

Planning and Growth Management Committee
January 6, 2010 meeting

I am speaking on behalf of the Rooming House Working Group.

The Rooming House Working Group is comprised of rooming house tenants and landlords, representatives from community agencies (including housing workers from the inner suburbs) and government representatives. This group undertakes activities aimed at supporting:

- the maintenance and improvement of existing rooming house inventory,
- the creation of new rooming houses,
- the tenants who live in rooming houses and
- the landlords and others that provide such housing.

We know from experience that rooming houses are a very important part of the affordable housing spectrum.

We appreciate that this committee is addressing the issue of zoning and rooming houses. We also appreciate the difficulties involved in harmonizing the zoning by-laws.

Nevertheless, we believe that the zoning by-laws should address rooming houses as part of the current consolidation. The by-law should allow this form of housing in all residential zones in the City of Toronto where they otherwise meet the requirements for size, density and building form.

There are currently 6,000 to 10,000 legal rooming house units in the City of Toronto and over 160,000 single individuals with low incomes. There is a great need for zoning that would allow licensed/regulated rooming houses in all parts of the city. There is anecdotal information that there are many more unlicensed rooming houses than are licensed. Permissive zoning would also allow the development of new stock. As-of-right zoning across the city would solve a host of problems, including the health and safety issue. Changing this legislation would bring regulations to ensure that all rooming houses are safe.

The RHWG has been advocating for many years that rooming houses provide much needed affordable housing for the many single people on low incomes in the city. We know that there is a stigma attached to the term rooming houses. We also know that, with supports, rooming houses can provide stable housing.

The ***Housing Opportunities Toronto*** (HOT) report refers to creating mixed use, inclusive neighbourhoods. Rooming houses can be an important component in realizing this goal. Extending the zoning would help to accomplish that goal.

The **Housing Charter**, proclaimed recently, speaks of everyone's right to decent affordable housing "in the neighbourhood of choice without discrimination".

And lastly, since the zoning by-law is the regulatory tool for implementing the **Official Plan**, it behoves us to mention that it speaks of the “full range of housing” as including “housing for homeless people and at-risk groups” and “housing that makes more effective use of the existing housing stock.” It also speaks of “enhancing neighbourhoods” and that the variety and quality of our residential communities are key factors in the attractiveness of Toronto.

At the same time, we are aware of a number of city reports that support the presence of rooming houses and working to extend their presence across the city. From the Golden Report in 1999 through the *Future Options* study (2004) to the 2008 study *Shared Accommodation in Toronto*, there has been universal support for the extension of zoning of rooming houses.

Recently, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) issued its **Right At Home** report. It includes mention of rooming houses as important in providing adequate affordable housing to all people. In addition, in the OHRC’s comments on the staff report in September and in the deputation of Barbara Hall, the Chief Commissioner, to this committee on November 4, 2009, they support, on human rights grounds, the zoning across the city for rooming houses specifically because it affects rights-protected groups.

Decent affordable housing is at a premium in the city. Rooming houses, when properly regulated, contribute in a real way to the affordable housing spectrum. Allowing for their zoning across the city would be a relatively inexpensive way to increase the availability of affordable housing in the city.

Many voices, not only the ones mentioned above, but also including those in need of this housing, cry out for the allowance for zoning of rooming houses across the city.

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Rooming House Working Group