

Re item 10.1, April 22, 2021 Emergency and Community Services Committee agenda

From Bill Johnston,

April 21, 2021

I write to support recommendations (a) and (b). I am not sure this item should be removed from the Outstanding Business List, as recommendations (c) suggests, since the report itself identifies more work needed to mitigate the effects of renovictions.

Every eviction is a double loss.

- The evicted tenant loses their housing and is forced onto a market where the going rents are likely higher than what they had been paying.
- And the rent on the vacated unit will rise.

The impact on evicted tenants is significant. As a report recently released by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation notes:

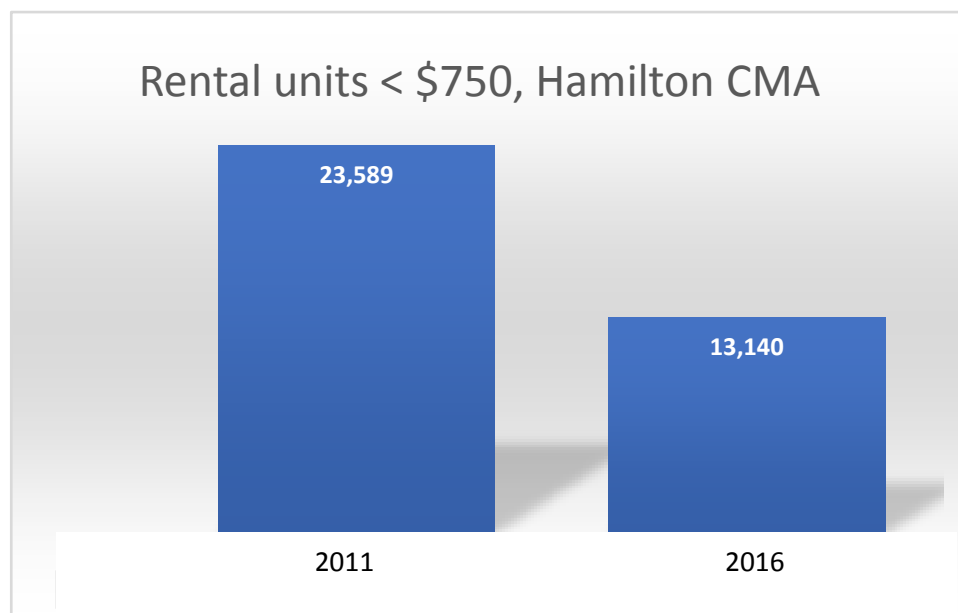
Evictions have profound impacts on tenants, including long-term impacts on tenants' physical and mental health, increased housing instability and vulnerability to homelessness, and negative impacts on children, youth, families, and wider communities. Tenants speaking about their experience of eviction used language of trauma and reported anxiety, fear, feelings of loss and depression, and other impacts. Evictions can lead to a cycle of increasing housing instability and can be an indicator of more complex needs.¹

There are also impacts on the community:

There are also widespread costs to society as a whole, including impacts on community levels of homelessness, shelter systems, emergency services, public assistance, healthcare services, and public assistance. Eviction prevention not only improves outcomes for tenants but arguably contributes to wider housing stability and ultimately can save taxpayers money.²

As noted, community impacts include rising rent levels. Ontario landlords can raise the rent by any amount on a vacated unit. That is a significant reason why the city is losing affordable housing units.

Between the 2011 and 2016 Census, the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area lost 10,400 private-market rental units that rented for less than \$750 a month. \$750 is affordable if your income is \$30,000.³



About 8,000 of those units would have been in the city of Hamilton. In that same period, Hamilton built about 365 new affordable units. So we lost about 20 affordable private-sector units for every one we built.

In addition, the number of subsidized units renting for less than \$750 also declined between 2011 and 2016, by 1,700 units.

Eviction prevention is just as important as building new units. And eviction prevention is far cheaper.

The measures outlined in the staff report will help some tenants defend themselves when they face eviction and that is helpful.

But the nature of evictions and the scale of evictions is changing in Canada, as the report mentioned above notes.

Previously, evictions were understood to operate at an individual or household level. With large corporate investment firms buying up entire buildings (and sometimes whole developments or communities) for redevelopment, however, en masse residential displacements are occurring (Crosby, 2020; Subramaniam, 2018; United Nations, 2014; Vancouver Tenants Union, 2018). The scale of these evictions affects not only larger numbers of households, but the broader housing market as well, and contributes to community erosion.⁴ ...

Renovictions and own-use evictions are occurring more frequently and can take place at a larger scale (whole buildings or communities), potentially affecting a wider cohort of individuals—not only lower-income or otherwise vulnerable people (Jang, 2019)⁵

There are financial costs to evictions, for both the tenants and the landlord (lack of rent while a unit is vacant), but the report notes:

Corporate landlords engaging in mass evictions, for example, may be relatively immune to the costs of eviction or find that profit-maximizing benefits outweigh the costs, if the long-term goal is to renovate or rebuild and significantly increase rental rates. Rather than a relatively individualized or one-time event or process faced by tenants and landlords, there are signs that evictions are increasingly part of a strategy to increase revenue streams.⁶

The report adds, “Many of the existing supports for tenants facing or experiencing eviction may have originally been designed originally to address a single household at a time. Existing services and programs may not adequately address the scale or magnitude of mass evictions, which may require more macro-scale or regulatory approaches.”⁷

The expansion of the Tenants Defence Fund to cover renovictions is welcome. Whether the amount provided is enough is unclear. I suggest the committee ask staff to report back in six months on how the measure is working and whether the amounts need to increase and also on the other steps referred to in the report:

- Updates on the Property Standards Bylaw
- The on-going licensing review, including using business licensing for landlords

- A tenant education program, which I suggest should include proactive steps to provide information to tenants of buildings whose ownership changes or when the owner submits a building permit application.

The issue of mass evictions, noted above, is a significant challenge, for tenants and for the city as it tries to ensure that everyone has an adequate home they can afford. It will take concerted efforts at all levels of government to tackle it, but the licensing powers that the city has and proactive education programs could go some distance to at least ensure tenants have the opportunity to have their *Residential Tenancies Act* right to return enforced, which would help both the tenant to continue their tenancy and the community by preserving existing lower-rent housing units.

¹ Zell, S., and McCullough, S. (2020). *Eviction and Eviction Prevention in Canada*. Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, the University of Winnipeg, page 3 of the executive summary, accessed April 19, 2021, https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_6/evictions-and-eviction-prevention-in-canada.pdf The report was released by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in April, 2021.

² Ibid, 4.

³ Calculation by Steve Pomeroy, based on Census data, provided in emailed correspondence with Bill Johnston, February 3, 2021. The proportion of rental units in Hamilton was calculated from Census data. The number of units of affordable housing built were calculated from city of Hamilton reports listing affordable housing units approved between 2003 and 2019.

⁴ Ibid, 9

⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷ Ibid, 9.