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Department of Urban Planning and Public
Works

Ward/Quartier

City Wide

- Planning and Economic Development
Committee / Comité de l'urbanisme et de
l'expansion économique
- City Council / Conseil municipal

Action

Rooming House Landlords Association Evaluation

Évaluation de l'Association des propriétaires de maison de chambres

Recommendations

1. That the Department's evaluation of the Rooming House Landlords Association, attached as Document 1, be received.
2. That the Department report in one year's time with an up-date on rooming house issues and initiatives, including evaluations of the Rooming House Landlords Association, the Rooming House Response Team, and the option of regulating rooming houses through licensing.



November 16, 1998 (8:28a)

Edward Robinson
Commissioner of Urban Planning and Public
Works

PW:pw

Contact: Paul Weber - 244-5300 ext 1-3993



November 16, 1998 (12:38p)

Approved by
John S. Burke
Chief Administrative Officer

Financial Comment

There are no direct financial impacts associated with the recommendations.


November 13, 1998 (3:13p)

for Mona Monkman
City Treasurer

BH:ari

Executive Report

Reasons Behind Recommendations

Recommendation 1

On April 15, 1998, City Council deferred consideration of rooming house licensing until November of 1998 to extend to the Rooming House Landlords Association (RHLA) the opportunity to further fulfill its objectives. Staff had reported in April, 1998 that the RHLA had begun only recently to operate formally and that what appeared to be needed to achieve results, in addition to periodic advice from the City, were time and momentum. Council agreed, and extended to the RHLA another six months to fully develop its mandate. It also directed staff to report back in November of 1998 with a one-year evaluation of the Association.

Document 1 reports the progress of the Rooming House Landlords Association during the course of the last year, including accomplishments and works-in-progress, concerns and constraints from the City's perspective, and opportunities for further development.

Recommendation 2

Staff has been reviewing and reporting on issues and initiatives in relation to rooming houses in a relatively comprehensive and regular way since May of 1996. In addition to the Rooming House Landlords Association, evaluated under Recommendation 1, the Rooming House Response Team has made an important and positive contribution to the rooming house situation by addressing, with an assortment of resources, both chronic and acute problems faced by rooming house landlords, tenants and/or neighbours. Document 2 provides a brief update on the Response Team contribution.

With respect to licensing of rooming houses, landlords continue to believe that licensing, in addition to being financially onerous to them (and to tenants as increased costs are passed on), will simply not address many of the behavioural and social problems that communities report

having with rooming houses. Experiences with licensing in other cities tend to support that opinion.

For its part, staff believes that, on balance, a Response Team approach to specific problems, together with a committed and productive Rooming House Landlords Association working to deliver more general and permanent improvements, represents the best, most directed and economical way of addressing rooming house problems. As a result, there is no recommendation in this submission that licensing be implemented now. Instead, it is proposed that the Department report again in a year with an evaluation of the rooming house situation including up-dates on the Association, the Response Team, and licensing if warranted.

Consultation

A draft report was distributed for comment to twenty stakeholders who have been closely involved with the City's rooming house initiatives and who have some familiarity with the Landlords Association. Four responses were received, three in support of the work undertaken to date and the recommendations of the report, and one not satisfied with results thus far in relation to a rooming house in her Sandy Hill community and favouring licensing. Document 4 contains more details of the consultation process and results.

Disposition

The Department of Urban Planning and Public Works, Planning Branch to advise the Rooming House Landlords Association and other concerned parties of Council's disposition.

List of Supporting Documentation

- Document 1 - Evaluation of Rooming House Landlords Association
- Document 2 - Up-date on Rooming House Response Team
- Document 3 - Consultation Details

Part II - Supporting Documentation

EVALUATION OF THE ROOMING HOUSE LANDLORDS ASSOCIATION

Document 1

Over the past year (from August 1997 to October 1998) the Rooming House Landlords Association met bi-weekly, for a total of approximately 30 times. The top four priorities for action identified by the landlords during this time were:

- membership building;
- serving as Response Team members;
- responding to and participating in any actions that result from their proposal's recommendations (from the May 1997, "Proposal by the Rooming House Landlords Working Group");
- educating others on the Association's existence and mandate, and gathering as much information as possible on resources that are available, and then disseminating that information to their membership.

Since that time the landlords have continued to make progress in all four of the priority areas they identified.

1. Accomplishments to Date

1.1 Membership

With assistance from the City of Ottawa, the landlords have contacted other rooming house landlords and informed them of their activities. The Rooming House Landlords Association is now a chapter of the Ottawa Region Landlords Association (ORLA). Thus, they are now a legal organization with a constitution and by-laws. Through ORLA, the landlords are kept informed about information relevant to landlords (for example, the new Tenant Protection Act). Some rooming house landlords have attended ORLA training sessions. Also, as part of their ORLA membership, the Rooming House Landlords Association has continued to produce an information page in the ORLA newsletter.

1.2 Response Team Participation

Members of the Rooming House Landlords Association have continued to act as a valuable resource to Rooming House Response Teams established to deal with various addresses. Landlords have attended Response Team meetings where they have provided advice and practical assistance in dealing with rooming house issues. One of the landlords has volunteered to take calls from other landlords who are in crisis, and has agreed to let his phone be used as a hot line.

1.3 Follow-up actions from the Rooming House Landlords Working Group Proposal

Follow-up on the recommendations that were sent out to other organizations and governments has resulted in three significant actions:

- The Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service has identified a specific Inspector as contact for all rooming house initiatives, including the Association;
- the Royal Ottawa Hospital has assessed mental health issues, particularly related to crisis situations, in rooming houses;
- and the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton Social Service Department has begun to dialogue with landlords about how to better work with them.

As a result of the Royal Ottawa Hospital assessment, rooming house landlords can now access their Outreach Team through the Rooming House Response Team. The Outreach team provides on-site assessments for people who are mentally ill and perceived to be in crisis.

Members of the Rooming House Landlords Association have also participated in two pilot programs that were funded through the Community Grants program by the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. One of these was the Tenant Peer Support pilot project, in which two former roomers visit tenants of rooming houses who are in need of advice or friendship to prevent evictions. The other project was the Life Skills Project, sponsored by the single men's shelters in Lowertown and Sandy Hill, that placed stable shelter clients in rooming houses with support from a Life Skills worker who would visit occasionally and seek to ensure that the tenant develops the skills that were needed to keep their own place, and live independently

1.4 Educational Work

The Rooming House Landlords Association has organized two “educational seminars” for their membership to date--one entitled “Working Co-operatively with the Police”, and the other entitled “Understanding City Requirements for Rooming Houses”.

The Rooming House Landlords Association is in the process of producing a “Best Practices Information Sheet” for rooming house landlords as well as a brochure advertising their organization. The Best Practices document is a summary of lessons learned and tips from landlords involved in the Association. It is meant to provide other landlords with relevant practical advice on how to better manage their rooming houses.

Representatives of the Rooming House Landlords Association have also met with the community associations in those areas of the city that have the greatest number of rooming houses: Centretown, Dalhousie, Sandy Hill, and Hintonburg. This was undertaken to let the community

associations know what actions the landlords have undertaken and plan to undertake, as well as to hear concerns that these communities have in relation to rooming houses.

The table below summarizes some of the Landlord Association relevant statistics and activities for which there is data.

Statistic	Number
Number of landlords in the Rooming House Landlords Association	60
Number of rooming house landlords in the City of Ottawa (estimate)	110
Meetings of the Landlords Association (for period of Aug. 97 to Oct. 98)	30
Response Team meetings that the Landlords participated in	9
Instances of advice to the Response Team	13
Educational seminars for other landlords	2
Meetings with community associations (Centretown, Dalhousie, Hintonburg, and Sandy Hill)	4
Meetings with service providers (e.g. Royal Ottawa Hospital)	4

2. Limitations

While the Rooming House Landlords Association has made some notable achievements in the past year, staff believes there are limits to what the Association can be expected to accomplish in addressing chronic rooming house issues. These are listed in point form below. Potential strategies to address these limitations are outlined in italics after each point.

2.1 Landlords are dealing with some problems which are simply beyond their control.

Rooming house landlords provide affordable housing for people who are coping with cutbacks to social services, de-institutionalization from mental health facilities and lack of employment opportunities. Tenants are at greater risk of crisis than ever before.

The Rooming House Response Team and the Landlords Association can work together to identify new resources for landlords and tenants to access when faced with crisis. Significant progress already has been made in accessing mental health, police and welfare services.

2.2 Given the volunteer nature of the Association, the landlords' main tools are education and peer pressure; in some situations these are not be enough to address chronic issues.

It must be acknowledged that given the volunteer nature of the landlords' initiative there are limits to what the Landlords can achieve in terms of creating alternatives to licensing. The bulk of the work addressing rooming house concerns will continue to rest with the Response Team which includes a full-time Coordinator and a part-time Community worker to co-ordinate and monitor its work.

- 2.3 Landlords whose properties are being scrutinized by a Response Team have at times refused the assistance of a landlord from the Association. Some believe another landlord cannot provide relevant advice while others may simply not wish to have their business exposed to other landlords, who may after all be competitors. Some of these landlords have declined to be members of the Landlords Association.

For the most part, the number of non-cooperating landlords remains small. Nevertheless, staff believes that opportunities exist for increased consultation between the Landlords Association and the Response Team from which new strategies can be developed to address the above concerns. To date, the landlords asked to participate on Response Teams have been very forthcoming when assistance has been requested.

- 2.4 Some landlords continue to deny the Response Team Community Worker access to their properties and view the worker's presence as City interference in the management of their properties.

A small number of landlords have longstanding disputes with community agencies and City officials that contribute to a lack of trust and an unwillingness to be open to the presence of outside workers. Nonetheless, the Response Team has been able to maintain working relationships with these landlords even if its effectiveness is somewhat limited.

3. Opportunities

Despite the above limitations, staff believes there are several areas where opportunities exist for the Landlords Association to strengthen the important role it plays in addressing rooming house issues. Many of these areas for action come from the Association's own proposal released to the City in May of 1997. The list below summarizes suggested areas for continued and future action.

- 3.1 Continue to participate in Response Teams and/or act in an advisory capacity in difficult situations;
- 3.2 Work with the Response Team to develop stronger contacts with community associations concerned with rooming house issues;
- 3.3 Act as an advisory body to assist the City in identifying and developing new strategies for dealing with chronic rooming house issues;

- 3.4 Continue to approach social service agencies to develop more resources for rooming house landlords (the Response Team has agreed to assist in the landlords in making these connections);
- 3.5 Continue to build Association membership and its functions;
- 3.6 Continue to produce and distribute materials aimed at addressing rooming house issues.

Staff would plan to work with the Association over the next year to exploit the opportunities identified above. The extent to which accomplishments on those fronts are achieved will form the basis of next year's evaluation report, proposed under Recommendation 2.

The landlords themselves have expressed a commitment to continue to work together as an Association and to work with the City, as it can, to address rooming house issues. It must be recognized that alone the Association cannot be expected to address all community concerns regarding rooming houses. Working in tandem with the Response Team though, the Association is a key component in an alternative framework to licensing.

UPDATE ON THE ROOMING HOUSE RESPONSE TEAM

Document 2

1. Background

In November of 1996, City Council approved the formation of a Response Team approach to address both acute and chronic problems at specific rooming houses. The core members of the Response Team were to be a co-ordinator, a community worker and the affected Ward Councillor. Other resources, such as Police, Fire and Property Standards, were to be drawn in on an as-needed basis for each property. The approach that evolved was to maximize the communication and co-operation between all parties concerning the specific address, and to develop a set of commitments by each party as to specific actions that would be taken. These commitments were written up as a “strategy” for that property, and provided to all parties. The Community Worker followed up on the commitments, and reported difficulties to the Co-ordinator who would take additional action and set up meetings as required.

In mid-January 1998, a survey evaluating the Response Team was undertaken. In general, there was strong and widespread support for the approach, especially as it contributed to improved communication between Response Team members, an understanding of the issues and the resolution of problems associated with individual addresses.

2. Summary Update

Since its inception the Response Team has worked at 56 rooming houses. Rooming houses are identified as candidate addresses by the Response Team if they are thought to need attention. Input to determine these addresses came from a wide variety of sources including social service agencies, City Departments, RMOC Departments, outreach workers, City Councillors and the Response Team Community Worker, whose duties include visiting the property. Of this group of candidate addresses the Response Team has been active at approximately 23 addresses. This would mean the Response Team has contacted neighbours, tenants, the landlord, researched the property’s history with other Departments, and physically visited the property on a regular basis.

Of the active properties, a smaller number actually require community meetings. At these meetings, all parties concerned with the address are invited to discuss the issues at the property and to develop potential solutions. These meetings are often run as community mediations with the Response Team playing a facilitator’s role on behalf of the concerned parties. To date, the Response Team has held 19 meetings regarding 16 properties (some properties have had more than one meeting). The majority of properties required only one meeting to initiate improvements. The incidence of decreased complaints is based on the Response Team’s record of calls from concerned community members, community worker visits and calls, and complaints from Councillors’ Offices.

There remains a small number of rooming house addresses which continue to pose difficulties for the Response Team. One of the Response Team's objectives over the coming year is to work in a more collaborative fashion with communities where these rooming houses are located. To this end, better systems of communication and accountability will be set up at these addresses and every effort made to ensure communities are integral to the work of the Response Team.

The Response Team is scheduled to be re-evaluated at year-end 1999.

A summary description of the work of the Rooming House Response Team in its first 18 months of operation is included in the following table:

Interventions	Number
Candidate Rooming Houses	56
Properties where the Response Team has been active	23
Incidence of decreased complaints at properties where the Response Team has been active	18
Community Meetings	14
Meetings with landlords	38
Visits to properties	175
Incidence of Crisis Intervention	11
Meetings with other service providers	45

CONSULTATION DETAILS

Document 3

A draft report was distributed for comment to twenty stakeholders who have been closely involved with the City's rooming house initiatives and who have some familiarity with the Landlords Association. Four responses were received.

The **Rooming House Landlords Association** responded with a letter supporting the recommendations of the report and expressing its intention to continue to work with the City in addressing rooming house issues.

Two representatives of the **Centretown Community Health Centre** responded with support for the recommendations and a request for clarification on several matters. Staff plan to meet shortly with these representatives to clarify any questions.

A representative from the **McNabb Community Neighbourhood Improvement Bunch** said the report looked fine.

A **community member** who lives near a rooming house in **Sandy Hill** expressed her opinion that neither the Rooming House Landlords Association nor the Response Team are effective in dealing with the small number of worst-case rooming houses. The respondent would prefer a licensing scheme that included a series of escalating fines designed to make operating "problem" rooming houses financially unfeasible. The resident noted that the Response Team has not found a permanent solution to the problems associated with the rooming house in her neighbourhood and that there has been insufficient community consultation to date.

Staff Response to Above Concerns

There remains a small number of rooming houses that, despite interventions on the part of the Rooming House Response Team (often with assistance from the Landlords Association), continue to create problems in their neighbourhood. One objective of the Response Team during the course of the next year is to develop new strategies to work in a more collaborative fashion with communities in which such rooming houses are located. To that end, better systems of communication and accountability will be set up, and every effort will be made to ensure communities are integral to the work of the Response Team.

With respect to the licensing proposal favoured by the resident, it has been reported to Council previously, and it remains the case, that licensing cannot address the management and social concerns that give rise to many of the rooming house problems experienced by communities.