

December 2020



**To the Mayors and Councillors
Toronto & York Region**

Canadians were already in a housing insecurity crisis when COVID exposed and exacerbated the cruelty of homelessness, the dangers of under-housing, and the vulnerability of those without access to affordable housing. Now, we're in a second wave and winter is arriving.

To our shame, it is people on the margins and intersections of society who are most negatively affected by housing insecurity, including racially marginalized and Indigenous residents, newcomers, and women.

Our rental housing crisis is the result of choices by all levels of governments, supported by large private sector landlords and investors. We call on all governments to act on behalf of and be publicly accountable to Canadian residents, not wealthy special interests.

Increasing the supply of stable affordable rental housing is key. Given the current regulatory framework, and the need to constantly extract profit, trying to solve the problem through large scale private rentals is not a solution. To solve the housing crisis, we have to move away from for-profit, market-based rental housing, and towards provision of much more social housing through co-ops, government-owned public housing, and non-profit organizations.

In the meantime, we need effective rules to protect tenants and require true affordable rental housing to be included in new developments. With shelters, our goal must be to get rid of them through progressive housing, support and prevention programs, but until then we must treat homeless people more humanely. These calls reflect the direct experiences of our members and the communities where we live.

For a few decades, the Labour Council Development Foundation became one of the key builders of co-ops in Toronto until social housing programs were decimated by the federal and provincial governments.

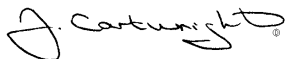
We have seen and learned during COVID that we **can** change. We have seen how unhealthy it is for people to be crowded into inadequate housing and we have housed homeless people in hotels. We briefly halted evictions. Canada's Rapid Housing Initiative shows that governments can think creatively about the rapid construction of affordable housing, but "financialization" of real estate may cause loss of affordable units outweighing the 3,000 estimated to be built. New housing initiatives need to be bigger, ongoing, and include additional regulatory changes.

To help us “build back better,” we call on municipal governments to:

1. Participate in establishing a fully-funded national housing program (including grants and ongoing housing supports, not just loans) whereby municipal, provincial and federal governments quickly implement a comprehensive plan to fund and build permanent affordable social housing, including co-ops, government and non-profit organizations
2. Define “affordability” in collaboration with housing advocacy groups and housing crisis experts
3. Retain affordable housing by regulating short-term rentals such as AirBNB, imposing a tax on vacant units, and enhancing RentSafe enforcement to ensure healthy homes
4. Expand affordable housing by implementing mandatory inclusionary zoning
5. Expand and humanize the existing system of shelters, including more use of hotel rooms to handle the emergency, provide health and support services to people who are homeless, and invest in Streets to Homes programs across greater Toronto
6. End municipal orders and police action to evict homeless encampments during COVID

A massive publicly-supported social housing program would not only address issues highlighted by the pandemic, it would create good jobs and help with the Greater Toronto region’s economic recovery.

Yours truly,



John Cartwright
President