



July 12, 2016

City Council Submission

Item EX16.11 – Tenants First - A Way Forward for Toronto Community Housing and Social Housing in

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto represents 165 co-ops comprised of 15,000 units and home to some 45,000 people across Toronto and York Region. We provide advice and services to our member co-ops, hosting approximately 80 workshops annually, and providing training to over 1,100 people. When possible, we also develop new co-ops.

We are pleased to make this written submission presenting CHFT's comments on the "Tenants First" staff report dated June 14, 2016 and thank the City for the opportunity to share our thoughts.

The staff report on TCHC suggests the need for significant change in the management of TCHC units, recommending the transfer of a number of TCHC units to non-profits. We believe that transitioning a portion of these units to co-ops would lead to the creation of financially sustainable communities.

Communities are integral to what we do at CHFT. Each co-op is dependently managed and governed by its residents and we believe that having volunteers involved in the community improves the community. Co-ops provides individuals with a platform to become engaged with their community, to gain valuable skills, and to encourage the betterment of their broader community outside of their co-op. Citizen engagement is critical to society and co-ops are an effective and cost-efficient way of fostering that engagement.

One co-op in particular demonstrates the capacity of the sector to transform public housing into co-op housing and have it become a thriving pillar in the community. Atkinson Housing Co-operative previously existed as Alexandra Park. Over 20 years ago, CHFT worked with the residents to convert the complex into a co-op and it now houses over 1000 members in the heart of downtown. Atkinson Co-op is governed by its residents, and it is an example and blueprint by which the co-op sector can turn TCHC into thriving communities.

The lessons learned from CHFT's transformation of Alexandra Park into Atkinson Housing Co-operative – especially given the scale and scope of the project - would help in any conversion of public housing to non-profit housing. One such issue would be the unique challenge of accommodating RGI-heavy communities. A change in housing provider does not indicate an eschewed responsibility for our city's most vulnerable.



We hope that the impending changes to the Housing Services Act and the recent provincial announcement of new dollars will factor into the City's directions on developing creative directions to the implementation plan under development. In particular, the changes related to mixed income housing and RGI developments could considerably benefit from new thinking with this opportunity as well as the inclusionary zoning changes we anticipate being realized.

We believe that any decisions to proceed with a transformation of TCHC units should be data-driven and done with a full consideration of the resources to ensure its successful implementation. The conversion project will require enormous investment from the City and partner non-profits and we believe that it is imperative that these projects are initiated with a fulsome understanding of potential challenges which may arise. Due to its significantly larger capacity, the City and TCHC would be tasked with the data-collection and research behind the initiative.

Co-ops have a history of strong governance stemming from their grassroots model. Empowering residents is one of the most effective ways to improve their lives and to create more engaged housing communities. The staff report continuously touches on tenant alienation and a lack of a sense of community in TCHC facilities and transitioning to a co-op model would address both of these issues head-on.

However, with a project of this magnitude, we accept that the co-op model does not fit all needs and we encourage the City to explore all not-for-profit options. The City should engage existing communities ensuring that tenant needs are met and the tenants themselves are respected. More broadly, this tailored approach to housing transformation should engage ancillary community services. Too often are TCHC residents without the emergency services they require when they are in the most need. In the reconstruction of the social housing system, we must ensure that the problems facing TCHC are fully addressed and rectified, finding the best possible arrangement for communities in the process.

Lastly, CHFT has encouraged newly developed co-ops to become part of our land trust system since the late 1980s. The land trusts lease the properties to individual co-ops ensuring that the land remains in the affordable housing portfolio. For over 25 years, CHFT has administered the land trusts that provide affordable permanent housing to well over 9000 people living in over 4000 co-op apartments and townhouses.

CHFT would like to partner with other non-profit organizations to own and operate TCHC properties. We would also like to work with tenants living in scattered houses to ensure that tenants are able to the services necessary to maintain the properties. There is a great deal of expertise in the non-profit community that would help to provide support to residents living in TCHC properties.



CHFT is excited to work with others to create new models that provide an array of options best suited to resident needs and we look forward to hearing about how the implementation plan progresses.

Sincerely,

Tom Clement

Executive Director

Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto