

As province prepares to download housing programs: Co-ops across Ontario demand public hearings

Co-ops across Ontario have sent more than 100 letters to the provincial government demanding public hearings on the upcoming legislation to transfer provincial social housing programs to municipalities.

Delegates at the Ontario Region annual meeting in Ottawa on May 19 passed a resolution to launch the campaign. For details about what you can do, please see the attached flyer.

We are urging all co-ops - federal and provincial - to send letters. Federal co-ops are not directly affected. Administration of their programs will remain at the federal level. But they have a right to join with provincial co-ops in calling for hearings.

“From Ainslie Wood Co-op in Owen Sound to Woodrose Co-operative Homes in Welland, the response from housing co-ops has been fantastic,” says **Joyce Morris**, President of the Ontario Council. “By now, the Ontario government has received the clear message that it shouldn’t rush through important legislation without full and open public hearings.”

“Ontario Region staff have been meeting with ministry officials, but we don’t know what will be in the legislation. And we still don’t know when the government will introduce the bill,” says Morris. “It could be

tabled within days. More likely, it will be delayed until the fall sitting of the Ontario Legislature, which starts on September 25.”

We expect the province to make major changes to co-op operating agreements before it hands over administration to municipalities. Good or bad, these changes will have a big impact on whether co-ops can provide good quality, affordable homes.

Globe says province plans big changes for RGI

The Toronto *Globe and Mail* reported recently that the province is planning major changes in rent-geared-to-income (RGI) programs for low-income households. The story refers to changes that would affect households that also receive assistance under the Ontario Student Assistance Plan or other provincial programs.

“We don’t know if the province plans to take the steps reported in the *Globe* story, but we do know that they are looking at big changes in this area,” says Morris. “When the federal-provincial Social Housing Agreement was signed last November, the government said it wanted to integrate RGI with other assistance programs. In March of this year, a provincial working group recommended that this happen. The

uncertainty around government plans for RGI is one of the many reasons why our campaign for public hearings is so important.”

Ontario members meet in Ottawa

More than 600 delegates, alternates, staff and observers gathered in Ottawa on May 19 for the annual meeting of the Ontario Region of CHF Canada. More than 250 members sent delegates.

You will find a brief report on the meeting in the national edition of *Newsbriefs*. The text of resolutions passed at the meeting and other annual meeting material will be posted on the CHF Canada web site at <http://www.chfc.ca>.

“It was a very successful meeting,” says Morris. “Members gave direction on the key issues of social housing reform and the need for more affordable housing.”

We’d like to hear from you. If you haven’t already sent in your evaluation, please do so now. We carefully review all the comments and suggestions from members to make changes in the next annual meeting.

Conflict of interest book

CHF Ontario Region launched a new book on conflict of interest in housing co-ops at our annual meeting. The book updates and replaces an earlier set of materials that the Ontario Region sent to all provincial co-ops.

It includes model conflict of interest and spending by-laws, plus advice on confidentiality and codes of conduct.

For more information, click on the Co-op Housing Bookstore web site at <http://www.coophousing.com/bookstore.html>. Or call the Co-op Bookstore at 416-465-8688.

New Ontario Council

At the annual meeting, members re-elected **Joyce Morris, Mark Klein** and **Marg Uhelak** to the Ontario Council. **Lori-Anne Gagne** was re-elected to the Northern Ontario member at a meeting of members in Sault Ste. Marie in April. The new Council:

- ☞ **Joyce Morris**, President (at-large member)
 - ☞ **Mark Klein**, Vice-President (at-large member)
 - ☞ **Lori-Anne Gagne**, Second Vice-President (Northern Ontario member)
 - ☞ **Brian Burch**, Treasurer (at-large member)
 - ☞ **Donna Charbonneau**, CHF Canada director
 - ☞ **Vince Hall** CHF Canada director
 - ☞ **Mark Paul**, Federations’ representative
 - ☞ **Tina Stevens**, At-large member
 - ☞ **Marg Uhelak**, Staff Organizations’ representative
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Tax assessment appeals: We want to hear from you

In 1998 the Ontario government changed the way property taxes are set. They put in place what they call the Ontario Fair Assessment System. This is another name for market value assessment.

Under the new system, housing co-ops continue to be taxed like ownership housing

(Residential/Farm), not like rental housing (Multi-residential) which pays a much higher rate. However, many co-ops have faced big tax increases when their property was assessed under the new system.

A big part of the problem is that assessors started to compare co-ops to condominiums when they looked for similar properties to set the market value. Recently, some assessors have started to compare non-profit housing co-ops to equity co-ops instead. This still results in property taxes for many co-ops that are higher than they used to be.

CHF Ontario doesn't think that it is fair to compare the market value of non-profit housing co-ops to condominiums and equity co-ops because our co-ops cannot be sold in the market.

We are trying to get the Assessment Review Board to use an approach that is fairer to our co-ops. We will keep you up to date on this issue through *Newsbriefs*. To help us with our work in this area, we want to keep track of property tax appeals by co-ops. If you have appealed your taxes, please call **Sombo Saviyé** in our office with the details.

Meanwhile, all co-ops should take a close look at their taxes and appeal if they seem too high. Remember, reassessments are now being done every two years so you need to check your assessment regularly.

There are two ways you can appeal your assessment:

- ☞ First, you can ask for your assessment to be reviewed informally by your Regional Assessment Office. This is called a reconsideration. Start by calling your local office and talking to an assessor. You can also get a copy of the

form to use at the Ministry of Finance web site. Point your browser to www.assessmentontario.com, then click on "documents" then click on "request for reconsideration".

- ☞ Second, if you are not satisfied with the result of the reconsideration, you can formally appeal the assessment to the Assessment Review Board.

For more information and advice, call **Sombo Saviyé** at 1-800-268-2537, ext. 235 (in Toronto, call 416-366-1711). E-mail: ssaviye@chfc.ca

Please don't forget. . .

- ☞ To send us copies of letters that your co-op has sent to the Ontario government requesting public hearings on the upcoming social housing download legislation.
- ☞ Also, send us a copy of any replies that you receive to your letter.

Fax CHF Ontario Region at 416-366-3876. Or call **Brian Eng** or **Michael Shapcott** at 1-800-268-2537 (in Toronto, call 416-366-1711). E-mail: beng@chfc.ca or mshapcott@chfc.ca.

CHF Canada on the web:

<http://www.chfc.ca>