

Submission to July 3, 2019 Planning and Housing Committee Meeting

My name is Maryanna Lewyckyj and I am the President of the Park Vista Tenants' Association. The association represents tenants living in four buildings on Park Vista (Ward 19) with a combined total of more than 350 units.

While the major fire at 650 Parliament St. in 2018 is a relatively recent and high-profile example of the devastating effects of displacement of hundreds of tenants, it's hardly alone in terms of stories of tenant hardship.

On July 20, 2008, an explosion at an underground hydro vault at 2 Secord Ave. forced hundreds of frightened tenants to leave their building, many with just the clothes on their back. One tenant said the explosion shook the building and it seemed like a bomb went off. Nine firefighters were injured fighting the blaze, which sent a huge plume of black smoke across the sky. About 900 tenants were left scrambling to find another place to live and couldn't re-enter their unit for more than a month. According to news reports, some looting occurred when tenants fled and when they returned, many found their units and belongings coated in soot.

A class action suit was later launched against a construction company and the City of Toronto. A settlement of \$6.5 million was reached in 2014.

While I've never had to deal with circumstances as dire as those at 2 Secord Ave. or 650 Parliament St., in the time that I've lived on Park Vista, tenants in my building have had to deal with two multi-day power outages, as well as an overnight evacuation due to a gas line leak and more recently, a water main break on Dec. 30, 2017 that left buildings without water for about 16 hours.

In 2016, when the City of Toronto was considering whether to introduce landlord licensing, the Park Vista Tenants' Association provided written feedback. Our October 2016 submission recommended that landlords be required to develop the following:

- Evacuation plan
- Power outage plan
- Protocol for after-hours emergencies
- Landlord's staff must be trained in first aid

The association also noted standards around emergency power need enhancing. Back-up generation should be a requirement, minimum 48-hour capability and it should be at the very least, capable of supporting both emergency lighting, alarms/safety systems and one elevator.

We also noted that for emergencies, text and email is fast and effective in contacting lots of people quickly. In addition, emailing non-emergency notices saves on paper and allows tenants to have records of all notices. However, in emergencies landlords must also be able to communicate effectively and quickly to tenants who don't have an email or smart phone.

We also recommended that if ALL elevators in a building are out, the landlord should communicate with tenants and have a contingency plan. We also suggested that a Municipal and Licensing Standards official should sit on the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) Elevating Devices Advisory Council. I recognize that elevating devices fall under provincial jurisdiction, but given the number of high-rise buildings in Toronto, putting a City of Toronto official on the advisory council might help bring high-rise issues to a provincial table. In addition, we believe elevator entrapments should be deemed a reportable incident even if there are no injuries. Also, prolonged elevator outages should be a reportable incident.

We noted that more coordination is needed between the various bodies with jurisdiction over rental properties: By-law enforcement, fire services, Toronto Public Health and Technical Standards and Safety Authority (for elevators), Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Landlord and Tenant Board.

And while our association certainly welcomes new measures to improve emergency management protocols, we would also appreciate it if the existing requirements were better enforced.

For example, the City of Toronto's Property Standards (Chapter 629-5.1) require the owner of a multiple unit dwelling to post a sign in a prominent place in the front lobby or entrance of the building. The sign is supposed to provide the name, address and telephone number of the owner, manager or other person responsible for the property and the name and phone number of the authorized person to contact in the case of an emergency on 24-hour basis. Not only is this information valuable for tenants, it's also valuable for police, fire services and paramedics. An emergency number should be posted prominently, the requirement should be enforced by the city and consideration should be given to requiring larger sign lettering and indicating whether a number is capable of receiving text messages.

Heat, electricity and water are referred to as vital services because they are crucial to proper living conditions. It should go without saying that landlords should communicate promptly with tenants when such services are interrupted and have contingency plans to deal with the situation. While mass displacements are rare, the onus should be on the building operator to have plans in place to mitigate the impact on tenants.

Our association applauds the regulations the City of Toronto introduced on July 1, 2017 to help better inform and protect tenants. We also believe there is an opportunity to raise the bar higher to ensure better support to tenants when emergencies arise.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

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