

Friday February 17<sup>th</sup> 2012

RE: Item EX16.3 - Securing Funding to Repair Toronto Community Housing's Multi-Residential Portfolio: Sale of Toronto Community Housing Stand-Alone Units

Good Morning,


I am here on behalf of the Toronto Women's City Alliance whose goal is to see the City create substantive equality that will make visible and audible the voices and issues of women and girls in Toronto. Women who live in Toronto are affected daily by the decisions made by the City. This includes accessing essential services like transit, community centres, social housing, and much more.

We seek to work with the City to expand its diversity lens to include gender explicitly and to examine the interactions between gender and race, ethnicity and immigration, as well as age, ability, family, etc. I am here today to ask the Committee to reconsider the proposed selling of 675 single-family units.

In our 2010 Women's Equalities Report Card project, women identified, housing as a key service that enhances their lives. Social isolation has been shown to be one of the most important consequences of inadequate housing and poverty. The City's move to sell off the dispersed homes represents a move backwards.

In Toronto, for many women and girls, housing is neither affordable, available, nor appropriate. This is because on average, women are poorer than men, especially when we are lone parents, elderly, live with a disability, victims of violence or belong to a marginalized group. In Toronto, there are more than 80,000 households on the waiting list for affordable housing.

We understand that many of these stand alone homes are in dire need of repair but why are we considering displacing over a 1,000 families – removing them from their homes and their communities - before looking at other alternatives for paying for these repairs? These two issues should not be looked at in connection to one another. Pitting tenants against each other is unfair, unkind and bad policy.



## TORONTO WOMEN'S CITY ALLIANCE

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Furthermore, this loss of housing stock will mean less access to appropriate housing for families with multiple children or kinship families. The loss of these units will also mean a regression from mixed-income neighbourhoods.

TWCA asks that all levels of government fund social and cooperative housing construction to eliminate homelessness and the social housing waiting list within 10 years. At the very least, Toronto needs to provide 1000 affordable units a year, as recommended in the HOT (Housing Opportunities Toronto) Report which Toronto City Council adopted. In 2009 the City recognized that every Toronto resident has a right to obtain safe, secure and affordable housing.


Councillor Mammoliti said that “one of the best ways of providing opportunity for all is to make sure people have access to affordable housing across Toronto,”...“In putting forward this plan, we are also supporting job creation, a greener city, healthy and productive residents and a better future for us all.”

You are absolutely right Councillor – access to affordable housing is the first step in improving a person's quality of life while allowing for the pursuit of other opportunities. Having access to social housing as a child allowed for my single mom and I to have a safe place to live, it also offered her the stability and security to pursue avenues of employment and education.

Housing and homelessness are complex issues. First of all, we do not have disaggregated data that demonstrates the kinds of families on social housing waiting lists – but we can guess that single mother families are predominant in this category. Secondly, studies on homelessness rarely focus on the *kind* of homelessness which is experienced by women and their children, such as couch surfing between friends and family. Having a roof over your head does not always mean you have a home. Thirdly, we know that women are forced to remain in abusive situations due to the lack of alternatives, particularly the inaccessibility of long-term affordable housing (that is, housing that does not exceed 30% of one's income). Women and their children have the right to low income housing that is safe and decent.

Canada has endorsed housing as a human right. This makes the supply of housing a social responsibility and not something to be left solely to market forces. Until this commitment is realized, Canada's governments remain in violation of human rights.

Many women, especially single parents, are forced to live in substandard housing that may be far from services, transportation or jobs and has insufficient space to accommodate special needs or children. Bed bugs, unsafe neighbourhoods, property standards violations, and harassment are just some of the conditions that women face when they are forced to live in inadequate housing.



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HOT recognizes the limits of the City's financial resources and calls on Toronto's federal and provincial partners to do their part. Mayor Ford, I ask that you leverage your relationship with the Prime Minister to help out Toronto's housing crisis. It was reported last month that the Federal Crime Bill will cost Ontario \$1 billion to build another prison and house new inmates. Why isn't this money going into housing? We don't need new prisons, we need affordable housing. The City needs to go to the province and the feds to advocate on behalf of Toronto's social housing tenants.

In the meantime Torontonians are working together to come up with creative solutions. Selling off these homes is just a quick fix, it is not a real solution and it will not generate enough income to help fix some of the dilapidated buildings. There are lots of innovative ideas floating around – many residents who want to help the City find solutions to our housing crisis. We strongly suggest that you look at partnerships with non-profits, cooperatives and pursuit of apprenticeship programs. We also suggest organizing an advisory committee to look at the issue further.

Let's not close the conversation right now when there are so many talented people in Toronto coming up with progressive solutions. You have heard from many people including diverse tenants and four of Toronto's past mayors, including Ontario's Human Rights Commissioner.

Let's please work together to create more affordable, sustainable and safe housing for the women, men and children of our city.

Our goal at TWCA is to demonstrate to you the various negative effects that these cuts will have on women and their families. The analysis requires thinking about how different groups are positioned differently in relation to resources in the City.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jennifer Arango for

Toronto Women's City Alliance