

June 2019

Summary of the Tenant Network Meetings for TCH Tenants

A bit of background...

The City is planning to pull scattered homes, rooming houses, seniors' homes and agency homes away from Toronto Community Housing. TCHC will continue to support apartment buildings.

The City has already sent out an REOI (Request for Expression of Interest) to not-for-profit organizations in Toronto. The purpose of an REOI is to seek information about how these organizations would approach the management and funding of scattered homes if the properties were transferred to them. At this time we don't know how many not-for-profit organizations responded, or who they are.

The next step is the RFP (Request for Proposal). Potential landlords will have about three months to submit a detailed, formal proposal. Although we were informed the RFP would be sent out by now, at the time of writing this update the RFP has not been sent. As soon as it goes out, it will be made public and we will post it on the website at www.tenantsupport.ca.

We were also told the City will make a decision who the new landlord (or landlords) are this fall, however since the RFP has not yet been posted there is a good chance that date will be pushed out.

Once the proposals are in and have been reviewed, it will go to City Council for a vote. There will be a period where the City negotiates with the chosen landlord (or landlords). The actual transfer will likely take a year or more.

The Tenant Network is currently 215 strong and we learned a lot from our surveys, conversations and meetings. So now what?

In January 2019, four Peer Workers were hired to set up a tenant network for tenants who live in one of the 647 scattered homes in Toronto. Our main objectives are to:

- Stay informed about the future of our housing
- Make sure our voice is heard
- Do what we can to ensure our needs are met

During this first phase we knocked on doors, conducted surveys and collected contact information to build the Tenant Network. The idea is that the more people who join the network, the better we can address issues and speak with one voice, and the more likely our landlord will listen to what we have to say.

Meetings were held during April and May to get input from tenants and come up with ideas for the Tenant Network. To help reduce travel time, we held three meetings—one in the west end, one in the central/east end, and one in Scarborough.

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We built a website to help us stay connected. The site has a tenant forum where we can post our questions, share information, and communicate with each other. News and updates about the status of the transfer of houses will be posted as the information becomes available. The site also has an FAQ (frequently asked questions) and a list of resources. You can visit the website at www.tenantsupport.ca. Please note that you will need to register if you want to post on the forum.

This first phase of the Tenant Network is now complete, with 215 tenants who have joined the Network and want to stay in the loop. Four new Peer Workers will continue to lead over the next few months and work with volunteers to build on the numbers and action ideas that came from our initial meetings.

We are still looking for volunteers to work on some of the committees, so please contact [REDACTED] if you're interested and can spare a little time!

No surprise, the top concerns tenants have about getting a new landlord relate to home repairs, rent increases, and losing their home

A tenant survey was done between February and May. Here is what we heard from tenants, with #1 being the most common and #6 being the least common:

1. Repairs and renovations
2. Losing our homes and rent increases
3. Wanting a good tenant/landlord relationship with a landlord who is more open, accessible and accountable, and wanting this to be an easy transition
4. Wanting tenant involvement/meetings, our voices heard, and involvement with how money is spent
5. No surprises, and wanting assistance if needed with transition/changes
6. No concerns, likes TCH as is

Great ideas were shared at the Tenant Network meetings

The Peer Leaders started a list of ideas the Tenant Network could work on. We collected more ideas at each meeting. Below is the combined list from all three meetings, separated by category. Points 1-3 had the highest rankings overall.

1. Maintenance issues

- Invite [REDACTED] to speak with the Tenant Network

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- Find commonalities around maintenance issues and confirm the plan to get major repairs done before the transfer
- Get maintenance assistance for seniors and people with disabilities

2. Transfer of homes

- Create a list of needs/wants/demands for our new landlord(s)
- Ask the City to meet with the tenants to provide updates, answer questions, and address concerns
- Get a copy of the RFP and share our thoughts, priorities and values with the City, and try to influence the decision-making process regarding who the new landlord(s) will be

3. Discounts for tenants

- Set up discounts for phone, internet, and utilities
- Arrange for group insurance rates for tenants

4. Support

- Hire a lawyer to represent the tenants
- Continue having meetings to update tenants (every 3 months)
- Provide training for Tenant Network volunteers
- Recruit university students to help with legal aid because they are overwhelmed with the number of evictions (note: add this to the website!)
- Set up a Peer Support Group to support tenants with mental health issues
- Do some fundraising to support the Tenant Network

5. Communications

- Add a section to the website that includes a list of what tenants want
- Develop a publication for tenants in scattered homes, similar to the Tenant Loop (formerly known as Housing Update)
- Post the history of housing on the website and include what's been done by other committees in the past, along with a link to Joy Connelly's website openingthewindow.com
- Create a standard set of key principles for The Tenant Network

Note: A couple of ideas were intentionally not included here because they either need to be discussed further OR the suggestions don't align with the mandate for the Tenant Network.

1. Invite the media and our City Councilors to a meeting
2. Partner with a non-profit agency or form our own NFP to run our homes independently, and perhaps submit our own RFP

A new landlord could be great news for us tenants!

During our meetings we discussed the characteristics and values we want to see in a new landlord. The asterisks (*) indicate the most popular.

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General characteristics

- A good reputation with a focus on housing*
- Stability – less changeover of staff
- Financially sound
- Canadian social housing provider (not foreign)
- Have specific staff that can focus on tenants' needs now and in future (e.g. subsidy structures for seniors, tenants with mental health issues, victims of abuse, etc.)

Core values

- Honest and transparent*
- Care about us, listen to us, respect us (just because we're in housing doesn't mean we don't care about our homes or don't deserve to live in a nice environment)*
- Not discriminatory or prejudice
- Allow us to grow and be supportive of our development
- Willingness to change the policy to allow us to have life insurance, a car, assets
- Committed to affordable housing
- Do what they say they will do

Maintenance

- Hire experienced workers/contractors so they don't have to come more than once*
- Buy quality appliances*
- Follow-up on work orders and do inspections*
- Hire tenants with specific skill sets to help maintain the properties*
- Provide youth with apprenticeship opportunities*
- Listen to tenants and respond quickly*
- Provide energy efficient appliances and houses (interior and exterior)*
- In-house maintenance whenever possible
- Spend wisely

Equality

- Treat all tenants the same and provide equal benefits (e.g. summer jobs for students, scholarships, a budget for community events, etc.)*

Communications

- Open the books and let us see how the bidding is done*
- Offer a direct line to the local office

Note: A show of hands and follow-up dotmocracy showed that the majority of tenants would prefer a smaller landlord that focused on housing, rather than a large organization that offers other services and is not entirely focused on housing.