

Submitted by Megan Kee,
October 17, 2023

--
October 2nd, 2023
Toronto City Council
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON



Toronto City Council,

The limited stock of affordable purpose-built rental housing is home to seniors, newcomers, families, students, and low to moderate income people across Toronto. This dense, rent-controlled housing is a safe haven to tenants in the midst of an affordability crisis. Unfortunately, many of these buildings are set to be demolished and re-developed to build luxury rentals and condominiums.

'Demovictions' do not only impact the tenants being displaced, but actually impact affordability for everyone. Demovictions: remove housing units that would have otherwise been affordable in perpetuity, add displaced tenants back into an already tight housing market, treat building materials like an infinite resource, contribute to environmental waste, and add to the rising number of people experiencing homelessness.

We are not opposed to the intensification of housing, and recognize the vital need for more density and purpose-built rental buildings in Toronto. However, the approach taken by City Planning is currently driven by developers, whose applications focus solely on their financial interests and maximizing shareholder dividends.

We believe that the City and Province, in partnership with tenant-led organizations, need to play a stronger, more proactive role in protecting tenants by determining where, when and how developments are constructed, by investing in Community Land Trusts and Co-op housing, as well as providing rentals geared towards income for low and moderate income people and families.

We also support efforts to retrofit existing affordable rental buildings to make them more energy efficient, and in particular, to install electric heat pump systems to provide zero-emission and efficient heating and cooling. However, such retrofits do not require evictions (even temporarily), and the cost of such retrofits must not be borne by renters. Given the future energy cost-savings, the costs should be borne by building owners.

No Demovictions is a group of tenant associations across Toronto that are advocating for responsible development and tenants' rights. Along with numerous partners who have signed this open letter—with representation from climate justice, housing, neighbourhood associations, and human rights groups—we are asking for the following changes to policy to ensure that we protect the limited stock of affordable housing and avoid a humanitarian disaster:

A Provincial moratorium on demovictions:

Until the impact of the dozens of purpose-built rental buildings being demolished in the City of Toronto has been evaluated to better understand the consequences that mass displacement will have on communities, tenants, and Toronto's housing, we are calling for the City to support us in asking the Province for a moratorium on all demoviction applications. This includes all applications that are pre-construction, including those that have been approved by City Council.

Rent and vacancy control:

We are asking for the immediate implementation of both rent control and vacancy control. The implementation of rent and vacancy control on all buildings will stabilize prices and provide tenants with security of tenure. The lack of vacancy control currently incentivizes developers and landlords to turn over units and buildings through evictions to raise rents.

A Demovictions Committee:

We are asking the City of Toronto to form a Demovictions Committee, comprised of tenant association representatives, housing advocates, housing policy analysts, political representatives, and more who will work together to develop meaningful solutions to demovictions, protecting the stock of affordable purpose-built rental housing, and ensuring that tenants' rights and fair compensation are considered in rental replacement by-laws.

Data collection:

Comprehensive and transparent data collection is a fundamental component to any well-informed plan. There is currently no meaningful data being collected or publicly reported on demovictions and their impact on tenants, communities, and the housing affordability crisis in Toronto. We request that the City actively and meaningfully consult with the aforementioned demovictions committee to develop a plan for improved, accurate demovictions data with clear, accessible public reporting.

Ensuring Developers, not tenants, pay the full cost of demolition:

There is currently no meaningful enforcement to ensure that developers and landlords provide supports outlined in the compensation and relocation packages under City of Toronto's Section 111 agreements. Moreover, these agreements do not adequately ensure that tenants do not shoulder the financial burden of displacement.

As it currently stands, tenants must pay the growing costs above rent gap payments, moving and packing costs, and the time required to search for adequate temporary housing in an already tight, volatile market.

We are requesting that rent gap payments be adjusted / indexed for volatile rental market rates, increased moving allowances, and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for landlords/developers in securing temporary housing for displaced tenants, so that tenants can remain in their communities where they have established support systems.

Transparency in Sales of Purpose-Built Rentals:

We are asking for all purpose-built rental buildings to be publicly listed for sale for at least 6 months, with tenants being given the first right of refusal. This provides tenants with an opportunity to consider a co-op or community land trust to preserve the stock of affordable housing and keep their homes. This provides additional protections and rights to tenants in light of the challenge of the financialization of purpose-built rental housing.

We are sounding the alarm on the demovictions crisis, and ask for your support to meaningfully address it. The number of displaced tenants will soon be in the tens of thousands, and we cannot wait for the Provincial government to take action. We need to ACT NOW. Tenants should not be pawns in the housing market, but active participants. In order for people to be prioritized over profits, tenants need a seat at the table.

We would like to meet with you to discuss these requests and help you understand that this is an issue that holds great importance to every single organization and person who has signed this letter. This is not just a tenants' or workers' rights issue. This is a human rights issue.

Thank you. Sincerely,

