

MINUTES

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON

THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 1999

CHAMPLAIN ROOM

1:30 P.M.

PRESENT

Chair: A. Munter

Members: D. Beamish W. Byrne, B. Chiarelli, L. Davis C. Doucet, D. Holmes, H. Kreling,
M. McGoldrick-Larsen

Regrets: A. Loney

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

That the Community Services Committee confirm the Minutes of the 8 July 1999 meeting, and that the Minutes of 17 June 1999 be held, pending review by the Committee pursuant to a request by a member of the public.

CARRIED

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- Notes: 1. Underlining indicates new or amended recommendations approved by Committee.
2. Items requiring Council approval will be presented on 13 October 1999 in Community Services Report No. 36, except Item 3 which will be presented to Council of 22 September 1999 in Community Services Report No. 35.

PRESENTATIONS

1. PRESENTATION OF FUNDS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

- Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee report dated 7 Sep 99

The Regional Chair, Bob Chiarelli, and Alex Munter, Chair of the Community Services Committee, presented cheques to twenty agencies whose programs have been recommended for funding through the 1999 National Child Benefit Program to support families and children.¹

Committee Chair Munter thanked the Social Services Department for its commitment and caring. He expressed the hope that these funds will mark the turning of the tide for community agencies and the recognition of the valuable work they perform for the citizenry.

Chair Chiarelli said he was honoured to work with community agencies to improve the fate of some of Ottawa-Carleton's less fortunate citizens. He posited that calling social issues "soft services" is a misnomer since these are the most difficult services to deliver. Chair Chiarelli spoke about the excellent team on Regional Council, advancing the view that tough debate generates good policy. As well, he praised the leadership of Councillor Munter as Chair of the Community Services Committee.

That the Community Services Committee receive this presentation for information.

RECEIVED

2. CENTRETOWN LAUNDRY CO-OPERATIVE

- Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee report dated 7 Sep 99

The Committee heard from Betty Gross and Steven Rose, who spoke about the Centretown Laundry Co-operative, a new and unique service targeting the financially and socially marginalized members of the Centretown community.

Mr. Rose noted the response in the community has been positive, and residents are excited about the laundry co-operative. He pointed out that other similar facilities could be established and he posited the project has a bright future ahead of it.

Committee Chair A. Munter thanked the presenters and wished them good luck. Councillor D. Holmes said this project was a long time developing, and she thanked the representatives for their work in bringing it to fruition.

That the Community Services Committee receive this presentation for information.

RECEIVED

¹ A complete list of the agencies and programs is held on file with the Committee Co-ordinator.

REGULAR ITEMS

SOCIAL SERVICES/SOCIAL HOUSING

3. “HOUSING FIRST”: USE OF REGIONAL PROPERTY

- Planning and Development Approvals Commissioner and Special Advisor,
Social Housing report dated 7 Sep 99

The Special Advisor on Social Housing, Joyce Potter, presented the report. It responds to a Council Resolution of 14 July 99, calling for the establishment of a “housing first” policy for surplus property, the preparation of an inventory of regionally-owned properties that could be used for affordable, rental housing and criteria under which these properties could be sold to non-profit housing providers.

Ms. Potter continued by saying the proposals before Committee in no way replace the need for the senior levels of government to take strong action to resolve social housing problems. Staff continue to work actively with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and with other organizations to encourage action from both the provincial and federal governments in this regard. Ms. Potter expressed the belief the Region can make available some of its properties for housing purposes. She noted that only two properties have been identified as truly surplus to the Region’s needs, whereas most of the others will be required in the longer term, mostly for transportation purposes. The two surplus properties are suitable for either sale or long-term lease to a non-profit group while the remaining five properties would only be available for a long-term lease.

Ms. Potter reminded Committee that Council has approved \$1 million for capital grants and staff will be going out with a Request for Proposals (RFP) from community groups; the RFP could include these seven regional properties, if approved by Council. Interested parties could package together a regionally-owned property and capital funds to re-develop the properties. In addition, provincial funds for homelessness initiatives could be used to provide support services. Staff recommend this be tried on a demonstration project basis and assessed as to whether it should become a regional policy. Ms. Potter spoke about other options, such as what is being done in Edmonton and Calgary, that is, creating a housing fund based on a percentage of the sale of surplus properties.

In response to a question from Councillor C. Doucet, the Planning and Development Approvals Commissioner, Nick Tunnacliffe, indicated staff considered only its current areas of responsibility in determining which properties were surplus to the Region’s needs. In addition, it was decided the best approach was to look at lands with buildings on them, since vacant lands would only result in relatively small write-downs in rental costs, and this would not necessarily translate into rents that are affordable to low income persons. Commissioner Tunnacliffe indicated there are other properties in the Region with buildings on them, but these have not yet been declared surplus, and these may become available at some point in time.

Public Delegations

Ms. Ann Chornenky, Ottawa Salus Corporation

Ms. Chornenky said Ottawa Salus Corporation has been providing housing for persons with mental illness for 22 years and is keenly interested in expanding the amount of housing available, since it has never been able to meet the need. She posited that housing for these clients is one way to prevent homelessness and she expressed support for the departmental recommendations. Ms. Chornenky described Ottawa Salus' Millennium Project, a number of units of bachelor housing dedicated to people with mental health problems and specifically targeted to people presently in emergency shelters: the agency is interested in the properties on Gladstone Avenue.

Ms. Chornenky spoke about Ottawa Salus' development on Flora Street, noting the agency secured a low enough mortgage by putting together funds from different sources. This ensures the people who live there can do so on the Shelter Allowance from the Income Maintenance Program, and always will be able to do so, an important feature of the program. The agency has been fundraising for two years and has set aside \$100,000 for its Millennium Project; it will ask Council for a donation of land and will request capital funding from either the Province or the Region to achieve its goal.

Speaking to the issue of housing stock, Ms. Chornenky expressed the view many people are on the street because they have been unable to find low cost housing they can actually live in. Ottawa Salus believes it can address the stock issue and protect it always for people with mental health problems: this is the mission of the organization.

Replying to a question from Councillor D. Holmes, Ms. Chornenky provided additional details about the support services available to residents of the Flora Street development and that would be replicated in any kind of housing;

- a part-time worker ensures people get integrated into the housing community and tries to resolve ongoing problems relating to housing tenure;
- every resident has a case manager, currently located with the Canadian Mental Health Association: this service is "portable", i.e., residents who leave the house retain that worker.

Ms. Chornenky, commenting on staff's assertion that lands with buildings represent a better investment, indicated this would not be the case with the Gladstone properties. Ottawa Salus would incur additional costs by having to demolish the existing properties since they are unsuitable for housing homeless, mentally ill persons.

Dennis Carr, Centretown Citizens' Ottawa Corporation (CCOC)

Mr. Carr said CCOC is a private, non-profit housing corporation, with a 25 year history of developing housing, primarily in Ottawa's central area. While expressing general support for the staff recommendations, he said he felt not enough land has been identified. He made reference to regionally-owned property at Laurier St./Bronson Avenue, which staff

have indicated is not surplus, as it will be required for the Bronson/Portage link, and the former Beaver Barracks site (Catherine/Metcalf/Argyle Streets), which was originally purchased for housing purposes.

Mr. Carr said he disagreed with staff's rationale for not considering vacant lands as part of the report, adding that the CCOC has studied this issue many times. Generally, the finding has been that, depending on the location of the property, free land brings approximately one-quarter of the rents down to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) housing benefit and this is a good percentage. He inquired as to the status of the former housing land bank, suggesting it can be re-tooled as a land bank for non-profit housing, and he expressed the hope the Region will become more aggressive in finding properties for housing purposes.

Nicholas Patterson, Economist

Mr. Patterson said it was important to distinguish between the homeless, approximately 1,000 people in Ottawa-Carleton, and those at-risk of being homeless, the 40% of the population that pays in excess of 30% of their income for accommodation. The homeless are in the most serious plight, and the facilities available to house them are sparse, rather poor and in short supply. Their plight can be improved by investing in between 300 and 600 units of rooming house-style accommodation with supplementary medical and psychological facilities. Resolving the problems of those at-risk of being homeless, the much greater number of individuals, should be attacked in a different manner. Mr. Patterson expressed concern at constantly seeing the two groups lumped together. In reality, they are so diverse it defeats any possibility of accomplishing anything not to have a specific program for homeless people and another of longer term character for the others.

Mr. Patterson said he was astonished to see a proposal to give away, lease or sell seven properties, with no appraisals and no information on the value of these properties. He expressed disbelief this would actually be done, calling it irresponsible and profligate on the part of the Region.

Debbie Barton, Chair, Ottawa-Carleton Social Housing Network

Ms. Barton spoke in support of the staff recommendations. She said many network members have been developing and providing social housing in the Region for years, and have a keen interest in continuing to develop non-profit housing. She expressed her gratitude to Council for exempting non-profit housing providers from Regional Development Charges, as this is viewed as a critical first step towards creating more affordable units in the community.

Ms. Barton said the community expected the report would contain a long list of properties for potential development. However, effectively only one site has been designated as surplus and the others represent only stop-gap measures, since they will be required in the future. She found it hard to believe that, across the entire Region, not one surplus land site could be found that was suitable for housing. She had not been aware that staff were looking only at sites with buildings and expected to see surplus land sites as well.

Ms. Barton pointed out that families and individuals on waiting lists are now being told they will have to wait at least 5 to 7 years for subsidized housing. She commended the Region for taking a leadership role in declaring homelessness a National Disaster and for earmarking dollars for homelessness initiatives. The majority of homeless persons are in this situation primarily due to an affordability problem, so permanent, affordable housing is the answer, not only to address the homelessness situation but also the impending crisis in affordability. In 1989, there were 1,662 rental housing completions in the Region, including private units and subsidized housing. In 1998, only 23 rental units were completed. The vacancy rate has fallen to 2.1% from a high of 4.2% and Canada Mortgage and Housing predicts it will fall even more. Ms. Barton challenged Council to once again take a lead role in establishing a "housing first" policy and to further expanding the list of potential sites to include surplus lands without buildings for social housing.

Committee Discussion

Councillor D. Holmes presented two Motions, the first calling for monies from any properties sold to be deposited into a fund pending a decision on an affordable housing fund and the second calling for the Beaver Barracks parcel to be made available for housing purposes. She provided historical background on the purchase of this property, recalling that the Province of Ontario effectively ended a YM/YWCA project to develop part of it for affordable housing units. Councillor Holmes said her community is very interested in seeing part of the site be used for affordable housing and it may be appropriate land for the Salus Corporation to build its Millennium Project. A planning study will be required since the zoning will need to be changed. The study will also clarify whether there is any interest in commercial uses on Catherine Street, whether the entire parcel should be rezoned to commercial, whether the property should be split, and other options.

Planning and Development Approvals Commissioner Tunnacliffe said the Beaver Barracks site has been through the administrative process and will be the subject of a future report to the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee to declare it surplus. Mr. Tunnacliffe said he was unsure whether, originally, the entire parcel was to be used for affordable housing or whether only a part of it was to have been for this purpose.

Councillor J. Legendre said he was very supportive of trying to address housing needs. He posited that, when a piece of property is surplus, and it contains a dwelling, it makes sense to convert it and turn it over to a non-profit group if this is what the group wants, but this may not be the best way to proceed. Community groups should consider that the properties represent a certain amount of "subsidy": they can take this "subsidy" in cash and add whatever funds they may already have acquired to build something more suitable to their needs.

Councillor L. Davis asked whether the recommendations, which are all geared to non-profit housing providers, preclude a church or other organizations from presenting a proposal to address the needs within their own community. Ms. Potter replied the recommendations do not preclude this happening. The church or group would have to

form itself into a non-profit housing corporation, as has been done in the past. She indicated that one criteria would be the capability and the experience of that group in doing something related to housing to ensure their project will come to fruition.

In reply to further questions from Councillor Davis, Ms. Potter noted that an Information Session has been set up for the 29th of September, where staff will explain the guidelines of the call for proposals to interested parties. She added that the deadline for the submission of proposals is the middle of November. This will allow agencies sufficient time to put together their submissions. These will then be assessed according to all criteria, to ensure that whatever the Region spends its money on will address the needs of homeless persons. Ms. Potter concurred with a suggestion from the Committee Chair, A. Munter, that social housing staff would be able to assist in connecting newer groups who may wish to make a proposal with more established groups.

After further discussion, the Committee considered the following Motions:

Moved by D. Holmes

That the land at 424 Metcalfe Street, Ottawa, commonly known as Beaver Barracks, be the subject of further planning studies and that a portion of the site be made available for affordable housing in the future.

CARRIED
(D. Beamish dissented)

Moved by D. Holmes

Should any of the Gladstone properties be sold, the monies be deposited in a fund in anticipation of the future decision on the establishment of an affordable housing fund.

CARRIED

Moved by W. Byrne

That Community Services Committee recommend to Council that:

- 1. A demonstration project be approved to offer selected regional properties for \$1 to non-profit housing providers to create housing affordable to persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;**
- 2. The following surplus properties be offered on the basis of a long-term lease or sale at a cost of \$1 to non-profit housing providers through a Request for Proposals:**
 - 930 Gladstone Avenue, Ottawa
 - 934 Gladstone Avenue, Ottawa
- 3. The following buildings be leased for \$1 to non-profit housing providers through a Request for Proposals, for interim use as affordable housing until the properties are needed for regional purposes in the future:**
 - 140 Bronson Avenue, Ottawa
 - 810 Norton Avenue, Ottawa
 - 3479 St. Joseph Blvd., Cumberland
 - 551-553 Laurier Avenue, Ottawa
 - 555-561 Laurier Avenue, Ottawa
- 4. The list of regional properties in recommendations 2 and 3 be included in the Request for Proposals to be issued September 23 for Homelessness Initiatives Funding.**
- 5. Within one year of the approval of a proposal(s), staff report back to Council with:**
 - an evaluation of the demonstration project including an assessment of costs and benefits;
 - recommendations regarding the use of other regional properties for affordable housing;
 - recommendations for an affordable housing fund financed from the sale of surplus properties.

CARRIED, as amended

4. APPOINTMENTS TO OTTAWA-CARLETON HOUSING BOARD
- Regional Clerk's report dated 2 Sep 99

Councillor W. Byrne described the process chosen by Ottawa-Carleton Housing (OCH) to select tenants to sit on the Board of Directors. The process included the striking of a Nominating Committee comprised of OCH tenants and administrative support staff and the sending of an information bulletin to all tenants' associations, as well as notices given at local Staff/Tenant Interchange and other community meetings. All applications and resumés were reviewed against pre-determined criteria; 9 applicants were interviewed, and the four with the highest score were selected. The names of only three candidates appear in the report as one has left OCH and is no longer eligible.

Councillor Byrne continued by saying the problem is that, because a number of buildings and complexes are not represented on the Staff/Tenant Interchange Committee, they were unintentionally excluded from the process. In addition, a very qualified individual's application and resumé were lost; because of this, he was not part of the process and did not discover this fact until it was too late. The Councillor said a more democratic process would be one similar to that used by City Living, where tenants are elected by their peers throughout the community.

Councillor Byrne pointed out that the people recommended are qualified, active, knowledgeable on tenant issues and dedicated to their communities. She posited that any frustration they might feel would be equaled by that of the tenants who have not been part of the process and who have no representation on either the Staff/Tenant Interchange or on the Board of Directors. The Councillor felt the Board of OCH should not miss this opportunity to ensure a more inclusive process is used to select its tenant representatives. Councillor L. Davis spoke about the fact that only a small number of people can put their names forward for the Staff/Tenant Interchange Committee. She suggested it was important to look at different categories of tenants, i.e., those in mixed usage buildings, in seniors' buildings, and at different criteria for different buildings. The Councillor felt the process should be open to all tenants. She posited the best qualified individuals will emerge and this will take nothing away from the persons whose names have been put forward.

Louise Bazinet, began by saying it was of utmost importance there be tenants on the Board of Directors of Ottawa-Carleton Housing. She wondered whether OCH staff keep the Board informed of problems, noting these matters are always brought forward, through tenant associations, at Community House meetings. Ms. Bazinet thanked the Committee for initiatives such as the Task Force on Poverty, the National Child Benefit Program Allocations Committee and for providing opportunities for participation on the Board of Directors to tenants of OCH.

Councillor Davis thanked Ms. Bazinet for wanting to make things run more smoothly for other tenants. She suggested the Board of Directors will need to look at paying for child care services, for parking and/or other transportation costs, to ensure the process is totally inclusive.

Moved by W. Byrne

That this item be referred to the Board of Ottawa-Carleton Housing, for amendment to the selection process to allow for election to the Board by the tenants, similar to the procedures employed by City Living.

CARRIED, as amended

INFORMATION PREVIOUSLY DISTRIBUTED

5. REGIONAL RESPONSE TO HOMELESS SITUATION NEAR CANAL
- Social Services Commissioner's memorandum dated 7 July 99
6. EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND AIDS IN OTTAWA-CARLETON
- Medical Officer of Health's memorandum dated 30 August 99

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

CHAIR

CO-ORDINATOR