

Madam Mayor, Members of City Council and city staff and members the public:

My name is Bill Johnston and I am a resident of Dundas, Ward 13.

I begin by recognizing the budget challenges city council faces. You face criticism for doing nothing and criticism for raising taxes to do something. And a whole series of problems are worse today—from lack of affordable housing and homelessness to infrastructure to climate—because of lack of action or inadequate action in the past.

My focus is the city's housing crisis and the related crisis of homelessness. At least 28,000 Hamilton households are in core housing need. That Census number is a significant **underestimate**. Some are households in overcrowded housing or housing that needs major repairs. Most are households who pay too much for their housing and there aren't more affordable homes in the city to which they could move. Those in core need—mostly renters—face the constant stress and worry of trying to pay their rent and other, rising costs, and the constant fear of eviction. We need to prevent the loss of any existing affordable housing and build more.

I commend council for two significant housing-related decisions made in 2023:

- The unanimous approval for improvements to the vital services bylaw, creation of the Tenant Support Program and funds for the Tenant Defence Fund.
- and creating the Housing Sustainability and Investment Roadmap. You now have a strategy. And you created the Housing Secretariat to coordinate and expedite the work.

I have three proposals for council's consideration.

First, I urge council **not** sell city-owned land on which housing could be built. By owning the land, forever, the city maintains control of how it is developed and someday redeveloped, and the city can insist that developers provide higher proportions of affordable units than the province's very limited inclusionary zoning rules allow.

Second, I urge you to provide the needed funding, in the 2024 budget, to make your tenant protections actually work. As you recognize, those protections need both education, for landlord and tenants, and enforcement, which requires staff.

Third, I urge you to fund the first third of the three-year, \$31 million Multi-Year Housing Reserve Fund which you approved in principle last year. Without those funds, the city won't be able to attract federal investments to build new housing units. Rightly or wrongly, the federal government requires co-investments. And the key to solving the crises of unaffordable housing, homelessness and encampments is new non-profit affordable and/or supportive housing.

The non-profit housing providers that have come together in the Hamilton Is Home Collaboration are ready to build, almost immediately, at least 600 affordable units to help the city start to solve those problems. We need city investment to attract the federal investment to make that happen, and we need it now, in the 2024 budget.

We have no guarantee the federal funding will still be available after the next federal election, in 2024 or 2025, so there is an extra urgency—beyond the desperate need in our city—to maximize use of the funding that is available.

Thank you.