

## **Re: Addressing Renovictions, Tenant Displacement and Property Standards in Apartment Buildings in the City of Hamilton PED23072(a)**

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### **Hamilton is leading the way in preserving housing affordability and preventing homelessness in Ontario**

**January 16, 2024, By Melissa Goldstein**

A combination of tenant organizing and advocacy, City Councillors' political will and persistence, and City staff committed to putting that will into action, has produced a set of policies that, together, will make the city a leader in the ongoing fight against the real estate predators--the investor-landlords who are driving residents out of their homes and communities, and onto the street...or into a tent in a park.

The new draft Renovation Licencing and Relocation bylaw, which requires landlords who want to evict tenants to do necessary repairs or renovations to first get a renovation licence and either provide the tenants with alternative accommodations or pay them compensation until they are able to move back into their units, will be helpful in preventing landlords from make huge profits from kicking tenants out and secretly renting their units to different tenants at much higher rents. Without the huge financial incentive that currently exists to renovict tenants, they won't bother trying to renovict tenants in the first place.

The promise of this bylaw is that landlords who genuinely need to do repairs or renovations will either get a licence or work with the tenant to do repairs without ending their tenancy (by far the easiest and cheapest option), and profiteering investors will find that it's no longer profitable to renovict Hamilton tenants and stop.

This bylaw is a necessary complement to the recently approved new Safe Apartment Buildings Bylaw and improvements to the Vital Services and Property Standards Bylaws, which will improve the condition of rental housing and prevent landlords from forcing tenants out by neglecting repairs, and the recently approved Tenant Support Program, which will help tenants organize to fight and prevent all manner of predatory eviction attempts.

I am looking forward to the upcoming policies to regulate the demolition and conversion of existing rental properties to reduce demovictions and preserve the supply of affordable rental housing, which should close the last of the policy gaps that allow predatory landlords to profit from eroding our existing affordable housing supply and making tenants homeless.

A decade ago, Hamilton had some of the lowest rents in the province. Today it has some of the highest among Canada's largest cities — higher than Montreal, higher than Calgary — matched with a growing homelessness problem. Ontario's current rent control policy is at the centre of Hamilton's housing and homelessness crisis, as it creates a situation where long-time tenants in rent-controlled units often have rents far lower than current asking rent levels, making long-time tenants with low rents targets of investors who see their low rents as unrealized investment growth, rather than something that is critical to someone's ability to survive.

Tackling predatory eviction at the municipal level is much, much harder, than simply introducing vacancy control rent control at the provincial level, as it requires complicated, expensive, and inefficient workarounds. Hamilton's policy-makers recognize that the first step to ending the housing and homelessness crisis is to protect tenants and preserve whatever affordable homes we still have. But in the face of persistent inaction from first Liberal, and now Conservative, provincial governments, I appreciate how hard the City of Hamilton has been working to do everything in its power to stop a problem effectively downloaded onto it by the provincial and federal governments. In the absence of good provincial rental housing policy and measures to rein in residential real estate speculation, all of the initiatives the City has been developing are critically necessary.

Now it's time for other governments -- municipal, provincial, *and* federal-- to step up and do the same.

*Melissa Goldstein is a Toronto-based researcher with the Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative and worked for the City of Hamilton in the spring/summer of 2023 to provide input into the City's renoviction prevention framework.*

