



Everyone needs a home

HFS Administrative Office
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Members of the City of Toronto Public Works and Infrastructure Committee
Wednesday, September 12, 2012 Meeting
Committee Room 1, City Hall

Re: Solid Waste Management Donated Items Reduced Rate for Non-Residential Special Category

Dear Members of the City of Toronto Public Works and Infrastructure Committee:

I, Justin Ryan, Property and Shelters Manager of Homes First Society (HFS) and on behalf of the HFS management and residents, am requesting that the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee exempt all non-profit organizations from the newly implemented garbage collection fees.

HFS develops and provides supportive housing (i.e. affordable, stable housing and support services) to break the cycle of homelessness for people who have the most difficulty obtaining any form of housing and who have the fewest housing options.

HFS operates 16 supportive housing and shelter sites providing both accommodation and support services to more than 500, seniors, single adults, children, families, and youth in the City of Toronto. We deliver these services on our own and in partnerships with others, such as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto's Streets-to-Homes program, and Seaton House. True to our mandate, our work reduces the strain on more expensive alternatives, such as hospitals, addiction treatment beds, prisons, and even shelter beds.

At a number of our locations, we regularly receive food donations that are often shared throughout our organization to our shelters and housing sites (depending on the quantity and type of donation); very often, food is close to its expiration date, and it would be unfortunate if we suffered financial strain by these donations that individuals and organizations so generously provide.

We've already experienced one negative result due to the potential expense of garbage – we are now declining some food donations to avoid the potential extra expense of the garbage which may result from accepting the donation, which sadly has a direct impact on our residents already strained food budget.

We are particularly concerned about increased expenses and the potential impact especially regarding the following points:

Registered Canadian Charitable Registration No. 118962182 RR





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- Hoarding:
 - Many of our residents have lost housing in the past due to hoarding issues.
 - As much as we try to stay on top of this issue with residents, it remains an ongoing challenge for our front-line workers.
 - And while we constantly work to prevent an accumulation of goods for health and safety reasons throughout all of our buildings, these are our resident's homes, and as such, they have the same rights and responsibilities as any other resident of Toronto.
 - For example, very often residents with hoarding issues will bring in items they've collected throughout the neighbourhood during the evening, only to have our staff work with them the following day to throw it out.
 - The additional burden of this becoming a significant expense will no doubt have negative consequences.
- Recycling:
 - Homes First has implemented a recycling system and has successfully reduced waste through recycling by 15-20%, which, especially when you consider the population we house, we consider this to be a great achievement.
 - Very recently, we've incorporated the Green Bin program throughout all of our buildings which we hope will further reduce garbage.
 - We are committed to recycling; all staff have been trained, literature and postings have gone out throughout our organization to residents and staff, and we have held a number of information sessions throughout our portfolio to reinforce what has already been taught.
- Yellow tags:
 - The Yellow Tag system presents some challenges:
 - The Yellow Tags need to be purchased in advance and distributed to each location.
 - It requires administrative resources to purchase and distribute yellow tags (i.e., distribution, payment by credit card, tracking).
 - We have concerns about these tags going astray as they are not individualized or identifiable, especially as we need to purchase approximately 500 of these tags per month and we often use agencies to assist with cleaning and garbage removal.

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- Cost:
 - Like many organizations that serve marginalized populations, any increase in expenses, especially an expense as potentially significant as this one, will impact the people we serve as we will be forced to cut programs and staff hours in order to meet these costs.

At the Talking Trash: Part 2 Meeting (held on Thursday, September 6th, 4:30-6:00 p.m.), the following points were made:

- Our organizations provide, at no charge to the City, vital social programs and services that save the City money. If we didn't provide these services, the City would have to in order to meet basic needs — food, housing, employment — of our most vulnerable citizens. Exempting our organizations from garbage collection fees is an investment the City makes in making Toronto better for all of us.
- The City provides grants to organizations doing good work because it recognizes it is a worthwhile investment in Toronto communities. By implementing this new garbage collection fee, the City is effectively “taking back” some its support for our work. If the City is going to cut our budgets with a new garbage collection fee, then it needs to increase funding for the grants program. And many of the organizations affected by the new fee receive no community grants in the first place.
- Some of the affected organizations are partially or wholly dependent on public donations of goods. Thrift shops get many donations that cannot be re-used or recycled. And food banks get food donations that come in non-recyclable containers. People want to help, but these organizations have no control over donations that add to their volume of waste.
- Organizations like thrift shops that reuse and resell goods help save the City money and lower fees for all Toronto residents by diverting hundreds of tons of waste that would otherwise have to be trucked to landfill in London, ON.
- The vast majority of the over 1,000 organizations affected by the new fee are non-profits and charities providing services of significant public benefit. The city's list of organizations that had been exempted included a few organizations that did not meet these criteria -- our sector is willing to work in consultation with the City to refine the criteria for exemption.
- Research has shown that religious congregations support their communities by providing dozens of social programs and services, and overwhelmingly to non-members — beneficiaries are 7 times more likely to be non-members. A 1999 study of 16 Toronto congregations found that each provided an average of 3.4 programs, each valued conservatively at over \$40,000 per year. Multiply that by the 550 or so places of worship affected by the new fee, and the value of the services they provide to their neighbours is worth almost \$75M every year — and that's in 1999 dollars.

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The expense of having non-profits and charitable organizations pay for garbage removal is far-reaching and far-ranging, and I strongly urge you to exempt all non-profit organizations from the newly implemented garbage collection fees.

Sincerely,

Justin Ryan, Property & Housing Manager
Homes First Society

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