

Progress Update on TCHC's Tenant Advisory Committee

Date: March 15, 2024

To: Planning and Housing Committee

From: Executive Director, Housing Secretariat

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Since spring 2023, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and the City have been working collaboratively to launch TCHC's Tenant Advisory Committee. The Tenant Advisory Committee's mandate is to advise TCHC on improvements to the implementation of their refreshed Tenant Engagement System and on corporate initiatives that advance tenant priorities.

Key activities undertaken by TCHC and City staff in 2023 to launch the Tenant Advisory Committee included:

- A joint recruitment process culminating with an orientation for all committee members in the summer;
- A series of working group meetings with the committee members to jointly develop the committee's terms of reference, and;
- Monthly committee meetings starting in September co-chaired by the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of TCHC and the Deputy City Manager, Development and Growth Services.

This report updates City Council on the progress of the TCHC Tenant Advisory Committee, including the terms of reference, as per City Council's request at their meeting on March 29, 2023. Additionally, it outlines the Committee's 2024 priorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Housing Secretariat recommends that:

1. City Council, as Shareholder, request the Board of Directors of Toronto Community Housing Corporation to direct the President and Chief Executive Officer of Toronto Community Housing Corporation to submit a report by the end of 2024 to the Board of

Directors of Toronto Community Housing Corporation on the refreshed Tenant Engagement System and a comprehensive implementation plan.

2. City Council, as Shareholder, request the Board of Directors of Toronto Community Housing Corporation to forward the report referenced in Recommendation 1 to City Council for information once approved by the Board of Directors of Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts to this report.

EQUITY IMPACT

TCHC tenants reflect the rich diversity of the city of Toronto, encompassing intersections of ethno-racial diversity, language, ability, gender, sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression and socio-economic status. TCHC's vision for their Tenant Engagement System is to foster relationships with tenants and build vibrant communities through diverse, inclusive, and collaborative methods that gives all TCHC tenants a voice and input in community-related decision making that affects their housing as appropriate. The Tenant Advisory Committee is advising TCHC on the implementation of their refreshed Tenant Engagement System to support that vision.

DECISION HISTORY

On March 29, 2023, City Council adopted [PH2.8 - Ensuring a Successful Tenant Advisory Committee at Toronto Community Housing Corporation](#) which directed City staff to support the Tenant Advisory Committee including with the recruitment of new members and the terms of reference development. City Council also requested a report back in early 2024 on the progress of the Tenant Advisory Committee.

On December 15, 2022, City Council adopted [MM2.16 - Ensuring a Successful Tenant Advisory Committee at Toronto Community Housing Corporation](#) which requested the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to have City staff review the proposal for a new Tenant Advisory Committee at TCHC.

On July 14, 2021, City Council adopted [EX25.12 - Toronto Community Housing Corporation - Annual General Meeting and 2020 Audited Consolidated Financial Statements](#) which approved an updated Shareholder Direction to TCHC.

COMMENTS

Background

In 2019, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) approved a refresh of the Tenant Engagement System to increase tenant participation in local decision making that affects their housing and that is aligned with the City's Shareholder Direction. Implementation began that year, but full implementation of the refreshed system was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. During implementation, TCHC staff and TCHC's Tenant Services Committee heard from tenants about emerging challenges with the refreshed system. As a result, the creation of a TCHC Tenant Advisory Committee (TAC) was part of a four-step plan approved by the Tenant Services Committee in late 2022 to improve the refreshed system.

The TAC's purpose is to advise TCHC on the implementation of its Tenant Engagement System and other tenant-facing programs until the city-wide layer of TCHC's Tenant Engagement System is implemented at the end of 2024.

Recruitment for the TAC began in August 2022. In March 2023, City Council directed TCHC, through their Board, to conduct an additional round of recruitment in partnership with the City to further diversify the TAC membership. City Council also requested that City staff support the TAC, assisting with the development of terms of reference, and that the Deputy City Manager and TCHC's President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) co-chair the TAC on a transitional basis to provide leadership and establish an effective Committee.

Additionally, City Council also requested a report back in the first quarter of 2024 on the progress of the TAC, including the terms of reference that were developed. This report responds to that request.

Tenant Advisory Committee Recruitment and Membership

There were three rounds of recruitment for the TAC starting in August 2022 and concluding during the summer of 2023.

TCHC initiated the first round of recruitment in 2022, prior to the City Council direction for City staff to support the TAC. The 2022 recruitment selected 14 committee members in total from TCHC's three operating regions: four from the West region; five from the Central region; and five from the East region.

Additional recruitment took place over two rounds during the spring and summer of 2023 to identify seven more committee members with a focus to increase diversity and inclusion on the committee as well as to target tenants not currently involved in TCHC's Tenant Engagement System. The City and TCHC partnered on the 2023 recruitment process which included extensive promotion of the opportunity to tenants, information sessions, joint application review and joint applicant interviews. Almost 100 tenants submitted applications and seven were selected as additional committee members based on their skills and experience, their interest in tenant engagement, and past and current involvement in community and TCHC initiatives.

As per the direction from City Council, the three tenant directors of the TCHC Board of Directors were invited to participate as Tenant Advisory Committee members. They were invited to participate as non-voting members to avoid any potential governance conflicts given the tenant directors' role as decision makers on the corporation's Board of Directors. This mirrors the approach taken by the Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation's Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee.

Terms of Reference Development

The development of the terms of reference for the TAC was a collaborative effort between the committee members, TCHC, and the City from July to September 2023.

During the TAC orientation session on July 25, 2023, TCHC and City staff led the committee members through a guided discussion to start identifying key sections for the TAC's terms of reference. This interactive process allowed TAC members to provide invaluable insights into what they believed constituted an effective and well-structured terms of reference.

Following the orientation session, it was apparent that further working group sessions would be needed to successfully collaborate on the creation of a terms of reference. An additional four working group sessions were scheduled throughout August and September 2023 to complete the TAC's terms of reference.

The supplementary sessions were dedicated to refining sections in the draft terms of reference based on input and feedback from the committee. TCHC and City staff reviewed each section with the committee members, moderated discussion if committee members had additional comments, and then made the necessary revisions to the document. TAC members then voted on the final wording of each section to finalize the draft terms of reference.

The final version of the TAC's terms of reference encompasses essential information regarding the TAC's mandate and objectives, roles and responsibilities for committee members and TCHC and City staff, guidelines for attendance, procedures for conflict resolution, and requirements for meeting quorum. See Attachment 1 for a copy of the approved terms of reference.

2023 Committee Meetings and Key Accomplishments

The TAC's first official meeting was held on September 28, 2023, and was co-chaired by the President and CEO of TCHC and the Deputy City Manager, Development and Growth Services. The committee achieved a significant milestone through their formal approval of their terms of reference.

The committee continued to meet monthly throughout the remainder of 2023 with additional working group sessions as needed. Key agenda items included a consultation on the TCHC Tenant Service Hub Review, input into TCHC's Tenant Engagement System review, and a review of TCHC's Tenant Engagement System Volunteer Policy.

All committee meetings were and will continue being organized as hybrid meetings with some tenants attending in person and others online to support tenant participation and to meet accommodation needs.

Additional TAC 2023 accomplishments include strong and consistent participation from a core group of 13 voting members, the implementation of an agenda review process with a subgroup of committee members, the committee providing valued input and advice to TCHC on items connected to the Tenant Engagement System, and a collaborative relationship between TCHC and the City to support the committee. Table 1 includes a summary of the TAC meetings co-hosted by TCHC and City staff starting in July 2023 until present.

Figure 1: TAC Meetings at a glance (July 2023 - February 29, 2024)

Meeting description	# of meetings
TAC Member orientation meetings	3
Terms of reference working group meetings	4
Business meetings	5
Agenda review meetings (TCHC and City staff and TAC members)	4
Topic-specific working group meetings	2
Total meetings	18

The main challenge encountered in 2023 related to some members' attendance, as there were three members who did not attend any of the 2023 TAC meetings. After several follow-up attempts by TCHC staff, the provisions in the terms of reference related to attendance were enacted and those members were asked to step down in late 2023. Additionally, two members needed to step down from the committee due to changes in their availability.

A process to fill vacancies was initiated in early 2024 based on the terms of reference utilizing the candidates list from the 2023 recruitment process. The committee's membership is now 18 tenants, and it has changed its quorum requirement to reflect the new membership number. Additionally, two of the three tenant directors of the TCHC Board of Directors continue to participate as non-voting members.

TAC Member Feedback

In January 2024, TCHC and City staff surveyed TAC members to gather their feedback on the committee's work to date, specifically:

- To assess whether the committee was advancing its mandate as outlined in the terms of reference, and
- To enhance future TAC meetings to improve the TAC member experience.

Just under half of the TAC's active members responded. Two TAC members advised staff that they chose not to respond as they felt it was too soon to assess the committee's work to date.

The responses to the survey questions varied. But, overall, the respondents felt the committee was progressing on its mandate to advise TCHC on the implementation of the refreshed Tenant Engagement System. Respondents also generally felt their opinions and suggestions were valued during the committee's main discussions. One key area of feedback from the respondents is the need for staff to encourage all TAC members to voice their opinions during discussions to ensure a range of voices are heard.

The survey's response rate and some of the feedback are an opportunity for reflection and improvement. Staff are addressing these findings so the TAC can strengthen its effectiveness and ensure that member voices are adequately represented in its discussions. For example, staff now actively track which members have not spoken on an item and call of them for input. This approach allows staff to ensure that all TAC members get an opportunity to share their thoughts and insights during a discussion, enhances participation, and encourages a diversity of perspectives to be heard.

TCHC and City staff will work with the TAC members on a second survey for members to capture their feedback and to further assess the committee's progress in the second half of 2024.

Next Steps

In 2024, the partnership between TCHC and City staff will continue to support the Tenant Advisory Committee's work. The TAC will continue meeting monthly to advise TCHC on the implementation of the refreshed Tenant Engagement System as well as on corporate priorities.

In 2024, TAC will work with TCHC and City staff to further define the roles and responsibilities of the permanent city-wide TAC including an updated terms of reference outlining the new permanent role and function of a city-wide TAC, a process for TAC member selection, the relationship between the city-wide TAC and regional TCHC Tenant Community Action Tables, and the role and function of tenant surveys.

This report recommends that TCHC's President and CEO report back to the TCHC Board of Directors on the tenant engagement system, which will include recommendations on a future role for the City in the TAC, including the joint City-TCHC selection of members, to ensure that the TAC continues as a vehicle to engage tenants in corporate-wide policies and strategies that impact tenants.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - TCHC Tenant Advisory Committee Terms of Reference