



Greetings,

My name is Leslie McDonald, Executive Director of Habitat Services. The Habitat program was created in 1987 to address concerns about the living conditions and personal care standards in boarding homes in Toronto. There are 45 properties in our current portfolio, housing more than 900 low income tenants. Most of our landlords are private sector providers who are licensed by the City, and agree to be monitored by Habitat, in exchange for a subsidy which assists them to provide the services required, and to maintain their buildings.

The Toronto Housing Summit, which was hosted by Mayor Tory and Councillor Bailao on September 30th, provided a fact sheet which pointed out the following:

- 20% of adults in Toronto live in poverty
- 43% of renters are spending more than 30% of their income on rent
- Toronto shelters are regularly at 90/95% capacity, and
- 5,219 is the average size of our homeless population

We have a housing crisis, particularly for those living at or below the poverty line, or who are socially vulnerable. The report you are reviewing today reminds us all that the City's own Affordable Housing Action Plan speaks to the need to preserve and expand the supply of affordable housing for single persons, and recognizes rooming houses as affordable housing for single people. It also encourages an increase in legal, well-run multi-tenant houses.

The current real estate market is the greatest threat to the city's rooming house stock. Licensing needs to be an enabler of the creation of new stock, not an inhibitor.

Rooming house licensing has not yet been expanded from its pre-City-amalgamation areas. I have made deputations to committees of council on this subject in the past—in 2008 and 2010—recommending that licensing be expanded. In 2010 I expressed dismay that decision making on the expansion of licensing had been delayed until 2011. Now we are nearing the end of 2016, and we seem no closer to a broad system of licensing across the entire city, that preserves housing stock, improves housing conditions, and protects tenants who may be living in precarious non-licensed situations.

The current pilot proposal, by my reckoning, will move this goal 4 or even 7 years further down the road. We need to move faster than that, as pressures on multi-tenant and affordable housing are increasing, and stock is disappearing. Please ask staff to bring the draft bylaws forward for discussion ASAP, not at the end of another year of consultation.

We also need to ask what incentives there are for owners to come forward and participate in a pilot. Will there be assistance for them to bring their properties up to a certain standard? And what assurances do they have that if they do so, they won't be shut down at the end of three years?

The Habitat program is successful at maintaining housing stock for vulnerable tenants because supports are provided to owners and operators, as well as to tenants. The Toronto Renovates and other programs have successfully provided funding for owners to improve their buildings while obtaining long term commitments that the stock will be retained.

We would also like you to look more closely at the recommendations around what is called "increasing community engagement in the license renewal process." Such affairs often end up being about the tenants, rather than issues with the building or its management. And why are tenants of multi-tenant buildings that much different from the rest of us? Why should their continued tenure be subject to special hearings when the license comes up for renewal?

No hearing should be held unless there is a demonstrable violation of a housing standard bylaw, fire code or other applicable law related to the condition of the property.

I live in Councillor Crawford's Ward, in Scarborough. When I moved there, I did not need to seek the approval of anyone in the neighbourhood, nor of the licensing commissioner. When someone decided to build a multi-story condominium that will have a view of my backyard, I was not given the opportunity to object, nor to question what kind of people would move in there. Nor should I be. I would welcome the extension of rooming house licensing to Scarborough.

In Summary:

- Please bring draft zoning and licensing bylaws forward now
- Look at providing incentives for owners to participate in a pilot such as the one outlined, and don't take 7 more years to test it out
- Think carefully about setting up rules and processes that treat tenants in multi-tenant buildings differently than other Torontonians
- Take action to expand licensing beyond the current restricted areas—its 2016!