

# REVISED



## Member Motion

### City Council

#### Notice of Motion

MM27.41	ACTION			Ward:27
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#### **Request for a Coroner's Inquest into the death of Vernon Belanger - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor James Pasternak**

*\* Notice of this Motion has been given.*

*\* This Motion is subject to referral to the Executive Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

#### **Recommendations**

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor James Pasternak, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the City Clerk to submit a letter to the Chief Coroner's office to request a public inquest into the February 9, 2017 death of Vernon Belanger, and City Council request that recommendations regarding potential fire safety concerns should be considered once the final cause analysis into the origin, cause and circumstances of the fire by the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management and Office of the Chief Coroner.
2. City Council direct Toronto Community Housing, Toronto Fire Services, the Office of Emergency Management, and any other relevant divisions to work with the Coroner's office, should a public inquest be heard.

#### **Summary**

The building at 291 George Street is owned and operated by Toronto Community Housing. Toronto Community Housing provides affordable housing to many of our City's most vulnerable residents, who often do not have sufficient access to services or supports when they are recovering from illness or injury.

On February 9, 2017, Vernon Belanger was killed during a fire in his unit at 291 George Street. He was 63 years old and was recovering from a stroke at the time of his death. Mr. Belanger also struggled with mental illness. He had been released from hospital too early. He had significant difficulty caring for himself after his stroke and did not have sufficient home care to ensure he did not endanger himself and others.

The fire that caused Mr. Belanger's death, resulted in at least four residents being taken to hospital. It was fortunate that no other lives were lost during the fire. The fire required the evacuation of the entire building, comprising of 132 households. The swift action of Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Police Services, Toronto Paramedic Services, Toronto Community

Housing, TTC, the Office of Emergency Management, and the Canadian Red Cross ensured the safety of the evacuated tenants and the arranging of emergency accommodations. Residents were displaced until the building could be assessed and repairs be made, most of which took place within the following week. Severe damage to the fourth floor has meant that some residents have not been able to return to their units until further repairs are made.

This is not the first time that a tenant has died in a fire in a Toronto Community Housing unit. The City of Toronto, through the Toronto Community Housing will be responsible for the cost of the repairs to the building and related costs for relocating displaced tenants. In 2013, the City of Toronto Ombudsman issued a report to City Council with recommendations to improve their systems for serving vulnerable seniors. Mr. Belanger is one of these seniors. He had challenges with both his mental and physical health. Determining factors that may have prevented Mr. Belanger's death is of value to the Toronto Community Housing as they continue to house and support vulnerable seniors and those struggling with complex health matters.

In order to prevent further loss of life in similar circumstances, it is incumbent on the City of Toronto to learn if measures could have been taken to prevent this fire and death from happening. The City of Toronto and the Government of Ontario provide subsidized housing to over 270,000 families in Ontario. When a death occurs within a building owned and maintained by the City or Province, it is of public interest to understand the circumstances that led to this death. A more fulsome understanding of the events that led to Mr. Belanger's death would likely prevent future deaths of vulnerable individuals who are recovering from debilitating illnesses such as strokes.

An Inquest provides a thorough examination of a death, with the goal of producing recommendations that might prevent future deaths in similar circumstances.

A public inquest into Mr. Belanger's death could determine a number of factors:

- Are there actions, services or supports that could have been provided to prevent Mr. Belanger's death?
- What system changes could be made to prevent future deaths such as Mr. Belanger's?

### **Background Information (City Council)**

Revised Member Motion MM27. 41

(<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-102219.pdf>)