

TO: Planning and Housing Committee

DATE: Tuesday, July 5, 2022

RE: **Local Priority Rules for Rent-Geared-to-Income Housing and Centralizing Access for Affordable Rental Housing** (Item PH35.18)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). My name is Mark Aston, and I am the Chair of the TAEH - a network of partners reaching across the city, all united in the vision of ending homelessness. We also serve as your non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with SSHA.

Our written deputation for today's committee meeting speaks to several important items that further our collective goal of making homelessness in Toronto rare, brief, and nonrecurring: Items 9, 18, 19, 20 and 22.

All these items support the Right to Housing, further access to safe and secure housing, contribute to preventing and ending homelessness in equity-seeking communities, support actions to protect and/or curb the loss of affordable housing in all Toronto neighbourhoods and increase the transparency and fairness of access systems.

I am speaking now to Item **PH35.20: Local Priority Rules for Rent-Geared-to-Income Housing and Centralizing Access for Affordable Rental Housing**.

The TAEH supports the recommended priority rule changes to the City's social housing program (RGI Housing) as well as creating a more streamlined, transparent and user-friendly coordinated central access system for the RGI and Affordable Rental Housing Programs in Toronto.

As you know, our current local priority rules for RGI have not been updated since 2002, and much has changed in Toronto's context, demographics, scope of affordable housing need, and in the risk or experience of homelessness. Overall, the recommended changes and actions before you today reflect these changes and align with the strategic actions of the 2020-2030 Housing TO Action Plan.

The recommendations also respond to the 2019 Auditor General's report to match City priorities with those in greatest housing need, and for staff to review the 2002 rules and recommend any additions or changes to the priority rules. They also respond to the feedback from community consultations.

RGI Priority Rules

The TAEH supports the recommended changes to the priority rules, with the following comments:

Adding a priority for tenants living in an RGI unit receiving housing supports that are now capable of living independently:

- This will create much needed flow throughout the housing continuum, thereby creating more supportive housing opportunities for those currently experiencing homelessness. Doing so is one explicit outcome of the Alliance's *Toronto Supportive Housing Growth Plan*, and TAEH will work actively with the Housing Secretariat and our partners in the broader supportive housing sector to support its implementation.

- We are pleased to see the important commitments in adding this priority group that the determination of a person’s readiness to reduce or stop supports is the supportive housing tenant’s and provider’s to make, and that all shifts require tenant consent.

Adding an Indigenous priority:

- Given the gross over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Toronto as compared to their percentage of our overall population, and the important City commitments noted in the report, this is a long-need priority rule.
- The TAEH fully supports Indigenous self-determination and that the recommended plan to implement this new priority will be co-developed with Indigenous partners.

Amending the homeless priority:

- Increasing the frequency of allocating available RGI units to people experiencing homelessness, including newcomers, to every 5th vacancy from the current 7th vacancy, will assist in creating better housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

Removing the Vulnerable Families priority:

- As the context and process for defining this priority have changed, and that therefore only 26 households with this priority remain on the current waitlist, it makes sense to remove it.
- We are pleased, however, that the report commits to ensuring a transition plan to ensure that these last households remain a priority for housing.

We are also pleased to see that referral agreements with housing providers for buildings targeting specific populations will continue.

Finally, the Alliance also supports the plan to monitor data on RGI households through the Housing Data Strategy to identify future recommendations to amend local priority rules to ensure that they remain aligned with changes in need and strategic actions.

A “one-window” Centralized Affordable Rental Housing Access System

Implementing this new system balances the feedback from community consultations that access opportunities are there for those most in housing need and for those that have been waiting the longest.

The positive outcomes of a more centralized approach that allow TAEH to support the related recommendations in today’s report include:

- Individuals and households will no longer need to find out in advance what type of housing program they are eligible for. They will simply enter their information and receive a list of options that match their eligibility.
- There will more, and better, non-web-based mechanisms for people to use. This is particularly important for people experiencing homelessness who do not often have ready access to computers.

- The administrative burden, currently too large to support quick processing for most, will be removed from housing providers. In future, they will receive a list of eligible tenants from the Housing Secretariat to proceed with according to their own screening/application processes.
- Once fully implemented all providers, both private and non-profit, will be mandated to use the Centralized Access System, giving the City greater control of allocating units across the waiting list and making it harder for individual developers and providers to rent outside of the priority rules.
- The City will be better prepared to allocate the new Inclusionary Zoning units as they are built.

Conclusion

Taken together, the changes recommended here today will help increase access to housing for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Toronto. They will increase fairness, accessibility overall for people in housing need, create better transparency, and simplify administration for housing providers, big and small, private and non-profit. We therefore urge you to approve this report with its set of recommendations.

Thank you,

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