

**Remarks to the
City of Toronto Executive Committee
on the Mayor's Task Force
on Toronto Community Housing**

Sharad Kerur, Executive Director
(sharad.kerur@onpha.org)
January 28, 2016



Mayor Tory and Members of the Executive Committee:

Thank you for permitting me time to speak to the important report tabled on Tuesday by Senator Eggleton and the Mayor's Task Force on Toronto Community Housing. We applaud the work of the task force and recognize the difficult job they had to undertake.

My name is Sharad Kerur and I am the Executive Director of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association. Our association represents 730 community non-profit housing providers throughout Ontario including Toronto Community Housing which has been a long standing member. Our members operate 166,000 units that house nearly 450,000 low-income households. For nearly 30 years we have been providing our members education, research, government relations, policy support and group procurement services. Annually we also hold the largest non-profit housing conference in Canada attracting over 1,500 participants from all areas of the housing sector.

Our association supports the direction the Task Force has laid out for TCH's future – specifically, the move to converting it from a municipal non-profit to a private non-profit. We say this knowing the struggles that both TCH and the City have faced with the current corporate and accountability construct – struggles that originated with the merger of 3 housing organizations as a consequence of municipal amalgamation and housing devolution.



From our standpoint, the shift from a municipal to a private non-profit is not a commentary that a private non-profit construct is somehow better than a municipal one, since we can cite numerous examples of both good municipal and good private non-profit housing providers. However, when looking at the recent history of TCH and the environment within which it functions, the current structure and accountability to the City needs to be rethought if for no other reason than to ensure its residents have safe and decent housing in which to live.

The private non-profit model allows the provider to operate in an independent and innovative manner while still being accountable to a regulator and ultimately the taxpayer. During the press conference held on Tuesday, Mayor Tory pointed to the successes of the 240 non-profit housing providers in Toronto. We can also point to over 700 other such community non-profits within our membership who function this way.

We have also seen many examples in other countries such as the US, the UK and Scotland where large housing organizations function independently, generate profits for a purpose through the provision of market rental and ownership housing and then use those profits to leverage financing for affordable rental, home ownership and regeneration of their social housing stock.

In one example we visited, Poplar Harca, located just outside of London in the UK, we not only saw a relatively young housing organization do all of this, but witnessed how they are also building schools, community centres, shopping plazas and health facilities to be used by their residents and those within their community. In the US we have seen examples of large public housing authorities such as Boston, Cambridge, Oakland, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle successfully providing housing services with links to health, education and



employment. Although these entities are still accountable to the federal government and rely on their funding, they are permitted a great deal of flexibility.

What these examples illustrate and what the report states, is that this type of potential cannot be achieved unless a new corporate structure is put into place – one that is nimble, flexible, unfettered and responsive to its core customers – the tenants.

Flexibility, innovation and independence doesn’t mean a loss of accountability to the City. On the contrary, in Ontario non-profits must work within the legislative framework of the Housing Services Act which sets out the oversight roles and responsibilities for the City as a municipal service manager. For example, the sale of non-profit housing assets must be approved by the municipality and even where the assets are sold, the Corporations Act requires those assets to be distributed toward charitable purposes. As well, the Act gives the municipality powers to remedy non-profits that get into financial or operational difficulty such as appointing advisors – a role that ONPHA itself has played with many municipal service managers through our mentorship program.

As with the task force and the City, ONPHA also has a mission to ensure that tenants have a safe, decent and affordable place to live. As with the report, our strategic plan specifically points to and supports excellence in housing with first class customer service. Going forward ONPHA wishes to offer its expertise, advice and resources to help both TCH and the City’s implementation team achieve the important outcomes set out in the Task Force’s recommendations.

Thank you.