

CITY OF TORONTO

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

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PUBLIC INTEREST

340 Harbord Street
Toronto, Ontario
M6G 1H4
Canada

Tel: (416) 531-5192

Fax: (416) 531-7210

www.PublicInterest.ca



Contents

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4	IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	24
A. Introduction	4	A. Neighbourhood Consultations	24
B. Methodology	5	B. Tenant Focus Groups	42
C. Summary Of Findings	7	C. Student Tenant Consulation	44
D. Conclusion	9	D. Post-Secondary Institutions Consultation	45
II. METHODOLOGY	10	E. Immigrant Settlement Agencies Consultation..	47
A. Engagement Strategy	10	F. Housing Support Workers Consultation	48
B. Data Collection	11	G. Owners/Operators	51
C. Data Analysis and Report on Findings.....	12	H. Online Survey	53
D. Consultations	12	V. APPENDICES	56
III. ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES	20	VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	103
A. Major Themes	20		
B. Divergent Views	22		

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

Public Interest was contracted by the city to undertake the first phase of the Rooming House Review during April and May of 2015, which consisted of community-based research through a variety of public and stakeholder consultation activities. The purpose of Phase I of the review is summarized in the following excerpt from the City's request for proposals for Rooming House Review Public Consultations (Request for Proposal No. 9117-15-7027)

"The issues facing rooming houses can broadly be categorized into three interrelated categories: the stock, the tenant population, and the broader community. Issues facing the stock include the condition, regulation, and affordability of rooming house accommodation. Issues facing tenants are challenges related to vulnerability of populations living in rooming houses, and protecting tenant rights during their tenure. Issues facing the community relate to real or perceived impact of rooming houses and how rooming houses fit in with the fabric of existing neighbourhoods."

The city has received an increasing number of complaints related to impaired life-safety conditions in neighbourhoods where there are illegal room house operations. Staff in various city divisions have encountered unsafe living conditions including: homes where the density of occupants is beyond the capacity of the building to provide healthy or safe living; accommodations that are substantially below those required by building and fire codes; and individuals residing in buildings with significantly diminished standards and not suited for human occupancy. Beyond the structures in which they are housed, in many wards across the City, issues are being raised about the impact of rooming houses within communities themselves, including: parking, litter and noise issues.

In an effort to address issues relating to the condition and regulation of rooming houses and the implications that any changes may have for both tenants and the broader community, the city is launching a rooming house review. In August of 2014, staff recommended a research and consultation program (rooming house review) to identify the extent of issues affecting regulation and enforcement of standards in rooming houses, and opportunities to improve conditions in rooming houses, and bringing non-permitted rooming houses into compliance without jeopardizing housing for vulnerable tenants."

During the first phase of the Rooming House Review, Public Interest collaborated with the City to develop and implement a robust engagement and research strategy that captured community and stakeholder perspectives on these issues as well as perceived solutions to specific areas of concern. This involved a line of inquiry throughout the engagement process that was guided by the following themes:

- Existing conditions in both legal and illegal rooming houses, including housing standards and safety concerns.
- The difference in operation across rooming houses in various levels of compliance with city regulations.
- The current stock of rooming houses both legal and illegal and their impact on tenants, city services, non-profit providers, and neighbourhoods.
- The role rooming houses play within the affordable housing continuum.
- Current zoning and licensing regulations as they relate to rooming houses.
- Rooming house tenants, including their demographics, economic status as well as information about their service needs.
- Community and life safety concerns related to rooming house accommodations and opportunities to individually, collectively, and systematically address those issues.

B. METHODOLOGY

Public Interest developed and implemented an engagement strategy tailored to ensure maximum participation, with particular attention paid to reducing barriers to participation and ensuring a wide range of perspectives were brought forward and documented.

Opportunities for engagement with the Rooming House Review process took place through 14 neighbourhood consultations, 7 tenant focus groups, and consultations with Toronto's post-secondary institutions, housing support workers, and immigrant settlement agencies, as well as a consultation and two key informant interviews with owners/operators of rooming houses. A confidential online survey was also developed as another opportunity for stakeholders and other interested parties to provide feedback.

The consultation format and facilitation were specifically designed to document opinions of all those who attended about the challenges, benefits, and solutions in relation to rooming houses through methods that allowed for rigorous analysis and reporting on findings.

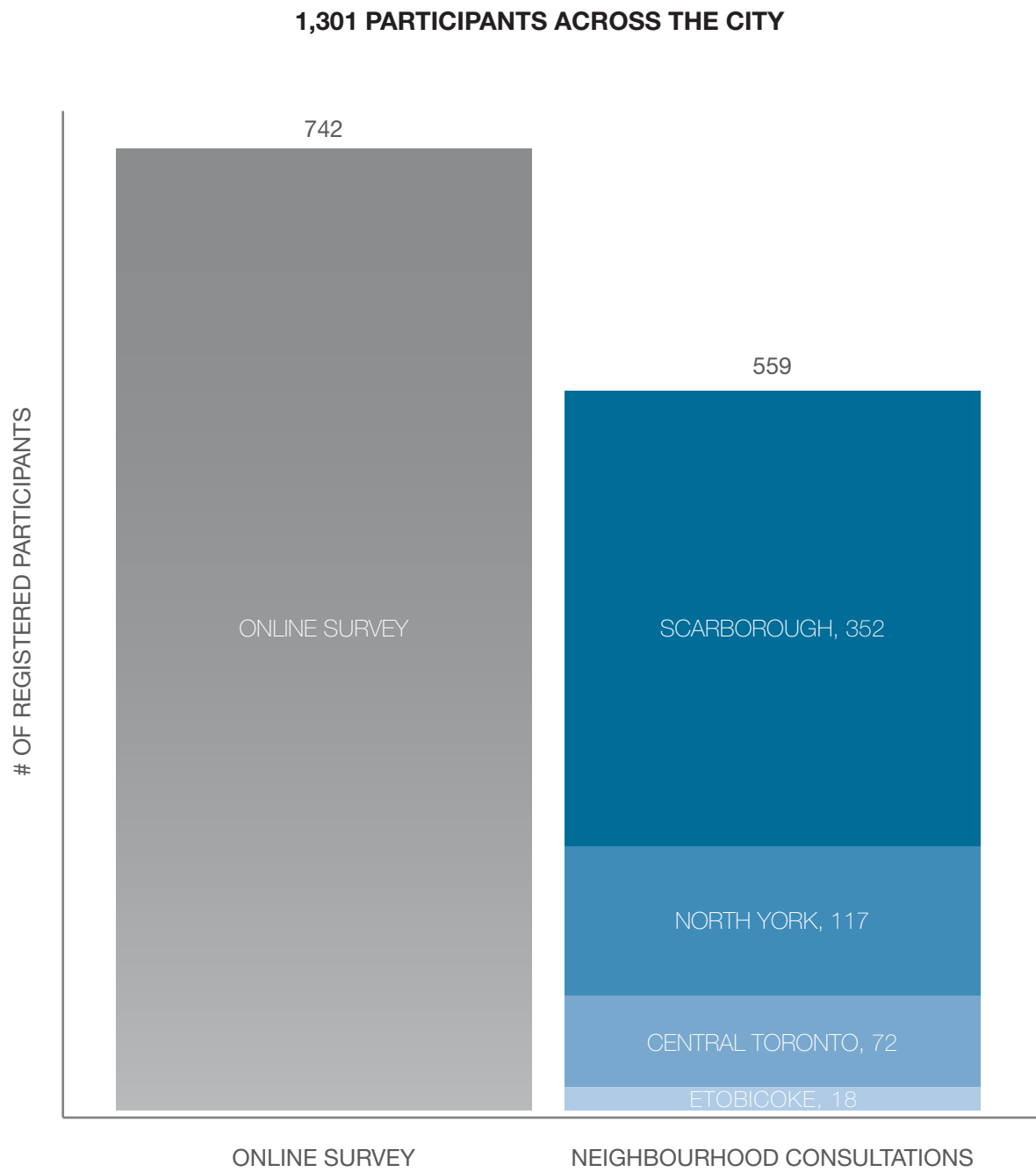
The format of the neighbourhood consultations allowed us to capture input from every participant, no matter the size of the audience, through documented small group discussions. This was a highly facilitated process that guided participants through a constructive discussion of the challenges and benefits in regards to rooming houses, and solutions to issues of concern. Roaming facilitators supported the table discussions to ensure that participants' views were respectfully shared and recorded.

Focus groups, stakeholder consultations, and key informant interviews were also conducted with a focus on ensuring a wide range of viewpoints were uncovered and documented through detailed facilitator discussion guides, onsite note takers, and a backup recording of each meeting.

The online survey similarly focused on gathering a wide range of perspectives by providing an opportunity for respondents to answer a customized set of questions based on whether they identified themselves as a neighbour, tenant, or agency serving rooming house tenants or owner-operator.

The findings for this report were developed by systematic analysis of all of the data collected from consultations, tenant focus groups, surveys, and emails called 'coding'. Through this process, the research team identified recurring topics raised as challenges, benefits, and solutions throughout the consultations as well as reoccurring comments from focus groups. Every theme was documented and assessed for frequency and prevalence, and cross-checked by two researchers to make sure no reoccurring theme was excluded in the final report.

The information, views, and opinions expressed in the findings of the final report do not represent the views or opinions of Public Interest or the City of Toronto.



C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The wide range of consultation activities drew in almost 1,500 participants from across the city. 742 respondents answered the online survey, 559 people attended the neighbourhood consultations, and 127 tenants and stakeholders participated in the focus groups, group discussions, and key informant interviews. The depth and breadth of the feedback provided a robust set of data from which to identify themes.

MAIN THEMES

Despite regional differences and the diversity of participants consulted, strong themes recurred in the feedback across the various sources and types of input provided by the community.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF TORONTO'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK

Input from all groups recognized that rooming houses did provide affordable housing for low income people. Some groups noted that rooming houses provide tenants with housing in proximity to the services, facilities, stores and institutions they need to access at a rent that would be hard to find in the same proximity through a different part of the rental housing market. Many also noted that rooming house residents often have no other options for housing.

THERE ARE SERIOUS ISSUES REGARDING ROOMING HOUSE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

There was consensus across the city and across all groups that there are significant issues with many rooming houses that fail to meet reasonable standards. Issues with maintenance were widely identified, including problems with garbage, vermin, locks, facilities, basic repairs, and deficiencies in building standards. Increased stress on parking and improper parking that obstructs snow removal were also common concerns. Significant building safety issues including compliance with fire regulations were also identified. Concerns about absent or exploitive landlords were also common. Many recognized that the poor management and maintenance of rooming houses impact the community at large.

BETTER ENFORCEMENT OF ROOMING HOUSES IS NEEDED

Virtually all groups, in all areas of the city underscored the fact that housing quality, management, and safety issues require better enforcement. The current system is seen as ineffective and its inability to ensure that standards are met is seen by some as contributing to the poor quality of housing. Common suggestions for improvement included more resources and authority to enforcement bodies, tougher fines, and a more effective and responsive complaints system.

While some participants vocally disagreed, most favoured the application of a single unified licensing bylaw and standards that were mandatory across the city, because this would allow better enforcement of standards.

EDUCATION AND MORE INFORMATION CAN HELP MITIGATE PROBLEMS

Neighbourhood consultation participants, stakeholders, and tenants all agreed that everyone needs access to better information. Tenants need to know more about their rights and how to get problems addressed, including how to access advocates who can intervene in circumstances where the tenant is vulnerable. Neighbours need a clearer sense of the rules, how to engage with the city to ensure that they are met, and that the City reports back the outcomes of the complaints. Owners/operators need to be clear about the rules and should be provided with more information and possibly targeted education initiatives.

MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS NEEDED

There was almost unanimous agreement across all input that more affordable housing is needed. Most felt that the issues with rooming houses were exacerbated, if not caused, by the severe shortage of affordable units, which left tenants in desperate situations that made them more likely to accept substandard accommodations.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

In addition to these major themes, other areas of feedback were found with some prevalence among certain groups or across stakeholders.

IMPROVE TENANT, LANDLORD, AND COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

Neighbourhood consultations, stakeholders, and tenants all commented on how connecting the various parties – tenants, community members, landlords, advocates and the city – through effective communications would better enable problem solving.

INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS TO IMPROVING CONDITIONS

Several neighbourhood consultations echoed the view of owners/operators, housing workers, settlement workers and survey respondents that rooming houses need incentives and supports as well as penalties.

CLEAR DIRECTION FROM THE CITY

Owners/operators feel uniquely challenged by dealing with the diverse needs of their tenants and maintaining properties that experience significant damage from intensive use. They generally feel that the City does not offer enough supports to owners/operators, and that standards and regulations tend to be inconsistent or overly complex. Overall, owners/operators think there should be a clear roadmap for landlords to obtain licenses in order to ease the process.

SOME CALL FOR BAN

Scarborough neighbourhood consultations had by far the highest turnout and expressed the strongest level of concern about rooming houses. While the documented feedback from those meetings showed significant support for licensing and regulation of rooming houses, Scarborough also had the highest numbers of neighbourhood consultation participants calling for an outright ban on rooming houses, which was often vocalized during the comments discussion groups provided in the group report back section of the consultation.

Scarborough was also the only area in the online survey where more respondents opposed broader licensing than supported it, by a rate of 52% to 41%.

In contrast to Scarborough, the neighbourhood consultations in licensed areas (Central Toronto and Etobicoke) expressed far less concern about rooming houses. Turnouts at the meetings were far lower than they were in unlicensed areas. Respondents to the online survey from these areas favoured licensing by 60% to 80%. Proposed solutions almost universally focused on how to improve rooming houses, rather than proposing to ban them outright.

IMMIGRANT AND STUDENT TENANTS

Analysis also showed that while issues across various types of tenants tend to be quite consistent, there are distinct concerns and perspectives with respect to immigrants and students.

Immigrant settlement agencies noted in their consultation that immigrants often have added barriers of language when accessing information, and may be more hesitant to engage the authorities for a variety of reasons. Some immigrants are accessing rooming houses to house families, including seniors and children, who are more vulnerable.

Student tenants and post-secondary institution stakeholders highlighted a few distinct characteristics of student tenancy in rooming houses. Students benefit from short-term rental arrangements and locations close to school. However, there are significant concerns about students being housed with non-students, and being isolated from the larger student community.

Student rooming house ‘ghettoes’ was highlighted as a concern, and many noted that there needed to be a clear and defined role for post-secondary institutions in finding better housing solutions and reducing the impacts of rooming houses on student tenants and the surrounding communities.

D. CONCLUSION

The purpose of Phase I of the Rooming House Review is to provide the city with a robust consultation and community-based research process to uncover perspectives from a wide variety of residents and stakeholders regarding rooming houses. Over a thousand residents and dozens of sector-based stakeholders were consulted through rigorously documented processes that included large neighbourhood consultations, tenant focus groups, consultations with post-secondary institutions, housing support workers, and immigrant settlement agencies, key informant interviews a consultation with owners/operators, and an online survey. The engagement techniques were specifically designed to reduce barriers to participation and gain input from all participants. The feedback gathered through these consultation processes has been analyzed using specialized coding to identify re-occurring comments and common themes, and reported in detail in the following pages.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Phase I of the Rooming House Review consisted of community-based research through a variety of public and stakeholder consultation activities. The City of Toronto hired Public Interest to undertake Phase I through engagement of a wide variety of stakeholders in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives regarding regulation and enforcement of rooming houses, opportunities to improve conditions in rooming houses, and ways to minimize the impact rooming houses have on surrounding communities. Phase I also sought to consult with those individuals and organizations that are potentially well positioned to offer solutions that reduce or eliminate issues and challenges faced in relation to rooming houses.

Public Interest developed and implemented an engagement strategy tailored to ensure maximum participation, with particular attention paid to reducing barriers to participation and ensuring a wide range of perspectives were brought to the table and documented.

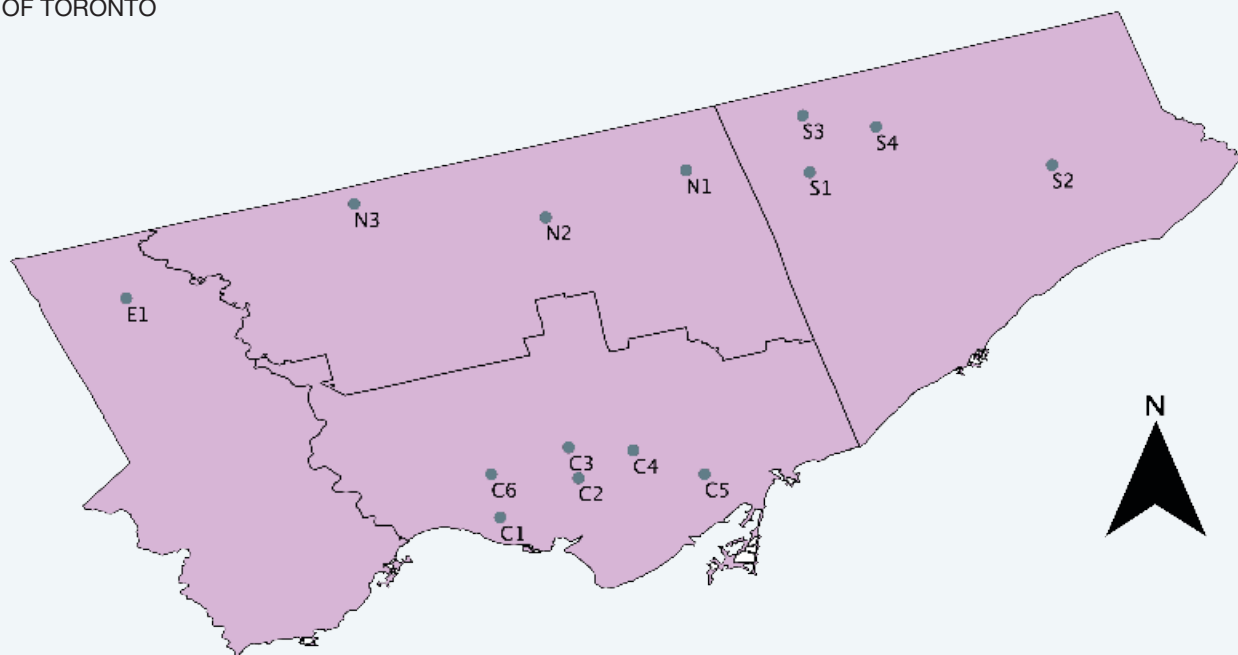
Stakeholders consulted include neighbourhoods (the general public), tenants, relevant organizations and institutions, and owners/operators. Opportunities for engagement with the Rooming House Review process took place through neighbourhood consultations, tenant focus groups, consultations with post-secondary institutions, housing support workers, and immigrant settlement agencies, as well as a consultation and two key informant interviews with owners/operators. A confidential online survey was also developed as another opportunity for stakeholders and other interested parties to provide feedback.

The consultation format and facilitation were specifically designed to ensure rich participation from all those who attended and to increase opportunities to capture opinions about the challenges, benefits, and solutions through methods that allowed for rigorous analysis and reporting on findings (see Appendix A for Public Consultations Participation and Locations).

The information, views, and opinions expressed in the findings of the final report do not represent the views or opinions of Public Interest or the City of Toronto.

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW NEIGHBORHOOD CONSULTATION LOCATIONS

CITY OF TORONTO



CENTRAL TORONTO

C1 - Parkdale Library, April 9
C2 - Lillian H. Smith Library, April 13
C3 - Huron Street Public School, April 29
C4 - Wellesley Community Centre, April 30
C5 - Jimmie Simpson Rec. Centre, May 4
C6 - New Horizons Tower, May 5

CENTRAL TORONTO

E1 - Elmbank Community Centre, April 28

SCARBOROUGH

S1 - Stephen Leacock Community Centre, April 20
S2 - Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre, April 21
S3 - L'Amoreaux Community Rec. Centre, April 27
S4 - Francis Libermann Catholic High School, May 7

NORTH YORK

N1 - Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic School, April 14
N2 - North York Central Library, April 22
N3 - Atkinson Building, York University, April 23

B. DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected using a combination of tools. At neighbourhood consultations worksheets and facilitators' notes were used to record small group discussions (see Appendix B-E for all documents relating to neighbourhood consultations). Tenant focus groups were guided by a set of questions, and conversations were recorded (see Appendix F). Consultations with post-secondary institutions, housing

support workers, and immigrant settlement agencies were also guided by a set of questions, as were the key informant interviews and consultation with owners/operators (see Appendix G and H). Note takers were present at all focus groups and consultations, and qualitative data from key informant interviews was also recorded by a note taker. Email feedback was collected and an online survey was used as well. Hard copies of the survey were distributed for those that could not access the online version.

II. METHODOLOGY

The structure of the data gathering process was tailored using various methodologies to optimize input from each set of participants. Neighbourhood consultations provided neighbourhoods with open access to the process. The tenant focus groups and consultations provided an opportunity for participants to drill down into practical experiences, and the survey was designed to provide anonymous input from residents across the city. Consent was collected from all participants engaged in focus groups and consultations (see Appendix I-K) and an honorarium was provided to participants of the tenant focus groups (see Appendix L). An emphasis on anonymity was stressed throughout the process and as a result no personal identifiers were attributed to comments made during data collection.

Data collection was structured to ensure an appropriate mix of geography, housing type, and operational styles to capture the full range of perspectives regarding rooming houses in Toronto. Public Interest was careful to ensure appropriate language was used throughout, allowing participants to voice their concerns and offer prospective solutions for rooming house related problems, legislation, and compliance issues. The small group work that took place at large neighbourhood consultations ensured a greater volume of input and greater participation for those who are not as comfortable speaking in large groups. Each small group reported back their discussions to the group including major challenges and proposed solutions (see Appendix M).

C. DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORT ON FINDINGS

After all the data was collected from consultations, tenant focus groups, surveys, and emails, it was themed and coded as part of the analysis. Themes were drawn from recurring topics raised as challenges, benefits, and solutions throughout the consultations as well as reoccurring comments from focus groups. Every theme was documented and assessed for frequency and prevalence. Themes were cross-checked by two researchers to make sure no theme was excluded in the final report, and the data was collaboratively checked by the full research team at different stages of the process.

Throughout the report, terms such as “most common,” “most prevalent,” and “most of the groups” are used to identify comments that appeared with the greatest frequency. Terms such as “prevalent” and “significant” denote comments that were made frequently but that were not the top comments.

“Often,” “many,” or “several” are used to indicate comments that reoccurred with mid-range frequency, while “some” indicates a low level of frequency. “A few” or “a couple” represent any comments worth mentioning that did not appear with any great prevalence. The term “participants” is used generally to refer to anyone that took part in the review. “Groups” is used to refer to comments received from neighbourhood consultations in different areas of the city, with the exception of Etobicoke where “participants” is used to reflect the various views of those that attended that consultation. “Respondents” is used for those that completed the online survey.

D. CONSULTATIONS

NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

LOCATIONS

A total of 14 neighbourhood consultations were held across the City of Toronto. City staff selected the locations of the neighbourhood consultations prior to Public Interest’s involvement and represent communities that are both covered and not covered by the existing licensing and zoning bylaws for rooming houses. Six neighbourhood consultations were held in Central Toronto, four in Scarborough, three in North York, and one in Etobicoke (see Appendix A).

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

With the support of City staff, neighbourhood consultations were promoted through:

- Metroland Papers
- City Councillors
- Residents’ Associations
- Libraries and local recreation centres
- Posters that were distributed by various groups and were on hand at each neighbourhood consultation
- Media coverage of previous neighbourhood consultations
- Networks of those who participated in the post-secondary institutions, housing support workers, and immigrant settlement agencies consultations
- Word of mouth from community members, many of whom participated in other neighbourhood consultations
- Tweets and other forms of social media

The primary audience for the neighbourhood consultation was interested members of the general public and those who lived near rooming houses. The neighbourhood consultations did also attract owners/operators, tenants, and those who worked with tenants. All stakeholders were represented to some degree in the neighbourhood consultations and online survey.

PROCESS OBJECTIVES

A carefully designed process was developed to provide an opportunity for participants to come together in small discussion tables of four to eight people to share and document their perspectives about rooming houses (see Appendix C). Participants were first asked to explore and provide their personal perspectives on the challenges and benefits experienced by neighbours, tenants, owners/operators, and the City with respect to rooming houses. Worksheets were distributed to document their comments (see Appendix E) and a note-taker was identified by each group. It is important to note that there was no mandatory requirement to fill out challenges or benefits for each of these different perspectives: the process allowed discussion and documentation of the issues that the participants at each table most wanted to discuss and felt were most relevant to their community. It was explicitly stated at the consultation that achieving agreement or consensus was not the objective of the process, but rather to capture all of the perspectives in the small groups.

Following the identification of challenges and benefits, the consultation process gave participants an opportunity to provide suggested solutions for two of the challenges that the participants had identified earlier in the process. In this way, groups had the opportunity to generate solutions that were meaningful, relevant, and tailored to their own communities.

PROCESS AND AGENDA

The agenda, process, and presentation for the 14 neighbourhood consultations was consistent overall. Three slight modifications were developed after the first two consultations. At the first consultation, the process did not provide an opportunity to discuss the benefits of rooming houses, and the participants' feedback highlighted that they perceived this to be an unhelpful constraint at their table discussion. The opportunity to discuss benefits was subsequently incorporated into the worksheets. Furthermore, the process at the first consultation was focused on discussing 'opportunities' rather than 'solutions'.

The participants did not understand the concept of 'opportunities' and recommended that the language be changed to 'solutions.' This suggestion was incorporated into the subsequent consultations. The rooming house definition in the first two presentations caused some confusion, so additional information was added for clarity.

Participants were greeted at the registration table and asked to sign in. Some participants chose not to register at all. At the registration table, all participants were given a number assigning them to a table. The assignment of tables was random. Participants who came together were asked if they were willing to sit at different tables to ensure diverse perspectives and interactions at each table. Of those participants who came together, some participants agreed to sit at different tables, while others chose to sit together.

The neighbourhood consultations began with the lead facilitator welcoming participants and providing an overview of the agenda, with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation that served as a guide and information aid throughout the evening (see Appendix D). The lead facilitator also explained Public Interest's role as an independent, impartial, community-based research consultancy responsible for facilitating and documenting this process.

The large group was then asked to turn to their tables to begin small group discussions. This was an opportunity for participants to get to know those at their tables as well as to demonstrate that the majority of the consultation would consist of small group discussions. It is notable that some participants came expecting a much different process, one more similar to a town hall format where their local councillor or City staff member would be available to hear their concerns from the floor. The facilitators dealt with concerns and questions about the process respectfully, while ensuring that the small group discussion format proceeded effectively.

Groups then returned to the large format where they were presented with the rooming house definition, data about tenant diversity, and information about licensed and unlicensed stock in the city. Ground rules were established for group discussion, and participants were given the opportunity to ask some questions before turning back to their tables for the first stage of group work exploring the challenges and benefits of rooming houses. Instructions were given from the front of the room and by the roving facilitators that participants could discuss and fill out any aspect of the sheet.

II. METHODOLOGY

After documenting the various perspectives regarding challenges and benefits, each participant was asked to mark with coloured dots the top two challenges of importance to them. The lead facilitator informed the participants that the placing of the dots was to help facilitate the next part of the process and not necessarily to indicate the tables' top priorities reached by consensus. After the participants individually placed their dots, they had a discussion about the similarities and differences between where the dots were placed. The group was then brought back to the large group.

After a brief presentation of information generated by the city with regards to public opinion about rooming houses and complaints in different areas of the city, the lead facilitator, if time permitted, then took a few questions from the floor. If there were more questions than time allowed, the lead facilitator and/or roving facilitators would then go individually to the participant with the question to respond while the next small group discussion began.

Two challenges were chosen either by identifying which had the most dots and/or through a short conversation between the small group members if the dots system didn't provide obvious choices. After the discussion, small groups were then asked to report back to the large group on the solutions generated for the chosen challenges. A significant amount of time was spent on the report back section of the consultation to ensure that participants were able to hear from each other in a large group format (see Appendix M).

After the neighbourhood consultations, both worksheets were collected from all the tables. Some participants had written out comments prior to the neighbourhood consultation in anticipation of a town hall format where they could speak from the floor. These comments were instead shared at the tables, included with the sheets, and also entered as data for analysis.

The neighbourhood consultation closed with a thank-you to participants, information on how to keep up to date with the Rooming House Review process, and a reminder that an online survey was also available.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

At registration, participants were able to give as much or as little contact information as they felt comfortable with. Those who were worried about confidentiality were not required to provide contact information.

To ensure that there was ample opportunity for participants to engage and have their issues documented at the consultation, a significant amount of time was spent in small group. This process reduced the barrier of participation for those who were not comfortable speaking in a large group. It provided the space for thoughtful consideration and dialogue about the challenges and benefits of rooming houses and ensured that more participants' perspectives were heard and recorded than would be possible in a large group format. The process was designed to ensure that participants could discuss the issues that were most important to them.

In addition, the lead facilitator frequently requested presenters in the large group portions of the consultation to speak on behalf of themselves and their individual perspectives and/or from their small working group perspective, instead of assuming their perspective was shared by the whole room. The lead facilitator would also, if necessary, clarify that inappropriate comments were not acceptable during the consultation.

Public Interest maintained active facilitation throughout the consultations to continually reduce barriers to participation. Facilitators roved from table to table to ensure understanding of the process, help draw out participation, and in some cases aid documentation of a group's perspectives on the worksheet. If certain participants' voices were not being heard, the roving facilitators could intervene and mediate the conversation, so that as much data as possible could be recorded on the worksheets.

For those participants who still did not feel that their perspective was captured through the process and/or wanted the opportunity to express more of their thoughts, the promotion of the online survey was another feature of the process that ensured these perspectives were captured.

Translation was advertised and available with advance notice and was provided at one neighbourhood consultation.

CITY COUNCILLOR AND CITY STAFF ATTENDANCE

City staff were in attendance at all neighbourhood consultations and sat on the side. Occasionally they were asked questions from the floor. Participants often asked the staff questions after the consultations. In addition, some neighbourhood consultations were attended by City councillors and/or their staff. At these consultations, the Councillor and/or staff provided a few words of welcome and their perspective on the Rooming House Review.

MEDIA

Media were in attendance at approximately half of the neighbourhood consultations. Some media representatives were observers of the process from the side while others observed at tables during the working group. Media were asked to identify themselves at the small working groups and were required to ask for direct permission to quote anything that was said in the small groups. If a reporter wanted to interview a participant, he or she was asked to move the interview to a place that did not disrupt the process. Following the City's protocols on media coverage of public meetings, the lead facilitator informed participants that media was in the room and that anything said from the floor may be quoted by the media.

TENANT FOCUS GROUPS

LOCATION

As part of Phase I of the Rooming House Review Process, The City of Toronto requested that a minimum of two meetings or alternative methods of consultation be completed with tenants of licensed and unlicensed rooming houses. In recognition that tenants are diverse, Public Interest held seven tenant focus groups in various locations with different licensing and zoning bylaws. Two focus groups were held in Scarborough, three in downtown Toronto, one in the west end of Toronto, and one in North York, ensuring that diverse, local neighbourhood experiences were captured.

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Through the support of trusted intermediaries from peer support workers, post-secondary institutions, housing support workers, legal clinics, and immigrant settlement agencies who work with diverse clientele, tenants were actively recruited for the seven focus groups. Trusted intermediaries were provided with posters to promote the focus groups widely. Public Interest received the RSVPs for attendance and asked pre-screening questions to ensure that those recruited were tenants who had lived or currently live in rooming houses.

Recruitment focused on ensuring that there was adequate geographical and demographic representation of tenants who lived in licensed and unlicensed rooming houses. Specific focus groups were held with women, students, persons with mental health and drug addictions, and those who were street involved.

OBJECTIVES

Focus groups were guided by a carefully thought out and designed focus group guide with a line of questions that took into account the diverse backgrounds and experiences of tenants (see Appendix F). The objective of the tenant focus groups was to consult with a variety of tenants, and to identify, through facilitated discussions, the challenges and benefits posed by rooming houses to key demographics in licensed and unlicensed rooming houses across the city of Toronto, as well as tenants' proposed solutions.

PROCESS AND AGENDA

The agenda and process were consistent for the seven focus groups. A minor modification was made after the initial two focus groups, when it became apparent that a question needed to be asked specifically about solutions. Solutions were being discussed throughout the process but there was no specific question soliciting ideas on solutions. Tenants wanted the opportunity to discuss solutions, so a question was developed and time given to ensure that was incorporated.

The focus groups were two hours long and were held in local social service and community agencies easily accessible to tenants. Tenants were asked to sign in and sign a consent form prior to the start of the focus group. By signing the consent form, participants gave their consent to engage in the process and granted Public Interest permission to take notes and tape record the proceedings for research purposes only (see Appendix I).

After all the consent forms were signed, the facilitator opened the focus group, welcomed the participants, and introduced the note taker. Public Interest's role as an independent, impartial, community-based researcher contracted by the City of Toronto was explained at this time.

The facilitator then provided the tenants with an overview of the Rooming House Review, the purpose of the focus groups, and a definition of rooming houses. The facilitator then took questions before leading the tenants through a discussion based on a carefully thought out and designed focus group guide (see Appendix F for Tenant Focus Group Guide, see Appendix M for Proposed Solutions).

II. METHODOLOGY

At the end of the process, the tenants were thanked for their participation, informed about the City website where they could follow the progress of the Rooming House Review, informed about the neighbourhood consultations, and encouraged to participate in and promote the online survey.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

The focus groups were held in locations where participating tenants often already had a level of familiarity and comfort. Recruitment of tenants was arranged through trusted third-party intermediaries, such as support and service organizations, which increased the tenants' level of trust in the process as well as their participation. Honourariums, TTC tokens, and refreshments were provided to ensure that financial costs and transportation were not barriers to participation (see Appendix L). One trusted intermediary provided additional honorariums to ensure that all the tenants who wanted to participate in the focus group could do so. Participants could provide as much or as little personal information as they wished during sign-in and during the focus group discussion itself.

An overview of the consent forms was read, ensuring that everyone in the room clearly understood the form before signing it. Public Interest's role as an independent, impartial, community-based research consultancy reduced the barrier to participation for those tenants who were not keen to participate in City-run or other more institutional processes. The process gave participants the opportunity to write their top three issues to ensure that if there were any unknown barriers to participation, the tenants could communicate their thoughts in written form. A few participants required assistance from the facilitator to capture their points in writing. Translation was provided at one focus group.

CITY COUNCILLOR AND CITY STAFF ATTENDANCE

No City councillors or City staff attended the tenant focus groups.

CONSULTATIONS WITH POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS, AND IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT AGENCIES

LOCATION

The City of Toronto required that a consultation be held with post-secondary institutions, housing support workers, and immigrant settlement agencies. These consultations were held at a library, Metro Hall, and with the support of a community partner. Participants who attended the consultations provide services and/or have an awareness of issues related to rooming houses throughout the City of Toronto, including areas that are covered by licensing and zoning bylaws permitting rooming houses, and those that are not.

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Participants were identified by the City of Toronto as well as Public Interest. Associations representing these agencies were also approached to help with promotion and outreach to their networks. Email invitations were distributed and recipients were asked to forward the email to other potentially interested parties. When necessary, phone calls were made, particularly to post-secondary institutions and immigrant settlement agencies. Fewer phone calls were required with the housing support workers, due to the quick and positive response to the emailed invitation.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the consultations was to garner the perspectives of those who provided services and supports to rooming house tenants on neighbourhood issues related to rooming houses, based on the areas of the city where they provided their services.

Focus groups with post-secondary institutions and housing support workers were held at the beginning of the consultations with the intent that the information received would potentially inform other aspects of the process and that these trusted intermediaries would assist with the promotion of the neighbourhood consultations and online survey as well as support recruitment for tenant and owner/operator consultations. A consultation was scheduled for immigrant settlement agencies but there were not enough participants available at the time, so it was rescheduled and conducted at the end of the engagement period.

PROCESS AND AGENDA

The agenda and process were consistent for the three consultations. A minor modification was made to the final focus groups to ensure the consistency of the process by providing an opportunity for participants to share potential solutions.

The consultations were scheduled to run for two hours. Similar to the tenant focus groups, participants were asked to sign in and sign a consent form prior to the start of the consultations. By signing the consent form, participants gave their consent to engage in the process and granted Public Interest permission to take notes and tape record the proceedings for research purposes only (see Appendix J).

After all the consent forms were signed, the facilitator opened the consultation, welcomed the participants, and introduced the note taker. Public Interest's role as an independent, impartial, community-based researcher contracted by the City of Toronto was explained at this time.

The facilitator then provided the participants with an overview of the Rooming House Review, the purpose of the focus groups, and a definition of rooming houses. The participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the process before the facilitator lead them through a discussion based on a carefully designed consultation guide (see Appendix G). The process also asked participants to write down their top three issues that should be considered as part of the Rooming House Review process (see Appendix M).

At the end of the process, attendees were thanked for their participation, informed about the City's website where they could follow the progress of the Rooming House Review, informed about the neighbourhood consultations, and encouraged to participate in and promote the online survey.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Consultations were held in accessible, well known locations. A barrier to participation that was addressed by the participants was the impact of short notice. Due to the tight time constraints of the process, participants were informed about the consultations with a limited amount of notice. While participants noted the tight timelines, there was significant representation at the post-secondary institutions and housing support workers consultations, as the schools and agencies made an extra effort to ensure robust participation. Immigrant settlement agencies were unable to accommodate the short notice resulting in the consultation being rescheduled, but they also identified a lack of general knowledge of the relevance of the issue of rooming houses for their clients.

CITY COUNCILLOR AND STAFF ATTENDANCE

No City councillors participated in the consultations. One City staff member whose department was not affiliated with the Rooming House Review participated in two of the consultations.

OWNER/OPERATOR ENGAGEMENT

LOCATION

The City of Toronto required as part of Phase I of the Rooming House Review the engagement of owners/operators of licensed and unlicensed rooming houses. Two key informant interviews were held on the phone and one focus group was held at a community agency in west Toronto. 21 participating owners/operators represented licensed and unlicensed stock in different areas of the city.

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Through the support of community and housing agencies as well as City staff, owners/operators were approached and confirmed for engagement. Habitat Services was exceptionally helpful in recruiting participants for the focus group. In addition to enlisting the aid of trusted intermediaries, snowballing was implemented, so that owners/operators used their networks to recruit and encourage the participation of other owners/operators.

II. METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES

As critical providers of affordable housing stock, owners/operators are a key aspect of the Rooming House Review, providing insight into the quality of housing stock and whether they are running rooming houses in accordance with the licensing and zoning bylaws. The objective of the engagement of the owners/operators was to gather their perspective on challenges, benefits, and solutions as they relate to rooming houses.

PROCESS AND AGENDA

The two key informant interviews were consistent with each other. There was only one consultation, which followed the same line of questioning as the key informant interviews.

Key informant interviews took about half an hour and the consultation with the owners/operators was scheduled for two hours, as with the tenant focus groups and other consultations.

Similar to the tenant focus groups and other consultations, participants were asked to sign in and sign a consent form prior to the start of the consultation. To ensure owners/operators felt safe to participate in the process, participants had the option to provide as much or as little information on the sign-in sheet as they chose. By signing the consent form, participants gave their consent to engage in the process and granted Public Interest permission to take notes and tape record the proceedings for research purposes only (see Appendix K). The two participants for the key informant interviews provided verbal consent to participation and to the transcription of the interview. After all the consent forms were signed at the consultation, the facilitator then lead the participants through the discussion based on the key informant guide (see Appendix H).

As with the other focus groups and consultations, the participants were able to provide their top three issues that should be considered as part of the Rooming House Review process (See Appendix M). At the end of the process, the participants were thanked for their participation, informed about the City's website, where they could follow the progress of the Rooming House Review, informed about the neighbourhood consultations, and encouraged to participate in and share the online survey.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

An emphasis was placed on ensuring that owners/operators felt safe to participate in the process. To reduce barriers of participation, the confidential nature of the process was stressed. In addition, owners/operators could provide as little or as much contact information as they desired, and while Public Interest ensured that the perspectives of those who operated licensed and unlicensed rooming houses were engaged, Public Interest did not press the participants to confirm which type of rooming houses they personally operated. Engaging participants who operated rooming houses in both licensed and unlicensed areas of the city ensured a diversity of perspectives.

As with the recruitment of tenant participants, the trusted intermediary strategy was critical to ensure the participation of the rooming house operators. Habitat Services was especially helpful as a trusted intermediary in this area.

CITY COUNCILLOR AND CITY STAFF ATTENDANCE

No City Councillors or City staff attended in the owner/operator consultation and key informant interviews.

ONLINE SURVEY

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

As noted previously, the online survey was promoted at every aspect of the engagement strategy:

- Survey link promoted on neighbourhood consultation posters
- Survey link shared and promoted through emails to third party institutions and agencies
- Survey link tweeted by Public Interest
- Posted on the City of Toronto website
- Promoted through councillors' offices
- Hard copy available for those not able to access a computer

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the online survey was to ensure that a diverse representation of participants could participate in a confidential process that was available at any time. The online survey enabled the participation of those who could not attend other consultations due to a variety of issues such as timing, location, comfort in larger groups, or concerns about confidentiality. In addition, the online survey was an opportunity for those who participated in other engagement processes to make their voices heard and provide more information.

PROCESS AND LINE OF QUESTIONING

The survey went live on the City of Toronto website on April 17th and was closed the evening of May 10th. The online survey had a set of questions that all respondents answered. The survey then automatically generated another set of questions that differed based on whether the respondent identified himself or herself as living in a rooming house, living near a rooming house, owning or operating a rooming house, providing services to people who live in rooming houses, or living in Toronto and interested in rooming house issues. The questions explored the issues around tenants, housing stock, community, and licensing (see Appendix N).

REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

By ensuring a process that was confidential, a significant number of participants felt comfortable participating in the survey. By being available online 24 hours a day and completely anonymous, the survey reduced barriers related to confidentiality, convenience, and comfort.

Some general members of the community and tenants identified accessing and/or using a computer as a barrier. A hard copy was provided to those respondents and was input manually by Public Interest. Some housing support and community agencies also supported tenants in filling out the survey online by providing access to computers and/or supporting the navigation and understanding of the questions.

The survey was also kept purposefully short so that time would not be a barrier to participation, and all questions were optional so that there were no forced responses and no pressure to choose responses that did not reflect the participant's perspective or made the participant uncomfortable.

EMAIL FEEDBACK

Public Interest welcomed email feedback from those who were not comfortable expressing their opinions in public, were unable to attend any of the consultation events, and/or wished to provide perspectives that were not constrained by the set of questions included in the online survey. The content of these emails was analyzed and solutions were drawn out and incorporated into the report on findings (see Appendix M). Some of the emails included links to helpful resources and these were noted in the solutions.

III. ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES

Strong themes recurred in the feedback across the various sources and types of input provided by the community. Though a wide variety of participants from diverse areas of the City had input through very different mechanisms, there were ideas that they clearly shared. These trends in no way diminish the significance of the deep concerns and strong opinions held by others who participated, and those divergent views are noted here as the overall dominant views of the community are explored.

A. MAJOR THEMES

1. ROOMING HOUSES ARE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF TORONTO'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK

IT IS AFFORDABLE

All areas of the city and all forms of input from all groups recognized that, regardless of other concerns, rooming houses do provide affordable housing for very low income. Tenants and housing workers noted that rooming house rents were among the only rates that reflect what OW and ODSP recipients could pay.

IT PROVIDES ACCESS TO AMENITIES

Tenants, housing workers, settlement workers, and survey participants all noted that rooming houses provide tenants with housing in proximity to the services, facilities, stores and institutions they need to access at a rent that would be hard to find in the same proximity through a different part of the rental housing market.

FOR MANY IT IS THE ONLY OPTION

Tenants, housing workers, settlement workers, and survey participants noted that rooming house residents often have no other options for housing. The lack of deposits and credit histories, the short timelines for finding housing, and the presence of mental health issues or addictions have made many unable to obtain other forms of housing.

2. THERE ARE SERIOUS ISSUES RELATING TO HOW HOUSES ARE MANAGED AND MAINTAINED

TOO MANY HOUSES DON'T MEET APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL STANDARDS

Though many participants noted that there are rooming houses that meet a broad range of standards, there was consensus across the city and across all groups that there are significant issues with many rooming houses that fail to meet reasonable standards.

Issues with maintenance were identified in neighbourhood and stakeholder consultations, tenant focus groups, and surveys in all areas of the City. These included mentions of problems with garbage, vermin, locks, facilities, basic repairs, and deficiencies in building standards. They also identified safety issues that relate both to the quality of maintenance and compliance with fire regulations.

INADEQUATE OR INAPPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT OF HOUSES IS A CONCERN

All groups, in all parts of the City, acknowledged that there are management issues in rooming houses. Most participants recognized that tenants are subject to a variety of unacceptable experiences. Various participants cited incidents of economic exploitation, abuse, threats, theft, and disruptive behavior variously by landlords and other tenants. Concerns about the absence of landlords or managers or other responsible presence, such as community agencies, in the houses was raised at times in neighbourhood consultations but also by tenants, housing workers and settlement workers.

PROBLEMS WITH MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT IMPACT THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

These problems spill out into the community according to community members but also according to housing workers, settlement workers and tenants. Community members raised concerns about garbage, noise, and parking, and, less frequently but more alarmingly, crime and disruptive behaviors. Most of these concerns are also identified as problems by other groups consulted.

3. BETTER ENFORCEMENT IS NEEDED

THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING WELL ENOUGH

Virtually all groups, in all areas of the city, underscored the fact that the housing quality, management, and safety issues require better enforcement. The current system is seen as ineffective and its inability to ensure that standards are met is seen by some as contributing to the poor quality of housing. The number of inspectors and their power to investigate and force changes was seen as inadequate.

BETTER ENFORCEMENT REQUIRES A CHANGE OF STRATEGY

While some participants vocally disagreed, most favoured the application of a single unified licensing bylaw and mandatory standards across the city.

Tenants, housing workers, settlement workers and survey respondents noted that licensed houses seemed to be better than illegal ones, and the areas of the City that had licensed houses expressed less concern about rooming houses and more support for licensing.

Participants in neighbourhood consultations largely agreed that licensing was an effective tool to bring standards to bear on houses that currently fail to meet acceptable norms.

BETTER ENFORCEMENT REQUIRES CHANGES TO THE RULES

Neighbourhood consultations underscored the view that broader licensing needed to be coupled with a clear set of reliable standards and a significant increase in enforcement.

There was wide agreement that inspectors needed more powers to investigate and enforce. Changes to legislation that would make it easier for investigators to gain access to the houses, review infractions, and issue citations were commonly requested in neighbourhood consultations.

BETTER ENFORCEMENT MEANS SYSTEM CHANGES

Proactive inspections were seen as a necessary component of an effective enforcement process. This was often identified in neighbourhood consultations but was also raised by housing workers and settlement workers. Neighbourhood consultations, housing workers, and tenants independently raised questions about why restaurants could be inspected and penalized but owners of rooming houses were not subject to the same rigour.

There were frequent calls to break down the silos that separate fire inspectors, health inspectors, building inspectors, permits, and other divisions so that information could move smoothly through the enforcement process.

Neighbourhood consultations also showed strong support for an improved complaints process. The current system is seen as inaccessible, not transparent and is often ineffective. A new system with an accessible complaints number, responsive action, and follow up with complainants was seen as necessary.

III. ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES

BETTER ENFORCEMENT MEANS TOUGHER PENALTIES

Neighbourhood consultations frequently raised the issue of penalties, wanting to see higher fines, more serious economic penalties, and, in some areas, penalties that rose with repeated infractions. Community members in particular, but also tenants and housing workers, did not see the current system as putting enough pressure on owners/operators to comply with regulations.

4. EDUCATION AND MORE INFORMATION CAN HELP MITIGATE PROBLEMS

Neighbourhood consultations, stakeholders and tenants all agreed that everyone needs access to better information. Tenants need to know more about their rights and how to get problems addressed, including how to access advocates who can intervene in circumstances where the tenant is vulnerable. Neighbours need a clearer sense of the rules and how to engage with the city to ensure that they are met.

Most groups felt that owners/operators need to be clear about the rules. There were numerous stories about misinformed landlords and others that simply were unaware of the existing regulations. Many participants thought they needed to be provided with more information and what some felt should be mandatory education sessions.

5. MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS NEEDED

There was almost unanimous agreement across all input that more affordable housing was needed. Most felt that the issues with rooming houses were exacerbated, if not caused, by the severe shortage of affordable units, which left tenants in desperate situations that made them more likely to accept substandard accommodations.

6. THE SYSTEM NEEDS MORE THAN JUST ENFORCEMENT TO IMPROVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

PEOPLE NEED TO BE BETTER CONNECTED TO MAKE THE SYSTEM WORK WELL

Neighbourhood consultations, stakeholders, and tenants all commented on how much better things would work if the parties communicated well. Connecting tenants to their communities, connecting both to advocates and connecting all of them to the responsible landlord was something participants from all areas felt would go a long way to enabling problems to be solved before they got out of hand.

SUPPORT AND INCENTIVES WOULD BE HELPFUL

Several neighbourhood consultations echoed the view of owner and operators, housing worker, settlement workers, and survey respondents that rooming houses needed incentives and supports as well as penalties. Housing workers noted that good landlords often can't make ends meet and neighbourhood consultations and stakeholders agreed that costs are high and regulations complicated. Participants argued for financial incentives, tax breaks, access to housing rehabilitation funds, and other tools. Various respondents also felt that landlords need simplified processes to reduce red tape and make compliance less complicated.

B. DIVERGENT VIEWS

While there were clear patterns to the responses city wide, there were also significant areas of disagreement. Particular sets of respondents held views that were distinct from the City as a whole.

1. SCARBOROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

Scarborough neighbourhood consultations had by far the highest turnout and expressed the most vociferous concern. While the feedback from those meetings showed support for more regulation, Scarborough also had the largest groups of neighbourhood consultation participants calling for an outright ban on rooming houses. Those calling for a ban were the most vocal, but not representative of most participant comments.

Scarborough was the only jurisdiction in the online survey where more respondents opposed broader licensing than supported it, by a rate of 52% to 41%. North York, the jurisdiction closest to that response, was still far more supportive, with only 35% opposing broader licensing and 50% supporting it.

2. NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS IN LICENSED AREAS

In contrast to Scarborough, the neighbourhood consultations in licensed areas (Central Toronto and Etobicoke) showed far less concern about rooming houses. Turnouts at the meetings were far lower than they were in unlicensed areas. Participants in the online survey from these areas favoured licensing by 60% to 80%. Recommendations almost universally focused on how to improve rooming houses than proposals to ban them outright.

3. IMMIGRANTS

Immigrant settlement workers who participated in the consultation identified a number of unique challenges that this population faces in rooming houses. While immigrants in rooming houses share the typical concerns such as maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and security, they also have distinct concerns most other rooming house residents do not share.

Although many rooming house residents have problems accessing information, immigrants have the added barrier of language to contend with. For some, past adverse experience with authorities in their countries of origin prevent reaching out to anyone to enforce standards or report abuses. For others, precarious immigration status creates similar problems.

The profile of rooming house residents is different for immigrants. Many are seeking housing for families rather than singles. These families may include seniors and children. Shared spaces and shared facilities create added stresses in this context as do problems with privacy, locks, and security. While the presence of drugs, smoking, and vermin are unpleasant for all residents, the risks they involve are greater for very old and very young residents.

4. STUDENTS

Student tenants and post-secondary institution stakeholders highlighted a few distinct characteristics of student tenancy in rooming houses. Students appreciate the freedom and flexibility that rooming houses provide, especially in terms of short-term rental arrangements that match their needs. Locations close to school are also a very important consideration, given that in many instances, other housing in the area is cost prohibitive.

However, students had significant concerns about being housed with non-students, and post-secondary stakeholders raised issues regarding the isolation some student tenants in rooming houses feel from the rest of the student community. Living with other tenants who range greatly in age, or experience mental health and addiction issues, was seen to impact student tenants' wellbeing.

Student rooming house 'ghettoes' were highlighted as a concern, and many noted that there needs to be a clear and defined role for post-secondary institutions in finding better housing solutions and reducing the impacts of rooming houses on student tenants and the surrounding communities.

5. OWNERS/OPERATORS

Owners/operators feel challenged by dealing with the diverse needs of their tenants, especially those with mental health issues, disabilities, and substance abuse problems, as well as the burden of maintaining their properties, which experience significant damage from intensive use.

There is a general feeling that the City does not offer enough supports to owners/operators including monetary support in the form of tax breaks, grants, and incentives, and educational support, including empowerment and awareness.

Some of the owners/operators feel that the city's bylaws are overly strict. Further, many feel that standards and regulations tend to be inconsistent and always changing, making them difficult to conform to.

Overall, owners/operators would like the city to re-evaluate its processes and standards and keep the needs and demands of owners/operators in mind. There should be a clear roadmap for landlords to obtain licenses in order to ease the process.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

The neighbourhood consultation process provided participants with an opportunity to discuss challenges, benefits, and solutions with regards to rooming houses. The findings of these consultations are reported based on this framework to ensure group feedback is portrayed in the context in which it was given. Below, a discussion of broad themes across all 14 neighbourhood consultations precedes reports on the consultations by district.

1. BROAD THEMES

Though neighbourhood consultations reflected many different areas of the City with very different regulatory environments, these meetings often differed sharply in tone, with some showing highly vocal frustration from particularly concerned participants. People questioned and challenged the actual definition of rooming houses, often identifying the current definition as too vague and at times not reflective of their experience. Despite this, the content of their input on the worksheets showed surprising similarity. The core concerns about rooming houses are highly consistent, and in every part of Toronto there was thoughtful consideration of the challenges faced by others and the difficulty of this task.

CHALLENGES

UNPLEASANT SITUATIONS

In virtually all areas of the City, the vast majority of groups noted that there were challenges with rooming houses related to noise, garbage, parking, and in some cases disruptive behaviour. These challenges are disruptive to the community and they spill over into other challenges such as obstructing snow removal due to improper parking. While these circumstances are disruptive to neighbours, groups recognized that these are also unpleasant for the people who live in the rooming houses.

UNSAFE SITUATIONS

Beyond matters that are disruptive and unpleasant, groups across the City also identified impacts from rooming houses that have a negative effect on safety. There were widespread concerns about fire hazards. Concerns about drug use and crime were also common. Groups were acutely conscious of how this affected neighbouring homes, but also frequently noted the negative impact on tenants. Living with criminal activity, fire hazards and other unsafe conditions were seen as significant challenges for tenants of rooming houses.

MAINTENANCE

Across the City, groups noted that poor maintenance was a challenge. The poor condition of the houses was identified as a challenge for neighbours but also for tenants, who are living in substandard conditions.

ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES

Groups generally recognized that enforcement was a challenge for City staff. Groups saw the number of inspectors as inadequate for the task at hand. In most areas of the City they also expressed concern about inconsistent bylaws, variation in rules, and an incoherent regulatory structure that made it harder for the City to manage.

ABSENTEE LANDLORDS

Landlords were often seen as part of the problem. Some groups specifically described “absentee” landlords but most areas of the city commented on landlords that are hard to reach, fail to address problems on the site and don’t appear to be ensuring adequate management of the property.

TENANT VULNERABILITY

Discussion groups in several areas throughout the City noted that tenants are vulnerable in a variety of ways. Groups also appreciated how this prevented them from raising maintenance issues, and subjected them to a variety of exploitative circumstances including substandard conditions. Vulnerable tenants were seen as potential victims of abuses by landlords but also by other tenants. Scarborough residents pointed out that tenants may not know their rights and may lack access to resources to support them in addressing safety problems in their homes.

STUDENT HOUSING

Though dispersed across regions in the City, patterns were common to areas close to academic institutions. While there were concerns about student rooming houses that reflected the general concerns, such as noise, garbage, and disruptive behaviour, there were themes specific to student housing. Residents were less inclined to see this as a form of housing for people on very low incomes with no alternatives and sometimes cited examples of very high rents for very poor accommodation close to the institution.

Residents tended to see the student housing issues as not simply one between them, the tenants, and their landlord but also as involving the institutions the students attended. Residents often felt that the institutions should be playing a greater role in addressing the housing needs of their students, including providing more housing for their students on campus. Residents who have been able to engage the academic institution in the issues found that they were able to address things more effectively, reinforcing their desire to see the institutions play a role.

LOSS OF COMMUNITY

In North York, and indirectly in other areas, groups named concerns that amounted to fear of losing their sense of community. Many groups had an image of the neighbourhood they lived in and found the presence of rooming houses, and in particular the people who lived in them, incompatible with what they had come to expect from their community.

PROPERTY VALUES

Residents across the City expressed concern about the impact rooming houses might have on property values. This concern was almost universal in Scarborough and prevalent in other areas. The poor maintenance of the rooming houses was identified as the most significant cause of the perceived downward pressure on house values.

STIGMA

Some groups in the Central Toronto and Scarborough meetings also raised the issue of stigma. The view of rooming houses imposes a negative image on its residents, which some groups saw as a challenge for tenants, undermining relationships with their neighbours.

HIGH REPAIR COSTS

Participants in all areas of the City noted that landlords face considerable maintenance costs. In Central Toronto and North York, some of those costs were identified as resulting from property damage by tenants. Other costs were associated with the general problem of managing disruptive tenants, but across the city the costs associated with rooming houses were seen by some groups as impacting landlords and their ability to operate houses.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

LOST REVENUE

Several groups in the North York and Scarborough meetings noted that illegal rooming houses result in foregone revenue to the City. Illegal operators pay no licensing fees, and are taxed as single family dwellings instead of multi-unit residential businesses.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Groups in North York and Scarborough noted that rooming houses had the capacity to put a strain on City infrastructure, with roads, sewers, schools, and amenities that were not planned to accommodate increases in population like those that accompany rooming houses.

BENEFITS

HOUSING

There was an almost universal recognition that, despite all the challenges presented by rooming houses, they do provide housing for people in difficult financial positions. Discussion groups broadly acknowledged the need for affordable housing as well as the benefit it provided to the tenants being housed, and often to the City and other organizations responsible for addressing homelessness.

AFFORDABILITY

Many discussion groups also acknowledged the affordability of rooming houses as a real benefit for tenants. Many felt that these tenants would be in shelters if they weren't able to access rooming houses. Others noted that the presence of affordable housing reduced homelessness and the presence of people sleeping on the streets.

LOCATION

In Central Toronto and Scarborough, groups also noted that this form of housing enables people on low incomes to live in areas of the city, and in proximity to services and facilities, that would be out of reach if they were living in any other segment of the rental housing market.

DIVERSITY

At every neighbourhood consultation throughout the City, some groups pointed to rooming houses as a source of diversity in the community by bringing a wide range of backgrounds to a neighbourhood. Some groups noted that the benefits of diversity depended on neighbourhood integration, and interaction between tenants and homeowners. In Scarborough, some groups believed that the new residents put more “eyes on the street” improving community safety. In North York some groups mentioned increased property values resulting from the increase in value of houses that are used as multi-unit dwellings.

NO BENEFIT

Some groups felt that there were simply no good things for the neighbours about having rooming houses in the area. In the Scarborough consultations, some groups placed special emphasis on this view.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

There was, across the city, considerable overlap in the solutions proposed. Though some groups had strong, clearly stated views that stood out, the majority of groups expressed predominately common views about the way forward when outlining their preferred solutions (See Appendix M).

ENFORCEMENT

Increased Enforcement

There was virtually universal agreement that the enforcement system now in place was not effective in preventing the challenges noted in the meetings. All areas of the City agreed that the enforcement system should be strong and well-resourced and many saw the lack of enforcement as the root cause of many other challenges.

Enforcement advice took a number of forms, all of which underscored the need for a more effective mechanism of oversight for this form of housing.

A Better Complaints Process

In many areas, groups raised the need for a more responsive system for complaints. Many groups suggested a more streamlined process would allow neighbours and tenants to play an active role in improving their neighbourhoods. Several groups suggested that using Toronto 311 would help, while others called specifically for a dedicated hotline.

Some groups felt there should be better information about rooming houses, including a publicly accessible database about the houses and their compliance with standards.

Many groups also wanted a more responsive complaints process that reported back to communities about actions taken to address issues and ensure compliance. Success is measured by a system that empowers people to readily report bylaw infringements and other issues to city officials, with reliable feedback to show that meaningful action will be taken.

Proactive Inspection And Enforcement

Many groups in different parts of the City called for frequent, proactive inspections of rooming houses. While some emphasized focused enforcement to prioritize fire code violations and health and safety issues, others felt a pervasive system of proactive inspection was needed. Some suggested regular scheduled inspections while others favoured “spot” inspections, unannounced.

Discussion groups felt it was critical that these be unobstructed inspections with the owner/operator readily available to address issues. Many recognized that this would involve changes to legislation to provide inspectors with more powers, including the right to enter the premises, and there was broad support for such changes.

A number of groups noted that restaurants are subject to such inspections and also have the results posted publicly and wondered why rooming houses should not be subject to a similar process.

Effective Coordination

Many groups noted that better coordination among City divisions, such as fire, permits, and licensing, would improve the City’s ability to identify and address problems.

Penalties

There was widespread support for stronger penalties and more rigorous enforcement. Many groups recommended fines for violations with some calling for increasing penalties for repeat offenders.

LICENSING FOR ROOMING HOUSES

Broader Licensing With Stricter Standards

Most groups believed that stronger enforcement went hand-in-hand with a clear, uniform licensing policy across the City. Setting and enforcing stricter standards was a priority, and licensing rooming houses was the preferred method for ensuring compliance. In all areas of the city this was raised frequently as an effective tool to tackle the current challenges.

Groups felt that a licensing regime should give clear and specific guidelines and standards on health, safety and maintenance issues. It was recommended that rooming houses should be subject to active inspections and should face clear and strict penalties for violations.

Many groups felt that licensing should be coupled with constraints on the growth of the stock, with limits on the number of rooming houses in any given area or on a specific street.

Taxes, Fees And Fines

Many groups felt the City should generate revenue by licensing rooming houses, imposing fees for registration, charging taxes commensurate with other forms of rental housing, and imposing steep fines for infractions.

Ban Rooming Houses

Some groups were not convinced that a uniform licensing policy was beneficial. Some groups in the areas where rooming houses are not permitted wanted a continuation of this model with more intensive enforcement to remove all rooming houses from their area.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IMPROVING ROOMING HOUSE OPERATIONS

Education

Groups recognized that even with effective enforcement, addressing existing challenges in rooming houses may require the active engagement of tenants and communities. As a result they often suggested efforts to provide information with regard to tenants' rights, regulations, zoning, and available services. Information should be clear, reliable, and provided in accessible formats in multiple languages.

Similarly, many groups felt rooming house operators should be given more information and training around the regulations affecting them. Some felt these should be mandatory.

Improve Engagement And Communication

Similarly, many groups encouraged better connection between owners/operators, communities, tenants, and their advocates as a key component of a successful system which would enhance everyone's ability to remain informed and address the issues identified.

The active involvement of owners/operators in their rooming houses and with the people affected by their presence was identified by groups as a way to facilitate better opportunities to address issues before they get out of hand.

Some saw this as a crucial step to improving community safety and neighbourhood cohesion.

Support And Incentives

Some groups saw tax incentives and subsidies as useful tools to ensure owners/operators were able to invest in bringing houses up to standards that would meet community expectations and support tenant well-being.

Others felt that managing the impact of regulation by streamlining the application and compliance processes would encourage better adherence to standards by owner/operators.

Affordable Housing Alternatives

Many groups noted that the shortage of affordable housing was a key factor in the perpetuation of rooming houses. The lack of alternatives was seen widely as a contributor to tenants accepting unsafe and unsanitary living conditions.

Groups recommended the construction of new affordable housing. Groups also suggested alternative tools for creating new affordable housing including rent supplements, and including low cost housing in new condos.

2. CENTRAL TORONTO NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

ATTENDANCE

Six neighbourhood consultations were held in the Central Toronto District, drawing 72 participants. Tenants and neighbours of rooming houses were both prevalent, as well as people from agencies that serve vulnerable populations. A few owners/operators also attended.

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Disruptive Behaviour

Most of the groups named disruptive problems that included alcohol and other drug abuse, sex trade, unpredictability, property damage, and loud parties and the messes that come with them, such as strewn beer bottles

Depreciated Property Values

Due to the problems, disruptions, and stigma associated with rooming houses, one of the most prevalent challenges identified for neighbours was the devaluation of their properties' values.

Noise

Many groups identified too much noise as a major problem. They named over-crowding, loud behaviours, and too many parties as noise-related problems.

Safety Issues

Many groups also said that due to the lack of property maintenance, poor property standards, and the number of tenants, rooming houses are not safe places for tenants or for the communities they are in.

CHALLENGES FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Absentee Landlords

Most of the groups also perceived that absentee landlords pose a major challenge for tenants. Groups explained some “bad” landlords do not respond to complaints, and access houses without giving tenants due notice. Many groups said that they experienced “crap landlords.”

Poor Quality, Maintenance and Standards

Most of the groups suggested that landlords may or may not maintain good standards for their rooming houses. Landlords were said to maintain substandard living conditions, especially if illegal tenants do not complain. Groups complained that tenants are vulnerable to safety risks due to inadequate snow clearing and fire-related risks. They mentioned that people with disabilities are more affected by poor maintenance and quality and the associated risks.

Safety Issues

Most groups suggested that rooming houses pose a major safety risk for tenants in Central Toronto. Safety issues were perceived as due to various reasons including shared bedrooms, unsafe physical conditions of rooming houses, and overcrowding.

Stigma

Most of the groups agreed that stigma associated with rooming houses is a major challenge for tenants. Most of them said the name “rooming house” itself carries stigma.

CHALLENGES FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Tenant Management and Conflict Resolution

Most of the groups agreed that difficult behaviour and delinquencies are a serious problem owners/operators face with their tenants. In addition, it was stated that owners/operators face challenging relationships with their tenants due to mental illness, hoarding, and otherwise disruptive behaviours.

Property Damage

Most of the groups said that another challenge for owners/operators is dealing with mess and/or poor building conditions left by tenants. This kind of damage and vandalism was associated with other risks, including personal, legal, and medical risks as a result of accidents or damage to property or persons.

Cost

Many groups agreed that the costs associated with the licensing, inspection, repair, and renovation of rooming houses was one of the most important challenges for owners/operators. Moreover, owners/operators are faced with making “unnecessary” repairs due to property damage caused by tenants, garbage left behind by tenants, and cleanliness problems.

CHALLENGES FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Enforcement

Most of the participants agreed that the enforcement of current City regulations was a major challenge for the city. They agreed that there was a lack of enforcement. Other challenges faced by the City included the allocation of inspectors, costs associated with training inspectors, and privacy laws that restrict inspectors’ powers.

Inconsistent Licensing Regulations

Most of the participants agreed that there are different and inconsistent licensing regulations among different divisions of the City, including the fire department, city planning, and housing. They recommended that licensing laws and regulations should be the same across all city divisions.

Providing Affordable Quality Housing

A majority of the groups at Central Toronto neighbourhood consultations agreed that the provision of affordable and quality housing is a challenge for the City. They suggested that there is a higher need for affordable and high quality rooming houses, especially for students, seniors, and people living on low incomes. They saw the small stock of affordable housing as a current challenge for the City.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

BENEFITS

BENEFITS FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Diversity

One of the most common benefits listed by groups at the Central Toronto neighbourhood consultations was the diversity and mix of people that rooming houses offer their neighbourhoods. Discussion groups commonly preferred integrated neighbourhoods, with a mix of homeowners, families, and rooming house tenants.

Reduces Homelessness

Most groups also felt that stable housing would result in fewer residents sleeping in parks and around private properties, which in turn benefits communities.

Relationship Aspect

Another significant benefit raised in Central Toronto was the contact some tenants get with community members. Tenants can often build relationships with supportive neighbours which can enrich the lives of both parties.

BENEFITS FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Affordable Housing

The most prevalent perceived benefit for tenants was the affordability of rooming houses, especially for vulnerable people including seniors, students, and people living on low incomes. Rooming houses were seen to help prevent transient lifestyle.

Community

Many groups also said rooming houses offered tenants the opportunity to build their own community, support each other, learn from their neighbours, make friends, and socialize.

Proximity to Amenities and Services

Another significant benefit for tenants mentioned by discussion groups was the opportunity to afford housing in relatively close proximity to essential amenities and social services. They provide seniors, young professionals, and families the opportunity to live in great neighbourhoods they may not otherwise be able to afford living in. Thus, this allows them to live closer to the schools and other supports and services they need, especially in downtown Toronto.

BENEFITS FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Income/Profit

Most of the groups saw rooming houses as a great source of income for owners/operators.

Return on Investment

Several discussion groups highlighted that many owners/operators see a return on their investments in rooming houses. They saw rooming houses as a way of affording owners the ability to afford their property and allowed owners to stay in their homes. For other owners, they can buy other properties and can afford to take on additional mortgages.

BENEFITS FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Reduces Homelessness

Most of the groups suggested that people will not be “homeless” because of rooming houses. Rooming houses were seen as healthier living arrangements than shelters. It was also stated that cold alerts would be less of a concern if we keep people housed.

Filling the Affordable Housing Gap

Several groups noted that the burden on the City to provide affordable housing is reduced as a result of the availability of rooming houses. They were seen as the best affordable option for many people living on low incomes, reducing the demand for public housing, thus reducing the stress on public housing infrastructure.

Tax Revenue

Several groups also suggested that the City could generate revenue through taxing and licensing rooming houses.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

LICENSING AND ENFORCEMENT

Strict Penalties

One of the most common proposed solutions was stricter penalties for those who break these rules.

Strict Standards

Many different proposed solutions were made that related to devising a standardized, city-wide system for regulating rooming houses, which included zoning bylaws to ensure the equitable distribution of rooming house stock, and uniform rental applications and safety standards.

Better Enforcement

Another common recommendation was that strict rules be supported by strong enforcement and appropriate oversight. Several groups recommended that more staff be hired for enforcement and oversight.

Grace Periods for Compliance

A few groups suggested that there be a grace period after implementing regulations that would allow owners and tenants adequate time to adjust and comply.

Police Patrols

A couple of groups suggested that bike police regularly patrol neighbourhoods with rooming houses.

PREVENTATIVE PROBLEM RESOLUTION

Regular, Unobstructed Inspections

Another common recommendation was for scheduled, unobstructed inspections of rooming houses to ensure they meet basic standards.

Tax Incentives

Tax incentives, including subsidies, rebates, and exemptions, were commonly recommended as tools to achieve various ends such as ensuring standards are met and encouraging the licensing of rooming houses. A couple of groups suggested landlords could offer discounted rent to tenants in exchange for taking on maintenance duties.

Posting Inspection and Landlord Information

Posting information about landlords and inspection results (some gave the Dine Safe reporting model as an example to follow) was mentioned several times, as well as the suggestion that housing advocates have access to rooming houses to ensure conditions are adequate.

Easy-to-reach Property Managers

Many groups also felt that property managers or owners should be onsite or otherwise readily accessible.

REPARATIVE PROBLEM RESOLUTION

Clear Processes for Filing Complaints and Resolving Issues

Several groups also suggested clear processes for filing complaints and resolving issues.

Tenant Advocacy and Mediation

A few groups suggested that tenant advocates and community boards could act as mediators in conflict situations.

DATA COLLECTION

Database or Registry

Another prevalent recommendation by groups in these neighbourhood consultations was for a publicly available database, registry, or other form of disclosing information about rooming houses that could be useful for tenants, neighbours, and landlords about who is living in rooming houses, unit prices, and number of complaints.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Rating System

A few groups suggested that this database or registry could be interactive, allowing tenants the opportunity to rate the conditions of their living houses, and landlord quality.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Role of Major Stakeholders

Improving communication between the major stakeholders was presented as a solution to a variety of key problems including reducing the stigma surrounding rooming houses, and building buy-in for new regulatory regimes.

Clear, Reliable, and Accessible Information

Many groups recommended that information regarding tenants' rights, regulations, zoning bylaws, and available services should be clear, reliable, and provided in an accessible way.

IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Owner/Operator Outreach

A common suggestion was that an effort should be made to reach out to rooming house owners/operators to inform them of new regulations, potential penalties, and other information relevant to running rooming houses.

Tenant, Advocate, and Community Engagement

Many groups also encouraged outreach, engagement, and collaboration between tenants, advocates, and communities to keep them informed and develop a greater capacity for advocacy.

Education for Tenants and Landlords

Many groups felt that landlords and tenants should have access to education sessions so they can easily familiarize themselves with the laws, rights, and safety standards that apply to their particular situations. It was suggested that these could take the form of optional or mandatory seminars or webinars.

Community Ambassadors

A few groups suggested using community ambassadors to help engage and educate tenants and communities about the many benefits of mixed income communities, and about how to file complaints and pursue a process of repairation.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ALTERNATIVES

Increase Funding

A prevalent recommendation was to invest more funding into existing affordable housing stock to help create alternatives to rooming houses. It was also mentioned that such funding should be accompanied with appropriate levels of accountability.

Rent Supplements

Rent supplements for vulnerable tenants such as seniors was also a prevalent recommendation in cases where affordable housing stock was not available or expanding the affordable housing stock is slow and/or onerous.

Increase Student Housing

Additionally, many suggested that more student housing is needed.

Mixed Housing

A few groups supported efforts by the city and others to leverage existing development in the city by promoting mixed housing stock in condominiums and new housing developments.

Alternative Funding

It was noted by many groups that a number of these suggestions require capital investment. In several instances, it was suggested that in order to cover these costs, the city should seek alternative sources of funding that could include funding from both provincial and federal governments, and from private sector investors.

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES

Connect Rooming Houses with Services

A few groups suggested building more formalized relationships between rooming houses and the services their tenants may or could use.

Re-invest Revenue into Services and Programs for Tenants

It was also suggested that tax revenues from rooming houses be re-invested into social services, such as programs that teach tenants life skills like cooking and healthy eating, and financial management.

3. ETOBICOKE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

ATTENDANCE

One neighbourhood consultation was held in Etobicoke, drawing 18 participants, most of whom identified themselves as neighbours of rooming houses.

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Depreciated Property Values

One of the most common challenges mentioned by most of the participants in the Etobicoke neighbourhood consultation was the depreciation of property values. They suggested that potential property buyers lose interest if there are rooming houses around their neighbourhood.

Delinquent Landlords

Landlord delinquency was a common theme in discussions had by most of the participants in Etobicoke. They said that owners/operators do not follow the rules and regulations regarding licensing, fire codes, and rooming house operation. Participants said these landlords do not want to assume their responsibilities. As a result, participants said, tenants and neighbours are suffering.

Safety

Several participants said maintenance issues invited fatal consequences for tenants and neighbours, including the risk of fire and other safety issues.

Property Destruction and Poor Property Maintenance

Participants were concerned that bylaw violations, property destruction, and poor property maintenance contributed to depreciated property values. Some of the participants mentioned that rooming house owners/operators do not maintain their houses very well or very often. Due to the lack of maintenance, participants lamented that rooming houses look ugly. As a result, the property values of rooming houses go down, and surrounding property values depreciate.

Garbage

A significant number of the Etobicoke participants mentioned that garbage was an issue, especially in high-tenancy situations. They pointed out that garbage is not collected frequently enough to keep up with the amount of garbage created by rooming houses and that rooming house owners/operator do not arrange private garbage collection. They said that landlords leave garbage bins in front of their rooming houses for days, and leave “old furniture thrown on the road.”

Noise

Many participants said that noise is a significant challenge for the neighbourhoods they live in. They gave examples of rooming house tenants who hosted loud, late night parties, breaking beer bottles and being noisy on the street. They mentioned that increased traffic throughout the day and night was another source of noise.

Lack of Inspections

A couple of participants said that it has been difficult to get the City to inspect rooming houses that have been getting complaints. They mentioned that, especially in illegal rooming houses that are not being inspected by the City, there may be many tenants living in one rooming house.

CHALLENGES FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Stigma

Most of the participants said that the phrase “rooming house” carried negative connotations, and that many people discriminate against rooming house tenants, including their neighbours. This was the most common theme expressed by many participants as a challenge for tenants.

Snow Removal

Another significant problem mentioned was snow removal. Participants highlighted the issue of having many cars parked on one street, creating a barrier for snow removal. They said some of the owners/operators do not shovel snow, and that this creates a safety risk for tenants.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Safety

A few participants suggested that tenants living in rooming houses face safety issues due to fire hazards, health hazards, poor locking systems, and a lack of reporting mechanisms when a safety problem arises.

Delinquent Landlords

A few participants identified landlords who do not follow the rules and regulations pertaining to owning/operating a rooming house as a challenge for tenants as well as for neighbours.

CHALLENGES FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Property Damage

Property damage was commonly identified as a challenge for the owners/operators of rooming houses.

Lack of Training

Some participants also suggested that rooming house owners/operators and landlords do not get adequate training about the rules, regulations, and responsibilities that come with operating rooming houses.

Difficulties Managing Properties and Tenants

A few participants mentioned that owners of rooming houses may experience challenges managing the maintenance of their property, and managing difficult tenants.

CHALLENGES FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Enforcement

Enforcement was commonly expressed by many participants in Etobicoke as a challenge the City has with rooming houses in Toronto. They said that it is very difficult for the City to enforce rooming house bylaws, fire codes, registration requirements, and the rights and responsibilities associated with running and inhabiting rooming houses.

Licensing

A few participants saw licensing as a challenge. They said that, though there is a licensing law in Etobicoke, not all rooming houses are licensed.

BENEFITS

BENEFITS FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Reduces Homelessness

Most of the participants in Etobicoke highlighted that rooming houses are beneficial in that they provide a housing option that helps reduce homelessness.

Multiculturalism

One of the significant benefits many of the participants suggested was multicultural integration. They said immigrants and people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who live in a rooming house make the City culturally strong.

Mixed Income/Society

Many participants mentioned that rooming houses create a balance of different people with different levels of income. They suggested that this resulted in less polarization between the rich and the poor.

Increased Property Values

A few of the participants suggested that the real estate market can benefit from the presence of rooming houses because they are in high demand. They said that rooming houses may increase property values.

BENEFITS FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Affordability

Most of the participants agreed that rooming houses can be an affordable housing option. They said that vulnerable people, including seniors and immigrants, can benefit from the low cost of rooming houses.

Community Building

One of the prevalent benefits many participants highlighted was the building of a sense of community by tenants who live together in a rooming house. Many tenants from different socio-cultural background could help each other when living in the same rooming house. They suggested that this is very important when tenants have limited or no nearby family or social supports.

Flexible Living Arrangements

Another common benefit identified by a few of the participants was in the flexible living arrangements offered by rooming houses. They said rooming houses have less formal rules and regulations regarding rental applications, and that supervision by owners/operators is limited.

Convenience

Many of the participants agreed that rooming houses are one of the more convenient options for students living in their neighbourhoods. Students, they observed, want to live close to their schools' campuses and do not want to commute very far for their studies. As a result, the rooming houses close to Humber Campus were seen as very beneficial for both national and international students.

BENEFITS FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Property Value

Most of the participants in the Etobicoke consultation highlighted that rooming houses are good rental-income property options with high property values. As such, rooming house owners may be able to buy additional property. Some noted that rooming houses may be easier properties to keep, even when owners encounter financial difficulties.

BENEFITS FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Filling the Affordable Housing Gap

One of the most common benefits many participants suggested was an increase in affordable housing. Many participants said that due to high costs associated with building permanent housing for City residents, rooming houses could be an affordable option. They said that rooming houses reduce stress on public housing. The City would also benefit from less accountability and lower costs associated with rooming houses, as opposed to public housing infrastructure.

Tax Revenue

A few participants said that the City of Toronto could collect more tax revenue from rooming houses. They said that this could be a long-term money generating source for the City.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

Better Enforcement

The most prevalent solution suggested for addressing the challenges of rooming houses in Etobicoke York was greater enforcement of existing bylaws. Participants suggested hiring more bylaw officers and ensuring adequate penalties for non-compliance.

Collaborate with Colleges

Another commonly suggested solution was for greater collaboration with Colleges and Universities to help solve the problem of being unable to meet the demand for student housing; either by reducing enrollment, building more student residences, or by developing programs to assist students with finding affordable housing options.

Licensing and Inspections

Other prevalent recommendations include licensing, registering, or otherwise permitting rooming houses with clear, standardized rules, as well as ensuring regular and unobstructed inspections of rooming houses. A couple of participants also suggested that a broader city housing strategy, taxation, and effective reporting systems for complaints could be possible solutions.

4. SCARBOROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

ATTENDANCE

Four neighbourhood consultations were held in Scarborough, drawing 352 participants, the overwhelming majority of whom were neighbours of rooming houses, as well as members of resident associations in the area. A few tenants and people from agencies that serve vulnerable populations were also present.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Depreciated Property Values

The devaluation of properties in the neighbourhood due to the presence of rooming houses was the most common issue identified by discussion groups, with many citing poor property maintenance as one of the root causes.

Parking and Traffic

Challenges related to street parking and traffic in Scarborough were also prevalent, and included the obstruction of street maintenance and snow removal as well as a lack of available parking.

Garbage

Garbage was also identified by many groups as a significant issue, with overflowing bins and litter being cited as the most frequent problems.

Safety

Many groups also voiced concerns about the safety and security of rooming houses, with a particular focus on fire hazards.

Community Safety

Many groups were concerned that rooming houses compromise the safety of their communities. Groups said that because they find it difficult to interact with rooming house tenants, they feel they do not know their neighbours in rooming houses, which they said makes them feel unsafe. They also felt that rooming houses compromise community safety by attracting the “wrong” types of people into the community and by encouraging dangerous, disruptive behaviours such as crime and drug use.

CHALLENGES FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Poor Living Conditions

Most discussion groups suggested that poor living conditions were a significant challenge for tenants, citing issues such as domestic violence, theft, poor property maintenance, fire hazards, and overcrowding.

Vulnerability

Many groups suggested that rooming house tenants are particularly vulnerable to having their rights abused and are easily exploited by their landlords.

Community Integration

Some groups also suggested that tenants often face stigma, a lack of respect from other community members, and discrimination.

CHALLENGES FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Property Maintenance

Many groups suggested that landlords face challenges in maintaining their properties.

Inability to License

Several groups suggested that landlords are concerned because they are not able to license their properties under current Scarborough bylaws.

CHALLENGES FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Regulating, Licensing, Monitoring and Enforcing

Most commonly, discussion groups suggested that the main challenges faced by the city were in regulating and enforcing rooming house bylaws.

Strain on City Infrastructure

Also prevalent was the notion that rooming houses place significant strain on city infrastructure, including significant concern about the increased need for policing, and on services such as garbage collection and parking enforcement.

Revenue Loss

Several groups noted concerns about the loss of potential revenue from licensing and taxing unlicensed, untaxed rooming houses, though they also noted the increased costs associated with inspecting and enforcing licensed rooming houses.

BENEFITS

BENEFITS FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

No Benefits

Most commonly, groups at neighbourhood consultations in Scarborough either reported no benefits for neighbours whatsoever, or refrained from engaging in a discussion about benefits for the neighbours of rooming houses.

Increased Traffic

A significant number of groups suggested that rooming houses would bring more traffic to the area, particularly with the building of the subway.

Diversity and Community Cohesion

Often, groups cited cultural awareness and community cohesion as benefits of having rooming houses in their neighbourhoods.

Reduces Homelessness

Several groups also saw a reduction in homelessness as a potential benefit from having rooming houses in their neighbourhoods.

Reduces Crime

A few groups saw crime reduction as a potential benefit stemming from more traffic in neighbourhoods with rooming houses in them.

BENEFITS FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Affordable Housing

Most discussion groups saw rooming houses as an affordable housing option for tenants.

Location and Accessibility

It was suggested by many discussion groups that rooming houses allow tenants to live in nicer neighbourhoods, and find housing closer to public transit, schools, hospitals, shopping, and employment opportunities.

Anonymity and Few Tenant Responsibilities

Several discussion groups noted that rooming houses let tenants remain anonymous, and free them from the responsibilities of property upkeep.

Increased Community Cohesion

Increased community cohesion and cultural diversity was noted by a few discussion groups as a benefit to tenants of rooming houses.

BENEFITS FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Income/Profit

Most discussion groups cited the financial benefits of owning a rooming house as a source of income.

Tax-Free Income

A significant number of groups also mentioned the fact that unlicensed owners are able to generate tax-free income, not declaring their income and often accepting rent payments in cash.

Mortgages

Several groups said that running a rooming a house can help landlords pay off mortgages on large, expensive properties that would otherwise be difficult for them to afford and keep.

Low-commitment to Property Maintenance

Several groups also noted that owners/operators do not have to be very committed to the maintenance of their properties.

BENEFITS FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Filling the Affordable Housing Gap

Most prevalent was the notion that rooming houses increase the stock of affordable housing in the City, and alleviate the City's responsibility as the sole provider of affordable housing.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Revenue

The generation of revenue from licensing fees as well as income and property taxes from licensed owners was identified by several groups as a benefit for the City.

Reduces Homelessness

Several groups also said that rooming houses are an affordable housing alternative to living on the streets for some people living on low incomes.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

IMPROVED BYLAW ENFORCEMENT AND INSPECTIONS

Better Enforcement

Poor bylaw enforcement was one of the most common issues discussed during the Scarborough neighbourhood consultations, and was frequently identified as the root cause of many of the other challenges and issues identified. As a result, efficient and effective bylaw enforcement and inspections emerged as key strategies for improving rooming houses and the communities they are located in within the Scarborough area.

Fining Infringements

Many groups also suggested the implementation of fines for various kinds of bylaw infringements.

Increasing Capacity for Enforcement

Enforcement was often seen as the responsibility of the city, with most of the groups also calling for more frequent fire and health and safety inspections, and the hiring of more bylaw enforcement officers.

IMPROVED COMPLAINT PROCESS

Streamlined Complaint Process

A significant number of groups suggested the need for a streamlined complaint process to allow neighbours and tenants to report bylaw infringements and other issues to city officials. Some groups noted that this would improve neighbour and tenant agency and involvement in the maintenance of safe and community-oriented rooming houses.

Telephone Hotlines

A significant number of groups suggested that using Toronto 311 would be an effective platform for the complaint process, while one group called specifically for a dedicated telephone hotline.

ELIMINATING ROOMING HOUSES

Eliminate Rooming Houses

A prevalent strategy that emerged from the discussions in Scarborough for addressing the challenges that come with rooming houses was the elimination of all rooming houses, entirely. More specifically, several groups suggested that all unlicensed rooming houses should be closed.

PERVASIVE LICENSING

Legalize and License in Scarborough

The legalization and licensing of all rooming houses across Scarborough was commonly suggested as a strategy to facilitate bylaw enforcement and city oversight, thus improving the maintenance of safe and accessible rooming houses. Licensing was seen by several as a major gateway to proper regulation, but also as a way for the City to generate revenue through the implementation of licensing fees and non-compliance fines.

Limits to the Number of Rooming Houses and Tenant Occupancy

Many groups also advocated for the introduction of specific zones in which rooming houses can be implemented, while others suggested limiting the number of tenants allowed per house.

Streamlined Application Process with Incentives

Some groups suggested that the application process for registering and licensing rooming houses should be streamlined, and that incentives should be provided for owners/operators to license their properties.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Education

Some groups suggested that the education of tenants, landlords, immigrants, and neighbours about how to integrate rooming houses into surrounding communities is a crucial step to improving community safety and neighbourhood cohesion.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Funding

Several groups identified the provision of funding for more affordable housing in the city as a strategy to alleviate the need for low-income tenants to live in unsafe, unlicensed rooming houses. This was seen as a way to improve the affordable housing stock in the city and eliminate many of the problems associated with unlicensed rooming houses.

5. NORTH YORK NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

Three neighbourhood consultations were held in the North York District, drawing 117 participants, the majority of whom were neighbours of rooming houses, including members of resident associations in the area. The consultation on the York university campus, however, delivered a different and somewhat unique set of participants, including university administration representatives, students who were also tenants of rooming houses, owners/operators of rooming houses, and neighbours of rooming houses.

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Loss of "Community"

The most common challenge identified was the loss of "community," often expressed in terms of not knowing who lives in the community anymore, a change in the community's identity, and too much transience.

Lower property values

Concern about lower property values was also prevalent, sometimes mixed with another common concern around lack of upkeep. Increases in real estate prices were also raised by some.

Enforcement

Lack of enforcement of existing laws was another top concern, with some highlighting a lack of responsiveness and communication from the city.

Garbage, Noise, and Parking

Nuisance concerns including garbage and litter, noise and parking were often identified as challenges.

Safety

General safety was often identified as a concern for neighbours of rooming houses, with specific concerns about illegal activity being raised almost as often. Fire safety was raised by a few groups.

CHALLENGES FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Safety and Security

Safety and security was a top concern, and some focused specifically on fire safety.

Sharing Living Spaces with Unfamiliar People

Sharing living space with strangers generally, or more specifically with tenants who had widely ranging backgrounds and ages, was a top concern.

Poor Living Conditions

Poor living conditions and poor maintenance and upkeep of rooming houses came up as prevalent concerns.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding in rooming houses was a concern voiced by many, especially in the York University consultation.

Difficult Relationships with Fellow Tenants

Many groups also mentioned challenges related to difficult relationships with roommates and landlords, especially in the York University consultation.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Rights and Resources

Concerns about tenant rights and a lack of recourse for resolving problems was mentioned.

Parking

A lack of sufficient parking space was mentioned as a concern for tenants.

Insufficient Regulation and Enforcement

A lack of regulating and enforcing rooming house standards and bylaws was also mentioned in a couple of groups.

Theft

Challenges with theft were raised by a couple of groups as a specific concern for tenants.

CHALLENGES FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Property Damage

The most prevalent challenge identified was damage to property, sometimes associated with tenant negligence.

Tenant Screening and Turnover

Challenges with screening tenants and dealing with tenant turnover was a common point.

Managing Tenants

Managing tenants and dealing with tenant conflicts was raised by many as a challenge for owners/operators of rooming houses.

Maintaining the Property

The expense of operating rooming houses, dealing with complaints by neighbours, addressing safety issues, and collecting rent were all identified by multiple groups as challenges faced by owners/operators.

CHALLENGES FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Enforcement

Bylaw enforcement was the top challenge identified by discussion groups at the North York neighbourhood consultations, with some noting that the rules are hard to enforce.

Safety

General safety concerns, and fire risks more specifically, were raised by many groups as challenges facing the city.

Problems With Bylaws, Regulations, Licensing

Several groups saw a lack of the “right” regulations, bylaws, and licensing as an issue for the City, while others were more specific about a lack of clear and consistent rules.

Infrastructure Strain

Increased pressure on infrastructure and utilities was a prevalent concern.

Upkeep

Garbage, litter, and to a lesser extent general upkeep of the property were identified by many as challenges for the City.

Revenue Loss

Some groups highlighted the loss of revenue and tax dollars, mostly associated with unlicensed rooming houses and unreported income.

BENEFITS

BENEFITS FOR NEIGHBOURS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Diversity

Some groups saw increased diversity in the neighbourhood as a benefit. Increasing property values from houses drawing a lot of rental income was also raised by a few groups as a benefit.

BENEFITS FOR TENANTS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Affordable Housing

Affordability was the most common benefit for tenants identified by most discussion groups in North York.

Proximity to Amenities and Services

Proximity to other community assets (school, work, transit, services) was raised by many, especially in the consultation held at York University.

Flexible Living Arrangements and Fewer Tenant Responsibilities

Freedom from responsibility and greater flexibility and choice in living arrangements were identified as benefits for tenants. Not having to commit to one's tenancy in a rooming house to the same extent required by other living arrangements was also mentioned by many as a benefit.

BENEFITS FOR OWNERS/OPERATORS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Income/Profit

Financial gain was the benefit identified for owners/operators that was mentioned most by groups, which was just as frequently related to legal forms of income and investment and illegal or "under the table" income. Some raised cheaper living costs for landlords living on-site as a benefit.

BENEFITS FOR THE CITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Filling the Affordable Housing Gap

The provision of affordable housing was widely identified, with some comments seeing rooming houses as filling an affordable housing gap that the city hadn't filled.

Revenue

A few saw increased tax revenue from increased property values as a benefit to the City.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

ENFORCEMENT

Better Enforcement

Many wanted to see better, more effective enforcement of current bylaws and regulations. Some spoke to the need for a more responsive system, and a few discussion groups wanted to see focused enforcement that prioritized safety issues.

Regular, Unobstructed Inspections

Many saw more frequent, regular and spot inspections as a needed proactive form of enforcement. The suggestion of granting inspectors more powers to investigate was also made.

Proactive Investigations

More proactive investigation of possible rooming houses through a variety of avenues, such as inspection at the time of sale was raised.

Better Coordination Between Regulatory Bodies

Better coordination between different regulatory bodies, such as building permit, fire, and licensing departments was also raised as a solution to help with better enforcement.

Fining Infringements

Several discussion groups also suggested the implementation of fines for various kinds of bylaw infringements.

Increased Capacity for Enforcement

A couple of comments referred to the need for more bylaw officers.

REGULATIONS AND LICENSING

Licensing

Many thought that rooming houses should be licensed, with some specifying that the licensing and regulation of rooming houses should be consistent across the city.

Increased Powers for Enforcement Officers

Many raised a need to provide bylaw officers with more power to enforce the law. Some specified granting them more power to allow them to gain entry to a rooming house.

Eliminate/Ban All Rooming Houses

Some groups thought that rooming houses should not be legalized or should be eliminated.

Limits and Conditions

Others wanted to see limits and conditions placed on rooming houses such as limits on how many rooming houses can exist in a given neighbourhood, limits on the number of tenants allowed in a rooming house, or requiring a landlord or manager be on-site.

Clear Criteria

Some groups raised the need for clear criteria regarding building codes, rooming house registration, inspections, and the resulting actions from bylaw violations.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Taxes and fees

Increasing taxes and fees, from charging rooming house owners business taxes to setting licensing fees high enough to cover all licensing and enforcement activities, was raised by some groups.

Zoning

A few comments were made about the need to balance or limit the number of rooming houses in any particular place, so that rooming houses do not concentrate in some neighbourhoods, while other neighbourhoods have no rooming houses available at all. A couple of comments pertained to having tighter restrictions on tenants overall in areas zoned for single-family dwellings.

COMMUNICATION

More Effective Complaint Systems

Solutions regarding anonymous tip lines, dedicated hotlines, complaint websites, and better systems in 311 were common and spoke to a need for more effective systems for handling complaints.

More Responsive Systems

Many also wanted a more responsive system that provided follow-up and reports about action taken to enforce the laws, either due to complaints or generally.

More Education and Information

The provision of information and education to tenants and landlords was raised as a potential solution by some, and in a couple of comments, specifically as a solution to safety issues.

GARBAGE AND LITTER

Better Bins and More Collection

Besides enforcement and fines, solutions to garbage challenges included the provision of better or more bins for rooming house properties, more public bins, more frequent garbage collection, and more education of owners/operators and tenants about the proper storage and placement of waste and large items for curbside pick-up.

SAFETY

Improve Safety

In addition to better regulation, enforcement, and inspection a few other solutions were suggested related to improving safety: the use of security cameras in certain areas; more active role of the community such as a neighbourhood watch; education and awareness; more police presence; and better coordination between police and the community.

B. TENANT FOCUS GROUPS

The perspectives of 65 tenants were captured through seven specifically designed focus groups. The focus groups were held in locations that the tenants found familiar and were designed to accommodate participation from people with a wide variety of backgrounds. The focus groups took place over a two-hour period and the facilitator used a focus group guide to conduct the session. Responses were recorded by a note taker and summarized and analyzed by research staff.

Tenants were candid with their concerns and criticisms of the current system but also outspoken about the importance of having access to housing that was accessible to them and affordable on their very limited budgets. The findings below are presented based on an analysis of major themes in the documentation of the discussions.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE THE ONLY HOUSING THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO MOST OF THEIR TENANTS

Virtually all tenants underscored the importance of cost in their selection for housing. “Cheap, affordable, low cost” housing was the number one consideration tenants identified as drawing them to rooming houses. Many tenants noted that the rent at a rooming house is one of the few rates that matches the welfare or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) allowance for housing.

Many tenants saw rooming houses as the only option they had for housing, not only because it was all they could afford but because for some, the absence of a credit check was critical, while for others acceptance within rooming houses of people with mental illness, criminal records, and addictions was key.

ROOMING HOUSES OFFER OTHER BENEFITS TO SOME OF THEIR TENANTS

Though cost was the most important decision driver, tenants did see some advantage to living in rooming houses, though few of the advantages outweighed the many challenges they face. Most tenants valued convenient access to amenities such as the TTC, stores, services and facilities. Some valued the ease of association with other tenants in the house, noting that it offered a sense of community and sometimes opportunities to pool resources.

ROOMING HOUSES HAVE MANY DRAWBACKS FOR TENANTS

Most tenants saw their homes as unclean and poorly maintained. Many complained about rats, cockroaches and bedbugs. Women, in particular, expressed frustration with the poor hygiene and filth in their homes.

Most tenants also found their housing unsafe. They complained of theft while some also had concerns about compliance with fire regulations. Many felt that there was little real security in their buildings, including complaints about locks that don't work and little protection of privacy.

In many cases concerns revolved around the behaviour of other tenants, including concerns about tidiness, noise, but in some cases also theft and harassment.

Some tenants were concerned that the normal protections for tenants did not apply to them, with no tenant law relevant to their circumstances, no rent control and often no paperwork, such as leases and receipts, from their landlords.

TYPE OF OWNERS/OPERATORS HAVE A BIG IMPACT

Most tenants had significant concerns about their landlords. Many described them as abusive, unscrupulous and unprofessional. Many told stories of threats and ill treatment. Many expressed concerns with their landlord's willingness or ability to maintain reasonable standards in their house. While some tenants found their landlord ineffective, many noted that the landlords were in fact unresponsive or completely absent.

Some tenants, however, had good experiences with landlords who were both responsible and responsive. Tenants widely agreed that landlords who were present and engaged were better at maintaining their properties and ensuring safe living environments. Tenants with experience of supportive agencies playing a role in rooming houses found that the presence of such agencies can also help.

COMMUNITY MATTERS TO TENANTS

Tenants said that, for the most part, they are engaged with their neighbours only when an issue occurs. Many tenants said they experience hostility from neighbours, though some said they understand the difficulty their neighbours face in accommodating houses in poor repair.

Tenants said they feel fairly disconnected from their neighbours as a result, though some have positive interactions at least intermittently. In some neighbourhoods, notably Parkdale and Kensington, tenants expressed considerable appreciation for a more inclusive response and describe a sense of connectedness and engagement with their neighbours.

TENANTS KNOW LITTLE ABOUT ROOMING HOUSE RULES BUT FAVOUR LICENSING, REGULATION

Few tenants said they were familiar with rooming house bylaws, including those rules that might provide some measure of protection for them. Further, few tenants feel they can act on rules they do know without consequences, regardless of what they know. Most tenants said that they see little or no constraints on their landlords' or their abusive activities, and so are disinclined to press issues for fear of retaliation. Tenants support an effective complaints system that takes tenant well-being as a key consideration.

Tenants overwhelmingly expressed preference for a system with broader licensing, more robust regulation, and clearer rules. Many tenants also observed that licensed rooming houses are generally better managed than illegal ones. Most see broader licensing as more likely to improve standards and many see it as a way to potentially increase housing safety.

Many tenants identified a concern that as rules and licensing increase and housing conditions improve, operating costs will likely rise and rents may become less affordable.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

TENANTS SHARE THEIR NEIGHBOURS VIEW THAT ROOMING HOUSES SHOULD BE REGULATED LIKE OTHER BUSINESSES

Most tenants said they favoured clear standards and robust enforcement. Many tenants wondered why owners/operators can run homes that are intolerable while restaurants face surprise inspections and severe sanctions for failing to comply with regulations.

MANY TENANTS FEEL HOUSING SHOULD BE DIVERSIFIED TO REFLECT NEEDS

Most tenants believe that the City needs to create more affordable housing. There was general agreement that more low cost housing is needed and that rents need to be in line with their very limited budgets. Many tenants saw a need for housing that is targeted at specific needs such as housing for women, seniors and supportive housing for mental health survivors and recovering addicts.

C. STUDENT TENANT CONSULTATION

The perspectives of 11 student tenants were captured through two separate consultation activities - a focus group designed specifically for students, and through their participation in the York University neighbourhood consultation. Although student tenants raised many of the same issues and benefits as other tenants in regards to rooming houses, they provided a unique perspective on those issues as well as raising issues that are unique to them. The findings below are presented based on an analysis of major themes in the documentation of the discussions.

AFFORDABILITY, FLEXIBILITY AND LOCATION OF ROOMING HOUSES ARE KEY BENEFITS TO STUDENT TENANTS

For student tenants, affordability was identified as the most attractive feature of rooming houses, and a few mentioned that they can't afford to live alone. Flexibility was also raised by some as a benefit; rooming houses allow for short-term stays with little commitment, matching the need to find accommodation that is available during the school year, but that can be vacated for the summer.

Most student tenants choose their rooming houses based on locational convenience. They said that the house was either close to school or close to the transportation that they use to get to school. Location is considered an important aspect and potential driver of rooming house tenancy among students.

ROOMING HOUSES CAN BE CROWDED, UNSAFE, AND UNCOMFORTABLE PLACES TO LIVE

Many student tenants raised safety, and fire safety more specifically, as an issue, while others made comments related to poor living conditions that sometimes become or intersect with safety issues. Renting rooms in basements or garages with no windows, creating uncomfortable and unsafe living environments, is one such example. Poor maintenance and lack of basic upkeep were highlighted a number of times as factors that reduce the quality of life, sometimes to the point of becoming safety concerns.

Many commented that rooming houses are overcrowded, leading to a number of issues including, most predominantly, a lack of adequately sized common space. Issues with overflowing garbage and limited hot water were also raised.

Some student tenants, particularly those living in an area near York University called “the village”, spoke about the creation of rooming house ghettos and raised a number of concerns associated with this phenomenon. A few spoke to the general deterioration of the neighbourhood, which is often most evident in the amount of garbage and the lack of outdoor upkeep on the properties. Lack of parking was also raised as an issue. Overall, there was the perception that the ‘ghettos’ may fall victim to a reduced sense of community or shared responsibility that leads to further deterioration.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER TENANTS AND OWNERS/OPERATORS ARE GENERALLY CHALLENGING

While some student tenants spoke to the advantage of living with other students and even possibly friends, a great number of comments related to concerns about co-tenancy. Student tenants said that a sense of discomfort comes with living with people who are not students and who may range greatly in age, or from experiencing a high turnover in other tenants. Conflicts with other tenants were also reported around issues such as noise, privacy, theft and use of common spaces. Occasionally, safety and security concerns were also highlighted with respect to other tenants.

Student tenants find landlords are generally unresponsive when it comes to properly fixing or maintaining their properties. Some mentioned that they couldn't get leases or receipts for rent from their landlords, or that landlords didn't respect their rights. For example, a couple of students commented that their landlords would bring new prospective tenants in to see their rooms without notifying them.

STUDENT TENANTS FAVOUR GREATER LICENSING, INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT OF ROOMING HOUSES

Most student tenants favoured licensing rooming houses in order to provide clear enforceable rules and standards that would improve the safety, security, and quality of their homes. Some feared that licensing would result in increased rent, making rooming houses less affordable, and only wanted licensing if there was a guarantee that rent would not rise. Other student tenants identified the need for licensing to include limits on the number of tenants per property and/or rules about the ratio of common space to tenants, to eliminate overcrowding.

Many students indicated that they would like to see regular as well as spot inspections. However, some wanted prior notice before having their individual rooms inspected.

STUDENT TENANTS SUPPORT THE CREATION OF BETTER HOUSING OPTIONS

Most student tenants were concerned about both the general lack of affordable housing in Toronto, and specifically about a lack of housing to meet student's needs. Many mentioned that rooming houses were not their preferred choice of accommodation, but were the only affordable option. A couple of participants also highlighted that students will suffer through poor living conditions, sometimes affecting their mental health, in order to save money. Some expressed the need for the city and post-secondary institutions to provide affordable, quality, shared living accommodations in close proximity to college and university campuses.

D. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS CONSULTATION

The consultation with post-secondary institutions was conducted at a library on April 2nd and drew 12 participants from four local universities and four colleges. Participants responded to questions posed by a facilitator from a consultation guide (See Appendix G). The findings below are presented based on an analysis of major themes in the documentation of the discussion.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE ONE OPTION FOR STUDENT HOUSING

Stakeholders pointed out that, like many rooming house tenants, students use this type of housing because they need affordable housing. However, they also pointed out that, in the case of students, this housing choice is also driven very much by location and timing.

Stakeholders noted that students seek housing close to the school they are attending and that housing costs in many of these areas are often high. As a result, rooming houses are an attractive solution for students seeking affordable housing in close proximity to their campus.

Stakeholders also noted that international students and students coming from other cities often have little time to find housing, and often turn to rooming houses as a quick housing solution.

Some stakeholders called this model of housing a “necessary evil”. Stakeholders identified that students sometimes use this form of housing as a temporary, stopgap measure while seeking more stable housing, while others stay longer term.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE OFTEN NOT A GOOD OPTION FOR STUDENTS

Stakeholders commented that students are often highly vulnerable tenants, and need support. International students, students living alone for the first time, and students living far from their support networks all face challenges.

Stakeholders commented that while some students appear to value the fact that rooming houses have fewer rules and constraints than school residences, many also find challenges with this form of housing.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Stakeholders identified that students in rooming houses can become isolated from the student community and often embedded in a community that they find uncomfortable and sometimes traumatizing. Stakeholders discussed the struggles students have with houses where there is illegal activity, where they feel unsafe and where they frequently experience fear. Some post-secondary institutions have opened libraries 24 hours a day to ensure that students have a safe place to go when their housing is unsafe.

Stakeholders noted that these kinds of stress and disruption also have an adverse effect on student's ability to achieve academic success.

Fire safety is also a concern for post-secondary stakeholders. A number of serious fires recently have heightened those concerns.

Stakeholders expressed concern that, without improvements in this form of housing, there were extreme risks to students, with some stakeholders noting that students face serious risks, and that some could die in rooming houses if appropriate steps are not taken.

ABSENTEE LANDLORDS AND POOR REGULATIONS ARE A CHALLENGE

Post-secondary institution stakeholders expressed frustration at their inability to intervene successfully when they identify problems. They note that students are often focused on their studies and relatively new to living alone, and so aren't willing or able to take on problems in rooming houses. They note that colleges and universities don't always have the capacity to intervene directly, but even where they do, they find it hard to get results.

Stakeholders noted that many owners/operators are absent, hard to reach and unresponsive. Many are operating illegal rooming houses so there is no regulatory framework to appeal to. When they do seek intervention from the City they find the complaints process difficult to navigate. Even when they are able to navigate it, they often find the actions taken to be ineffective, or that the city often does not have the power needed to intervene successfully.

INFORMATION IS AN ISSUE

According to stakeholders, post-secondary institutions attempt to support students' efforts to obtain housing by listing available housing and referring students to rental accommodation. However, they lack the capacity to independently assess housing providers, and have no access to assessments done by others. Owners, operators, their agents and some real estate agents actively market to students with mixed levels of accuracy, but again, the institutions feel they are in a poor position to assess the claims made.

Since students are often trying to make housing choices quickly, stakeholders felt that better information could have a significant impact on the quality of their choices. A municipal listing of compliant and non-compliant houses would be beneficial.

Post-secondary institutions attempt to provide students with information about how to evaluate housing that could help them avoid renting places that are better avoided, but they have limited resources. Stakeholders thought that more education for students about housing choices from more sources would be beneficial.

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS CAN'T BE THE WHOLE SOLUTION

Stakeholders from post-secondary institutions were clear that they took these issues seriously, but also clear that they had limited capacity to address them.

They pointed out that they are not funded for housing, but rather for teaching and research. They recognize that parents who send their children to post-secondary institutions, and international students looking for a place to study, may respond badly to signs that the housing situation for some students is substandard, and that this creates an impetus for them to act. However, they also feel poorly placed to solve the problem, lacking the resources, access, and position to have a meaningful impact on the housing situation.

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS CAN HELP LINK THE HOUSES TO COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT

Stakeholders noted that part of the isolation students feel in rooming houses is due to the disconnection from their neighbours, and suggested that the conflict they experience relating to noise and other issues are real and they are also real barriers to engagement between tenants and other people in their community. Some institutions have had success bridging that gap, conducting outreach to link students in rooming houses to their neighbours with beneficial outcomes. Some thought that better connecting both to the City and city regulatory functions would also be an asset. Similarly, linking students in rooming houses to organizations that offer them support has helped.

Stakeholders felt that opening up that dialogue among all the potential partners could correct negative perceptions, address issues effectively and create the infrastructure to ensure better homes and more successful neighbourhoods.

E. IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT AGENCIES CONSULTATION

Five immigrant settlement workers from five agencies participated in a consultation held at City Hall on May 7th, 2015. Stakeholders responded to questions posed by a facilitator from a consultation guide (See Appendix G). The findings below are presented based on an analysis of major themes in the documentation of the discussion.

Immigrant settlement agency stakeholders identified several unique concerns that immigrants face in the rooming house system, as well as echoing many of the concerns cited by rooming house tenants across the board.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE THE ONLY HOUSING ACCESSIBLE TO THESE TENANTS

Stakeholders noted that immigrants have few housing options. Most immigrants have no credit history and are not accepted by other landlords. Waiting lists for affordable housing are long. Some have also been refused housing because of mental health histories. The cost of housing in Toronto is too high, and there are no other affordable rental alternatives.

ROOMING HOUSES POSE CHALLENGES FOR TENANTS

Stakeholders noted that many of the complaints common to rooming house tenants apply to immigrants as well. They identified concerns with lack of maintenance and repairs, as well problems with privacy and unauthorized access to the rooms. Stakeholders described owners/operators demanding illegal payments, refusing to document transactions, and refusing to refund deposits. Landlords were seen as hard to reach. Stakeholders noted that other tenants are a source of difficulty as well. Incidents of theft and issues with safety were mentioned, as was the high turnover and transience of the population.

ROOMING HOUSES POSE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FOR IMMIGRANTS

Stakeholders pointed out that immigrants face distinct challenges above and beyond those common to rooming house tenants. Immigrants are often seeking housing for their families rather than just single rooms. Rooming houses are a difficult place to raise children, and equally uncomfortable places for seniors, with little privacy and problems with drugs, transience, and illegal activity.

Stakeholders conveyed that immigrants often face language barriers and lack information about their rights and the regulations, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Immigrants are often uncomfortable reporting problems, concerned that authorities may not be entirely helpful. This is especially true of tenants without immigration status.

LICENSING IS NEEDED

Many of the participating stakeholders worked with immigrants who were living in illegal rooming houses. They noted that the ban on rooming houses in some areas of the City makes it impossible for people to find legal housing they can afford. While illegal rooming houses were seen as having significant problems they felt that even these were better than having immigrant families living on the street, which they saw as the only alternative. They argued that rooming houses were very much needed by the communities they serve and advocated for more licensing in more areas of the City and for the inclusion of rooming houses in a comprehensive spectrum of housing options.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

REGULATION AND CONTROLS ARE NEEDED

Stakeholders felt that licensing should be linked to strong regulations. There should be clear standards on health and safety. Close monitoring of rooming houses, with regular inspections were recommended.

Stakeholders felt that the system should also support and encourage good operators, providing education, incentives and help with navigating the system. They also noted that supports were present in some rooming houses, and that governments sometimes partnered successfully with community agencies to create beneficial, supportive models.

Some stakeholders felt the laws governing apartment buildings should extend to rooming houses in order to put rooming house tenants under the same protection as other tenants.

ENFORCEMENT IS CRITICAL

Stakeholders felt that many of the challenges associated with rooming houses could be addressed with more rigorous, proactive regulation and enforcement. They suggested broader licensing with vigorous enforcement as a way to remove the nuisances that rooming houses pose to the neighbourhoods they are a part of, and reduce fears of negative impacts on property values. Similarly, stronger enforcement would ensure that all rooming house tenants have a clean, safe place to live.

Stakeholders also encouraged providing advocacy to support tenants in raising issues. They suggested more education about tenant's rights, and more information for community members about rules as a means of increasing compliance with the regulations. They noted that these efforts would have to address language barriers tenants face. A hotline for reporting issues was also suggested as a way to increase tenant ability to address issues.

MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING HELPS

Stakeholders noted that many of the challenges rooming house tenants face could be eliminated if there were an adequate supply of quality affordable housing for families. Stakeholders suggested government run rooming houses, small units of subsidized housing and affordable homeownership options would help immigrant families settle in better accommodations.

F. HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS CONSULTATION

24 housing support workers from 20 agencies participated in a two hour focus group held at Woodgreen Community Services on April 1st, 2015. Stakeholders responded to questions posed by a facilitator from a consultation guide (See Appendix G). The findings below are presented based on an analysis of major themes in the documentation of the discussion.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE THE ONLY HOUSING THAT IS ACCESSIBLE FOR SOME TENANTS

Stakeholders cited lower rental cost as the primary reason tenants live in rooming houses. They noted that this is the lowest cost housing available and pointed out that this was the only form of housing that actually reflected housing allowances provided by welfare and ODSP.

Rooming houses also accommodate tenants that are not able to access other housing options. Many rooming house tenants cannot afford rent deposits and do not have a strong credit history, and rooming houses are one of the few forms of housing that don't require these. Some stakeholders indicated that tenants with mental health and addiction challenges are often rejected from other housing and rooming houses are one of the few settings that will agree to rent to them.

Some stakeholders also noted that rooming houses provide the most easily arranged housing with the lowest cost of entry, and thus serve as the most practical form of transitional housing for people who lack stable housing arrangements.

ROOMING HOUSES OFFER OTHER BENEFITS TO SOME OF THEIR TENANTS

Although stakeholders saw rooming houses as the only option for many tenants, they were also aware of some benefits to rooming house tenancy for some people. Some pointed out that tenants are able to interact socially with housemates, and build community in ways that private apartments don't provide. Rooming house arrangements were simple, with few rules and few constraints. Rooming houses also offer accommodation close to things that tenants valued, including services, specific stores, transit, and other amenities at rental rates that are still manageable.

ABSENTEE LANDLORDS ARE A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE

Stakeholders noted a wide variety of challenges with landlords. Many are simply not engaged in ensuring decent standards in the houses. Maintenance is often slow and sometimes non-existent. Some landlords are hard to reach, making problems hard to resolve. Stakeholders described a “kafka-esque” arrangement where they seek to help a tenant, but the landlord may not be reachable or not cooperative, while engaging the City might lead to closure of the rooming house and the eviction of the tenant they are seeking to support.

IN SOME CASES, THE PRESENCE OF LANDLORDS IS NOT ALWAYS A BENEFIT

Stakeholders described other setting in which landlords were all too present, entering tenants rooms without authorization, demanding illegal payments, being physically or verbally abusive to tenants, providing access to the house for non-tenants, and engaging in disruptive and threatening behaviour. Few tenants have enough information to prevent abuses, and fewer feel safe doing so. As a result, little is done to constrain this behaviour.

OWNERS/OPERATORS VARY WIDELY

Stakeholders made a point of noting that some owners/operators are excellent landlords. Some take pride in providing a safe, decent, affordable home for their tenants. Stakeholders also noted that these landlords often find the current regulatory system difficult and have difficulty making ends meet while complying with all the regulations.

Stakeholders also noted that some landlords that do a poor job are not doing so intentionally. Some don’t understand the rules, don’t know the safety regulations, lack the physical or financial means to address the issues that need attention and are neither properly trained nor properly informed for the tasks they are undertaking.

LICENSED HOUSES HAVE FEWER PROBLEMS OVERALL

There is variation in all aspects of the sector but overall stakeholders’ experiences were that licensed houses had fewer problems. Stakeholders noted landlords of licensed houses tend to be more responsive, more responsible, and less difficult to reach than those operating unlicensed or illegal rooming houses. However, licensed houses also tended to be more expensive, which made them inaccessible to the tenants with the biggest financial challenges.

OTHER TENANTS CAN BE A CHALLENGE

Stakeholders noted that some of the problems in rooming houses come from the other tenants.

Some rooming house tenants are disruptive and volatile. Tenants with mental health and addiction problems who lack appropriate supports can be difficult housemates. There is a high level of transience in rooming houses, which can also be disconcerting for the other tenants.

Some tenants create difficult living conditions including problems with cleanliness and property damage. There are issues of crime and safety, with some tenants facing theft, violence, and illegal activity by housemates.

Stakeholders note that operators of unlicensed rooming houses have little recourse in dealing with these tenants, as involving police can risk exposing their own bylaw violations.

ALTERNATIVES ARE DIRE FOR MOST TENANTS

Stakeholders were clear that, whatever the challenges rooming houses pose, the alternatives to rooming houses are worse. Stakeholders were confident that losing rooming houses means more people on the street, more people in shelters and more homeless deaths. They saw no alternatives to these outcomes and expected that crime would rise as people were put in more desperate circumstances.

CITY PLAY A BIGGER ROLE IN THE ROOMING HOUSE SECTOR

Stakeholders saw a significant role for the city in addressing these challenges. They felt the City should treat rooming houses as an element of a coherent housing strategy that includes a range of housing options.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Stakeholders felt that more licensing is appropriate but wanted that to occur in an overall strategy for addressing tenants needs. Stakeholders felt that strategy should include a more vigorous enforcement process that has more “teeth” and can ensure quick action on deficiencies in houses. They believed that a more proactive inspection and enforcement model would be more effective, as would increasing the City’s power to enter a premises to inspect to share information across divisions.

Stakeholders felt that the City should be more selective about who can become a rooming house operator, provide more education and training to operators, and expect a higher standard in the housing stock. They noted that the City licenses and regulates a large range of businesses, imposing standards on them and inspecting to see that those standards are met. They identified restaurants as an example and suggested a similar regime would be a more effective strategy for managing the rooming house stock.

INCENTIVES

While stakeholders were eager to see more enforcement of rooming house regulations, they were also aware that the rooming house sector needs support if it is going to succeed. They felt incentives and supports were needed to make quality housing economically viable. Stakeholders felt the City could enhance the stability of good rooming houses by helping operators access affordable insurance, and by administering tax breaks and building rehabilitation funds. They felt that rooming house residents are good candidates for rent supplements in order to make better housing affordable for people living in poverty.

Stakeholders also noted that the current rooming house regulations impose complex and time consuming tasks on operators, and that simplifying the application and compliance processes would be beneficial.

IMPROVED CONDITIONS IN ROOMING HOUSES ARE LINKED TO A RESPONSIBLE PRESENCE

Stakeholders had many examples of houses that have been improved by the presence of a responsible party helping with the operation of the house. Stakeholders noted that on site landlords or property managers are more accessible to tenants and neighbours and tend to be more responsive and faster at addressing issues.

Stakeholders also noted that having third parties present, such as agencies providing support to tenants, adds a positive element to rooming houses and that houses that have that additional presence tended to be better places to live.

BETTER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS, OWNERS AND TENANTS CAN HELP

Stakeholders noted that some rooming houses have a real and negative impact on their neighbours that is not actively addressed. For houses to be successfully integrated into their neighbourhoods, they need to respond effectively to issues such as garbage, noise, and parking.

While these problems do occur and need to be addressed, stakeholders also felt there were some perceived problems that did not bear up under closer scrutiny. Stakeholders saw the belief that rooming houses inherently undermine the quality of a neighbourhood, lower property values, and create crime as driven more by fear than fact.

Stakeholders were confident that these are issues that can be addressed. They gave examples where efforts had been made to link communities with rooming house operators and rooming house tenants, and many of the issues between them had been resolved. Stronger connections between neighbours and tenants make it easier for neighbours to raise concerns and for tenants to comply. Clearer lines of communication between landlords and neighbours have the same effect. Proactive efforts to build connections between neighbours and tenants also increase mutual respect and tolerance.

SUPPORT TENANTS

Stakeholders emphasized that the regulatory system ought to be focused on protecting tenants from exploitation and unsafe conditions, while ensuring that they are adequately housed. Enforcement should be oriented around bringing houses up to standards quickly, with minimal disruption to the people housed there. Tenants should be provided with education about their rights and the protections that the City provides. Vulnerable tenants also need support and advocacy to exercise their rights and to address problems with their landlords. Stakeholders felt rooming houses would work better if the people who live in them have the support they need to ensure that problems are addressed.

BUILD AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Stakeholders underscored their belief that the root of all of the problems with rooming houses is the lack of affordable housing options for people living on very low incomes. This shortage puts tenants in desperate circumstances and creates a market for low cost housing that can, and too often does, exploit that desperation. If tenants had safe, clean, affordable housing there would be no market for illegal rooming houses or unscrupulous operators.

G. OWNERS/OPERATORS

Two key informant interviews were held on the phone and one consultation was held at a community agency in west Toronto to engage 23 owners/operators of rooming houses. Participants ranged in the type of rooming house they owned or operated, including licensed and unlicensed houses in different areas of the city. The findings below are presented based on an analysis of major themes in the documentation of the discussion.

ROOMING HOUSES PROVIDE AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTION

Most owners/operators indicated that the central benefit of rooming houses is that they provide a roof over the heads of vulnerable populations who would otherwise be on the street or in shelters, including seniors, students, immigrants, mental health sufferers, and people with disabilities. There is no typical rooming house tenant: they come from all walks of life and their circumstances differ considerably. One of the key informant interviewees called the rooming house a “microcosm for the City of Toronto.”

There was a general consensus that the stock of affordable housing in Toronto needs to increase, and one owner/operator proposed that the City build more supportive housing in new condos.

NEIGHBOUR RELATIONS CAN BE A PROBLEM

Many of the owners/operators stated that they receive regular complaints from neighbours about litter, garbage, and noise. Participants of the consultation also said that they are frequently confronted with a “not in my backyard” attitude from the neighbourhoods in which they own and operate rooming houses. Neighbours tend to be fearful of rooming house tenants and they actively oppose the creation of more houses, pressuring their city councillors to take action.

One key informant interviewee expressed frustration, stating that whatever the nature of the neighbours’ complaint, the City tends to take an aggressive stance on the issue and does not take into account the perspective and needs of the landlord.

In order to create more neighbourhood awareness, tolerance, and understanding, some owners/operators feel that there should be more community initiatives and gatherings that bring neighbours (rooming house tenants along with local residents) together.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH TENANTS ARE OFTEN CHALLENGING

One of the most prevalent challenges highlighted by owners/operators is dealing with the diverse needs of their tenants, especially those with mental health issues, disabilities, and substance abuse problems. The varied and sometimes unstable nature of rooming house tenants can create a significant amount of stress for landlords, who want to accommodate these vulnerable populations but are not always able to manage difficult behaviour.

Rent collection was another frequently cited issue, as tenants often do not have sufficient funds. When combined with mental health issues, collecting rent becomes an even trickier process.

Hoarding, hygiene, and vermin/bugs are major issues in rooming house properties but participants noted that it can be difficult for landlords to evict tenants who bring in and perpetuate these problems.

Theft and conflicts among tenants occur but some owners/operators highlighted that they don’t always have the time or resources to deal with these internal issues directly.

Many owners/operators reported property damage and a general lack of regard and respect for the property on the part of the tenants, which increases the costs of maintaining the rooming house and puts further time demands on the landlords.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

MAINTANANCE AND UPKEEP POSE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

From the perspective of the owners/operators themselves, the most commonly cited challenge is the financial burden of maintaining their properties, doing repairs, and keeping up with shifting municipal standards and regulations. Some licensed landlords mentioned that they hire contract workers to maintain their property for them, which is an added cost.

Some expressed the feeling that the incentive to run rooming houses is decreasing because it is not lucrative anymore.

There was repeated mention of the benefit of annual funding from the City to assist and accommodate tenants with mental health and disabilities, but that the funding wasn't keeping pace with inflation. Right now, owners/operators say they have a hard time keeping up with the associated costs.

OWNERS/OPERATORS EXPERIENCE A LACK OF CITY SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION

There is a general feeling that the City does not offer enough supports to owners/operators, including monetary support in the form of tax breaks, grants, and incentives, and educational support, including empowerment and awareness. In general, they say they feel burdened by their responsibilities and demands. Time constraints can create a backlog of activity: some things need to be done right away but the property owners say they can only manage so much.

Most owners/operators expressed that the City is not cooperative or helpful: saying that the City makes processes more complicated and difficult than they may need to be. Some of the owners/operators feel that the City's bylaws are overly strict and enforcement of them can become petty and bureaucratic.

One licensed owner who has been operating supportive rooming houses for 30 years feels that as a private landlord, he does not have the same rights as public ones that provide affordable supportive housing. Some owners/operators that manage supportive rooming houses expressed frustration that they are treated like condo developers.

Most of the owners/operators would like to see increased communication and cooperation between City officials and landlords, rather than a steady stream of negative feedback and backlash. The City should help landlords eliminate roadblocks for new houses rather than help create them.

CHANGING REGULATIONS AND INSPECTION PROCESSES ARE CONFUSING FOR SOME

Some expressed concern that interacting with multiple government departments (e.g. Fire, MLS) can be confusing, overwhelming, and counterproductive. Some owners/operators also expressed issues navigating the Landlord & Tenant Act and a lack of transparency about rights and regulations. Others commented that each inspector that visits a property can have different standards and attitudes, which complicates landlords' interactions with them and makes it more challenging for them to keep their properties up to code. Further, many feel that standards and regulations tend to be inconsistent and always changing, making it difficult to conform to them.

Some owners/operators recommended a joint support effort between Toronto Fire, Police, and MLS. These departments need to work together with owners/operators rather than operating independently of each other and making processes more confusing. Indeed, many would like to see the City set clear, uniform regulations and standards for rooming houses, especially in relation to fire inspections. Overall, owners/operators would like the City to re-evaluate its processes and standards and keep the needs and demands of owners/operators in mind. There should be a clear roadmap for owners/operators to obtain licenses in order to ease the process. Furthermore, the City should relax and revamp certain policies, such as enforcement and regular inspections. The landlords don't want to feel unjustly punished or penalized.

BARRIERS TO LICENSING NEED TO BE REDUCED

Overall, owners/operators agreed that there are too many fees, and that the City keeps adding more. Some suggested that the City's licensing process for rooming houses is confusing, unclear, and hard to navigate. Some owners/operators indicated that insurance is too expensive and many cannot afford it.

Many feel strongly that there needs to be more education for owners/operators; one licensed interviewee suggested an instructional booklet that includes information about zoning regulations and the process of properly converting a property into a rooming house.

A common desire was to see licensing extended to Scarborough and North York: owners/operators in these areas would like to run properties that are not considered illegal, as it gives them legitimacy and makes them safer places to live.

ROOMING HOUSES ARE A BRIDGE TO OTHER FORMS OF HOUSING

When asked why people seek out rooming houses, the most prevalent answer among the owners/operators was that tenants, many of whom are on ODSP or OW, often have no other options available: rooming houses are the most affordable accommodations and many do not require credit checks.

The general sense among owners/operators is that rooming houses are a stepping stone to other, more stable forms of housing; this is the eventual goal of most tenants and some landlords encourage their tenants to seek these out.

H. ONLINE SURVEY

A survey was developed in consultation with City staff to elicit the views of Toronto residents on all aspects of rooming houses. The survey was posted online on the City's web site from April 17th until May 10th, and was promoted to participants of the Rooming House Review on the posters and print adds for neighbourhood consultations as well as at consultations themselves. It was also promoted at Focus groups and shared on Twitter and Facebook. The research team analyzed data from respondents and a summary of the highlights of the responses was developed (see Appendix N).

RESPONSES

The survey received 742 responses from a diverse sample of the city residents. 31.4% of respondents were neighbours, 14.8% of respondents were tenants, 20.2% of respondents were service providers, 2.7% were owners/operators, and 40.2% of respondents were other interested residents. 10.6% indicated none of the above. Respondents were able to select more than one applicable answer, so percentages indicate the proportion of each answer but do not add up to 100%.

MAKEUP OF TENANT POPULATION

Respondents saw rooming house tenants in a way that accurately reflects other information on their circumstances.

- 75.3% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include people who need low rent
- 70.3% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include students
- 66.4% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include immigrants
- 63.5% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include people who have a hard time finding housing
- 53.3% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include people with mental health and addiction issues
- 38% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include seniors
- 22.3% of respondents recognize rooming house tenants include families

Most respondents (76.4%) recognized that affordability was a key factor in choosing to live in a rooming house. 71.5% saw lack of options as a dominant issue in rooming house tenancy but many (46.4%) also recognized that access to amenities and services is a key issue. Some (15.6%) recognized that there are tenants that value the community aspect of rooming houses.

TENANT CHOICES

Tenants who responded to the survey confirmed that the number one driver of tenancy is cost, with 74.3% naming affordability as a factor in choosing to live in a rooming house. 36.6% of tenants responding to the survey said a rooming house was all they could find. However, access was also important, with 64.4% of tenants saying it was close to their school, 27% saying it was close to other community amenities they value and 18% saying it was close to work.

NEIGHBOURS' CONCERNS

Neighbours who responded to the survey identified several concerns. They were most concerned about maintenance (65.4%), garbage (61.8%), fire hazards (60.1%), and overcrowding (59.9%). About half of the neighbours who responded to the survey also worried about property values (50.7%) and parking (47.0%). 37.3 % worried about crime and only 30.0% worried about accidents.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

COMMUNITY

Only 25% of the tenants who responded to the survey said that they felt welcome in their neighbourhood, though 44.4% said that it was very important for them to feel welcome. 22% of tenants said community matters to them.

TENANTS' ISSUES

Most of the tenants who responded to the survey were living in unlicensed houses.

While tenants had many complaints, most described their rooming houses as safe (56.7%), and quiet (51%). However only a minority said their houses were well-maintained (41.1%).

Nonetheless, tenants indicated widespread problems with their housing, including concerns about the quality (57%) and maintenance (54%), and reporting nuisances such as noise (53%) and garbage (49%). They also noted significant problems with other tenants (50%).

Though only a minority, a significant number of tenants noted concerns about safety (34%), fire hazards (32%), and pests (29%).

OWNER/OPERATOR VIEWS

Though the sample size is small, the landlords that responded to the survey (17) mostly own a single rooming house. There was little overlap in the sample between unlicensed and licensed operators.

Unlicensed owners/operators worried about the cost of licensing (27%), the ability to legalize their houses in areas where there is no licensing (20%), qualifying for a license (20%), obtaining the information needed to comply with regulations (20%) and ability to follow the process (20%). Some owners/operators were opposed to the involvement of the City (20%) and others felt the rules were confusing (13%) or changed too often (7%). Some felt that meeting the city's standards cost too much (20%).

Few owners were aware of any concerns neighbours had about their houses (24%). Those that did assume community concerns focused on property values (42%) rather than the practical issues like garbage (25%) or safety (17%).

Despite all this, many owners (41%) favour more licensing.

Most owners/operators wanted to see financial incentives (53%) as a way to help them obtain and maintain licensed rooming houses, while many also favoured simpler applications (47%), clearer application guidelines (47%) and help with applications (35%).

ATTITUDES ABOUT LICENSING AND REGULATION

A majority of survey respondents (59%) were unfamiliar with the rooming house rules. Despite this, over half (55%) were convinced they need to be changed.

Most respondents (67%) want better enforcement, but a minority (42%) think the rules need to be tougher.

A majority of respondents (58%) want better protections for tenants and 50% want that for the community.

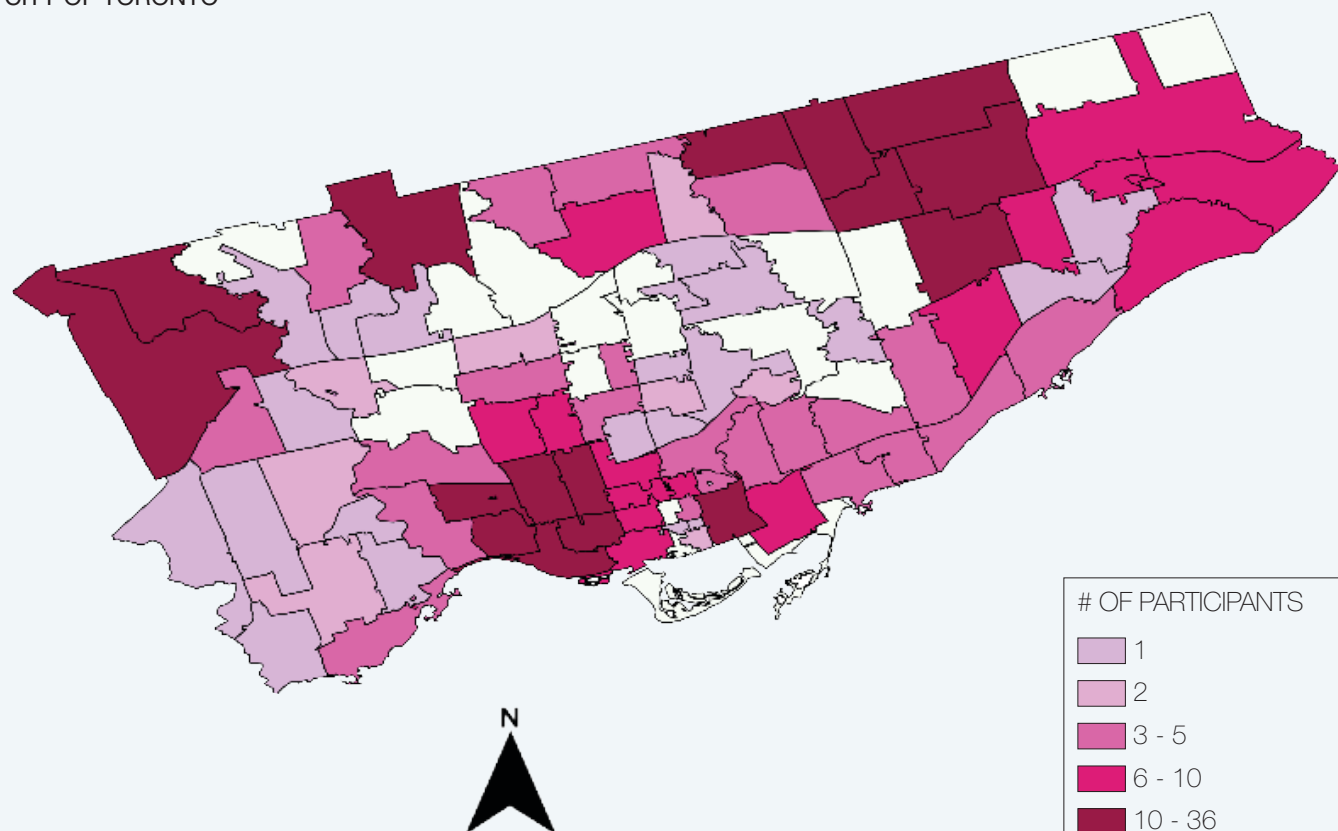
More than half of all respondents (53%) want licensing across the city, while another 10% want it at least in more areas than it currently exists. Only 26% want the limits to be the same or tighter than the current ones. Support for broader licensing tended to be higher in areas where licenses were currently available. Support was highest in Central Toronto (80%), and high in Etobicoke (60%), somewhat lower in North York (50%), and lowest in Scarborough (41%).

IMPACT OF LOSS OF HOUSING

The impact of house closures was seen by most respondents (68.4%) as a serious problem. Most respondents felt that without rooming houses tenants would be homeless (56.9%) or would be forced to use shelters (52.3%). Some felt they would find other housing options (44.0%) or would live with friends or family (36.4%).

ROOMING HOUSE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS BY FSA

CITY OF TORONTO



V. APPENDICES

LIST OF APPENDICES

A. Public Consultation Participation And Locations ...	57	H. Owner/Operator Key Informant Interview Guide....	76
B. Neighbourhood Consultation Flyer	61	I. Focus Group Consent Form (Tenant)	78
C. Neighbourhood Consultation Format	62	J. Focus Group Consent Form (Stakeholder)	80
D. Neighbourhood Consultation Powerpoint	64	K. Focus Group Consent Forms (Owner/Operator)...	83
E. Neighbourhood Consultation Worksheet.....	69	L. Honorarium Receipt Form	85
F. Tenant Focus Group Guide	72	M. Proposed Solutions	86
G. Housing Support Worker, Post-Secondary Institutions, Immigrant Settlement Agencies Consultation Guide	74	N. Graph Data From Online Survey	92

APPENDIX A: PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND LOCATIONS

14 NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATIONS

CENTRAL TORONTO			
<i>Area</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># Participants Registered*</i>
Parkdale	Apr. 9, 2015	Parkdale Library	22
Grange Kensington	Apr. 13, 2015	Lillian H. Smith Library	25
Annex Harbord	Apr. 29, 2015	Huron Street Public School	6
Regent Park Cabbagetown	Apr. 30, 2015	Wellesley Community Centre	8
South Riverdale	May 4, 2015	Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre	5
Corso Italia Davenport	May 5, 2015	New Horizons Tower	6
Total			72
ETOBICOKE			
<i>Area</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># Participants Registered*</i>
Smithfield	Apr. 28, 2015	Elmbank Community Centre	18
Total			18
SCARBOROUGH			
<i>Area</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># Participants Registered*</i>
L'Amoreaux	Apr. 20, 2015	Stephen Leacock Community Centre	105
Highland Creek	Apr. 21, 2015	Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre	29
Steeles	Apr. 27, 2015	L'Amoreaux Community Recreation Centre	150
Milliken	May 7, 2015	Francis Liberman Catholic School	68
Total			352
NORTH YORK			
<i>Area</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># Participants Registered*</i>
Peanut Hillcrest	Apr. 14, 2015	Our Lady of Guadalupe	32
Newtonbrook Willowdale	Apr. 22, 2015	North York Central Library	33
York Uni Heights	Apr. 23, 2015	Atkinson Building, York University	52
Total			117
GRAND TOTAL			559

*N.B. These figures reflect the number of participants who signed the registration form and not necessarily the total attendance numbers.

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX A

CONSULTATIONS: HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS, POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT AGENCIES

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># of Participants</i>
Housing Support Workers	Apr. 1, 2015	Woodgreen Community Services	24
Post-Secondary Institutions	Apr. 2, 2015	Lillian H. Smith Library	12
Immigrant Settlement Agencies	May 7, 2015	City Hall	5
Total			41

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES IN CONSULTATIONS: HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS, POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT AGENCIES

<i>Housing Support</i>	<i>Post-Secondary Institutions</i>	<i>Immigrant Services</i>
Advocacy Centre for Tenants	Centennial College	Centre for Immigrants & Community Services
Canadian Red Cross Society	Humber College	St. Stephen's Community House
Central Neighbourhood House, Street Survivors Program	University of Toronto	Parkdale Intercultural Association
City of Toronto Education Services Sector	York University	Metro Toronto Chinese Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Dixon Hall	City of Toronto	YMCA Newcomer Information Centre
Federation of Metro Tenants Association	OCAD	
Habitat Services	Ryerson University	
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services	George Brown College	
Landlords Self-Help Centre	Seneca College	
Massey Centre		
PARC		
Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities		
South Riverdale Community Health Centre		
Sistering		
Toronto Christian Resource Centre		
St. Simon's Shelter		
Toronto Drop-In Network		
Woodgreen Community Services		
YWCA		
John Howard Society		

TENANT FOCUS GROUPS

<i>Tenant Group</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># of Participants</i>
Students	Apr. 20, 2015	Toronto Reference Library	5
Street-involved	Apr. 22, 2015	St. Stephen's Community House	10
Women	Apr. 25, 2015	Sistering	11
Parkdale	Apr. 30, 2015	Houselink Community Homes	8
Scarborough	May 5, 2015	WSCLS	14
Mental Heath	May 6, 2015	Woodgreen Community Services	10
North York	May 7, 2015	Unison Health & Community Services	7
Total			65

OWNERS/OPERATORS FOCUS GROUP

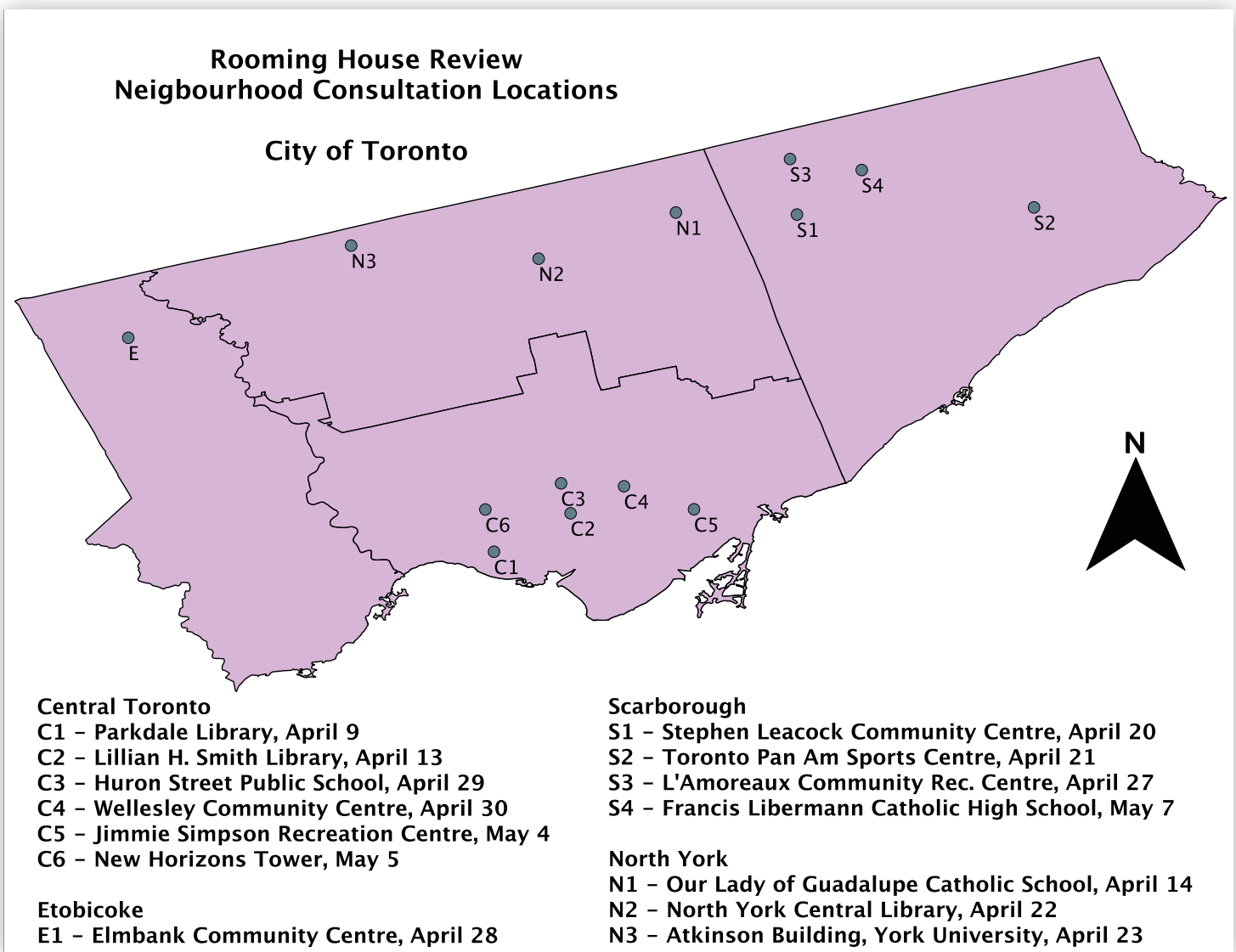
<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># of Participants</i>
Licensed & Unlicensed Owners/Operators	May 1, 2015	Houselink Community Homes	21

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

<i>Online Survey</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># of Respondents</i>
Open Survey	April 17 - May 10, 2015	City of Toronto website	742

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B: NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATION FLYER



ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW

NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATION

Join other community members and stakeholders to discuss how we can improve:

- Living conditions for rooming house tenants
- The impact rooming houses have on surrounding communities

Central Toronto	Scarborough
Parkdale Library, Auditorium 1303 Queen Street West Thursday, April 9 th 6-8pm	Stephen Leacock Community Centre, Main Hall 2500 Birchmount Road Monday, April 20 th 6-8 PM
Lillian H. Smith Library, Auditorium 239 College Street Monday, April 13 th 6-8pm	Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre, Leadership Room 875 Morningside Avenue Tuesday, April 21 st 6:30-8:30pm
Huron Street Public School 541 Huron Street Wednesday, April 29 th 6-8pm	L'Amoreaux Community Recreation Centre, Studio Room 1 2000 McNicoll Avenue Monday, April 27 th 7-9 pm
Wellesley Community Centre, Room A 495 Sherbourne Street Thursday, April 30 th 6:30-8:30pm	Francis Libermann Catholic High School, Cafeteria 4640 Finch Avenue East Thursday, May 7 th 6:30-8:30pm
Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre, Multi-Purpose Room (Upper Level) 870 Queen Street East Monday, May 4 th 6:30-8:30pm	North York
New Horizons Tower, Auditorium 1140 Bloor Street West Tuesday, May 5 th 7-9pm	Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic School, Gym 3105 Don Mills Road Tuesday, April 14 th 6:30-8:30pm
	North York Central Library, Room 1 5120 Yonge Street Wednesday, April 22 nd 6-8pm
Etobicoke	Atkinson Building, York University, Harry Crowe Room 4700 Keele Street Thursday, April 23 rd 6-8 PM
Elmbank Community Centre, Multi-Purpose Room 10 Rampart Road Tuesday, April 28 th 7-9pm	

The City of Toronto's "Rooming House Review – Public Consultation" is a project facilitated by Public Interest. For further information, or if you are unable to attend but would like to fill out the rooming house survey, please visit toronto.ca/roominghousereview

For information on directions to the consultation and locations for parking, or to request translation (48 hour notice required), please contact Sujan Sapkota at 416-531-6235 or sujan@publicinterest.ca



APPENDIX C: NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATION FORMAT

STRUCTURE OF EVENT

INTRODUCTION (3 MINS)

- Welcome and Agenda
- Councillor remarks – if required

SMALL GROUP ICEBREAKER (5 MINS)

- Everyone introduce themselves
- Talk about what you know about rooming houses and why they exist

FRAMING AND CONTEXT (10 MINS)

- Provide some contextual facts/framing – Presentation
- Provide Definition of Rooming Houses

For the purpose of this discussion when we say rooming house we mean a shared house, apartment or building where you share a kitchen and/or washroom with four or more other residents (not including members of your household).

PRIORITIZING THE CHALLENGES EXERCISE (20 MINS)

- Review the Work sheet
- Ask the group to choose a note taker
- Begin to discuss and write down in the worksheet the challenges faced by neighbours, tenants, owners/operators, and the City in relation to rooming houses
- While facilitators are circulating the room they will have handed out dots just before segueing into the seeking opportunities section
- Without speaking to each other place two dots in each column for the issues that you think are the most pressing for the 4 columns
- After you have voted individually, discuss why you picked these issues and note them on the worksheet

SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES EXERCISE (40 MINS)

- Presentation – More Rooming House Facts
- Look at the issues you identified as the top 2 and start brainstorming opportunities and what role/responsibility/activity each of those (neighbourhood, tenants, owner/operator, city) play in them
- Does more licensing address your identified issue? What role does each of the stakeholders play in terms of licensing?
- How do your opportunities impact, positively or negatively, the mix of affordable housing in Toronto

SMALL GROUP REPORT BACK (15 MINS)

- Collect Worksheets at the end

THANK YOU AND CONCLUSION (5 MIN)

- To participants
- Councillor
- Make sure worksheets are collected at the end
- Mill around when consultation is over to say thank you individually – try to over hear comments and conversation – be available

TAKE DOWN

- Some locations have a hard timeline when we have to be out so make sure we take down fast
- Put room back as was if required referring to photo you took at the beginning

SET-UP AND REGISTRATION (30 MINS)

- Staff arrive at location 30 minutes prior to consultation
- Introduce yourself to location staff – ascertain any rules, when you have to be out, etc.
- Take photo of room before doing anything, as for some consultations you have to put room back exactly
- Tables to be set-up in rounds with numbers clearly taped in the centre
- Coffee and light refreshments set up in a strategic place in the room
- Staff orient themselves to the location of washrooms
- Set-up registration table and greeters at front with registration sign-in form
- Powerpoint on with welcome slide on the screen
- Post direction signs where required
- One City staff is assigned to be lead at each consultation – they will introduce themselves to you and will be the key contact for City Councillors if they attend

REGISTRATION

- Welcome participants to consultation – thank them for taking their time
- Ask them to sign the registration form – if lots of people have more sheets going at once
- Hand out a number to each participant that number tells them what table to sit at
- Fill out table assignment after the person has registered and moved on

FLOATING FACILITATOR/NOTETAKER

- Check-in with registration table to get sense of the mix at tables
- Take notes throughout the process of what you either both in small groups and large group
- Roving and Active Facilitation – listen to what is happening at table – might need to stop and assist minimally – for some tables might need to stop roving and join to actively facilitate

APPENDIX D: NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATION POWERPOINT

City of Toronto Rooming House Review

Neighbourhood Consultation



Welcome and Agenda

- Overview of Review Process
- Introductions at your Table
- Rooming Houses – Definition and Background
- Exploring and Prioritizing the Benefits and Challenges of Rooming Houses (group discussion)
- Quick Facts about Rooming Houses in Toronto
- Identifying Solutions to the priority challenges (group discussion)
- Report Back from Groups
- Thank You and Survey

Rooming House Review

April to May 2015: Public Consultations

- 14 neighbourhood-based consultations
- Online survey
- Report on “what we heard” to Executive Committee: June 2015
- July to December 2015: Analysis and Recommendations

Group Introductions

- Share your name
- Share briefly why you think rooming houses exist.

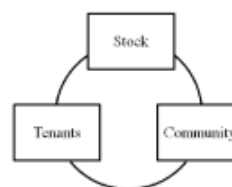
Rooming House: Definition

For the purpose of the Rooming House Review, when we say rooming house, we mean:

A house, apartment or building where you share a kitchen and/or washroom with four or more people that pay individual rent

Rooming House Review

Looks at the issue from the perspective of:



Tenants

Rooming house tenants are varied and include:

- Seniors
- Students
- Newcomers
- Low-income singles
- Some families
- People unable to access other forms of affordable housing

Stock

Rooming House stock is varied and includes:

- Licensed rooming houses
- Unlicensed rooming houses
- Buildings of varying standards and sizes
- Today, only former municipalities of Toronto, York, and Etobicoke permit rooming houses

Rooming Houses



Ground Rules for Discussion

- Speak one at a time
- Allow time and space for others to speak
- Be respectful
- Listen actively – respect others when they are talking
- Talk about the issue

Identifying the Benefits & Challenges

- Identify a note taker from your group
- Discuss with your table the possible benefits and challenges experienced by neighbours, tenants, owners/operators, and the City in regards to rooming houses
- Write the issues down in the appropriate column on the worksheet

Prioritizing the Challenges

Without speaking, identify your top two challenges for:

- Neighbours
- Tenants
- Owners/Operators
- City

Once you have identified your top two challenges for each column, place your dot beside them.

Prioritizing: Why

- Discuss among your group why each of you prioritized certain challenges.
- What are the similarities in the choices, what are the differences?
- Are there certain challenges that have more dots overall?

What We Know: Rooming Houses

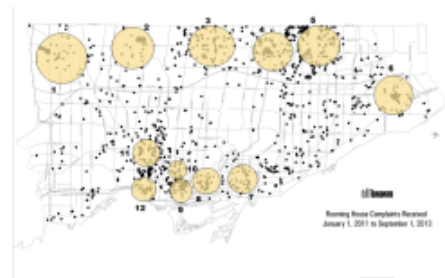
According to a recent Toronto poll:

- 13% identify as having lived in a rooming house, and tend to earn lower incomes.
- 18% identify having rooming houses in their neighbourhoods.
- Those who identified no issues with rooming houses tend to live in areas where they are licensed.
- 16% thought that rooming houses shouldn't be part of Toronto's housing mix.

What We Don't Know

- No clear data on unlicensed rooming houses
- This stock tends to come to the City's attention through complaints
- Little information on unlicensed rooming houses that don't generate complaints

Complaints Received: Map



Seeking Solutions

- Identify the top two challenges (those with the most dots)
- On the Solution Worksheet - write the first top issue in the left column
- Start brainstorming solutions for those issues
- Discuss and write down actions and roles various stakeholders need to undertake for the solution to be achieved (neighbourhoods, tenants, owners/ operator the City)
- Turn the Solution Worksheet over and do the process again for your second issue.

Small Group Report Back

- Choose one of your priority issues
- Share the issue and the solutions
- (3 minutes max each)

Thank You

- Your input will be provided to the City of Toronto to inform their Rooming House Review
- For updates on the Rooming House Review, please visit the website at www.toronto.ca/roominghousereview
- Online survey is available for further input and/or to share with your neighbours who might not have been able to make it today



APPENDIX E: NEIGHBOURHOOD CONSULTATION WORKSHEET

of Participants in Group Discussion: _____

List possible benefits and challenges each group experiences with regards to rooming houses:

Group	Benefits	Challenges
Neighbours		
Tenants		
Owners/Operators		
City		

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX E

Look at the top 2 challenges you identified and list some possible solutions

After writing down potential solutions – identify actions or roles that neighbours, tenants, owners/operators or others can undertake to implement these solutions.

#1 Challenge <i>Write in this space</i>	Solutions	Actions/Roles

Look at the top 2 challenges you identified and list some possible solutions

After writing down potential solutions – identify actions or roles that neighbours, tenants, owners/operators or others can undertake to implement these solutions.

#2 Challenge <i>Write in this space</i>	Solutions	Actions/Roles

APPENDIX F: TENANT FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

TENANT FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Hello, my name is _____. I work at Public Interest and we are conducting focus groups on behalf of the City of Toronto to inform the Rooming House Review. The public consultation includes focus groups with tenants to find out more about the living conditions, regulations, and enforcement of rooming house standards and the provision of housing options for vulnerable populations in Toronto. There is also an online survey. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us today! I am hoping to learn your thoughts and insights on the topic of rooming houses. Our focus group should take about 2 hours to complete, and I will do my best to keep us on time. Our key goals for this focus group are to learn more about the role rooming houses play in our City and to explore issues regarding living conditions, regulation, and enforcement. Our discussion seeks to identify challenges and solutions that you feel are important for the City to consider as part of its review. Just a reminder that anything you tell me will not be personally attributed to you in any reports that result from this interview. All of the reports will be written in a manner that ensures that no comment can be attributed to a particular person. I'm going to be taping this discussion to help me remember what everyone has said. Please try and speak up and one at a time so that your voices can be captured clearly on tape. No answer is wrong or right. I encourage everyone to express his or her opinions, thoughts, and ideas as freely as possible. This tape will not be shared with anyone outside of our project team, including the City of Toronto, and no one individual will be identified in our report. I will also ask that what is said in this room stays in this room: we would like to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Round of Introductions

For the purpose of this discussion, when we say rooming house we mean a shared house, apartment or building where you share a kitchen and/or washroom with four or more other residents (not including members of your household).

For our first set of questions, I just want to get to know you all a bit better and find out your general perspective on rooming houses you currently live in or lived in in the past.

GENERAL QUESTIONS (20 MINS)

1. Why did you choose to live in a rooming house?
2. What do you like about living in a rooming house? What are the benefits?
3. What do you not like about living in a rooming house?
(Prompts: *quality of the accommodation?* *safety of the accommodation?* *Location?* *Other tenants?* *Neighbours?* *Landlord?*)
4. Would you prefer to live in other accommodations? Why or why not? If yes, what stops you from living in those preferred accommodations?

QUESTIONS ABOUT ROOMING HOUSE RESIDENTS (15 MINS)

5. How do you relate to the other tenants in the house?
(Prompts: *are they friends?* *Strangers?* *Do you know much about them?* *Do you talk to each other and about what?* *Are there arguments/confrontations, and about what?* *Does the owner/operator help with the tension between tenants?*)
6. What are the benefits with living with other tenants?
7. What are the challenges associated with living with other tenants?

QUESTIONS ABOUT LANDLORDS (15 MINS)

8. How would you describe your landlord?
[Prompts: *think of the first words that come to mind. What has your interactions with them been like, Positive or negative?* *Are all landlords same?* *Was anyone better than other?*]
9. Does your landlord or property manager live in the same house you live in or not?
(Prompts: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of either scenario, depending on whether there is a spread in the room*)

10. Do you know your landlord? Do they maintain/operate the property themselves or hire someone to do it?

(Prompts: explore level of maintenance and operation of properties that are directly managed or not. Explore issues around 'absentee landlords')

11. Is your landlord or property manager easy to contact and responsive if there is an issue at your house?

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY (15 MINS)

12. Why did you choose to live in your neighbourhood?

(Prompts: Are there services there that you access? Is it where your friends are? Is it where you have lived before?)

13. What community services or resources do you use in your neighbourhood? Are there any would you like to use, or that travel other places to use, but that aren't available in your neighbourhood?

(Prompts: provide suggestions if needed - libraries, support networks, health services like clinics or doctors, schools)

14. Describe your relationship with your neighbours.

(Prompts: Do you know them? Do you talk to them? Do you feel comfortable around them?)

15. Do you feel like you are part of your neighbourhood? Does that matter to you?

QUESTIONS ABOUT LICENSING (30 MINS)

16. Tell me what you know about rooming house laws and licensing in Toronto?

17. Do you know if your rooming house is licensed or unlicensed? Does it make any difference in your living experience (do you notice any differences between licensed and unlicensed)?

18. Right now, only the old cities of York, Toronto and Etobicoke have bylaws that allow for licensed rooming houses. In the rest of the City, rooming houses are unlicensed and illegal. Do you think all rooming houses should be licensed? If yes, why? If no, why?

[By licensing I mean the registration with the City of Toronto, and follow the rooming house standard].

19. If you had an issue you didn't feel comfortable talking to your landlord/building manager about, who would you call? Have you ever made a call to that person? If yes, what happened? Were they able to deal with the issue?

20. Do you think there should more enforcement of standards for rooming houses? What should be better enforced? Are there any downsides of better enforcement?

21. Do you think there should be more rooming houses, the same amount, or less? If your rooming house got closed down, what would happen to you?

(Prompt: Do you think you would be able to find another place to live?)

FINAL QUESTIONS (5 MINS)

22. Could you suggest some solutions of the problems we have discussed before?

[Prompt: Is there anything the City should do? Tenants should do? Owners/Operators should do?]

23. What are three key things that should be considered to make rooming houses better in Toronto? (have them write this down and if time then say them)

24. Do you have anything else to add? Any comments or suggestions?

End with thanking all participants for their time, and informing them that we will be following up.

Let participants know they can follow progress on our website and let their stakeholders know there is an online survey and neighbourhood consultations.

APPENDIX G: HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS, POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT AGENCIES CONSULTATION GUIDE

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Hello, my name is _____. I work at Public Interest and we are conducting public consultation on behalf of the City of Toronto to inform the Rooming House Review. The public consultation includes discussion with key stakeholders, tenants, owner/operators and members of the community. In addition there will be an online survey. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us today! I am hoping to learn your thoughts and insights on the topic of rooming houses. Our focus group today should take about 2 hours to complete, and I will do my best to keep us on time. Our key goals for this consultation are to explore the role of rooming houses in housing various groups or individuals, many of which are singles, and issues regarding living conditions, regulation, and enforcement. Our discussion seeks to identify challenges and solutions that you feel are important for the city to consider as part of its review. Just a reminder that anything you tell me will not be personally attributed to you or your organization in any reports that result from this interview. All of the reports will be written in a manner that no individual comment can be attributed to a particular person. I'm going to be taping this discussion to help me remember what everyone has said. Please try and speak up and one at a time so that your voices can be captured clearly on tape. This tape will not be shared with anyone outside of our project team, including the City of Toronto, and no one individual will be identified in our report. I will also ask that what is said in this room stays in this room; we would like to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Round of Introductions

GENERAL QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

1. When I say rooming house – what type of housing am I talking about?

After response provide this definition:

For the purpose of this discussion when we say rooming house we mean a shared house, apartment or building where you shared a kitchen and/or washroom with four or more other residents (not including members of your household).

2. Do any of the people you work with or serve live in rooming houses?

This is a quick check-in to make sure all of them say yes.

3. What is your experience with rooming houses?

Prompt: is it through connection with tenants, owners/operators, the general community.

TENANTS OF ROOMING HOUSES (45 MIN)

For our next set of questions, I would like to hear what you know through your work about who the tenants are of rooming houses, what are their living conditions, issues and concerns if any and their use of community services.

4. Have you had any interaction with rooming house tenants? If yes, can you describe the nature of your interactions?
5. Based on your experience, who are the tenants of rooming houses?
6. Can you identify the main issues that you've heard tenants raise about this type of housing?

Prompt: tell us about quality and safety of this housing, cost of the housing, availability and location: can be positive or negative

7. What role do rooming houses play:

- For your agency, and how important of priority is that need in your organization?
- For the tenants you work with?
- For the community at large?

Prompt: around needs and challenges for tenants to find affordable, quality and safe housing in Toronto?

Prompt: Any specific barriers to those who are vulnerable?

Prompt: need for organization perspective, city perspective

8. Are there any other housing options besides rooming houses which fill these needs? If yes, what are they?
9. Do you know whether the rooming houses you are dealing with are licensed or unlicensed? Have you noticed a difference between licensed and unlicensed? Based on this, do you think they should be licensed?
10. There have been some concerns about operators violating laws and health and safety standard. Have you had any challenges with this? What kind of enforcement do you think is needed? Can you identify any barriers and unintended consequences of that enforcement?

BREAK (10 MIN)

OPERATORS OF ROOMING HOUSES (15 MIN)

In the next set of questions, I am interested in hearing more about what you know about the issues specific to the people who run rooming houses the owners/operators.

11. Have you had any interaction with rooming house operators or owners? If yes, can you describe the nature of your interactions?
12. Are there notable differences between owner/operators you deal with? How would you characterize those differences?
13. Based on your experience with operators, can you identify any key barriers they face to owning and operating a rooming house in Toronto?

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO ROOMING HOUSES (15 MIN)

In the last set of questions, I am interested in finding out more what you know through your work about the community response to rooming house and their tenants.

14. What do you know about your community's response to having rooming houses in their neighbourhood? (How would you characterize the response?)

Prompt: Has there been any action to support or oppose rooming houses in the community?

15. Do you hear about any specific issues both positive or negative that the community has with respect to rooming house tenants or operators?
16. Anything else you think we need to know about your community and rooming houses?

CONCLUDING THE FOCUS GROUP (10 MINS)

I only have a few short questions left! This section is asking about next steps and follow-up.

17. What are the consequences if we don't get this right?
18. I'd like you to take the paper in front of you and write down the top 3 things that the city should consider when reviewing the role of rooming houses in our communities?
Prompt: issues, solutions, recommendations
If there is time, discuss their answers. Collect papers at the end.
19. Do you have any questions/comments for us? Anything else you would like to add?

End with thanking all participants for their time, and informing them that we will be following up.

Let participants know they can follow progress on our website and let their stakeholders know there is an online survey and neighbourhood consultations.

APPENDIX H: OWNERS/OPERATORS KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE – OWNER/OPERATOR

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us today! You are being asked to participate in this project and provide your perspective on this topic because you have firsthand experience with operating a rooming house, either licensed or unlicensed, in the City of Toronto. I am hoping to learn your thoughts and insights on the topic of rooming houses. Our interview today should take about 1 hour to complete.

My name is _____. I work at Public Interest and we are conducting these interviews on behalf of the City of Toronto to inform the Rooming House Review. The public consultations are to find more about the living conditions, regulations, and enforcement of rooming house standards, as well as the provision of housing options for vulnerable population in Toronto. There is also an online survey, which we encourage you to let other owner/operators know about.

Our key goals for this interview is to learn more about the role rooming houses play in our City and explore issues regarding living conditions, regulation, and enforcement. Our discussion seeks to identify challenges and solutions that you feel are important for the city to consider as part of its review.

I will be taking detailed notes during the discussion to help us capture accurate information. You are not obligated to answer all of the questions and your answers are completely confidential: the City's staff will not see these responses, except as generalizations or anonymous quotes. Your participation in this interview will not have any impact on programs and services you receive now or in the future from the City of Toronto.

Any questions?

GENERAL

1. Do you own or operate a rooming house?
2. How many properties do you currently own or operate as rooming houses?
3. How many years have you owned or operated rooming houses?

4. Do you own or operate rooming houses in an area of the city where you can get a license?
5. What are some of your immediate challenges in operating a rooming house? Can you think of some ways to overcome those challenges?

TENANTS

6. How would you describe the tenants of your rooming house(s)?
[Prompt: Seniors, students, immigrants and newcomers, low income people, people finding difficult time finding housing in Toronto, people dealing with mental health or addiction issues, people who can only afford very low rent]
7. In your opinion, why do people live in rooming houses?
8. How do you find tenants?
[Prompt: do you use community agencies? Advertise in the classified, Kijiji? Is it hard to find tenants?]
9. Do your tenants know how to reach you?
10. Please describe the nature of your interactions with your tenants?
(Prompt: how often do you interact with them? Is it usually because they contact you or you contact them? What are typically the reasons for interacting?)
11. Are there any particular challenges you face with your tenants?
12. Who takes care of the property?
(Prompt: cutting grass, putting out garbage, fixing and maintaining the building and facilities)

COMMUNITY

13. Do your neighbours have concerns about your rooming house(s)?

14. What is the nature of their concerns?

[Prompt: Garbage maintenance, overcrowding, parking, safety etc.]

15. Have you ever taken any action in response to concerns?

LICENSING

16. How familiar are you with the City's existing licensing standards with regard to rooming houses?

17. Right now, the only areas of the city where rooming houses can obtain a license to operate are the former cities of Etobicoke, Toronto and York. Does this constraint on licensing have any effect on you, positive or negative?

18. Do you currently have a license for any of the rooming houses you operate? (if they own multiple houses ask how many are licensed/unlicensed and ask the questions below accordingly)

19. If yes:

- Did you face any particular barriers to obtaining a license?
- Did you need to make any changes to the property to obtain a license?
(Prompt: changes to meet codes or standards for examples)
- Did you receive any help from anyone (city, agencies etc) to obtain a license or overcome barriers?
- Overall, what do you think are the advantages of having a license? Are there disadvantages to having a license?

20. If no:

- Can you tell me the main reasons you don't have a license?
- Have you ever tried to get a license/would you want to get a license if they were available in your area?
- To your knowledge, what would you need to do to get a license, providing that licenses were available to you in your area?
(Prompt: fill in the application, make improvements to the house...)

- Overall, what do you think are the advantages of having a license? Are there disadvantages to having a license?

Questions for All

21. What would assist you most in operating a well-maintained house?

[Prompt: City help, financial support, improved relationship with neighbours, onsite manager, better monitoring system etc.]

22. Do you think the City's existing monitoring and enforcement systems for rooming houses work well or should be changed? What changes do you think are needed?

23. Do you think the City's existing licensing rules for rooming houses, including areas where licenses are allowed, work well or should be changed? What changes do you think are needed?

24. What do you think might happen with possible closures of rooming houses?

[prompt: tenants leave – where do they go? For owner/operator, for neighbourhood]

25. When your tenants leave, where do they end up living?

26. Any other comments about licensing?

27. Do you have suggestions of other owner/operators who might be willing to participate in a key informant interview? We are looking for those who are licensed or unlicensed.

CONCLUSION

28. What are the top 3 issues the City should consider as part of their rooming house review?

29. Anything else you would like to say about rooming houses?

APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM (TENANT)

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW

The City of Toronto is undertaking a review of the current condition of rooming houses and has contracted Public Interest to complete this research project. The project will identify issues affecting rooming house regulations, locations, and enforcement standards, draw out possible opportunities and areas of improvement, and engage public voices in order to minimize the impact on communities. You are being asked to participate in this project and provide your perspective on this topic because you have firsthand experience with living in a rooming house, either licensed or unlicensed, in the City of Toronto.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, this will not have any impact on programs and services you receive now or in the future from the City of Toronto.

Each focus group will include 6 to 8 tenants who will discuss rooming houses with two staff from Public Interest: a facilitator and a note-taker. The focus group will last for approximately 2 hours. The focus group will be recorded so that Public Interest can review the discussion after its completion. We will also be taking detailed notes during the discussion to help us capture accurate information.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

We do not expect that there will be any risks to you as a result of participating in this project. If you become uncomfortable during the focus group discussion, you may choose not to answer any of the questions. You may also choose to leave the focus group at any time.

There are no direct benefits for you to participate in this project. The project will help the City of Toronto understand the major issues facing rooming houses and develop potential strategies for improvement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The project materials (including notes from the focus group discussions and audio files of the discussions) will be kept in locked cabinets at Public Interest. All computer files will be kept on a secure network and will be password protected. Only members of the project team at Public Interest will have access to these materials. They will provide the City of Toronto with written summaries of the project and the names of the attendees at each focus group. After the project has been completed, Public Interest will destroy all of the audio files, surveys, and notes from the project.

Public Interest will share the information collected in the focus groups with the City of Toronto Rooming House Review. The Rooming House Review will feed the information into the process as they deem necessary for the project. The identities of all participants will be protected. We are asking

that you respect the confidentiality of the other participants and refrain from telling anyone what was said during the discussion.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about the project you may contact:

Sujan Sapkota
Community Engagement Worker
Public Interest Strategy & Communications
340 Harbord St., Toronto, ON M6G 1H4
Direct line: 647-454-3150
Email: sujan@publicinterest.ca

Or:

Tekla Hendrickson
Director of Projects
Public Interest
340 Harbord Street, Toronto, ON M6G 1H4
Direct line: 416-531-5192
Email: tekla@publicinterest.ca

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the focus group for the Rooming House Review. Your signature also indicates that you agree to voluntarily participate in the focus group and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

I agree to participate in the Rooming House Review project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Participant's signature

Date

APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM (STAKEHOLDER)

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW

The City of Toronto is undertaking a review of the current condition of rooming houses, and has contracted Public Interest to complete this research project. The project will identify issues affecting rooming house regulations, locations and enforcement standards, draw out possible opportunities and areas of improvement, and engage public voices in order to minimize the impact on communities. You are being asked to participate in this project and provide your perspective on this topic because the institution with which you are affiliated has clients that have resided in or are currently residing in rooming houses and has provided support to and/or has had direct contact with either residents or owner/operators of rooming houses.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, this will not have any impact on programs and services you receive now or in the future from the City of Toronto.

Each focus group will include 10 to 20 stakeholders who will discuss rooming houses with two staff from Public Interest; a facilitator and a note-taker. The focus group will last for approximately 2 hours. The focus group will be audio-taped so that Public Interest can review the discussion after its completion. We will also be taking detailed notes during the discussion to help us capture accurate information.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

We do not expect that there will be any risks to you as a result of participating in this project. If you become uncomfortable during the focus group discussion, you may choose not to answer any of the questions. You may also choose to leave the focus group at any time.

There are no direct benefits for you to participate in this project. The project will help the City of Toronto understand the major issues facing rooming houses and develop potential strategies for improvement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The project materials (including: notes from the focus group discussions and audio-tapes of the discussions) will be kept in locked cabinets at Public Interest. All computer files will be kept on a secure network and will be password protected. Only members of the project team at Public Interest

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the focus group for the Rooming House Review. Your signature also indicates that you agree to voluntarily participate in the focus group and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

I agree to participate in the Rooming House Review project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Participant's signature

Date

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX J

will have access to these materials. They will provide the City of Toronto with written summaries of the project and name and organization of attendees at each focus group. After the project has been completed, Public Interest will destroy all of the audio-tapes, surveys, and notes from the project.

Public Interest will share the information collected in the focus groups with the City of Toronto Rooming House Review. The Rooming House Review will feed the information into the process as they deem necessary for the project. The identities of all participants will be protected. We are asking that you respect the confidentiality of the other participants and refrain from telling anyone what was said during the discussion.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about the project you may contact:

Sujan Sapkota
Community Engagement Worker
Public Interest Strategy & Communications
340 Harbord St., Toronto, ON M6G 1H4
Direct line: 416-531-6235
Email: sujan@publicinterest.ca

Or:

Tekla Hendrickson
Director of Projects
Public Interest
340 Harbord Street, Toronto, ON M6G 1H4
Direct line: 416-531-5192
Email: tekla@publicinterest.ca

APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM (OWNER-OPERATOR)

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

ROOMING HOUSE REVIEW

The City of Toronto is undertaking a review of the current condition of rooming houses and has contracted Public Interest to complete this research project. The project will identify issues affecting rooming house regulations, locations, and enforcement standards, draw out possible opportunities and areas of improvement, and engage public voices in order to minimize the impact on communities. You are being asked to participate in this project and provide your perspective on this topic because you have firsthand experience with operating a rooming house, either licensed or unlicensed, in the City of Toronto.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, this will not have any impact on programs and services you receive now or in the future from the City of Toronto.

The focus group will last about two hours and include two to three staff from Public Interest: one main facilitator and two support staff/notetakers. The focus group will be recorded so that Public Interest can review the discussion after its completion.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

We do not expect that there will be any risks to you as a result of participating in this project. If you become uncomfortable during the focus group discussion, you may choose not to answer any of the questions. You may also choose to leave the focus group at any time.

There are no direct benefits for you to participate in this project. The project will help the City of Toronto understand the major issues facing rooming houses and develop potential strategies for improvement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The project materials (including notes from the interview) will be kept in locked cabinets at Public Interest. All computer files will be kept on a secure network and will be password protected. Only members of the project team at Public Interest will have access to these materials. They will provide the City of Toronto with written summaries of the project. After the project has been completed, Public Interest will destroy all notes from the project.

Public Interest will share the information collected in the focus groups with the City of Toronto Rooming House Review. The Rooming House Review will feed the information into the process as they deem necessary for the project. The identities of all participants will be protected. We are asking that you respect the confidentiality of the other participants and refrain from telling anyone what was said during the discussion.

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX K

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about the project you may contact:

Sujan Sapkota
Community Engagement Worker
Public Interest Strategy & Communications
Direct line: 647-454-3150
Email: sujan@publicinterest.ca

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the focus group for the Rooming House Review. Your signature also indicates that you agree to voluntarily participate in the focus group and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

I agree to participate in the Rooming House Review project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Participant's signature

Date

APPENDIX L: HONOURARIUM RECEIPT FORM

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APPENDIX M: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

A. EMAIL FEEDBACK

Members of the public were invited to submit feedback and solutions to the Rooming House Review by emailing **roominghousereview@toronto.ca**. A list of solutions submitted by email are included below.

SOLUTIONS

- Acknowledge that rooming houses are an essential affordable housing alternative
- Acknowledge the burden carried by a relatively small concentration of taxpayers living among licensed rooming houses by providing them with a property tax credit
- All areas of the city should have zoning for rooming houses/supportive housing
- Allow licensed rooming houses across the city
- Create a more rigorous application process for license renewal that seeks more input from neighbours
- Don't ban rooming houses in Scarborough – will be a disaster for poor people
- Ensure they are permitted in all parts of the city
- For safety reasons, small houses should not contain more than 3 apartment
- Heavy fines for illegal renovations
- Humber College, city, and private sector should build more student residences on school property
- If more than 2 hydro meters are requested for a house -Toronto Hydro should require proof that the meters they installing are for legal apartments
- Illegally converted houses should not be allowed to be sold in that condition
- Improve living conditions for tenants
- Increase regulation and supervision of rooming houses with a view to raising the standard of living within
- Increase social services to residents of rooming houses
- License/Regulate rooming houses in Scarborough to protect landlords and tenants, and increase city revenue
- Limit the number of years that a rooming house may operate in order to allow a community to grow and change without the constant burden of a rooming house, particularly those that are run into the ground over time by owners trying to cope with rising costs
- Long term parking permits for tenants of licensed houses

- Mandatory licensing, regulation, and inspection
- Prohibit rooming houses in Scarborough
- Prohibit rooming houses in the suburbs (despite lack of affordable housing)
- Put property managers on site
- Reduce the concentration of rooming houses within neighbourhoods by spreading the burden of hosting rooming houses among more neighbourhoods
- Reference made to three Canadian media articles about “laneway housing”
- Rooming houses on Holyoake Crescent should be shut down because it is a low density, single family street
- Temporary permits for tenants of licensed houses
- Tenants need basic training on house maintenance and communal living
- Tenants need incentives to maintain their homes and integrate with the community

B. SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY OWNERS/OPERATORS

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Annual increase of funding for RH operators to help people living with mental health challenges
- Collaborative approach to funding w/ province
- More education & communication
- Cooperation of city official
- Joint support effort between Toronto fire, police, licensing
- Community initiatives & neighbours coming together
- More input from owners re: enforcement
- Clear regulations, especially standardized fire inspections
- Uniform standards
- Licenses for Scarborough & North York
- Proper distribution of rooming houses in all neighbourhoods
- Eliminate roadblocks for new houses
- Supportive housing in condos
- Incentives for landlords to support tenants
- Easier method of financing that recognizes rooming houses as well-run business & good investment

- Central authority to help landlords deal with property damage
- Booklet teaching landlords how to zone houses to become rooming houses: city not cooperative & only gives negative feedback
- Clear roadmap for owners to obtain licenses
- Policies relaxed & revamped (e.g. inspections can become petty)
- Level playing field
- Solutions Identified By Owners/Operators As Top 3 Considerations
- Increased funding & support
- Remove road blocks for new houses, financial negativity
- Licensing to RH that are not
- Licensing in North York
- Don't classify RH builders same as condo developers
- Build supportive housing in condos
- Higher cost inside GTA, cheaper outside
- City needs to give incentive to landlords to support tenants

C. SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THIRD-PARTY STAKEHOLDERS

1. POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Safety and security of students: reputation of PSE and City
- New development of affordable housing
- Balance of regulation and affordability
- Complexity: culture plays enormous role
- Landlord incentive
- Campaign: dispel myths about rooming houses
- Not clear role of post-secondary institutions
- Partnership between post-secondary institutions
- Licensing, but enforced
- Education for owners around operating legal rooming houses/safety
- Annual inspection (similar to restaurant)
- "Rooming housing" into affordable housing strategy
- Resource allocation and implementation for rooming houses

- If not rooming houses alternative housing (City subsidized housing)"
- Reference made to original letter/recommendation from Councillor Peruzza to investigate issues related to post-secondary campus neighbourhoods; a City of Toronto report to council as a result of previous consultation process in 2011; Seneca's submission to consultation & recommendations in 2011; request by Seneca to be formally entered into record during Licensing & Standards Committee Meeting on March 29, 2012; joint letter issued by Presidents of Seneca & York University about rooming house issue

2. NEWCOMER SETTLEMENT AGENCIES

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider space per person & not just # of people in unit
- Housing geared toward income
- Gov't. policy for 1st time buyers: support
- Control foreign investment buyers
- More regulations & policies on rooming houses & enforcement
- Create more affordable housing (e.g. rent-geared to income, subsidized housing, etc.)
- Better education to community (landlords & tenants) about their rights & where to go for assistance
- License rooming houses & enforce rules
- Control current housing market to ensure people who are truly living in Toronto can afford a place to live
- Include rooming house in Landlord & Tenant Act to ensure both sides protected & if there's issue regulation to follow
- Monitor rooming house w/in apartment (subsidized & market rent) in order to protect "tenant/renter"
- Regulate rooming houses operated by private owners & support them throughout process. Maybe City can give them incentives on how to comply w/ regulations & safety: may encourage private renters to disclose business
- City partnerships w/ community agencies
- Clear regulation on rooming house (realistic goal: think of both tenant & landlord sides) & good enforcement system (public education, regular visits to rooming houses)

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX M

- Subsidized housing: smaller units, use taxpayers' money & enforcing regular checks, encouraging people to seek better housing options
- Provide more accessible advocacy for both landlords & tenants (language, location, public awareness)
- Follow up w/ licensed rooming houses or set up hotline for reporting these houses that are following regulations
- Build government funded rooming houses w/ affordable prices, not social housing w/ long wait periods

3. HOUSING SUPPORT AGENCIES

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Allow more rooming houses (esp downtown)
- Hear the concerns of those against rooming houses; prevent tenants from feeling powerless
- Having a strong and more expensive network of housing help and referral
- Better enforcement of MLS bylaws
- Outline how a shutdown occurs
- Rent control
- Better ways to keep track of both licensed and illegal RH and their ownership
- Transfer of rooming houses to non-profit or corporations
- Enforcing regulation: Increased education/engagement (for all parties, especially general public), outreach to/support for landlords, increased enforcement of property standards/landlord violations
- Building more connections between landlords agencies and communities
- Use the information the City has to develop rooming house protection and promotion plan
- Use city fund or funded network to create staffing, rent supplement as an incentive
- Stop pretending that rooming houses are alternative form of housing. They are critical part of housing stock in Toronto
- Rent supplement for rooming tenants ensuring they do not pay more than 30 percent of their income
- A mechanism to take over rooming houses that fail to meet a minimum standard
- Provide incentive to landlords to build houses
- Legalization of rooming houses throughout GTA, eg. Scarborough; broader licensing to entire city of Toronto, to include Scarborough & North York; amalgamated rooming house by-law across City
- More protection and services eg. funding to tenant victims of illegal rooming houses that have been shut down
- Improved and more effective enforcement mechanism where complaints are initiated by tenants
- Enforcement of fines + LTB tribunal decisions that protect & compensate low income tenants in substandard living conditions or whose rights are violated by landlords
- Licensing of rooming house landlords re: upholding of responsibilities outlined in the RTA & accountability for rental stock
- Incentives (tax or other) to encourage property owners to convert/operate houses into rooming houses
- Take steps to support RH landlords via model that combines subsidy or rent supplement with requirement for services and/or supports for tenants i.e. like the Habitat model. This would also include training for RH owners & staff
- Influence and/or change income sources for low-income tenants. OW/ODSP etc. Poverty is an important piece of the equation
- Expanding & harmonizing Rooming House zoning by-laws to allow for licensing in other areas of Toronto
- Increasing rent supplements or per diems to fill in gap with housing costs & support/expand affordable housing
- Legitimate acknowledgement by policy makers of extreme need to maintain & create more affordable housing (RH) that translates to ACTION (lacks political will)
- Explore mechanisms to transition rooming house stock into community-owned social housing
- Translation of key information about rooming houses available to diverse public & better defined terms

D. SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY TENANTS

1. STUDENTS

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Max limit of tenants & rooms
- Licensing
- More rooming house options according to people's budgets
- Increase affordable housing
- More variety across neighbourhoods as opposed to intensification within neighbourhoods
- Balance between quality & affordability

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Maintenance of property
- Cleanliness
- Slum landlords
- Safety & privacy
- Proximity to school
- Health & safety
- Affordability
- Quality

2. STREET-INVOLVED TENANTS

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Standard procedure for renting rooms
- Registered & certified re: health & safety

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Speeding up backlog of waiting list, as it can take 10 years to get in
- Do better background check on new tenants re: criminal record & status in Canada
- Make more low income property available: difficult to apply for condos but being built every day and hardly any are low income
- Cleaning & repairing household
- People to respect each other's things
- Tenants getting along
- Properties must be looked after: city has to look into this
- Fire safety

- Cleanliness i.e. rodents/bugs, garbage collection facilities
- Posted list of rules of occupancy
- Drugs
- Hookers
- Crime
- Fire & safety
- Overcrowding
- Maintenance
- Create stable rent atmosphere, lower cost of regular housing accommodations, make it available for fixed/low income individuals
- Create more units for at-risk individuals so they can afford to live in more immediate location to services they need
- Provide housing geared toward meeting needs of specific individuals such as people with physical/mental issues (like convalescent/senior buildings)
- City needs to take steps to secure pedestrians & not push them away from city: they deserve respect
- Toronto's health & safety act: downtown dwellers need to feel safe
- Re-directing people to suburbs is not right thing to do
- Standard procedures
- Get certified by health & safety
- Neighbours involved

3. WOMEN

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Female-only floors or houses
- Keeping track of reports/complaints
- Inspection follow-up through right channels
- City must think outside box, not like corporation: focus on its people
- Don't neglect marginalized population

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Chore charts, tenant meetings
- Rent discounts for tenants who help out with maintenance
- Regulation
- Inspections: vermin, whether suitable to live in, fire safety
- Licenses

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX M

- Landlord must put funding back in house to ensure health/safety
- Landlord accountability

4. TENANTS LIVING WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- “Guaranteed anonymous complaint system for tenants
- Tenant screening/guidelines: record checks
- Set of explicit rules
- Regulations & caps”

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Wheelchair accessible
- Safety
- Regular maintenance checks
- Cost/affordability
- Cleanliness
- Sprinklers
- Healthy & clean living conditions
- Regular inspections
- Licensing

5. TENANTS LIVING IN PARKDALE

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Ask people what want specifically, housing for seniors
- Licensing approved by tenants voluntary
- Not forced signed by tenants
- Future houses run by not-for-profit community social agencies
- City licensing commission must work together to address issues
- Put up housing that benefits people with mental health & addiction issues
- Committee of people with past experience who want to advocate & guide policy makers

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- Laundry
- Cooking
- Affordability
- Licensing
- Gov’t. input
- More affordable housing in city
- Landlord accountability
- Safety
- Own kitchen
- No drinking or drugs
- Wild parties
- More good tenants
- Non-profit rooming houses
- More focus groups with survivors/vulnerable population
- Consider people living with mental illness
- Neighbourhoods
- Amenities
- Fire hazards
- Standardization (licensing)
- Individual-locking mailbox for each tenant
- Involvement of peer workers & rooming house tribunal

6. TENANTS LIVING IN SCARBOROUGH

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Hold everyone accountable: if tenant or landlord causing problems get rid of them
- Take care/maintain property
- Tenants need protection
- No quick solutions
- Recourse for tenants to get issues resolved w/out fearing eviction
- Housing Stabilization Fund: assist low-income tenants, too hard to qualify, not easily accessible/helpful, no appeal process if denied
- Landlords must recognize responsible for human lives
- Legalization process for tenants’ protection
- More understanding & communication

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS

- “Government needs to build more apartments for rooming house tenants
- Create women-only housing
- License rooming houses throughout city
- Enforcement not only random but also target areas w/ high incidence report
- By-laws should control pricing to prevent exploitation of consumers
- Landlord more open & willing to listen to tenants’ questions & requests
- Yearly rent cap
- More information about landlords’ & tenants’ rights
- Third party problem resolution apart from Landlord Tenant Tribunal
- Better communication btw landlord & tenants
- Subsidiary to landlord directly: ensure each house has limited tenants to 1) reduce waiting lists for subsidized housing applications 2) provide more choice of subsidiary houses, offer “”profits”” for landlords to encourage them to reduce members in same house
- Free licensed housing procedure, encourage limited members in house for landlords
- New & improved regulations
- Better enforcement of these regulations
- Better licensing standards
- More accessibility & rights for rooming houses
- Affordable/subsidized housing more spread out
- Community education re: poverty issues & special needs of low-income Canadians (RH providing basic human right)
- Improve tenant/landlord interaction & respect

FROM TRANSLATION:

- House owners: fix reasonable requests that are made by tenants
- The Canadian government should take into account people with low incomes and build housing for them
- The government should help us to receive good money to maintain the income”

7. TENANTS LIVING IN NORTH YORK

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Tenants need accessibility to handle emergencies e.g. power outages
- City can take ownership of problem: fill then bill to landlord

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED AS TOP 3 CONSIDERATIONS







- Tenants’ & landlords’ rights & responsibilities need to be posted
- Size of rooms needs to be regulated
- Landlord & Tenant Act law education
- More affordable housing
- Licensed rooming houses where landlord more responsible for repairs/supplies
- Post regulations
- Maintenance standards
- Landlord should assist with disputes
- Hold landlord responsible
- Inform both tenants & landlords about laws
- Make easy to get help: no court fees
- Set standard measurements for spaces
- Emergency lightbulbs for public areas
- Build better sound barriers (insulation)
- More in-depth laws & capacity to enforce

V. APPENDICES

APPENDIX N: GRAPH DATA FROM ONLINE SURVEY










RESPONSES

Please select all responses that apply to you.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I live in a rooming housing.		14.8%	110
I live near a rooming house.		31.4%	233
I own or operate a rooming house.		2.7%	20
I provide services to people who live in rooming houses.		20.2%	150
I live in Toronto in and am interested in rooming house issues.		40.2%	298
None of the above.		10.6%	79
Total Responses			742

MAKEUP OF TENANT POPULATION

To your knowledge, who usually lives in rooming houses?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
People who are having a difficult time finding housing in Toronto.		63.5%	473
People who are dealing with mental health or addiction issues.		53.3%	397
Seniors.		38.4%	286
Immigrants and newcomers.		66.4%	495
People who can only afford to pay very low rent.		75.3%	561
Students.		70.3%	524
Families.		22.3%	166
I don't know.		3.4%	25
Other, please specify...		9.4%	70
Total Responses			745

In your opinion, why do people live in rooming houses?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
They are affordable.		76.4%	568
They like living with other residents.		15.6%	116
The rooming houses are close to the places they have to go.		46.4%	345
They have no other housing options.		71.5%	531
I don't know.		3.5%	26
Other, please specify...		7.5%	56
Total Responses			742

TENANT CHOICES**Why did you choose to live in a rooming house?**













<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
It's affordable.		74.3%	75
It's close to where I go to school.		64.4%	65
It's in the neighbourhood I want to live in.		26.7%	27
I like the people I live with.		21.8%	22
It's the only place I could find.		36.6%	37
It's close to where I work.		17.8%	18
Other, please specify...		7.9%	8
Total Responses			101

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX N





NEIGHBOUR'S CONCERNS

What issues (if any) do you see with the rooming house(s)?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Fire hazards.		60.8%	132
Garbage problems.		61.8%	134
Increased crime.		37.3%	81
Increased pest infestations (e.g., cockroaches, rats).		43.8%	95
Increased risk of accidents.		30.0%	65
Lower property values.		50.7%	110
Maintenance problems.		65.4%	142
No impact on my neighbourhood.		10.1%	22
Overcrowding.		59.9%	130
Parking problems.		47.0%	102
Safety issues.		54.8%	119
Other, please specify...		30.0%	65
Total Responses			217

COMMUNITY

How would you describe your relationship with people in your neighbourhood?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I feel welcome in my neighbourhood.		25.3%	25
I feel neither welcome nor unwelcome in my neighbourhood.		47.5%	47
I do not feel welcome in my neighbourhood.		19.2%	19
I don't know.		8.1%	8
Total Responses			99

How important is it to you to feel welcome in your neighbourhood?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
Very important.		44.4%	44
Somewhat important.		34.3%	34
Neither important nor unimportant.		16.2%	16
Unimportant.		5.1%	5
I don't know.		0.0%	0
Total Responses			99





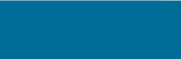










TENANTS' ISSUES**Please describe your rooming house. Is your rooming house ____ ?**

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>Total Responses</i>
Affordable	81 (80.2%)	15 (14.9%)	5 (5.0%)	101
Safe and secure	55 (56.7%)	39 (40.2%)	3 (3.1%)	97
Quiet	49 (51.0%)	46 (47.9%)	1 (1.0%)	96
Well-maintained	39 (41.1%)	51 (53.7%)	5 (5.3%)	95





V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX N

Have you experienced any of the following issues with your rooming house?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Conflicts with other tenants		50.0%	46
Crime		21.7%	20
Fire hazards		31.5%	29
Garbage problems		48.9%	45
Inadequate shared facilities (such as a kitchen, washrooms)		56.5%	52
Inconvenient location		10.9%	10
Maintenance problems		54.3%	50
Noise problems		53.3%	49
Not enough outdoor space		23.9%	22
Overcrowding		31.5%	29
Parking problems		27.2%	25
Pest infestations (such as cockroaches or rats)		29.3%	27
Safety issues		33.7%	31
Visually unpleasant		32.6%	30
Other, please specify...		15.2%	14
Total Responses			92

Is the rooming house you live in licensed or unlicensed?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
It is licensed.		13.1%	13
It is unlicensed.		31.3%	31
I don't know.		53.5%	53
I don't want to answer this question.		2.0%	2
Total Responses			99

Please describe your landlord's activities and your interactions with your landlord.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
The landlord collects my rent.		37.1%	36
The landlord manages the property.		19.6%	19
The landlord does not manage the property.		5.2%	5
The landlord is concerned about my safety and well-being.		8.2%	8
I do not have any interaction with my landlord.		3.1%	3
My landlord is not available.		1.0%	1
I do not know who my landlord is.		2.1%	2
Other, please specify...		14.4%	14
The landlord is not concerned with my safety and well-being.		9.3%	9
Total Responses			97

LANDLORD VIEWS

How many properties do you currently own or operate as a rooming house?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1		68.8%	11
2		0.0%	0
3		6.2%	1
4		12.5%	2
5		6.2%	1
Other, please specify...		6.2%	1
Total Responses			16

How many properties do you currently own or operate as a rooming house?

(Other, please specify...)

#	Response
1.	10

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX N














What are the barriers to obtaining licences for rooming houses?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
Applying for a licence is expensive.		26.7%	4
I am in an area of the City where the bylaws prevent rooming houses.		20.0%	3
I do not have the financial resources to maintain standards.		6.7%	1
I do not know where to find the information about the process.		20.0%	3
I do not understand the process.		20.0%	3
Meeting the property standards is expensive.		13.3%	2
My property wouldn't qualify because of parking, room size, or other problems.		20.0%	3
The rules are too confusing.		13.3%	2
The rules change too often.		6.7%	1
There is too much interference from the City.		20.0%	3
Other, please specify...		26.7%	4
Total Responses			15

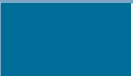








Do your neighbours have concerns about your rooming house(s)?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
Yes.		23.5%	4
No.		64.7%	11
I don't know.		11.8%	2
Total Responses			17

If your neighbours have concerns, what are they?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
Crime.		8.3%	1
Fire hazard.		0.0%	0
Garbage.		25.0%	3
Lack of maintenance.		0.0%	0
Lack of parking.		0.0%	0
Noise issues.		0.0%	0
Overcrowding.		16.7%	2
Pest control.		8.3%	1
Potential risk of accidents.		8.3%	1
Safety issues.		16.7%	2
Visually unpleasant.		0.0%	0
Worry about property values.		41.7%	5
Other, please specify...		33.3%	4
Total Responses			12

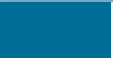




What would assist you in operating a well-maintained, licensed rooming house?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
Standard city licensing and enforcement across the city		41.2%	7
Financial supports and incentives to improve my property		52.9%	9
Clear information about how to apply for a licence		47.1%	8
A simpler licence application process		47.1%	8
Assistance with the licence application process		35.3%	6
Better relationship with neighbours		17.6%	3
Better monitoring and enforcement of all rooming houses		23.5%	4
Better tenants		23.5%	4
Other		17.6%	3
Total Responses			17

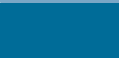




V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX N

How long have you owned or operated rooming houses?




<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
0 to up to 5 years		31.2%	5
5 to up to 10 years		25.0%	4
10 to up to 15 years		25.0%	4
15 to up to 20 years		12.5%	2
20 or more years		6.2%	1
Total Responses			16

Are the rooming houses you own or operate licensed or unlicensed?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
All are licensed.		35.3%	6
Some are licensed and some are unlicensed.		5.9%	1
None are licensed.		35.3%	6
I don't know.		5.9%	1
I don't want to answer this question.		17.6%	3
Total Responses			17

ATTITUDES ABOUT LICENSING AND REGULATION

How familiar are you with the City or Toronto's existing rooming house licensing rules?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Chart</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Count</i>
Familiar		33.1%	234
Unfamiliar		58.5%	413
I don't know.		8.4%	59
Total Responses			706

How well do the City's existing licensing rules and enforcement systems for rooming houses work?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
They work well.		2.2%	15
They need to be changed.		54.9%	379
I don't know.		42.9%	296
Total Responses			690

If you think that they need to be changed, what changes do you think are needed?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
The rules governing landlords should be better enforced.		67.2%	402
The rules governing landlords should be less rigid.		9.2%	55
The rules governing landlords should be tougher.		42.6%	255
There should be better protection for tenants.		57.9%	346
There should be better protection for the neighbouring community.		50.0%	299
Other, please specify...		17.9%	107
Total Responses			598

In 1998, six smaller cities joined to become the current City of Toronto, some retaining their previous legislation. As a result, rooming houses are only permitted in the former cities of York, Toronto and Etobicoke. Rooming houses that operate in Toronto and Etobicoke must be licensed. Where do you think Toronto should have licensed rooming houses?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Fewer areas of the City.		16.0%	110
The same areas we have now.		9.9%	68
More areas of the City.		10.2%	70
All areas of the City.		53.6%	368
I don't know.		10.3%	71
Total Responses			687

V. APPENDICES

CONTINUED: APPENDIX N

IMPACT OF LOSS OF HOUSING

Sometimes enforcement of rooming house bylaws leads to the closure of a rooming house and the eviction of the tenants. Do you think this is:

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A serious problem that needs to be addressed		68.8%	473
An unfortunate situation that can't be helped		23.1%	159
Not a problem at all		8.9%	61
Don't know		6.7%	46
Total Responses			688

If rooming houses were not available, what would people who currently live in them do for housing?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
They would find other rental housing options..		44.1%	305
They would use shelters.		52.5%	363
They would live with friends and family.		36.4%	252
They would be homeless.		57.1%	395
I don't know.		12.9%	89
Other, please specify...		16.0%	111
Total Responses			692

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