

PH17.4.4, PH17.5.1, PH17.6.1



Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation
Centre pour les droits à l'égalité au logement

October 20, 2020

Planning and Housing Committee

Written submissions from the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation

Dear Members of the Planning and Housing Committee.

The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1987 and dedicated to advancing the right to housing. CERA is recognized internationally as a world leader in promoting and protecting human rights in housing and in applying both domestic and international human rights law to address issues of homelessness and poverty. We have been working to advance the right to housing and progressive housing policy in Toronto and Ontario for over 30 years. We also began Eviction Prevention work twenty years ago, when the concept of eviction prevention was not widely understood or discussed as it is today. As early adopters and long-time leaders in the eviction prevention space, CERA continues to provide free services to Toronto residents facing eviction or a human rights violation in their housing that may threaten their ability to stay in their home. Every year, we assist over a thousand renters facing eviction or a human rights violation in the context of their housing stay in their home and this work provides us with significant insight into the issues faced by renters across Ontario, particularly vulnerable renters, including seniors, newcomers to Canada, racialized individuals, persons with disabilities, and families.

We are writing to offer the following recommendations for the following Agenda items: PH 17.4, PH 17.5 and PH 17.6.

Agenda Item PH17.4, "Creating New Supportive Housing Opportunities in Parkdale in Partnership with the University Health Network and United Way of Greater Toronto"

Rights based participation from individuals, communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders directly affected by inadequate housing and homelessness is an essential component of ensuring the progressive realization of the right to housing. It is encouraging to see that the Social Medicine Initiative and the framework for developing the properties currently owned by UHN in Parkdale into supportive and affordable housing incorporates this essential component. CERA strongly supports the innovative partnerships and opportunities for collaboration across sectors found throughout the framework and proposed model for this exciting initiative. We hope the above model will offer an example of how the principles of a rights-based approach can be used to effectively addressing the affordable and supportive housing needs of Toronto's most vulnerable residents and communities.

Agenda Item PH17.5 “Pilot Project to Protect Rooming Houses for Long-term Affordability – Update”

CERA is pleased to see that the City’s Rooming House pilot project reflects the City’s commitment to a rights-based approach to housing policy. A key component of this approach is the prioritization and allocation of resources to assist those in most need to secure adequate and affordable housing. As stated in the reports attached to this Agenda item, rooming houses provide critical supply of deeply affordable housing options for many of Toronto’s most vulnerable and marginalized residents. It is essential that rooming houses and other forms of affordable housing are preserved and maintained to provide safe, secure and adequate homes for tenants across Toronto. CERA agrees with the Update’s conclusion that creating permanently affordable housing through the acquisition of rooming houses and other forms of rental housing will increase the opportunity for vulnerable residents and communities to access and maintain safe, healthy and adequate homes. CERA urges the City to continue working towards the legalization and licensing of rooming houses in all areas of amalgamated Toronto.

Agenda Item PH17.6 “Actions to Promote the Protection of Residential Rental Tenancies – Update”

CERA is a proud member of the Advisory Committee on the Protection of Affordable Rental Housing and we are looking forward to continuing the work of this Committee if, and when, it transitions to the Tenant Advisory Committee. CERA fully supports the expansion of this Committees’ mandate to include all City related tenancy matters and are eager to continue to provide advice and guidance to the City on rights-based approaches to supporting vulnerable residents and adopting measures to address the concerns of tenants across Toronto.

CERA fully supports the recommendations put forward by the Subcommittee on the Protection of Affordable Rental Housing with regards to better data collection and analysis around the issue of evictions in Toronto. Specifically, we fully support the Subcommittee’s recommendation to develop a process to monitor residential evictions by collecting information from the City staff delivering tenant eviction and support programs and the recommendation to request a Data Sharing Agreement between the City and the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Over the past decade, CERA has watched as the circumstances of people who call our eviction prevention hotline have become progressively complex, urgent, and desperate. More information and data about evictions in Toronto are needed to fully understand the prevalence, causes, consequences and outcomes of tenants who are facing eviction or have been evicted from their home. By exploring innovative ways to collect and analyze this data, the City and housing advocates like CERA will be better positioned to understand exactly how evictions are shaping the housing landscape across our city. In addition, this data can be used to better design, implement and evaluate policies and programs related to eviction and homelessness prevention in Toronto and raise awareness about the current eviction crisis.

There are examples of eviction data collecting initiatives that the City could draw inspiration from and drive positive eviction related policy outcomes. The Evictions Lab at Princeton University¹ has created a national database on eviction estimates that includes eviction related data for several municipalities across the United States. Data available through this database includes the neighborhoods where

¹ <https://evictionlab.org/>

evictions most frequently occur and, in some instances, how much money evicted renters typically owe to their landlords. It is easy to see how this data could be used by the City of Toronto to better budget for, target and expand eviction prevention programs like the Rent Bank.

The City's work on affordable housing and eviction prevention is continuing to move in the right direction and we are thrilled that the City is stepping up in these areas. We commend City staff and members of this Committee on the work undertaken to date to ensure the City's housing policy aligns with the commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing in Toronto.

Thank you,

On Behalf of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation.