



Back to Widow faces eviction from TCHC-owned home after being promised she can stay

Widow faces eviction from TCHC-owned home after being promised she can stay

April 04, 2011

Robyn Doolittle

For 25 years, Joyce Tait has lived in and loved her modest two-bedroom Beach apartment with the million-dollar view.

The 79-year-old widow pays market rent — \$1,200 a month, not including utilities — for her 900-square-foot ground-floor unit in an old brick house on Hubbard Blvd along Lake Ontario. She had hoped to die there.

But last week, a man from the Toronto Community Housing Corp. knocked on her front door. He told her the agency was planning to sell the property, as part of a sale of 22 single-family dwellings across the city. Tait would need to find somewhere else to live.

The news came despite the fact that a decade ago, when TCHC debated selling the duplex, the city promised Tait she could stay as long as she wanted.

A letter dated July 11, 2001, which Tait's son has dutifully kept in a folder all this time, reads: "Relocation exemptions granted to duplex tenants for reasons of age or health (10 were granted) are reconfirmed — properties will not be sold until the exempted tenant(s) have vacated. . . . I hope that these latest Council resolutions relieve any uncertainty that you may have."

Sitting in her peach-coloured, perfectly kept living room, Tait holds the letter, quietly crying.

"What can I say? I don't want to leave. This is my home," she said. "I just keep thinking, I don't know how they can do this. They told me I could stay as long as I wanted."

Before retiring 15 years ago, Tait was an administrative assistant at George Brown College. Her husband worked in the textile industry. The couple always wanted to live in the Beach, where Tait had grown up. They put their name on a waiting list for the Hubbard apartments. After eight years, they got the call.

Tait's four children live in the neighborhood. Her eight grandchildren love to ride their bikes along the boardwalk. Tait's living room window looks out to the now towering maple tree a family friend planted to mark her husband's passing 18 years ago.

On Wednesday, the TCHC's one-member board — Case Ootes, a former councillor and current interim managing director of the embattled housing agency — will decide on a staff recommendation to sell the single-family homes. If Ootes agrees, it would go to city council.

While on council, Ootes loudly advocated for TCHC to sell off its single-family homes and put that money toward a backlog in repairs, which last year was more than \$600 million.

"To have a family housed in a half-million dollar home doesn't make a whole lot of sense if you look at the opportunity that you have to convert that asset into a situation where you can provide social housing at less cost," Ootes said in 2007.

At the time TCHC officials spoke out against him.



Joyce Tait got a letter last week from the city saying her beachfront home was to be sold, though she'd been assured a decade ago she'd never have to move.

DAVID COOPER/TORONTO STAR

It was around that time that a staff report recommended the housing agency sell off about 370 of its 58,500 units, including three multi-residential buildings and 47 single-family homes.

In 2010, an aboriginal housing organization, Wigwamen, bought 20 of the homes for well below market value. Since then, 10 non-profit social agencies have expressed interest in purchasing 22 of the remaining homes. There are 29 units in total, 15 of which are occupied. They are located across the city, from High Park to the Danforth. In February, the city received approval from the housing ministry to do this. The remaining five homes would be put on the open market. The previous board decided to defer the decision until this Wednesday's meeting.

For former councillor Sandra Bussin, who put forward the motion 10 years ago so Tait would never have to leave, the recent developments are devastating.

"It's a business first model. Citizens second," she said. "As a city, we should have a heart and we should be taking care of our citizens, many of whom had lived in their homes for well over 30 years and the potential displacement and impact on those people is significant."

Bussin believes the motion should still stand today.

When asked if TCHC staff was aware a motion from 2001 would prevent the sale of the properties, a spokesperson replied: "The sale of houses is a process that requires a series of government approvals and includes multiple opportunities for individuals to voice their concerns."