

Tenants First Phase 1 Implementation Plan: Summary of Tenant & Stakeholder Engagement



Overview of the engagement process

As directed by City Council in the Tenants First report, a Tenant Advisory Panel was established to help guide the development of the implementation plan. 13 Toronto Community Housing tenants representing a range of geographic and demographic diversity, lived experience, knowledge and interests as well as experienced and emerging leadership were selected to provide direction and advice and inform development of the Tenants First Implementation Plan. They provided feedback on proposals and recommendations developed through the Tenants First working groups and supported tenant outreach and engagement activities related to Tenants First initiatives. Through weekly meetings over a five month period, presentations and discussions, panel members provided advice and guidance on the proposed recommendations and actions contained within the Phase 1 report, and *developed* a report highlighting their advice as well as their reflections on the process. (***attached- Tenants Advisory Panel Report to Executive Committee- Appendix 1***)

Tenants First Project staff met with the Toronto Seniors Forum and their Housing sub-committee to update them on the emerging implementation plan for Phase 1 as well as senior groups in several TCHC buildings. A youth-focused workshop for youth living in TCHC was attended by youth participants in the “If I Ruled TO” annual event.

Tenants First Project Management Office partnered with Social Planning Toronto to conduct a series of 4 Housing Policy Forums to engage tenants and representatives from the community and non-profit sectors in a dialogue on a range of issues related to Tenants First directions. Participants attended 4 sessions focusing on portable housing benefits, seniors housing, TCHC reform & Tenants First and supportive housing (***attached- Social Planning Toronto- Summary of Housing Policy Forums, May 2017- Appendix 3***)

A series of 4 Tenants First Information meetings were conducted to inform TCHC tenants about the proposed recommendations as well as provide tenants with an opportunity to share their feedback and ideas. A representative from Maytree Foundation supported the meetings with a presentation about the roles of government in funding and providing social housing, the municipal decision-making process and an overview on civic engagement and participation.

In small group discussions facilitated by Tenants First Advisory panel members, the community update meetings asked participants four key questions:

- 1) What should the City consider with the creation of a new seniors housing provider?
- 2) What do you think the focus of the new Toronto Community Housing should be?
- 3) How can Toronto Community Housing best support vulnerable tenants?
- 4) How should the City and Toronto Community Housing continue to engage tenants through the implementation of Tenants First?

Below is a summary of the notes taken at the update meetings, as well as submissions from tenants directly to the Tenants First team. The comments are grouped into predominant themes & responses for each question.

What we heard

1. What should the City consider with the creation of a new seniors housing provider?

Structure: Tenants wanted to see an organization where tenants have decision-making and where management respects and communicates well with tenants

- Non-hierarchical, flattened structure, with accountability, Go back to the old model- no new bureaucracy!! No to experts!
- Tenants should run the organization, or strong representation, hopefully led by tenants
- Better management, good governance, thoughtful structure
- Customer service model – better communications and public relations
- Mission and vision adjusted to seniors
- Should not be run like a nursing home
- If run by another provider, who will oversee who manages the buildings, standards and upkeep?
- Don't privatize the seniors- run by the government. If it's private, the landlords should have to follow strict guidelines
- Organization should have experience with vulnerable seniors and a good track record
- Elected system of Senior Tenant Reps and a Tenant Council for Seniors- they can be a strong voice- increase the number of tenants on any governing body or Board of Directors
- A complaint system that works.

Governance: Tenants were unsure about whether the new seniors entity should be a non-profit or City division / Agency, but either way good oversight is necessary

- Department or Division within the City
- City owned & operated so that there is accountability to the City and better funding supply
- Must be non-profit yet have the care for tenants
- Must be public not private, should have sense of duty and public trust
- Should be non-profit but retain City oversight; could be separate not for profit
- City needs to have oversight and be gatekeepers

Choice in housing: Tenants thought seniors should be able to choose where they live and pointed out benefits of both seniors only housing and mixed buildings

- Will seniors be compelled to move? Ensure they are not! Give seniors a choice of where they can live,
- Good to have seniors separate in their own buildings because they feel safe and secure
- Buildings should be in close proximity to amenities
- Don't just segregate seniors- should have inter-generational focus
- The buildings need to be mixed- don't just have seniors only buildings, no to separate seniors buildings- don't believe in segregation; not all seniors want to live in seniors only buildings

New entity must be well funded: Tenants were concerned about future of TCHC and new seniors entity if not well funded and had some ideas about how to fund both.

- We must raise taxes to fund the housing system
- Affordability for seniors- they are on fixed incomes- no rent should go up higher than pensions
- Generate more money through lottery or fundraising, no other government is interested in social housing/poor people in Toronto
- The funding for seniors & surviving TCHC should be equal to the funding for non-profits- this would permit equal levels of care to those of the co-ops and non-profits can provide
- Need additional funding to build more housing units (pipe dream)
- Business model should work for serving the senior population
- Sustainable funding from more than one source: City, Federal, Province
- More funding- but it should not come from City's current budget as it will take away from other services- it should come from sources such as the Police Budget and/or roads
- Provincial government should pay more shelter allowance for seniors on Ontario Works and ODSP
- Seniors should not have to pay market rent or hydro bills
- Solar panels on every roof, sell hydro back into the grid, green roofs when solar not possible

Service Delivery Model: Tenants want a service model that works for seniors, that engages community agencies and the tenants who use the services.

- Should consider what seniors needs are- physical and mental health should consider programs to reduce social isolation- congregate dining, etc
- Better coordination of City/TCH services
- Tenants should be engaged to say what the service providers are, offer services that tenants want; ask them what they need
- Responsive maintenance- on time when fixing units
- Restore on-site staff- nursing services on site; access to geriatric services
- Accessible and knowledgeable support services when you need specific help
- Community spaces in building for senior-driven and led programming and accessible to tenants
- Language accessibility
- Accessibility- buddy system, room for scooters, bathroom supports
- Inter-generational support- young people who can help get their groceries and other supports
- Need to support a volunteering programs- seniors want to volunteer but need opportunities
- Don't put seniors in buildings where other tenants have severe mental health issues.
- Should be a combination of in-house and off site services; some services are better on site and also need to balance seniors getting outside their buildings
- Wellness & fitness components- chair yoga, parties

Safety and security: A new seniors entity must make safety of seniors a priority.

- Safety of the seniors is critical, please pay attention to safety needs of tenants!!
- Seniors need to feel safe in their buildings- restrict access to buildings- too many people coming & going into the building
- Monitor strangers coming into the building
- Always ensure at least one elevator is working
- More after hours staff on site than current

- Security staff should be onsite for longer hours and be more respectful of tenants

Other Feedback:

- City should be open to other proposals besides Tenants First
- Make sure Local 416 staff are the ones doing the maintenance and doing the buildings- no horror stories of buildings run by the big private contractors
- Consider how the transfer system will work for tenants who want to transfer to a seniors housing provider

2. What do you think the focus of the new Toronto Community Housing should be?

Be a good landlord: Overwhelmingly, tenants want a landlord that is responsive and keeps buildings well maintained and safe.

- To be a good landlord that does repairs well, keep up with repairs in a timely fashion
- To give people a home and not just four walls
- People first, not the \$ sign
- The main focus should be: # 1 security, # 2- for RGI tenants- make the rent calculations fair and transparent, # 3 maintenance and #4 designated smoking areas.
- Get rid of contract management- make TCH accountable!!
- Focus on tenants- clean, healthy, safe & hygienic homes and better communication with tenants
- Reform the RGI system- 30% of gross income- too many tenants are treated differently, unfair situations in money reporting
- Be a landlord vs. a babysitter- too invasive in our lives
- Improve safety- 24 hours security for the buildings, better monitoring of cameras for security, Intercom, lobby camera systems need to work
- Stop sending threatening letters to people about their tenancy issues
- On-site supers, maybe even on site cleaners
- Communications, transparency, respect for tenants and accountability of the organization
- More accountability from the contractors and staff who do repairs- no one inspects to make sure repairs are done properly
- Call centre should listen to and respect tenants
- More focus on environmental issues especially for new construction
- Pest control!!!
- A better process for filling vacant units- many sit empty
- Need to evict criminals and change the law so they do not return; evict problem tenants, Housing is a right, subsidized housing is a privilege, speed up the eviction process for those causing problems because we're all becoming vulnerable tenants
- Please deal with the slum conditions (rooming houses downtown)
- Don't put people with issues into buildings that disrupt and make others vulnerable
- Rooming houses are poorly managed- wild wild west (Winchester)
- Update the transfer policy so people understand it and for more transparency and accountability- more equitable transfer system, at least explain so people understand it

Services & Programs: Tenants want to provide input into the kinds of services available and to be connected to services when needed.

- Consult with tenants about what services and programs should be in their buildings &

communities- no current process for this

- Continue to address the needs of seniors living in non-seniors buildings
- Employment opportunities, programs for youth, after school programs
- Bring back the youth staff we used to have, programs for youth are very important
- Youth Councils to support youth and develop ideas to build their communities
- Provide information to all tenants about services that are available in their communities
- Accessibility of community rooms- for tenant use
- A campaign against vandalism in the building.
- Tenant led and focused programs like having tenants welcome new tenants
- More focus on families and youth, especially employment for youth
- ESL programs in the buildings to support newcomers
- Common rooms for tenants can relax and socialize
- TCHC should develop partnerships with groups that have expertise so staff can focus on housing issues, Partner with agencies who have expertise in services /programs, especially for children and youth

An Effective Organization: Tenants want a smaller and more locally driven organization.

- Organization should be smaller to better serve the needs to tenants and deal with property maintenance
- TCHC Managers need to be better connected- too many silos between resident services, capital & maintenance people, flatter management model with more staff in the community
- More respect for the work of the front line staff from management.
- Smaller portfolio would be easier to manage- there are too many programs that cost too much money- focus on being a good landlord
- The Client Care line is ineffective, too slow!
- Please go beyond banker's hours!
- Tenants First proposal guts Resident Services silos them with the City of Toronto, reduces opportunities for resident engagement
- Professionally managed staff with good service, communications with NO contract management
- Don't pay the contractors until the work is done properly
- Proper staff in proper positions who are properly trained!
- A reporting system that does not make people feel unsafe
- Follow protocols (rules); respond to tenants (stop ignoring) and don't dehumanize us
- Keep on top of all the third parties (contractors, community people, etc)
- Hire more people who care and listen to the tenants
- Decentralized system would provide faster & better service
- Need better quality management at local level
- TCH should follow its own policies & procedures- make tenants adhere to their leases
- Tenants need to understand the different staff roles!
- Staff training in customer services and treating tenants with respect and dignity
- More tenants need to be on the Board of Directors by direct election
- An advocate or ombudsman for the tenant's not just people facing evictions! Need the support of an independent advocate

Communicate well with tenants: Tenants want to be respected and heard.

- Remove the glass in the Operating Unit offices- tenants don't like to speak with staff through a glass window- makes you feel inhuman
- Better recognition & respect for tenant reps & leaders

- Strengthen participatory budgeting, including capital budget
- Hear and respect what tenants say-support real tenant engagement
- Invite more agencies to be part of buildings
- Residents need to be part of decision making in their communities
- Treat tenants like residents of any private residence
- Implement decisions that are made by Tenants First
- Need to have translated communications for the major languages in the buildings, not just have people requested if needed.
- Consider engaging tenant volunteers who can be interpreters and translators to communicate and do outreach
- Question tenant engagement failures; need to reorganize tenant volunteers and tenant reps
- Give people reasons to have a stake in their building
- Tenants are never first- there is too much red tape to get anything done.

Other feedback:

- DO NOT sell any TCHC units, NEVER get into a situation of closing units NEVER SELL UNITS.
- Total revamp of Housing Connections is needed- doesn't work properly, address the huge waiting list

3.How can Toronto Community Housing best support vulnerable tenants?

Tenant Supports: Supports should be available to tenants when needed and staff should be trained to recognize trouble and respond effectively. Focus should be on Partnerships.

- A Tenants' Bill of Rights
- First off, we need to know who they are- then ensure they have access to necessary services- there are many who we don't even know what their needs are
- TCHC should be aware of tenant's vulnerabilities through the application process. They should be able to educate tenants about how to access community supports from the time they move in instead of waiting until there is a crisis.
- Train staff and tenants to recognize when a tenant may be in trouble, don't ignore the problem
- What is a vulnerable tenant? Mental health, addictions, homeless persons, victims of abuse and neglect, newcomers- refugees immigrants, community "informants", misinformed tenants, latch key kids and seniors who are isolated
- Everyone is vulnerable at some time. Communication is essential between the landlords and community of support providers. TCHC tenants are all vulnerable due to income!!!
- Send people (in-person) to remind tenants who miss the deadlines to renew annual review instead of just adjusting INCREASING RENT. Staff should be more humane, don't just focus on the money
- Community hub space for information for people who need help- especially in the high priority neighbourhoods.
- A staff person trained to deal with mental health issues (shrink) that offers 24 hour care
- Focused supports for people with mental health/ physical disabilities especially for reclusive people
- Focus on abused women and terminally ill people in our communities
- Diversity means putting vulnerable tenants with other tenants.
- More supportive type housing with partners who can provide the services
- More support for vulnerable tenants facing eviction

- Adhere to principles of routine scheduling of support services so tenants know when to access help
- Why can't we just check up on them? Better outreach
- Inform tenants about their rights under legislation
- Have tenants work to assist the vulnerable tenants- they trust them, consider a buddy system
- Conflict mediation services for people who are having difficulty
- Partner with agencies who have expertise- engage with the CCAC's and LHIN's, stronger collaboration with community support agencies, medical health clinics, etc, bring in basic health services to rooms that are not being used in buildings
- Transfer tenant to designated buildings for mental health issues and supportive housing, housing agencies that stay in the buildings
- Don't discriminate against tenants who have challenges
- Connect with each tenant individually (resource intensive!) connect them to programs and services- be proactive instead of waiting until there is a crisis
- Rooming houses are unsafe and need security- should be operating as supportive housing
- Address and be respectful of accessibility needs of tenants
- A case manager for each building; social worker on hand to assist tenants in navigating systems
- Need 24 hour service not 9-5 services, minimum, provide a phone number so people know who to call
- Stronger connections and relationships to substance abuse/addictions services and supports-for example having AA come into the buildings- it is free and we just ignore this
- When tenants are discharged from care facilities, ensure follow up supports to ensure they stay well
- Follow the Human Rights protocols that are posted

Organizational Focus; TCHC should be set up to support vulnerable tenants

- In each OU there should be an office with a PSW, nurse etc who all know each other, who can provide services for tenants, with phone numbers people can call that will help vulnerable tenants keep their tenants and ensure the staff are safe
- Increase security for tenants to feel safe, especially evenings and weekends
- Increase communication of services that are available
- Employ more tenants
- Anti-social behavior be addressed in a supportive way
- Transfers and referrals to rehab services and facilities where needed; locate tenants with known vulnerabilities in areas where supports exist
- More lobbying of the nursing home system to have places for tenants to go when needed so they don't remain in unsupported housing
- TCHC needs to ensure the service providers are working for the tenants needing services not their own organizations or funding targets!!

4. How should the City continue to engage tenants of Toronto Community Housing through the implementation of Tenants First?

Communications/Meetings/Access to Information: Tenants want to continue to be engaged and know that their feedback is being used.

- No more show ponies; engage us properly
- Joint staff/resident working groups

- OU's should have monthly meetings that should be open to all TCH tenants
- Listen to tenants, they have valuable information, get tenants involved in decision making
- Let tenants engage on their own!
- Local building meetings are important, tenants can socialize and hear what is going on
- Regular updates, town hall meetings and workshops
- Face to face engagement works best
- A local community newsletter
- Need to have representatives go to each building to explain the changes
- Tenants can go door to door if they have the information to share
- Update the TCH web site; inaccessible!
- Engage partners who work with tenants to engage with tenants
- Lobby intercepts not just for meetings and events but to talk to tenants about the issues in their communities and what supports are needed
- Advance notice of meetings and events
- Suggestion box only available by City staff
- Provide translation & interpretation
- Go to the tenants, don't expect them to come to you

Support Tenant Leadership: Tenants want opportunities to have meaningful input.

- Maintain Tenants First as a panel and replace members occasionally, Regional Tenants First panel; Tenants First panel is every area
- Larger City-Wide Tenant group in TCHC- similar to former Tenant Engagement Reference Committee
- Tenant positions on the Board should be increased, elected by all residents not just Tenant reps
- Someone to represent individual tenants rather have a tenant rep that represents many tenants
- Cooperating with tenants and stop putting up barriers
- Tenant engagement vs. staff manipulation, Stop breaking the NEW TENANT CHARTER!
- A dignified body of tenants to address major concerns; respect tenants input- have consideration for tenants who take time out to attend the meetings by using and giving the tenants credit.
- Have tenant coordinators in each building- have tenants as part of the management and decision making process in each building
- Tenants take leadership role rather than staff driven
- Scrap the current system of tenant engagement- facilitate organization of a tenants association with no TCHC employees, new models of tenant engagement system (broken)
- City of Toronto should have tenant leaders from each portfolio that meet regularly- an Advisory Council for Tenants that the City runs
- More opportunities for tenants to get involved in the life of their communities
- Empower the tenants to communicate with other tenants; not always staff driven, remove the current top down approach!
- Training on civic engagement- programs and resources
- Need more tenant advisory tables so tenants can have a say; current system is just tokenism- current tenant rep system- some good reps, some useless- need more training & capacity building- tenants association in every building
- Need an inclusive/safe platform for tenant voices- should not just be about the tenants that TCH management likes
- Promote tenant involvement in building healthy communities
- Stop barriers being put in place every tenant should have a right to access common spaces for community use

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