



August 31, 2015

Dear Chair and Affordable Housing Committee Members,

Re: Large single-room occupancy buildings

There have been a number of recent and pending proposals for redevelopment of buildings that primarily consist of rooms for rent, many of which were former hotels and taverns that also provided rooms. Most of these are on commercial stretches of major streets, considered suitable for mid or high-rise residential and mixed-use development.

Because the City's Official Plan policies and Chapter 667 of the Municipal Code (under S.111 of the City of Toronto Act) protect dwelling units, not dwelling rooms, these properties may be increasingly attractive to developers believing that no rental replacement will be required, and little or no tenant relocation assistance provided. It may be that the very success of the City's rental protection framework has resulted in more development pressure being applied to these single-room occupancy sites. As they disappear, we do not have a replacement for them and our affordable housing stock is diminishing.

The issue I am raising here is not surrounding licensing, enforcement or illegal rooming houses, it is regarding legal and existing commercially-operated rooming houses, that may be developed, resulting in the loss of upwards of 100 units of affordable housing at once with no requirement for replacement. Often those renting in single-room occupancy buildings depend on deeply affordable housing and can be left vulnerable and on the street. The loss of even one of these commercially-operated buildings would place tremendous strain on city services and our affordable housing stock.

This problem is not unique to Toronto and in cities such as Vancouver they are implementing cash in lieu and other fees for large rooming house conversions. See a recent story here: <http://www.news1130.com/2015/07/02/vancouver-considers-upping-fee-for-converting-rooming-houses/> and Vancouver's SRO bylaw here: http://app.vancouver.ca/bylaw_net/ConsolidatedReport.aspx?bylawid=8733&txtSearch=sra.

I believe that there may be a distinct and unique category of rooming houses that should be considered for those commercially-operated single-room occupancy buildings with 15 or more dwelling units. My recommendations below are not related to those rooming houses within what would have otherwise been single family homes, which represent only a few rooms each - the loss of a single one of these would not place huge pressure on our affordable housing supply. It is important that any fees we consider be for commercially-operated and large single-room occupancy buildings so that we maintain an incentive for homeowners to create rooming houses.

Councillor **Mike Layton**



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I am therefore recommending that:

1. That staff from the Rental Housing Review Work Group include in their work plan a special focus on commercially-operated single-room occupancy buildings with 15 or more dwelling rooms, and in particular:
 - a. Provide an estimate of the number of such buildings and dwelling rooms that have been approved for redevelopment in the last 5 years, resulting in the loss of affordable rental rooms, and an estimate of the number of similar buildings currently in the pre-application or application review stage; and
 - b. Review the impact on the affected tenant population of the loss of such accommodation, and what kind of accommodation such tenants were able to move to; and
 - c. Examine policy options for the City, under the City of Toronto Act or other means, to provide protection for, or replacement of, this kind of affordable rental housing, and provisions for tenant relocation assistance.

2. That City Planning, MLS, SSHA and Legal staff work to protect our affordable housing stock by
 - a. determining if we have existing powers or tools to uniquely license or protect commercially-operated single-room occupancy buildings with 15 or more dwelling rooms similar to the protection that exists for dwelling units.
 - b. considering the creation of fees and/or cash-in-lieu, such as the those in Vancouver, for developers in those instances where commercially-operated single-room occupancy buildings with 15 or more dwelling rooms are impacted, including being impacted by redevelopment or conversion to other uses such as condos and boutique hotels.

Sincerely,

Mike Layton
City Councillor
Ward 19, Trinity-Spadina