

Bold Ideas to Fix the broken Toronto Community Housing (TCHC)

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Toronto City Council is looking at options to improve the deplorable State of Disrepair in existing multi-residential social housing units for residents that live in Toronto Community Housing. The TCHC'S commitment to use the net proceeds from sales to invest in repairs in crumbling housing stock is **practical** and **long-overdue**.

The Auditor General's report combined with the actions adopted by Council last year have attempted to correct wrongs specifically related to the disregard of rules around expenses, the procurement process and abuse of taxpayers' money. A challenge that remains is addressing the concerns of equity seeking groups –such as; women, seniors, people with mental health issues, and the most vulnerable.

Currently, the TCHC capital repair bill aimed at dealing with the existing backlog of repairs sits at an estimated 751 million dollars and is expected to grow to 1 Billion dollars by 2015. Facing these types of major financial challenges, it is clear that a new approach is necessary if ever we are to put TCHC on solid ground to better serve all tenants.

Immediate action is necessary to implement strategies that will work to improve this current situation.

As an active City Councillor, I have witnessed first-hand current strategies that are disastrously failing tenants and believe that there are **alternatives which could serve to improve the situation:**

1) Home ownership alternatives / Habitat for Humanity

The City should change gears and embrace partnerships that focus on Affordable Home Ownership. This type of a partnership would be cost-effective and a true hand up to assist those who would otherwise end up in the social housing system. Public/Non-profit partnerships are essential. These financial models work, and over time only increase equity which benefits families who are now absorbing the cost of maintenance and repairs.

2) Phase-out any potential sales

The recommendation to sell the 765 TCHC houses should not be supported. We should only be considering the immediate sale of current vacant houses at full market value. The sale of any other TCHC stand-alone properties may be given consideration after the TCHC has **concluded** its analysis of the feasibility and benefits of such a sale. Any future sales should be approved by City Council, perhaps through a "Task Force that includes

“real experts” in housing. A TCHC and a City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office should be formed ASAP to report on the benefits/impacts of future sales.

3) Rent Subsidies

Rent subsidies or vouchers should be considered to address those that are on the waiting list, or waiting for years for rent gear to income (RGI)

The New York rental assistance model known as “HUD’s” creates strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. Low rent subsidies are given directly to apartment owners, who lower the rents they charge tenants. You can find low-rent apartments for senior citizens and people with disabilities, as well as for families and individuals with low incomes.

4) 10 year Affordable Housing Action Plan (HOT) Provincial and Federal Funding

City Council must urge the Provincial and Federal governments to take full responsibility for the current social housing crisis; particularly in reference to the massive TCHC stock of homes downloaded onto the City without a funding plan to deal with capital repairs.

5) Social Housing solutions is every-body’s business

As Elected Members of Council, I believe, we are tasked with the responsibility of addressing the current mess that the TCHC is in, pragmatic and innovative approaches will take us a long way. On the other hand, Ideological posturing will only perpetuate a sense of helplessness affecting the most marginalized.

6) The current status quo is not an option

The best way to immediately raise funds for repairs is to sell of the vacant homes that are in need of tremendous repair and use the sale of these homes to repair other homes in the stock. This is certainly a better option than raising taxes, tenant rents, or diverting money from other city programs - doing nothing is not an option.

7) Toronto Community Housing stock should be declared “capital facilities and exemption from municipal and school property taxes”

This option would reduce TCHC costs through the reduction of municipal and educational property tax exemptions. If granted, the educational provincial taxes must be used towards repairs and maintenance of this affordable housing stock.

Currently, we have hundreds of units that are sitting empty because they are in a state of disrepair but are costing us a fortune to retain while offering no benefit to anyone. This is totally unacceptable and doing nothing is not an option. We need to take immediate action and implement strategies and goals that are practical and achievable in order to resolve this situation.