

Toronto Community
Housing Corporation
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August 6, 2010

Patsy Morris
Executive Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
10th floor, West Tower
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Re: **August 16, 2010 Meeting of the Executive Committee
Toronto Community Housing's Follow Up Response**

Dear Ms. Morris,

I am writing in follow up to a request by Toronto City Council at its meeting on July 6 and 7, 2010 that requested "the Board of Directors, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, to report to the Executive Committee for its meeting on August 16, 2010, on how the TCHC's Community Management Plan is addressing the need for strategies for human resource development for public domains of participatory action". On behalf of the Board of Directors, I provide the following response:

Since its inception in 2002, Toronto Community Housing has been at the forefront of developing and implementing unique and innovative tenant engagement strategies and programs. Within the context of the Tenant Engagement Strategy and in consultation with tenants, staff, community agencies and our labour partners, a number of programs and strategies have been designed to create the conditions whereby tenants will become actively involved in matters of concern to them resulting in the creation of healthy and vibrant communities. This can be taken from the perspective of the tenant, who can participate actively within and outside of Toronto Community Housing to effect change, or of the staff who promote, support, and enable tenant participation.

This commitment to engagement is clearly reflected in Toronto Community Housing's 2010-2012 Community Management Plan in those sections of the plan entitled Strengthening People and Strengthening Our Foundation.

Strengthening People - - Empowered Tenants

Toronto Community Housing staff work with tenants and partners to create conditions for tenants to become actively engaged to voice issues of concern, seek out or advocate for resources, and directly effect change in their communities as residents of Toronto. This results in healthier communities, social development and social inclusion.

When tenants are engaged, we find new ways of working that involves tenants, staff and other stakeholders in creating solutions to problems. It helps us feel the pulse of communities – informing staff of emerging issues, helps us understand local needs, and helps us be more responsive to issues that most relevant to tenants.

Tenant engagement helps to facilitate the role of tenants as full and active participants in civic life in Toronto and our wider society. Civic engagement provides leadership opportunities that build advocacy skills and enhance problem-solving skills. It enables tenants to address issues beyond social housing that affect their lives, family, community and the city. The Community Management Plan includes strategies for tenant engagement and building tenant leadership.

Tenant Engagement Strategy

Our approaches for tenant engagement facilitate tenant decision-making, build relationships, establish trust and develop an understanding of community issues, needs, opportunities and resources. The foundation of the tenant engagement strategy is the Tenant Engagement System. The system includes the following components: building meetings and cafes, neighbourhood and operating unit councils with special area councils for youth and seniors, participatory budgeting, community animation, workgroups and committees, and issue-based work.

Structure to Support Local Participation and Decision Making

In 2003, the organization introduced the Tenant Participation System as an integral component of its overall organizational governance model. The Tenant Participation System was intended to facilitate tenant decision-making through a 350 tenant elected base to create a vehicle through which participation can be achieved. The System was evaluated and revised in 2008. The model developed provides an entry point for better understanding of what role the organization can play in creating or supporting ways in which tenants can more actively participate in their neighbourhoods, connect more strongly to community and social networks and continue to have influence over decisions that impact their lives in the governance system.

Based on a review of the Tenant Participation System, tenants and staff decided the following changes were required:

- development of a new engagement strategy that recognizes and supports tenants as residents of their neighbourhoods, communities and the city of Toronto;
- enhancement of the existing governance model to operate effectively with the new organizational structure and operating unit boundaries; and
- development of mechanisms and identification of Toronto Community Housing's role in supporting tenant engagement on issues beyond housing that impact their lives.

The new Tenant Engagement System was established to enable and strengthen tenant participation in Toronto Community Housing's governance as well as support tenant engagement on issues of impact to their lives. Tenant Representatives are elected to participate in building meetings in their communities and in Neighbourhood Councils created to represent tenant interests (e.g. by identifying community issues, consulting with tenants, providing input into policy and program development, setting local priorities, and participating in community business planning and decision-making in area Councils).

On June 23, 2009, Toronto Community Housing held its third portfolio-wide tenant elections since the inception of the system in 2003. This election marks the first election under the new Tenant Engagement System. An unprecedented 726 candidates across the Toronto Community Housing portfolio competed for 416 Tenant Representative positions. Approximately 14,500 tenants, representing 31% of eligible voters, cast their votes in 189 polls across the Toronto Community Housing portfolio. 131 positions were filled by acclamation and 244 were filled in 189 contested elections. The remaining 41 positions remain vacant until bi-elections are held for those communities.

As part of our Tenant Engagement Strategy we launched an important initiative in April 2010, elections for youth representatives. There will be one Youth Council for each operating unit, for a total of 11 councils. Elected Youth Representatives, tenants who are 14 to 28, will represent a diversity of youth tenant's concerns and have a real say in decision-making at the neighbourhood council level. This means that youth tenants will be a part of the new tenant engagement model, working with staff to make decisions, set capital priorities, advocate on behalf of youth tenants, plan community budgets, and solve community issues. It also ensures that Toronto Community Housing is held accountable by youth tenants for the quality of services and housing that it provides. In total, 175 youth tenant representatives received a new two-year

mandate – 54 youth representatives were elected and 121 positions were filled by acclamation. Sixty-eight positions remain vacant across the portfolio.

Through *Participatory Budgeting*—a process of democratic decision-making—tenants decide how to spend part of Toronto Community Housing's capital budget for investments and repairs in their community. We will continue to expand the participatory budgeting model to include more tenants in decisions and in building community economic opportunities into project implementation.

For the ninth year in a row we organized Participatory Budgeting which gives tenants the power to decide how to spend capital housing money in a democratic and transparent way. Tenants have funded initiatives such as gardens, playgrounds, gymnasium renovations, kitchens and bathroom upgrades, computer resource centres and additional building security features. We support tenants throughout the process, as tenants create priorities, present their priorities at voting events, vote on the top priorities, and select the successful proposals.

Community Animation, a peer-to-peer approach of training and education, engages tenants to address issues that affect their communities and the city. Through an intensive training course, community animators are provided with skills and tools that they apply toward building partnerships and engaging other tenants to create change in their communities. We will continue to apply the community animation model in green initiatives such as recycling, water, and energy conservation. We will also expand the model into our community revitalization program, and make it an essential element of our strategies for community gardening.

The Community Animation Model furthers Toronto Community Housing's Green Plan. In 2009, Toronto Community Housing recruited and trained Community Animators to educate tenants on environmental issues and motivate tenants to adopt more ecologically positive behaviours. What sets a tenant-led education program such as this one apart from other approaches is the fact that tenant leaders are given the tools and capacity to motivate their neighbours to realize change in their communities. Put simply- tenants motivate each other to act. We are tracking and evaluating the impact of this important program.

Advisory and Consultation

The Tenant Engagement Reference Committee is an elected group of tenants that advises Toronto Community Housing on tenant engagement issues. Among the committee's recommendations after Toronto Community Housing's 2008 restructuring was to increase opportunities for tenants to provide input into specific areas of the engagement system through working groups and committees. These groups convened for the first time in 2009 and will be supported by staff as they grow and develop over the next three years. In addition, staff brought together youth tenants in 2009 to create the Youth Engagement Reference Committee, which will shape the governance structure of the youth councils.

Issue-Based Engagement and Advocacy

Through issue-based engagement, Toronto Community Housing creates opportunities for tenants to participate and influence decision-making in systems beyond housing, and to become part of civic life as residents of the city. Issue-based engagement enables tenants to organize, advocate, and work with external stakeholders on critical issues that affect their lives. We will continue to support the development of tenant groups such as the Somali Tenants Association, Hispanic Tenants Association, and Anti-Ableism Committee, as well as support tenants in developing advocacy campaigns such as Save our Structures. We will also support tenant groups to become involved in issues of civic engagement, social justice, poverty reduction, and food security, by connecting them to advocacy and external networking opportunities.

In 2009, Toronto Community Housing developed Community Standards – guidelines and expectations for staff, tenants, and community partners on acceptable standards of community behaviour. The Standards were developed through an extensive consultation process with tenants, staff, and community stakeholders and were approved by Toronto Community Housing's Board of Directors in August, 2009. To be implemented in all communities, Community Standards are intended to address tenant concerns regarding negative behaviours of other residents and enhance community perceptions of safety and community liveability.

Tenant Leadership Strategy

We recognize a need to develop mechanisms to expand opportunities for leadership and engagement beyond the traditional role of elected Tenant

Representatives. The *Tenant Leadership Strategy* identifies opportunities and provides supports for tenants to develop and apply knowledge and skills to achieve the following outcomes:

- More active participation in their communities and our governance system
- Increased involvement as a resident of Toronto
- Stronger connection to community and social networks
- Better access to services and opportunities
- Improved influence over decisions that affect their communities

Toronto Community Housing is partnering with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education to conduct a 12 session program on civic engagement and participatory democracy. In May 2010, the first group of thirty tenant leaders completed the program which immerses them in innovative examples of civic participation, local democracy, and community development in various settings. The program combines discussion on ideas about democracy and civic engagement, practical tools for implementation, and experiential learning through group projects. A second group of thirty tenant leaders will commence the program in September 2010.

Learning and Development

We will provide support for training and skills development opportunities for tenants in their role as elected Tenant Representatives and Toronto residents. We will support the development of curriculum through collaboration by staff, tenants, and educators and we will facilitate partnerships with educators and educational institutions to enable the curriculum to be offered in academic settings. Topics will be aligned with tenants' interests and the needs of their communities, such as human rights, governance, community development, and civic engagement.

In 2010, a group of parent advocates, the Parents Advocacy Group undertook a community leadership training program presented by Humber College. The training modules consisted of workshops such as proposal writing, conflict resolution and program sustainability of programs. One result – a group of women in the Field Sparrow community came together to create a children's safety training program.

In 2011, we will build on a pilot undertaken with the Nonprofit Management & Leadership Program at York University's Schulich School of Business. The initiative resulted in a 4 half-day Capacity Building Leadership Series workshops for 30 representatives in several communities. The sessions improved the

functioning of tenant councils by promoting group work in areas such as community asset mapping and effective council communication.

Strengthening Our Foundation - - Improved Customer Service & Better Communications

Tenant engagement is a core principle to Toronto Community Housing. To ensure the environment supports tenants, staff must equally be equipped to support and nurture active participation. Broad-based learning experiences covering all of the foundations of public participation are required. The Community Management Plan includes enabling strategies to support successful tenant engagement through building the skills and abilities of staff.

Structure to Support Learning

In 2008, the organization restructured and introduced two new functions to support learning and growth in the organization - - organizational development and community practice. Toronto Community Housing strengthened the staff resources needed to build a learning community to support the re-structuring while reinforcing tenant leadership development for public action. An Organizational Development Director was hired in 2008 to ensure organizational change initiatives are managed strategically so that staff develop leadership at all levels of the organization. The mandate of Organizational Development is to create a socially inclusive environment and a healthy, accountable workplace. The director oversees Training and Development, Workplace Diversity, Succession Planning, Performance Management. Toronto Community Housing also incorporated a Community of Practice team. The team, comprised of four seasoned community development workers, work with both staff and tenants to strengthen skills development and broaden leadership and participation to promote community health, tenant engagement and successful tenancies.

Our recruitment process is also being changed to ensure that we screen prospective applicants not just for skills but more importantly for five new competencies including building coalitions.

Learning Strategy

Development of our human resources and civic engagement activities will support the Community Management Plan and will include a comprehensive Learning Strategy. This Strategy will promote inclusion, particularly of tenants who face mental health or accessibility challenges or who might be at risk.

Building Capacity

Toronto Community Housing has a long history of deepening the competency of front-line staff to understand and support community capacity building and civic

engagement. In 2005, Toronto Community Housing launched a training program in partnership with Tamarack that provided five day-long workshops for managers and Health Promotion Officers on skills and competencies for community capacity-building, neighbourhood-based collaboration and creating trust-based leadership.

Toronto Community Housing is a member of the Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation. It's a community of individuals and organizations dedicated to the creation and sustainability of vibrant communities, businesses, governments, not for profits and learning institutions through the good practice of dialogue, deliberation, collaborative action and decision-making processes. Toronto Community Housing and the Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation partnered last year to bring the learning conference to Toronto that focused on:

- How have communities and community leaders used dialogue and deliberation to create change?
- What does "leadership" mean when it comes to dialogue and deliberation?
- What are new ways or emerging promising practices?
- How can governments use dialogue and deliberation to make more sustainable decisions?
- How can dialogue and deliberation create stronger communities?
- How do we make sure "silent voices" are part of these conversations?
- How can dialogue and deliberation help solve some of the problems in today's democracies?
- What can people do to help create stronger democracies?

250 learners and networkers came together to discuss how conversations make stronger communities and healthier democracies.

Toronto Community Housing has and will continue to invest significant resources in staff training and development thereby ensuring that our staff has the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively implement and sustain our community engagement programs and initiatives. In the social housing sector, this is a rare approach but is picking up speed given the positive outcomes that are gained. Toronto Community Housing continues to be a strong leader in the area of tenant engagement for social housing but considers itself an organization of continuous inquiry and improvement.

The organization's ability to innovate and support tenant engagement practice has continued to evolve at a good pace. The organization wishes to advance further in this area and has ensured that the 2010 – 2012 Community Management Plan reflects this.



David Mitchell
Chair
Toronto Community Housing Board



Keiko Nakamura
Chief Executive Officer
Toronto Community Housing