

May 4, 2012

TO: Mayor and Councillors

FROM: Joseph P. Pennachetti, City Manager

SUBJECT: Ombudsman's investigation 200 Wellesley Street East

I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with some additional information with respect to the Ombudsman's report on the City's Emergency Human Services response to the fire at 200 Wellesley Street East that occurred in September 2010. Council will consider this matter at its meeting on May 8 and 9.

I have reviewed the Ombudsman's recommendations and am in agreement with them. The 15 recommendations set out by the Ombudsman are in alignment with findings of the City's own internal investigation. I have identified actions to address these recommendations. Implementation of some of them has already occurred, with the remainder scheduled for completion by the end of June 2013.

From my perspective, it was clear from the outset that TCHC had assumed the lead decision-making authority of emergency response of their tenants. I feel this confusion of roles led to some of the concerns identified in the report. I agree that there is a need to have one point of decision making authority and it should rest with the City's Incident Commander. I will be taking immediate action to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities between the City and its Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Corporations. I am confident in future emergencies of this scale, response will meet all of our expectations and all parties will have a clear understanding of decision making and authority.

The incident at 200 Wellesley St. E. was extremely complex and challenging, involving many vulnerable individuals with significant needs. The fire resulted in the evacuation of 1,200 tenants from Canada's largest social housing building, owned by the Toronto Community Housing (TCH). Many of the residents affected were extremely vulnerable, with complex and varied social, financial and physical needs, requiring significant City support and assistance.

The City's Emergency Human Services response to the incident at 200 Wellesley was unprecedented, involving hundreds of staff redeployed from 14 City divisions. Over the four months that the Emergency Reception Centre was open, tremendous service was provided to a large number of residents, who were all safely cared for without any major injury or incident. Many of the issues identified through the review occurred within the first few days after the fire, and were quickly addressed in the following days. The Ombudsman's report recognizes the commitment and dedication of staff in the City's Emergency Planning Unit, the personal sacrifices involved, and the co-operation and receptiveness she received from them in conducting her investigation.

The City's first responders – Fire, Police, EMS – were exceptional in their roles. The City has a robust emergency management program in place, which we continuously work to refine and strengthen. From a Human Services point of view, City staff went above and beyond to assist the vulnerable residents of 200 Wellesley St. E. What we have learned through this experience is that we need more formalized protocols and procedures to guide us through challenging emergency situations that affect vulnerable residents. That work is already underway.

In her report, the Ombudsman has provided a summary of my comments to her. In order to provide you with the full details of my response, a copy is attached for your reference.

I look forward to discussion of this matter at Council. In the interim, please contact me if you require any additional information.

Joseph P. Pennachetti
City Manager

