

RH3.1 Attachment 2

ATTACHMENT 2: ADVISORY COMMITTEE & PROPERTY OWNER GROUP ADVICE

Advice from Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee met several times and provided input into improved tenant communications and programs. It also provided advice into the City's submission on Bill 184. The following are challenges and opportunities presented by the Advisory Committee specific to communications and programs.

Communications on Tenant Rights and Responsibilities

Challenges:

- Tenant programs rest with several different divisions across the City. It is difficult for tenants to know where to go for help. It also results in a lack of a cohesive strategy to work with tenants.
- The current website is difficult to navigate. Housing information rests on several division websites requiring multiple searches. Many search terms and program names do not direct tenants to the information they need.
- Information is not currently communicated in plain language.
- 311 needs to better direct tenants to the information they need.
- Tenants need better access to City data such as building conditions and inspection criteria, status of planning and building application processes, eviction data etc. - so they can be better prepared for discussions with landlords and understand their rights.
- Jurisdictional responsibilities are not often clear in existing communications.
- Not all City programs are adequately communicated - many tenants are unaware of key programs and supports.
- Information is often out of date and key updates and opportunities are not shared in real time.
- Tenants often rely on advice of friends or family and not website or government information.

Advice:

- From a tenant's perspective there should be one point of contact or clearing house. Tenants should not need to navigate various programs to determine which they are eligible for. There should be a centralized office that helps tenants facing eviction.
- In addition to the internet, information should be shared through other means such as mail outs, building apartment notices, newsletters and handbooks in apartment buildings.
- City should explore approaches from other jurisdictions such as New York City that has created a displacement alert portal sending out information to tenants in buildings that are predicted to experience evictions based on key data collected.
- City should invest in helping tenants exercise their rights - fund people with lived experience to assist other tenants.

- Invest in programs to establish tenant committees and neighbourhood hubs for information sharing, collaboration with local landlords and advocacy.

Improvements to City Programs to Help Tenants Facing Evictions

Challenges:

- Many programs are widely unknown.
- Several programs are by referral only and inaccessible to many.
- Eligibility criteria is too narrow making them inaccessible.
- Timely or comprehensive customer service is compromised by funding shortfalls.
- Some program designs are limited in scope and out of date regarding income thresholds and affordability criteria.
- Loan programs - instead of grants - are limiting as many people are unable to repay loans.

Advice:

- Overall the eviction prevention and tenant support programs need to be funded at a higher level to meet the current demand. The City should re-examine existing contracts and explore increased funding opportunities.
- Consider funding more than 10 Housing Help Centres to be more accessible to tenants across the City.
- In the absence of a "one-stop-shop" for tenant support, agencies and City divisions administering programs should refer tenants to alternative programs if they are ineligible for those they are applying to.
- The Toronto Rent Bank should include a grant program with clear guidelines and criteria for tenants with a low-income.
- The Tenant Defence Fund should be updated to: increase grant level to reflect the true cost of legal fees; add flexibility in the types of tenancy issues to be addressed; and explore new models such as community-based paralegals available to tenants across the City.
- Increase awareness of programs like Eviction Prevention in Communities Program (EPIC) and the Housing Stability Fund (HSF) that are referral based so tenants - that would qualify - can reach apply without a referral.

Developing a Tenant Workshop

One of the action items for the Advisory Committee was to co-design and deliver a Tenant Workshop by the end of Q1 2020. Unfortunately COVID-19 hit and in-person gatherings were not possible and continue to not be an option.

Advice:

- Share a list of existing tenant information webinars
- Consider developing YouTube or on-line webinars to address key tenancy issues

Advice from Property Owner Group

The Property Owner Group was only able to meet once in person pre-COVID and also provided comments by email on the City's Bill 184 submission. The nature of the discussion was different than that of the Advisory Group and focused on insight on eviction trends, possible data collection sources and how evictions could be prevented.

Partnership Opportunities to Keep Tenants Housed

- City should offer information sessions for property owners to inform them of existing programs and services they can inform tenants about if tenants are falling into arrears – e.g., housing allowances, rent bank, trusteeship program etc.
- Provide handouts or pamphlets that property owners can share with tenants
- Ensure tenants are being supported after going through Landlord and Tenant Board or other major processes
- There should be joint advocacy for guaranteed income; people have been writing about and advocacy for this for years, but with a stronger group with wide range of stakeholders, may be able to make some impact in this area
- Enforce new rules related to AirBnB to protect affordable rental stock
- Implement more programs with supports some tenants need additional support to stay houses
- City needs to re-examine how it taxes multiple residential housing
- Implement an IT solution where City staff or Housing Help staff could follow up with tenant and/or landlord regarding the outcome(s) of a complaint of an illegitimate eviction.
- Need for increased funding of legal clinics to help tenants.

Data Collection

- City needs better data collection to better understand trends in the rental market
- City should be tracking areas where current rents are below market value, these areas are where illegitimate activity may happen
- City should track N12 and N13 evictions and find out how many people are actually invited back after renovation
- Work with Housing Help Centres to track illegitimate evictions since many tenants seek their input.

How to Preserve Affordable Rental Housing

- Provide incentives to assist in repairs and retrofits
- Speed up the approval process (building permits, renovation permits)
- Address multi-residential property tax discrepancies

What should City do within its authority to address illegitimate evictions?

- Consider a targeted approach instead of blanket inspections to target worst offenders
- Invest in enforcement use penalties and fines to deter illegitimate activity