
TORONTO STAR

Editorial
Ford's futile cash grab

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Given Mayor Rob Ford's ill-informed desire to sell off public **housing** to fund the city budget - "Obviously we need the money" - it's fair for the rest of us to ask: "Where's the gravy?"

Cutting taxes and balancing the books was supposed to be easy in light of all the bureaucratic fat at **Toronto City Hall**. At least, that's what Ford assured voters on the campaign trail less than a year ago. Now he seems to favour pillaging the **Toronto Community Housing Corp.** to help fill an expected budget gap in excess of \$700 million.

Even if he could cover that 2012 shortfall on the backs of the poor, Ford shouldn't do it. But as with so many of the mayor's plans and promises, it isn't a serious option. The real world isn't so simple.

The issue surfaced this past week when the **housing corporation's** departing managing director Case Ootes urged the sale of 928 single-family homes owned by the **housing** authority. He calculated this could raise more than \$400 million, money that Ootes suggested should be used to offset the **corporation's** \$650 million repair backlog - now at "crisis" proportions.

More than 80 of these houses are empty because they require major fixes. Indeed there may be more benefit in selling them than in keeping them, provided the money goes to building and repairing other **community housing**. It's something that should be considered by the **corporation's** new governing board, to be appointed this week.

However, when Ford heard of a possible \$400 million windfall he suggested that some of it go into the city's coffers. "Let's get that revenue," he told reporters, elaborating that some might go to **housing** and the rest into the budget.

Not so fast. Selling this property and passing the proceeds to the city would have to be approved by the **community housing** board, and that would be akin to corporate suicide given the agency's dire needs. It would also have to be approved by the province. And existing Ontario law requires that all rent-geared-to-income units that are sold must be replaced, substantially limiting any potential windfall.

Even if Ford could somehow find a way over these hurdles, selling almost 1,000 homes in various states of repair would likely take years. It wouldn't be much help in dealing with the city's shortfall now.

So we ask again, "Where's the gravy?" Ford failed to find it in time for the 2011 budget, which was to drop by 2.5 per cent thanks to all the fat he would drain from the system. He ended up spending more to run the city, not less. Never mind, said Ford, 2012 will be different. If so there's no sign of it yet. Gutting public **housing** shouldn't be an option.

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