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Toronto Community Housing approves sale of 706 houses



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Donovan Vincent Staff Reporter

Toronto Community Housing approved selling 706 of its homes Friday, but some councillors who weren't part of the vote want the city to halt the sell-off and look into maintaining the units as social housing.

Councillors Adam Vaughan and Paula Fletcher say city council should consider using money from development levies or community benefit funds to address TCHC's capital repair woes and keep the houses from being sold in the private market.

"A section or portion or percentage of that could perhaps go toward looking after social housing . . . there are really exciting opportunities," Fletcher told reporters.

"We need to get outside the box and look to come up with creative solutions to save housing."

As TCHC board members voted to accept a staff report calling for the sale of the 706 homes, housing advocates and many tenants living in these houses packed the board meeting to voice their complaints.

Shouting "we're not for sale" and "shame," the crowd was angry they were not consulted about the fact they'll be uprooted from their communities.

The selloff, rejected only by board tenant representatives Catherine Wilkinson and Munira Abukar, must still be approved by city council and the province.

TCHC interim CEO Len Koroneos said for sale signs could go up next June, but that the homes would be placed on the market over a few years, beginning with 70 vacant ones. In selling the properties over time, the TCHC would typically move tenants into apartment buildings.

Most of the 706 houses are single-family homes. Tenants in 631 of them pay rent geared to income, and the rest are market rent.

The hundreds of millions of dollars in forecast profits are to be invested in repairing multiple-unit buildings, which are cheaper to maintain. The sale is an absolute must, Koroneos told the meeting, because of TCHC's \$650 million capital repair backlog.

The buildings are thought to be worth just under \$400 million, with the value of individual properties ranging from \$200,250 to well over \$1 million.

Coupled with not having to pay for upkeep of the sold units, the sales could free up more than \$12 million per year for repairs of other TCHC stock, according to the staff report.

Most of these so-called "scattered houses" are located across the city in middle- and some upper-income communities. Several tenants who'll be uprooted told board members they've lived in these homes for several years and have established strong roots in their communities.

At the raucous five-hour meeting, many voiced fears about being relocated to social housing apartment buildings.

"Our housing is safe, stable and consistent. My children are thriving. Our success is your success," tenant Kathleen Ross told the board before the vote.

Abukar slammed the staff report for not providing sufficient detail given its magnitude, and called for a deferral saying there are "new times and new hopes" for TCHC's capital woes given the provincial Liberals were re-elected. Her motion was voted down.

Councillor Frances Nunziata, a board member, voted for the sale, saying several multi-unit TCHC apartment buildings in her ward "aren't liveable."

"We have to repair the buildings we have," she said. "They're disgusting."

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