community Ministry Society in September 2020.



## **How is the housing portion being funded?**

All three levels of government have provided funding for the housing portion of the project. The combined total contribution is approximately \$40 million, which includes:

- \$5.15 million from the federal government, through the National Housing Co-Investment Fund
- Approximately \$28.4 million from the provincial government, through BC Housing, including approximately \$15.3 million through the Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund and approximately \$13.06 million through the Supportive Housing Fund
- Approximately \$6.73 million in funding and municipal waivers from the City of Vancouver, including \$4.83 million through the Community Housing Incentive Program (CHIP)

## **Who will hold the mortgage?**

FIRST UNITED will maintain ownership over the building and will possibly take a small 2-3-year mortgage on the title of the podium space while we complete receipt and processing of contributions to our capital campaign. Outstanding construction costs for the housing will be repaid through mortgages held by Lu'ma Native Housing Society against a 60-year leasehold interest.

## **Is FIRST UNITED selling its air space parcel to the housing provider?**

No, we are not. We are leasing the housing component of the building in two air space parcels: one for the forty units of supportive housing and one for the remaining units. Both will be operated by Lu'ma, but they're separated based on the type of government funding assigned to the units.

## **FEASIBILITY QUESTIONS**

### **What will the entire project cost?**

The total cost of the redevelopment of 320 E Hastings is approximately \$92 million. FIRST UNITED's portion of the project, comprising the first four floors of the building and a portion of the parkade level, will cost approximately \$37 million.

### **How will FIRST fund the redevelopment?**

Our First Forward Capital Campaign is working to secure the funds needed through fundraising and grants. Thanks to widespread enthusiasm for the project, \$22 million was already secured prior to the launch of our public campaign in November 2021, including a \$10 million Leadership Gift and \$1 million in corporate gifts.

### **What happens if FIRST does not meet its fundraising goal?**

Based on the strong support expressed by our community as well as by municipal and provincial governments and other partners, we are confident that we will be able to meet our fundraising targets. FIRST UNITED has secured bridge funding from BC Housing in order to guarantee our redevelopment and construction timeline. The goal of our First Forward Campaign is to raise the remaining funds by the time the building is complete in 2025; however, we will continue to pursue donations and grant funding beyond that point, as necessary, to ensure our funding requirements are met.

### **What happens if FIRST raises more funding than the project requires?**

Any additional funds raised will support related capital costs, long-term maintenance and operational needs for the new building.

## CONTRIBUTION QUESTIONS

### How can I help?

You can help us realize this amazing project by making a donation (of any size) to our First Forward Capital Campaign and by helping us spread the word. We accept one-time, monthly and multi-year cash gifts as well as planned giving in the form of corporate donations, matching gifts, charitable annuities, securities, and bequests.

### If I can't make a campaign gift now, can I make one at a later date?

Yes, absolutely. We will continue to accept donations towards the project through to 2027. You can make a pledge now and specify a later payment date in your Donor Gift Agreement, or you can make a donation to FIRST UNITED at a future date. If your gift is realized before completion of the building, your contribution will go towards our fundraising goal. If your gift is realized after 2027, you may designate those funds towards either a) the long-term capital costs of the building, or b) the ongoing operational needs at FIRST UNITED.

### Can I give different amounts in different years for my pledge payments?

Yes, you can. Based on the total amount of your pledged gift, the FIRST UNITED team will work with you to establish the number of installments, the size of each installment, and the schedule that works for you.

### Once I make my campaign gift, how else can I help?

We would love for you to help us spread the word to anyone you know who might be interested in joining you to help us move First Forward. You can share information about the First Forward project by:

- Referring your contacts to the Redevelopment page of our website
- Sending an email introduction to [firstforward@firstunited.ca](mailto:firstforward@firstunited.ca)
- Sharing your enthusiasm for our project on social media and tagging us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @FirstUnitedDTES using the hashtag #FirstForward

### Why aren't you naming spaces after donors?

To honour FIRST UNITED's commitment to reconciliation, we are naming all spaces in the new building after the Indigenous and spiritual roots of the land that the building occupies and the Indigenous leaders who were part of the founding of Vancouver. We're very excited to be one of the first organizations to implement this proactive, cutting-edge approach that puts reconciliation front and centre and decolonizes the fundraising space.

### How do dedications work?

Donors can dedicate donations of \$10,000 or more to a specific area or space in the new building and FIRST UNITED will dedicate the space in the name of the donor, the donor's family, the donor's business, or as a memorial or tribute to another person, as determined by the donor and approved by FIRST UNITED. We're pleased to offer collective and sole dedication opportunities, with the latter available for gifts of \$250,000 or more. Dedication will be reflected on a plaque beside the Indigenous name of the area or space for 10 years.

### What happens to a dedication plaque after the 10-year timeline?

When we approach this milestone, the FIRST UNITED team will get in touch with you and your family to give you the first right of renewal on your dedicated space.

**Join Us to Move First Forward** 

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