Council Briefing Note

Brought to you by CUPE Local 79

RE: EX30.2 - Implementing Tenants First - Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) Scattered Portfolio Plan and an Interim Selection Process for Tenant Directors on the Toronto Community Housing Corporation Board

Summary

The report starts a formal process of transferring ownership of single family, agency-run, and rooming house stock from TCHC to non-profit providers and land trusts. While there is rationale for transferring ownership of agency-run homes and exploring better models for operating rooming houses, there is no clear rationale for transferring the 660 buildings, largely single family homes, that make up the rest of the scattered housing. In fact, while the transfer will potentially offload some of the City's Capital Repair Backlog onto non-profits, staff report that it could also potentially cost the city more in operating subsidies provided to these providers.

Meanwhile, there is no discussion about buildings that are currently serviced by private for-profit entities and the issues with service quality experienced by residents in those buildings.

In summary, Local 79 respectfully recommends that:

- Staff develop and report back on a cost comparison between continued in-house operation of the scattered housing portfolio and the cost of providing the service through the proposed transfer. This comparison should be provided prior to determining whether to issue an RFP.
- Local 79 be engaged in any process that assesses the current and future operation of rooming houses presently owned by TCHC.
- Staff report back on options to improve service quality and costs in TCHC buildings that are currently managed by for-profit entities, including bringing the service provision back in-house.

Local 79 also reconfirms its previous recommendations in regards to Tenants First, Phase 1 Implementation. Specifically, that City Council:

- Invest in expanding Toronto's rent-geared-to-income social housing stock.
- Make any new seniors housing entity a Division with the City.
- Involve frontline workers at TCHC in the development and implementation of decentralization pilots.

Provide cost comparator for scattered housing RFP

CUPE Local 79 understands the rationale of transferring buildings currently run by non-profit agencies to those operators. Some of those providers have indicated a willingness to make capital investments, and the transfer would support continuity and quality of services and housing for the residents in those buildings.

Likewise, rooming houses represent a legitimate challenge for TCHC. Local 79 supports the recommended assessment of these units and the associated services on the understanding that the Local be included as a stakeholder in the assessment process.

However, Local 79 is deeply concerned about staff's recommendation to move forward in developing a Request for Proposal (RFP) that would seek to transfer ownership of an additional 660 buildings with a total of 783 units. Beyond potentially reducing the City's capital repair backlog by $33.9 million (2016 dollars) according to the report, there is little rationale or proof provided as to how such a transfer will benefit tenants and better support frontline workers in their ability to deliver quality service. In fact, the report also notes, through the information collected through the REOI process undertaken last fall, prospective non-profit owners would likely require additional subsidies to operate social housing in these buildings, representing a net annual cost increase of $1.4 million to $5.1 million in 2016 dollars.

Local 79 therefore strongly encourages City Council to request a cost comparator for continued operation of the scattered housing portfolio by TCHC prior to the issuance of the RFP. To provide an apples-to-apples comparison, such a comparator must be based on whatever requirements are stated in the proposed RFP and informed by external cost estimates collected through the REOI process undertaken last fall.

Review for-profit service delivery

A number of TCHC buildings are operated by private for-profit entities through fee for service agreements. There have been many anecdotal reports that service levels are very poor in these buildings. It is incumbent on the City and TCHC to review and consider the future of these agreements as part of the Tenants First plan, including whether these buildings and their tenants could be better served in-house.

Expand social housing to match the growing needs of our City

Over 100,000 households are waiting for social housing and yet the City has not developed a strategy, in this report or any other reports, to reduce that waitlist in a lasting way. There is no concrete objective or set of targets to increase the supply of rent-geared-to-income social housing in Toronto.

A plan to build more RGI units doesn't necessarily mean more towers. It means creating accessible, universally designed housing with different housing types/built form to accommodate the diverse needs of tenants such as families, the differently abled, women fleeing violence, and seniors. TCHC's expanded housing portfolio should include MORE single-family dwellings as part of the overall mix. Shifting those units to the non-profit sector runs counter to that goal.

A new seniors housing division

Local 79 is cautiously supportive of Staff's recommendation to create a new, seniors-focused entity. However, that support comes with a major proviso: the new entity needs more accountability to City Council and tenants than what currently exists at TCHC. Major problems at TCHC have been uncovered through Auditor General's reports. Councillors have often found themselves intervening to help residents navigate complicated bureaucratic processes (processes that often leave our members frustrated as well!). Given the particular vulnerabilities many seniors in TCHC face, it is essential that the new agency include robust mechanisms for oversight, advocacy and

tenant representation. The best way to achieve these mechanisms is to make the new entity a Division within the City of Toronto itself.

Tenant-focused decentralization pilot projects

Toronto's social housing needs are not just about expanding the amount of RGI units. It's about embedding those units in spaces that provide other key supports to low-income and/or vulnerable groups. Employment programs, social inclusion opportunities, health supports can mean the difference between a home that helps you build a life and a home that is merely a roof over your head.

Local 79's frontline workers at TCHC feel many of the same frustrations tenants face with a centralized system that is unresponsive to community needs. Local 79 is optimistic that the decentralization pilots suggested in the report will be an opportunity to test ways to address these frustrations, but this can only be the case if members are deeply engaged in the development and implementation of the pilots.

TCHC Community Service Coordinators and Building Service Coordinators represented by Local 79 develop, implement and support programs and activities in TCHC communities. They find themselves hamstrung when they know which programs and supports are a priority for the tenants they work with, yet have little opportunity to see these priorities reflected in their largely centralized workplans.

Local 79 and its frontline workers at TCHC request a seat at the table in the development and implementation of the three decentralization pilots being recommended. We want to be partners in creating a more tenant-centered and responsive social housing provider.