



January 23, 2012

To: City of Toronto Executive Committee
cc: Mayor Ford, Minister Wynn, Toronto City Council

Re: **A temporary deferral for review of options is necessary prior to the sale of Toronto 's stand-alone homes**

On January 13 the Cities Centre at the University of Toronto hosted an all-day seminar on **A Better Strategy for Toronto's Public Housing**. Participants represented a wide range of expertise on the provision and management of public housing. A summary of the presentations and discussion is attached.

Participants at the seminar agreed that the worst thing the City could do is to act precipitously. Nor should a decision be based on consideration of short-term gain. A sale of these houses would not necessarily represent a net financial gain. The sale would displace families in need of family housing, and forever remove a significant stock of affordable family housing. The severe need for family housing will remain and various costs will appear in other city and provincial budget lines (social assistance, child welfare, health, education, etc.).

We, therefore, strongly urge the Executive Committee and City Council to delay making decisions on the sale of the stand-alone houses and instead engage in a careful examination of the options available to the City. Until the alternatives are fully explored, it would be wrong to seek Council or Provincial approval to sell off such a large number of family-oriented homes.

The seminar produced several strong ideas and possible solutions to the challenge of retaining these houses as affordable accommodation. The presentations and discussion were wide ranging including events associated with the development of the City's current public housing stock, lessons learned from these events, the general situation at the housing corporation and most specifically, the immediate issue before the Executive Committee and Council: the proposed sale.

Participants expressed particular concern about the impact of selling stand-alone houses, including the eviction of over 2000 tenants from their current dwelling and neighbourhood and the loss to the City of an important stock of housing for large families. While recognizing the need for additional revenue to undertake repairs we are particularly concerned that the multiple impacts of this decision have not been fully explored and debated. There is a need to discuss in detail the implications of the sale for the families living there and for the long-term preservation of a scarce public resource.

This discussion should focus on options for keeping these houses in some form of affordable accommodation. We are very much concerned that all of the options for retaining this stock as affordable housing have not been carefully considered. A number of alternatives are noted in the attached summary. Discussions concerning the future of this housing must take place in the context of accurate and complete information about the current situation and the alternatives. Indeed, there must be a careful review that considers the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Sincerely,

Eric Miller, PhD
Director

David Hulchanski, PhD
Associate Director

Frank Cunningham, PhD
Senior Advisor



Cities Centre Invitational Seminar
Friday, January 13, 2012

A Better Strategy for Toronto's Public Housing

Co-chairs: David Hulchanski & Frank Cunningham, University of Toronto

Speakers (in order of appearance): Anne Golden, Councillor Ana Bailao, Ron Struys, David Crombie, Tom Clement, Councillor Paula Fletcher, Joe Deschenes-Smith, Greg Kalil, Joy Connelly, Martin Blake.

Summary

Bob Murdie and David Hulchanski have prepared this summary. It is a composite of our notes from the daylong seminar. It is intended to be an outline record of what was discussed. It does not necessarily represent the views of any individual at the seminar.

Milestones in Canadian post WW II social housing policy that impacted on Toronto

- Albert Rose (1958) *Regent Park: A Study in Slum Clearance* (UofT Press). The benchmark study of Canada's first major public housing project.
- Michael Dennis and Susan Fish (1972). *Programs in Search of a Policy*, a book that played into what was already happening. Michael Dennis took a lead role in shaping Toronto's social housing policy in the 1970s, writing much of the Goldrick Task Force Report (*Living Room*) and becoming Commissioner of Housing.

What are the lessons from the 1970s?

How do we keep housing on the public agenda?

1. *The housing – community interrelationship*: There is a very deep connection between housing and community. They help answer: Who am I? Where do I belong? How do I behave and interact with others? These questions are best answered in small places. Housing policy needs to pay attention to the connection between housing and community (house/home, neighbourhood/community). Housing is physical and social. An understanding of the connection between housing and community is crucial for the well being of individuals, communities and a society. This understanding needs to be the starting point for decisions on housing policy.
2. *The necessity of seeking and creating broader partnerships and constituencies*: Who are your partners in a policy issue? What kind of a constituency are you trying to build? It is essential to explore new ways of partnering with others who may not at first glance share the same position. This includes developing partnerships with public, private and civil society actors and partnerships with a broad mix of elected officials.
3. *Leadership*: A political debate has a number of leaders. Widen the circle as much as possible (beyond the usual suspects). Leaders bring people together to listen, teach and learn. This will move the agenda along. Leaders who will bring a diverse set of new people to the table – widen the circle. They must pay attention to process.
4. *History is a great teacher*: Know and learn from and use the history and evolution of the policy issue. Answers come from history. History enhances an understanding of the present and informs thinking about the future. We need to better understand and employ our history.

Homelessness

- The Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force (Anne Golden, Chair, 1998). *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto* (looked at housing issues through the lens of homelessness)

Governments failed to pay attention to most of the recommendations. The recommendations were evidence-based and designed to be modest, reasonable, and therefore, easily implementable – if resources were allocated. Little progress has been made on addressing the causes of homelessness:

1. *Social*: inadequate response to mental health needs, addiction, social exclusion, discrimination.
2. *Economic*: dramatic change in the labour market (more low-wage jobs with few benefits, more “working poor”) and inadequate income support programs.
3. *Housing*: a dwindling supply of housing that the now more numerous low-income households can afford. Senior levels of government are providing very little assistance.

The BIG problem was the lack of affordable housing and supportive housing. The senior levels of government said we could not afford more affordable housing though in retrospect the cost was relatively little.

Solutions to the housing affordability issue are outlined in a report from the Conference Board of Canada (2010). *Building from the Ground Up: Enhancing Affordable Housing in Canada*. We need a significant increase in affordable housing but the times are tough compared to earlier decades.

Discussion arising from the Ann Golden and David Crombie presentations

1. *Inequality*: rate in Canada is growing faster than the US. Virtually all growth in incomes has gone to the top 20%. BUT less inequality is better for human quality and developing a strong social fabric – a socially cohesive society.
2. *From a culture of exclusion to compassion*: How do we change from a culture of exclusion to a culture of compassion? Takes good quality leadership (e.g., David Crombie in the 1970s).
3. *Public/Private Partnerships*: private sector can’t build cheaper but can share some of the risk.
4. *Seize opportunities*: Need to proactively seize opportunities (e.g., Pan Am Games).
5. *Exercise of political power*: Politics plays an important role (e.g., Senate Committee on Social Affairs could have played an important role but Art Eggleton (Social Affairs Committee) has been replaced by a Conservative as Chair).

Discussion of general situation at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)

1. *Management of housing*: The role of TCHC is to manage housing, not set policy. Question: how does TCHC best use its assets to serve a social / public objective?
2. *Loss of institutional memory*: 2010/2011 was a rebuilding period at TCHC with loss of senior management and most important, institutional memory. Also, with the dissolution of the Board there was a loss of intellectual capital. Tenant reps have been viewed as second class citizens. This has made management of the housing more complicated and reduced organizational momentum.
3. *Ideology and political partisanship trumps evidence and competence at the Board*: Council needs to allow TCHC to get back into the business of managing housing. The climate has become highly ideological and less practical (evidence-based).
4. *TCHC is now broken*: TCHC is “broken” and is no longer run as a business.
5. *Tenants no longer the focus*: How do you restore an alignment of interest between TCHC and the tenants?
6. *Too large?* Why one big corporation? Should TCHC be de-amalgamated into more manageable components, one of which might be the stand-alone houses given that

TCHC is not up to managing stand-alone units properly. Co-ops and non-profits effectively manage scattered site houses and buildings here and elsewhere.

Immediate Issue: The Proposed Sale of scattered or stand-alone houses

1. ***January 24:*** The proposal received TCHC Board approval in October, 2011 and goes to the City's Executive Committee on January 24, 2012.
2. ***Thousands to be evicted:*** The sale will lead to the eviction of 2000+ tenants. They have been promised housing elsewhere in TCHC but perhaps in a neighbourhood far away from where they are living now. We are dealing with people and their homes. How do we ask a family to leave thereby losing their local networks and displacing kids from their schools in order to do what? Save higher income taxpayers a bit of money by decreasing the small stock of family housing?
3. ***Housing for large families:*** Majority of these houses are 3/4/5 bedroom units. Therefore, an important stock for housing large families.
4. ***Policy of social mix vs. segregation:*** Most of these houses are in socially mixed neighbourhoods where they have become an accepted part of the community by local residents . . . so why sell?
5. ***Secrecy:*** Good policy making in a democracy is informed by facts. There is need for accurate and complete information about the sale so that informed discussion of the best option can take place. There also needs to be an analysis of just how significantly the proceeds from the sale of these houses will contribute to TCHC's massive repair backlog.
6. ***Multiple impacts not yet understood – or even identified:*** We need to be careful about selling off public assets for short term gain . The non-market family houses in neighbourhoods will likely never be replaced. There needs to be a thorough analysis of the impact of this sale – the pluses and minuses – and a careful evaluation of the range of other options.
7. ***Possible alternative options:***
 - Affordable home ownership for some units with a second mortgage that protects longer term affordability
 - Conversion of some to co-operative tenure by adding them to nearby existing co-ops
 - Use of some as supportive housing managed by existing non-profits specializing in supportive housing
 - Sell some of the houses that are too problematic (due to condition, location, etc.)
8. ***Sale of units:*** Though most agreed that the sale of units was fine if it contributed to meeting housing needs better, some expressed the view that none of the scattered houses should be sold and should be kept as some form of affordable rental. Instead we should be focused on increasing the supply of affordable housing and considering money that could be diverted from other resources.
9. ***Strategy and rationale for any sale:*** If there is to be sale of units leading to a decrease in available non-market affordable rental housing in the city, it must be done on the basis of a plan, with a clear rationale, following informed public debate. There should be no sale without a plan, preferably to retain these houses as part of the affordable stock.
10. ***Deferral of decision in order to make an informed decision on the options:*** Why rush into an irreversible action with a public asset? Council needs to establish a task force to advise on the best option(s) for the scattered and stand-alone housing (with a specific mandate and tight timeline).



INVITATION

Cities Centre Invitational Seminar
Friday, January 13, 2012, 9am to 4pm
Location: 246 Bloor St. West (at Bedford), Room 548

A better strategy for Toronto's Public Housing

Cities Centre at the University of Toronto invites you to participate in a housing summit on Friday January 13, 2012. Selected experts in finance, development, and social policy, together with housing providers, residents, and politicians, past and present, are being called together to try and chart a new future for public housing in Toronto.

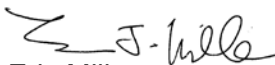
Our city is facing a serious public housing crisis. Thousands of people living in Toronto Community Housing are facing eviction and the waiting list continues to grow as governments talk of divestment rather than investment. For more than a decade, public policy has evolved slowly, if not stagnated, and the condition of Toronto's social housing has deteriorated significantly.

At Cities Centre we believe there is a better way forward. We cannot wait for governments at all levels to return to the housing field. We are pulling together a carefully selected group with the range of expertise and experience necessary to identify specific alternatives for the City of Toronto's very large and diverse housing portfolio. The focus includes financial renewal, alternative governance, corporate restructuring, and revitalization of the housing stock and its neighbourhoods. We intend to produce specific recommendations and identify the next steps for action.

Our opening keynote speakers have been confirmed: David Crombie and Anne Golden. The day will include both plenary and breakout sessions, and lunch.

As space is limited and our focus is specific, participation is by invitation only. Please **RSVP** to Pat Doherty at Cities Centre citiescentre@utoronto.ca by January 9. If you are unable to attend we will offer the opportunity to others.

Many thanks,


Eric Miller
Director


David Hulchanski
Associate Director


Frank Cunningham
Senior Advisor