

Acknowledgements

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Contents

Acknowledgements 1

Summary..... 3

Background..... 5

 Overview of the consultation process 6

 Context..... 7

What we heard 9

 Transformative Idea 1: Transition to a New Community Based Non-Profit Housing Corporation..... 9

 Transformative Idea 2: Create Mixed Income Communities..... 11

 Transformative Idea 3: Better Buildings and More of Them..... 13

 Transformative Idea 4: Decentralized operations/Strengthen partnerships..... 15

 Transformative Idea 5: Reform the Rent Geared to Income (RGI) System 17

 Other Major Themes Raised 19

APPENDICES 22

Summary

Eight public consultations were held by City staff between April 11 and 25, 2016. These consultations were held in order to capture meaningful input from Toronto residents on the recommendations for the transformation of Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) contained in the January 2016 final report from the Mayor's Task Force on TCHC. This feedback informed the staff report to Council in July 2016 that provides an initial assessment of the Task Force's recommendations and underlying assumptions.

This is a summary of the notes taken at these consultations and submissions made separately directly to the team, and reflects the input of some 300 voices; mainly residents of TCHC. The comments are grouped by the five "transformative" ideas as presented in the Task Force report.

Better customer service, mistrust of TCHC, the need for more supportive housing, concerns about how the recommendations would be implemented and who would oversee the transformation, were all points made repeatedly throughout the sessions. Participants also regularly called for resident-driven decision making and continuing engagement.

1. Transition to a new community-based non-profit housing corporation

There was a lack of consensus and some scepticism to this idea: more safety, better maintenance, and repairs remain top of mind for many TCHC residents. Many said they were not clear about how this transition to community-based non-profits would make anything better for them. There were many calls for more research, as well as concern about capacity among non-profits for this job. Some mentioned that accountability is an ongoing concern.

2. Create mixed income communities

Many agreed with this, although some feared it could result in their housing being lost and possible differences in the treatment of subsidized and market-paying tenants. Many suggested that units would have to be repaired and upgraded to attract market-rate renters.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

3. Better buildings and more of them

There was general support for this idea, although some wanted to know whether this would lead to more affordable housing overall, pointing out that the city needs more affordable housing as well as investments in improving the existing stock. People also said that the real objective should be to create better neighbourhoods and communities, not just a better building.

4. Decentralized operations/strengthen partnerships

For many this is a priority and should come before others on this list. Today's TCHC is unresponsive, they said, with a lot of distance between staff and residents. A decentralized model could reduce that distance. Participants also spoke of the importance of quality repairs and well-trained and empowered staff and managers, pointing out that these are critical to the success of a decentralized model. Others wanted assurance that some shared services would be available to all in a decentralized model.

5. Reform the Rent Geared to Income (RGI) system

The majority of consultation participants expressed strong support for some degree of reform to the RGI system. Many said it was the key recommendation and should be tackled first. However, a large number said more research was needed first, and voiced concerns about implementation, mentioning portability of benefit, simplification of the paperwork and eligibility requirements, as well as mistrust of private sector landlords.

Background

The Mayor's Task Force on Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) released its final report "Transformative Change for TCHC" in January 2016. This was the result of work undertaken over 12 months by six volunteers recruited to offer advice to the Mayor on "how to strengthen and support the delivery of housing to its residents, now and in the future." The analysis focused on four key areas: operations and delivery; partnerships and innovation; capital revitalization and new development; and governance.

The Task Force's key finding, highlighted in their final report, is that "Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), because of its history and structure, is unsustainable financially, socially and from an operating and governance perspective. It is at the centre of a crisis that was 30 years in the making." Five ideas were presented in the final report, including 29 recommendations designed to achieve transformative change for TCHC, its tenants and for the quality of their housing.

Mayor Tory and the City's Executive Committee asked the City Manager to complete an initial assessment of the Task Force's recommendations and underlying assumptions and to report key directions to City Council in spring 2016 and an implementation plan in fall 2016.

The City created the TCHC Task Force Review Team to prepare these reports. As part of this work, and to inform the initial report, the Team hosted a series of public consultations in April, 2016. TCHC tenants, community groups, service providers and members of the general public attended these sessions which sought reaction, ideas, comments and concerns about the Task Force's five transformative ideas. Questions under discussion were solution-focussed and designed to help inform the directions in the City's spring 2016 report.

This report summarizes what the City's TCHC Task Force Review Team heard over the course of the public consultations and through the written comments submitted by residents. The input collected during the consultation process has been organized by themes and is presented by transformative idea.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Overview of the consultation process

More than 300 participants contributed to discussions that took place in the eight community consultations organized by the City's Task Force Review Team. The sessions were held from April 11 to 25, 2016 in locations across the city, including two TCHC communities and easily accessed and accessible City facilities such as Scarborough Civic Centre. See appendix A for the list of dates and locations.

These community consultations were public sessions. Posters inviting people to participate were distributed through TCHC to all its communities, as well as to public libraries, community agencies, and social housing providers. The participants were not required to self-identify as TCHC residents but the majority of participants did. Toronto residents, housing advocates, and community agency representatives also participated. Some City Councillors attended the various sessions.

Refreshments, child minding, and ASL translation were provided at each session to support full participation. Additionally, most of the sessions were scheduled in the evening. One session was held on a week day afternoon and one on a Saturday to accommodate different schedules.

The consultation format was structured to solicit input on the Task Force's five transformation ideas:

1. Transition to a new community-based non-profit housing corporation
2. Create mixed-income communities
3. Better buildings and more of them
4. Decentralize operations/Strengthen partnerships
5. Reform the rent geared to income (RGI) system

Each session kicked-off with a presentation summarizing the work of the Mayor's Task Force, the City's Task Force Review Team's work, and the five transformative ideas. Participants sat at different tables to engage in small group discussions facilitated by community animators, many of whom were TCHC tenants. Each table had at least one facilitator and a City staff person who took notes to record the discussions. City staff were also present as subject matter experts to answer questions related to social housing in

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Toronto, TCHC, and the Task Force's recommendations. Time was set aside at the end of each session for a larger report back and group discussion.

The consultation questions focussed on hearing about participants' thoughts, reactions, ideas and concerns in response to each of the five transformation ideas. Participants were also asked to prioritize areas for further research and action. The discussions that ensued were dynamic, animated, at times intense, and tremendously informative for the City's Task Force Review Team.

The input and ideas collected were analyzed and themed by an interdivisional team of City staff supporting the Task Force Review Team. The information collected at every session was read through and analyzed to determine key themes and messages from the consultation participants. The summary of what the City's Task Force Review Team follows in the next sections of this report.

These consultations are the beginning of a conversation that will continue at a second round of consultations planned for the fall, after the June 2016 directions report is considered by City Council.

Context

TCHC has wrestled with long-standing and well documented challenges related to building conditions and the capital repair backlog. This impacts the quality of housing for their tenants. Other challenges include housing some of Toronto's most vulnerable, the need for better customer service, as well as residents' safety and security in their communities. These challenges were frequently mentioned by participants in the consultation sessions.

What was also voiced regularly by the participants is the diversity within and between TCHC's building, developments, and community across the city. Each community is unique and one size will not fit all when change is implemented. This was clear to the City's Task Force Review Team as each consultation had a different feel and tone.

What also emerged through the eight consultation sessions was that there was strong support for some ideas but also a lot of diversity of opinions on the Task Force's five

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

transformative ideas. In a few cases, some ideas were well received and strongly supported by a portion of the participants, while others felt strongly the other way.

One message that was loud and clear is that people want to see tangible change now. Several participants spoke about how often they had already provided policy makers at the City with their input without effect. This, they said results in a lack of trust among TCHC residents, the housing provider, and the City.

The following sections are structured to highlight the key themes relating to each of the Task's Force's transformative ideas from the different consultation questions. Other themes also emerged throughout the eight sessions indirectly related to the Task Force's five transformative ideas or came up in a range of different contexts. These are discussed in the "Other Emerging Themes" later on in this document.

What we heard

Transformative Idea 1: Transition to a New Community Based Non-Profit Housing Corporation

Lack of clarity, consensus, and the need for more research

This idea generated the most discussion and sparked the most questions among participants, resulting in little consensus. For many, it is also the theme that was the most confusing in terms of what it means, how it will be implemented, and what its impacts might be for TCHC tenants. Many participants wanted to know more about what this model would look like and how it compares to today's TCHC.

The majority of participants did not believe this to be the idea that should be tackled first. Many said more research is needed so people can better understand the model and what is being proposed. They also wanted to know more about the financial and implementation impacts. Some also wanted to see more research on the different social housing models that exist such as housing co-operatives.

Some participants expressed complete scepticism to the idea, stating that TCHC was created through an earlier merger of several housing companies. They questioned how transitioning TCHC to a new community-based non-profit would be any different and result in real, tangible change.

"...the idea of transferring to a non-profit needs more research. Don't understand the process for that recommendation."

"The present system is problematic – it's not clear enough how it will be changed. Many tenants don't understand and are afraid of the process."

APPENDIX 2 Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Where will the money come from the repair our housing?

Many participants said TCHC's existing housing needs to be repaired whether there is a new model or the status quo. TCHC tenants described how their windows, doors, tiles, bathrooms, kitchens, and balconies still need to be fixed.

Simply put, regardless of the model pursued, adequate funding for repairs is needed. Many questioned where the funding was going to come from and felt that the transformative idea did not address this fundamental question. Additionally, many discussed that for the model to be successful, the housing would have to be fixed before being transferred. If the units are transferred in their current state, the capital repair burden will simply be passed on.

Better accountability

Many participants discussed the need for better accountability among TCHC, the City, and its tenants. It was mentioned time and time again that it is difficult to get repairs/maintenance issues addressed, that the work completed is of poor quality with little oversight, and sometimes needs to be redone. Overall, better property management is needed.

Some also expressed concerns that TCHC would be less accountable or responsive if transformed to community-based non-profit. Those participants expressed the desire for it to stay within the City's governance and administrative structure. Some even referenced the former CityHome with smaller, more manageable community housing units. However, that idea was not universally shared. Some participants felt the slate needed to be wiped clean and that TCHC needs a fresh start.

"Concerned that the city will offload social housing and not retain social accountability."

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Support to keep housing as a public asset

Building on the feedback describe above, a few participants expressed concern that the implementation of this transformative idea would result in the loss of a public asset, the privatization of the housing stock, and the loss of affordable housing. There was some support to maintain TCHC's housing as publically owned to ensure it remains available for those in need into the future.

Improved safety and security

Participants described ongoing challenges in some buildings and communities with specific tenants or criminal activities. Some residents feel unsafe due to gang activity, drug dealing, and prostitution in their buildings or communities. So it is important that TCHC be quick to respond to reports of on-site criminal activity.

The Review Team also heard from participants that some tenants have challenges such as mental health or substance use issues that lead to conflict with neighbours. The necessary supports and services are required for some tenants to be successfully housed. In these cases, participants said that it is important that tenants are connected to the right supports in their community.

Transformative Idea 2: Create Mixed Income Communities

Overall support for the idea

Most consultation participants agreed with the transformative idea of creating mixed income communities. Some even described how they currently live in mixed income building/communities.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Ideas and concerns related to implementation

As much as the idea was generally supported by the consultation participants, many concerns and ideas were heard by the Review Team related to its implementation including:

- **Capacity of the non-profit sector to absorb additional rent geared to income (RGI) units:** There were questions related to whether the transfer of RGI units would be successful or if other non-profit housing providers want to increase the number of RGI units they have.
- **Equitable treatment between RGI and market tenants:** Some expressed fear and anger that a mixed income model will create a power imbalance and inequity between tenants, with market tenants getting better service (e.g. repairs completed more quickly). They worried about RGI tenants losing control in decision making.
- **Mixed income in the same building:** In order to reduce the stigma of living in social housing, participants expressed the desire to see mixed income implemented throughout the same building so you cannot identify the RGI or market unit. Some do not like the Regent Park model where the community is mixed income, but RGI tenants are in separate buildings from market tenants and home owners.
- **Ability to attract new market rent tenants:** Some questioned that TCHC could attract new market rent tenants given the current poor building conditions, lack of amenities in some communities, and ongoing safety concerns. It was also unclear where the funding would come from to repair units.
- **Fear of losing my housing:** Participants wondered if moving to a mixed income model would result in tenants losing their housing or needing to move to a different community.
- **Fear of changes to my community:** In contrast to one of the comments above, some expressed concern that moving towards mixed income communities would result changes to their community's fabric (i.e. gentrification). They fear they would no longer feel a part of the community as higher income services move in to serve higher income residents.
- **Consideration of how it is implemented:** Some participants expressed that having some buildings targeted to specific communities or populations (e.g. seniors, people with mobility issues, etc.) is an asset and can allow for specific programming and for services to be established close to where people live.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

"Fear that the need for revenue will tend towards preferences for higher incomes to resolve financial challenges, displacing those most in need..."

"If they give us more market rents, will we be kicked out?"

"...safety, better social environment, reduced stigma in community...better security, police will care more."

Transformative Idea 3: Better Buildings and More of Them

General support for the idea

Consultation participants were generally in favour of having better buildings and more of them. However, it was unclear to many whether this transformative idea will lead to more affordable housing units overall, or simply maintain the current number of RGI units in at TCHC but spread over a larger number of buildings. Many also had question or concerns related to how this would happen.

"This is a no brainer – who doesn't want that?"

Need for more affordable housing

Participants repeatedly said Toronto needs more affordable housing and that increasing the overall stock of affordable housing should be a focus. Some participants also said affordable and/or RGI units should be included in every building across the city, which in turn would create more mixed income communities.

"The legislation should ensure corporate developers build more affordable housing or have a condo with 20% of affordable housing."

APPENDIX 2 Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Take care of existing stock

The importance of taking better care of TCHC's existing buildings and making it a priority was highlighted by a number of participants. As discussed earlier, many TCHC units need to be repaired or are in poor quality. Many need major repairs and regular maintenance. The consultation participants also stressed the importance of ensuring repair work is high quality so that it lasts.

Also, participants said that any new TCHC buildings that are developed should be well built well so they can be used for years to come.

"Can't sustain what we have now, so it is concerning that they want to build more before fixing."

"Take care of current housing stock first. Repair first and then build more. But this won't solve the ever-increasing waiting list."

Accountability to ensure repairs get done well

The theme of accountability related to repairs came up frequently. Participants often asked who would be responsible for the repairs, the process, how decisions are made regarding the use of contractors, and who would make sure that the repairs are done well. Several participants described experiences where they were told something was going to be done with no follow through or action.

Some buildings are beyond repair

Participants thought that full building assessments should be completed to figure out which buildings are beyond repair and need to be torn down and rebuilt versus buildings that could be repaired.

APPENDIX 2 Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Funding for those needed repairs

Similar to the discussions related to Idea 1 "Transition to a Community-Based Non-Profit Housing Corporation," there were many questions about where the funding was going to come from to complete the needed major repairs. Without the funding, this idea can't work.

Importance of building community

Participants also said that the focus should be not just on fixing individual buildings but on creating better neighbourhoods and communities. They identified the need for more amenities and neighbourhood services as well as for more community spaces to be shared by a range of users.

Transformative Idea 4: Decentralized operations/Strengthen partnerships

Priority for implementation

Many participants indicated that they would like to see the City tackle this transformative idea first or sooner than some of the others. They described TCHC's current model as unresponsive with a lot of distance between staff and residents. A decentralized model could reduce that distance by putting core staff on site at buildings. Participants thought it was important that staff and managers be well trained and provide quality service. This is critical to the success of a decentralized model. Others talked about ensuring that some shared services available to all are still part of a decentralized model.

Consistency in management decisions

Participants also emphasized the need for consistency in management decisions across operating units within TCHC. Striking a balance between this consistency across the board

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

while letting Operating Unit Managers have flexibility to meet local needs will be critical for the success of the proposed model.

"Managers in operating units are good because they're able to respond to local needs, but there needs to be consistency between managers and operating units."

Clear accountability needed

Linked to such comments, participants also spoke about the importance of accountability related to day-to-day operations and decisions not being lost through a decentralized model. Whether in a centralized or decentralized model, it is clear that tenants do not want to get the run around or speak to multiple staff regarding the same service request or issue.

Responsiveness to local situations and issues

Participants recommended that any operations model make sure that staff respond quickly and effectively to local situations and issues. Communities are different across the city and services need to be too.

"We favour this very much. More autonomy, authority and funding at the local level which would enhance knowledge of needs and their solutions."

Having a range of partnerships

Consultation participants spoke about the need for cultural, education, and training programs for different groups of TCHC residents as well the need to address issues related to poverty. They thought that programing could be facilitated by having a range of partners, from different organizations in local communities and across the city.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Several participants thought that community agency involvement is generally a good thing. Others talked about ensuring that a single agency does not "take over" the community rooms and building facilities when they are working with clients in a particular building, so that other residents cannot access them.

"Bring more agencies into community. Have more residents involved in community/buildings to be involved in decision-making. Isolated community needs more help in terms of how to get involved."

Enhanced supports for specific tenant groups

Some participants suggested looking at ways to bundle specific support to different tenants by grouping tenants with similar needs in the same building or communities. The example frequently used was seniors. Some seniors have a range of medical and additional support needs. By grouping more of them together, there may be opportunities to better deliver services to them.

Transformative Idea 5: Reform the Rent Geared to Income (RGI) System

Strong support for RGI reform

The majority of consultation participants expressed strong support for some degree of reform to the RGI system. For many, it was the key idea of the five and should be tackled first. Still, a large number voiced concerns about how reform would unfold, saying that more research needs to be done.

Portability

Many were supportive of having a portable RGI/housing benefit. Some said they welcomed the additional choice in where they could live that would come from a portable

APPENDIX 2 Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

benefit. A few even described wanting a portable benefit that could be used to move anywhere in the Province and to move to areas that are more affordable than Toronto.

"We agree with linking the subsidy to the person rather than the unit."

Simplified application and eligibility

Many participants described wanting a simplified RGI system that was easier, with less and easier-to-understand paperwork. This included having RGI eligibility be combined into the same process as other income support or benefit programs, such as Ontario Works. Others described there being language barriers when filling out forms and needing appropriate supports to complete all the paperwork. Simplified forms and more access to supports to complete them could be part of a reformed system.

"All the income statements and documentation should fall under one program."

Concerns about implementation

A range of concerns were described by consultation participants should a revamped RGI system be developed including:

- **Loss of support in private market:** This included the loss of existing supports or simply not having the same access to supports and services if living in the private market.
- **Lack of affordable housing:** The lack of affordable housing in Toronto was a frequent theme in the consultations. People were concerned that there is simply not enough affordable housing to meet current demand or the demand that could be generated through a reformed RGI system. Others suggested that the implementation of stronger rent control was needed.
- **Landlords increasing rents:** Some expressed fear that private landlords would increase rents resulting in housing that is less affordable than what participants have now.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

- ***Discrimination by landlords of subsidized households:*** Other participants worried landlords would discriminate and not rent to individuals or families with a subsidy. This would make it more difficult to find suitable, secure, affordable housing.
- ***Systemic discrimination of certain tenant groups:*** Some also discussed concern related to systemic discrimination of certain tenant groups if the RGI system was fully portable such as racialized groups, single mothers, people with a criminal background, etc.

"A part is missing – there is not enough accessible and affordable housing for a portable RGI to work."

"...there are some questions about how this portable subsidy would affect other vulnerable people, for example people coming out of jail or people who owe thousands of dollars."

Other Major Themes Raised

A number of other major themes were raised by the consultation participants either related to the full suite of the Task Force's original five transformative ideas or related to their current experiences living in TCHC housing, for those who are TCHC tenants.

Fix my housing now

This was one of the most common and resounding comments made at these consultations. Moreover, it cuts across many of the Task Force's ideas. TCHC residents want their housing to be clean, safe, in a good state of repair, and well maintained. They want their housing provider to be proactive and responsive when something needs to be fixed. Any repairs need to be done well so they do not need to be completed again.

Resident driven decision making and overall engagement

The participants also felt strongly that TCHC tenants need to be actively involved as equal partners in the decision making process. A move to resident driven decision making is

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

important. Related to this, there was also much discussion regarding the current tenant engagement model at TCHC. Some participants said it worked well in their buildings. Others felt it needed to be revamped and did not feel they were well represented under the current model.

"Residents need to see themselves in the change."

Better customer service

The theme of better customer service also emerged throughout the consultations. Some participants described receiving poor service or being mistreated by staff. In other cases, they described delays in service requests being processed. Areas for improvement include hiring dedicated staff, having a customer service focus, and improved sensitivity training for staff.

"Staff...need to be trained... They are not sensitive or well-trained to be objective and sensitive to the needs of others..."

"Don't return calls even after 6 messages – need better staff."

One size does not fit all--our communities are unique

This theme also emerged at many of the consultation sessions. Participants spoke of the diversity within and between different TCHC communities. For example, the needs of Lawrence Heights are different than in Jane-Finch, which in turn are different than the needs in Jamestown in downtown Toronto. Participants stressed that any actions selected cannot be the same for all communities and that different strategies will be required to address different community-specific needs.

"The Mayor's task force needs to know that all the TCHC buildings do not operate the same—tenants in the different communities MUST be consulted..."

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Mistrust

Mistrust was a theme that came up frequently and in different contexts over the course of the eight consultation sessions. Some participants expressed a lack of trust in TCHC given their experiences as residents and described feeling let down time and time again. Other participants expressed general mistrust that real change was going to take place. They described being consulted over and over again with little outcome. Mistrust of non-profits/co-operative housing providers was also stated by participants who wondered whether things would be better with a different model.

"How will this all be implemented?"

One question that emerged at many of the sessions touched on how implementation of the Task Force's recommendation was going to take place and who would provide oversight of the process. Based on their previous experiences, some worried that a future change in government could result in a change of direction for TCHC down the line.

We need more funding

As documented in the themes above, participants frequently wondered about the financial impacts of what is being recommended. They feel like increased funding is needed, regardless of the approach taken or the ideas implemented. It was not clear if or how the Task Force's recommendations would bring any new money to TCHC. For example, some discussed the need for funding to repair existing housing if it was going to be transferred or to attract market tenants to create mixed income communities.

Need for more supportive housing

Participants frequently spoke about the overall need for more supportive housing in Toronto. In some cases, neighbours with support needs were described as being disruptive and needing a much higher level of support than they were receiving at TCHC.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

More supportive housing with services tailored to the needs of its residents was cited as a better option for many residents.

Hopefulness

While many participants vocalized ongoing frustrations with TCHC and feelings of uncertainty regarding how the Task Force's recommendations were going to impact them, their children, and their communities, some actively spoke of having hope for the future. They described being hopeful that real, visible change would finally come to TCHC communities.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Consultation Session

Appendix B: Copy of Discussion Guide

APPENDIX 2 Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Appendix A

List of April 2016 consultation sessions

Monday, April 11

Scarborough Civic Centre
150 Borough Drive
Rotunda – 6:30pm - 9:30pm

Tuesday, April 12

Sheppard Place
4455 Bathurst Street, Ground Floor
Recreation Room – 6:00pm - 9:00pm

Thursday, April 14

Cedarbrae Manor
65 Greencrest Circuit, Ground Floor
Recreation Room – 12:30pm - 4:00pm

Tuesday, April 19

North Kipling Community Centre
2 Rowntree Road
Rooms 1&2 – 6:00pm - 9:00 pm

Wednesday, April 20

North York Memorial Hall
5110 Yonge Street
Burgundy Room – 6:00pm - 9:00pm

Thursday, April 21

Lawrence Heights Community Centre
5 Replin Road
Gymnasium – 1:30pm - 4:00pm

Saturday, April 23

The 519
519 Church Street
Ballroom – 2:00pm - 5:00pm

Monday, April 25

Oakdale Community Centre
350 Grandravine Drive
Gymnasium – 6:30pm - 9:30pm

APPENDIX 2 Summary of Public Consultations – City's Task Force Review Team

Appendix B

Discussion Guide for Community Consultations

The consultations asked participants four key questions:

- 1) What are your thoughts, reactions, ideas and concerns about the five transformative ideas from the Task Force?

Idea 1: Transition to a new community-based non-profit housing corporation

Idea 2: Create mixed-income communities

Idea 3: Better buildings and more of them

Idea 4: Decentralize operations/Strengthen partnerships

Idea 5: Reform the rent geared to income (RGI) system

- 2) What ideas need more attention, work or research done?
- 3) Which of the five transformative ideas would you like to see the City tackle first? Why?
- 4) How do you want us to involve you, your community, and neighbourhood in this review? What kind of community engagement activities do you recommend?