

EX17.1 Towards Recovery and Building a Renewed Toronto

Submission by Melissa Goldstein to the Executive Committee, October 21, 2020

The Impact and Opportunities report correctly recognizes that investing in affordable housing has a significant positive impact with regards to the social determinants of health, to individual and community well-being, and to public sector budgets.

What should be added to the report's recommendations are a) measures to preserve our existing affordable housing supply, b) measures to prevent residential eviction and help tenants maintain their housing, and c) clarification that all affordable housing produced will be permanently affordable housing.

The loss of rental housing affordability in Toronto is being achieved largely through eviction, driven by real estate speculation and enabled by weak provincial rent control policy. When tenants are evicted, the city loses private market affordable housing, as landlords of newly vacated properties use the opportunity to raise their rents. When rents are raised, the city never gets the affordability of the units back. With rental rates rising far faster than the incomes of renters and deeply affordable housing being snapped up by investors and redeveloped or converted into more expensive housing at an alarming rate, Toronto is losing private market affordable rental housing much faster than it is being built. However, the City continues to address our affordable housing shortage by focusing almost exclusively on new development.

What other cities like Vancouver, Montreal, San Francisco, Chicago and New York have realized, is that affordable housing preservation is a more cost-effective use of public funds, given that developing new affordable housing is more expensive to produce, is generally much less affordable than what is being lost, and its affordability is often time-limited. Continuing to invest heavily in new affordable housing development, while letting incredibly valuable existing affordable housing stock disappear, ensures that the supply of affordable rental housing never actually grows & the affordable housing crisis never ends.

The attached report, [Fixing the Leaky Bucket: A Comprehensive Policy & Program Framework to Preserve Toronto's Supply of Deeply Affordable Housing](#), released this week by the Neighbourhood Land Trust, reviews what other North American cities have done to address very similar situations as what we are facing here in Toronto and lays out a roadmap for the City of Toronto for preserving the city's deeply affordable housing stock and protecting vulnerable tenants, based on what's working in other cities.

To achieve the objectives outlined in the Impact and Opportunities report, the following measures to preserve our supply of deeply affordable housing and protect tenants should be added to Toronto's Recovery Strategy:

- 1. Create a permanent Small Site Rental Housing Acquisition Program with annual acquisition targets that provides dedicated funding and financing to non-profit housing organizations or community land trusts to facilitate the purchase and conversion of all forms of at-risk private market affordable rental housing into permanently affordable housing.**

Public programs to transfer private market affordable housing to public or non-profit ownership are an important tool that cities including Vancouver, Montreal, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City are using to preserve their rapidly disappearing deeply affordable housing. These programs are not only far more effective at preserving affordable housing and protecting tenants from displacement than other policy tools and initiatives, but they are very cost-effective: acquiring and rehabilitating existing affordable housing units is significantly less expensive than building new affordable housing, even when life cycle issues are taken into account. (See pages 23-28 of the linked report for details.)

- 2. Invest in preventing residential evictions and helping renters maintain their housing by a) increasing the funding of existing rent support programs even further and expanding access to them, and b) investing in City and community proactive tenant support programs.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing pressures on tenants, and has put tens of thousands of Torontonians at imminent risk of eviction because they are behind in rent and have no way of getting caught up. These tenants must be supported to remain in their homes, as the cost of eviction to the well-being of tenants and to the City (in terms of pressures on social services and the shelter system and the loss of affordable housing) is immense. The EPIC program in particular needs to be much better funded and heavily promoted, as most tenants don't know it exists and aren't able to access it. In addition to modifying the Rent Bank so it disperses grants and eligibility is expanded to include people who are unemployed, it also needs to have the \$4000 per year cap lifted so that tenants experiencing months without income don't lose their housing. This funding increase can be short-term. An 18-month top-up that can be reassessed as the situation evolves. What we need is the financial capacity and flexibility within the tenant support system to respond quickly to emergencies. This additional funding for eviction prevention needs to be a priority in the 2021 budget.

Renters across the city are finding their tenancies threatened by landlords who want to find ways to get their tenants to vacate their units so they can raise rents and generate more income, causing housing that is affordable to both low and middle-income earners to be lost at a rapid rate. The City of Toronto needs to ensure all tenants are better supported and that existing housing affordability is preserved. What is required is an intersectoral, coordinated, and integrated proactive tenant support system to ensure that tenants at risk of displacement and/or homelessness receive appropriate support (including tenant education and access to legal support) well in advance of displacement efforts by landlords and property owners (including eviction notices and buyout offers), and that tenants who are displaced can claim the support, rights and compensation to which they are entitled. (For more information on what a inter-sectoral, coordinated, and integrated proactive tenant support system would entail, see pages 60-63 of the linked report.)

3. Legalize multi-tenant housing across the city through as-of-right zoning and improve its quality without causing tenants to lose their housing.

Zoning rules that prohibit multi-tenant housing in much of the city discriminate against people who cannot afford a self-contained unit by making the housing form they can afford—an individually rented room or shared accommodation—illegal in Scarborough, North York, and East York. Legal or not, people are currently living in multi-tenant housing in all parts of the city, which demonstrates the fact that prohibiting multi-tenant housing doesn't make the housing go away, it simply prevents the safety and living conditions from being improved. Legalizing multi-tenant housing across the city through “as of right zoning” would:

- allow people to stay in their communities and allow people of all income levels an opportunity to be part of the community;
- contribute to the development of mixed-income, inclusive communities by increasing the supply of affordable housing in established neighbourhoods;
- better protect existing tenants and enable them to defend their rights;
- allow housing conditions in multi-tenant housing to be improved through regulation and programs like those provided by Habitat Services;
- enable the City to better track the status of the City's affordable housing stock and develop evidence-based policy solutions;
- add “gentle density” to neighbourhoods without requiring additional development; and
- ensure that policies developed specifically to preserve the supply of private market affordable rental housing and protect tenants reach their maximum effectiveness.
- Legalization must be accompanied by coordinated efforts to improve the quality of existing multi-tenant housing without causing tenants to lose their housing.

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