

**Rooming House Working Group Meeting Notes
March 14, 2011, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Metro Hall Room 302**

Present:

Rosemary Foulds	Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Chair
Paul Denison	Toronto Christian Resource Centre, Community Co-Chair
John Argue	Parkdale Community Legal Services
Anne Carol	Affordable Housing Office
Janet Fairfield	East York East Toronto Family Resources
Ken Kennedy	Kennedy Residence
Paulene Kennedy	Kennedy Residence
Priya Kissoon	CERIS
Joe Magalhaes	Municipal Licensing and Standards
Phil Nazar	Toronto Christian Resource Centre
Chris Persaud	Habitat Services
Stella Pinnock	Landlord
Robin Sarniak	COTA Health
Glenn Sheridan	Landlord's Self-Help Centre
Hyacinth Sulph	KPH – Trillium Life Care

Regrets:

Brian Forth	Circle of Life Homes
Lisa Freeman	Student
Donald Jones	Affordable Housing Office
David Raponi-Monk	John Howard Society
Tracey Smith	Shelter Support and Housing Administration

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m. Members were welcomed to the meeting and there was a round of introductions.

2. Minutes of Meeting of January 10, 2011

The minutes of both meetings were approved with the following changes on page 2:
Item 4 c, paragraph 2: replace “by-lay” with “by-law”
Item 4 e, paragraph 1: replace “Chari” with “Chair”

3. Rooming House Support Project

Rosemary provided an update on the project's development¹. Since the November 8 meeting:

- Questions were compiled based on the November 8 discussion
- Individuals in three agencies were interviewed (WoodGreen (Harvey Stein and Pablo Escobar), Toronto Christian Resource Centre (Phil Nazar and Paul Denison), and RENT/Landlord Connect (Elis Ziegler)). Roxanne Clarke from

¹ Minutes of the November 8, 2010 meeting are available on line at <http://www.toronto.ca/housing/rhwg.htm>

WoodGreen has not yet been involved, due to competing demands on her time.

- Responses were compiled – everyone interviewed has an interest in the project, there are many points of convergence and some of divergence
- Representatives from the agencies have met once to discuss the points of divergence and some have been resolved.
- Another meeting is planned on March 28.

Points of agreement:

- The philosophy underlying the project is to support good rooming houses and good tenancies (tenants and landlords).
- The activities will focus support on rooming houses and landlords.
- The geographic scope for the project will be in the part of the City where zoning permits rooming houses and they can be licensed (former Toronto and parts of former Etobicoke)
- The building scope for the project will be rooming houses that are currently licensed, those applying for a license and those that could be licensed.
- The project will inform good practices for areas where rooming houses are unregulated and or not a permitted use.
- The project will strengthen current activities of the agencies including
 - Direct landlord support
 - Agency and landlord coordination
 - Support to landlords during the licensing process.
 - Peer involvement
 - Landlord and neighbour relations.
- A waiver will be essential to clarify the supports the project offers and to limit the risk of the project partners.

Issues discussed but not decided:

- Smoothing the relationship between landlords and tenants (mediation, mediation light, listening)
- Relationship with MLS
- Links with social assistance
- Role of crisis response
- Supports to Tenants

The project outline should be ready for discussion (and hopefully, approval) the May RHWG meeting.

Discussion Points:

- Habitat Services should be included among the agencies in the discussion: Chris Persaud will attend the next meeting. Rosemary will provide Chris with background information

- Supports to Landlords and Tenants
 - The project is building on what already exists: the City supported rooming house landlords in the past and has pulled back from it with its housing first focus.
 - Moving to a project that supports tenants or peers might be too big a stretch in the current environment.
 - To have a tenant support component, the project would need more partners (e.g. Sound Times, and Ontario Council of Alternative Businesses).
 - Project aims to work with systems and make systems adjustments to improve housing for the poorest people in the city.

4. Update: Proposed Zoning Regulations for Rooming Houses

Staff in the City Planning Division will discuss the timing of the report about proposed zoning regulations for rooming houses with the Chair of the Committee, Peter Milczyn. The current deadline of November 2011 could change.²

Discussion Points:

- Rooming house regulation is contentious and individual councillors have strong opinions.
- The Rupert Coalition has appealed the comprehensive Zoning By-law to the OMB and is preparing a Human Rights challenge. The Coalition is meeting later this month and the agenda includes an assessment of the political appetite for zoning reform to permit rooming houses.
- Members questioned the efficacy of relying on the human rights appeal. The Human Rights Commission wrote to the City in May 2010 regarding the distance separation provisions in the comprehensive zoning by-law. The Commission recommend changes to address the issue. These changes were not incorporated in the comprehensive zoning by-law that was approved by Council in July 2010.

5. Summer Heat Season: Heat Registry Proposal for 2011

Rosemary provided an update on the status of plans for the Heat Registry for 2011. Copies of three pamphlets were circulated during the presentation and discussion.³

Project highlights:

- This is a pilot for 2011
 - The heat registry began at a drop-in centre in the summer of 2007. The Registry's goal was to reach people who are the most vulnerable to heat related illness.

² The 2010 report and follow up actions are available on line at: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/pg/decisions/2010-01-06-pg34-dd.htm> , found easily by search for 34.2 (the agenda item number)

³ Pamphlets distributed at the meeting can be accessed at the Link to the Heat Alert Web Site <http://www.toronto.ca/health/heatalerts>

- The focus in 2011 is on rooming houses and boarding houses where some of the people who are most vulnerable live.
 - Peers would contact tenants in selected buildings to provide education about health risks, set up a heat registry and contact registered tenants when an extreme heat alert is called.
 - Change Toronto would recruit, hire, train and supervise the peers. Change Toronto has hired, trained and supervised peers to operate Cooling Centres during extreme heat alerts in 2009 and 2010.
- Proposed partners for the project include
 - Habitat Services, which provides a connection with Boarding Home operators.
 - The RHWG, which could provide access to rooming houses and boarding homes that do not have contracts with Habitat Services.
 - The Rooming House Emergency Response, which could be a source of peers to be employed by the project.

Discussion Points:

- The boarding homes and rooming houses that do not have an agreement with Habitat Services should be a priority for the project
- Municipal Licensing and Standards inspectors visit rooming houses. At a minimum the inspectors should have information about the project and information about places where tenants can go to keep cool.
- Peers themselves will be vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat when performing their duties and will need to be able to access cool spaces. If peers could access cooling rooms in Boarding Homes, they would have more options to exercise self care.

6. Announcements

- Licensing Rooming Houses in Triplexes - Through email, Brian Forth asked for a future agenda item. He reported that his employers, who own triplexes, are willing to operate some of these units as rooming houses. Current regulations, licensing and zoning, do not allow this.

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

8. Next Meeting: May 9, 2011, 2 p.m., room 309, Metro Hall