

WOMEN'S ACTION TEAM ON SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Deputation Presented to City Council On the 2007-2010 Draft City Strategic Directions Report July 9, 2007

Good afternoon. We represent the Women's Action Team on Safe and Affordable Housing, which is comprised of diverse women from across the city who live in subsidized housing, shelters, etc. and women who work for community-based organizations and housing agencies. My name is Barbara Bareham and I also represent Cornerstone. My name is Jacqueline Nyiramukwende and I also represent Ottawa Community Immigrant Service Organization and the Rwandese Community Association.

We are here today to reiterate our commitment to this city, and to share our concerns, thoughts, knowledge and experiences with you. We want to be part of the decision making process. We want to be taken into account and we need to ensure that the full diversity of women and men in this city are included.

We invite you to think of the women close to you who live in subsidized housing or are waiting to be placed in affordable housing and/or are at risk of becoming homeless. They face many issues with regards to the housing situation and conditions that are unacceptable to them and their families. We want you to also think of the women who are unable to find accessible housing to meet their needs, who often return to violent situations, live in shelters, in over-crowded situations, and/or housing units that are unsafe.

During the last municipal elections, budget process, and the public consultations regarding the \$7.12 million for housing needs in Ottawa, women in our networks wrote and spoke to Council in order to give examples of the dire need for additional affordable housing and for effective repair of existing housing.

The 2007-2010 Draft City Strategic Directions report states that Council is committed to 'repair, replace and/or upload all City housing stock by the year 2020' and to work with both 'federal and provincial partners to end homelessness in Ottawa in 10 years'. We support efforts to expand and repair our housing stock and to up-load some services and pressure Provincial and Federal levels of government to address funding gaps. However, in fulfilling these objectives, we do not want decisions to be based on what will be cheapest for the city, but what will contribute most to the quality of life for women, their families and the communities in which they live. In order to effectively work towards achieving these objectives, the Mayor and Council must consistently maintain timely consultation and input from the community.

We are deeply concerned with the way in which the consultation process during these recent priority-setting exercises has been handled thus far by the Mayor and Council. Meaningful communication and consultation with the community is an essential part of our City's budget and prioritization process. The City Council that we elect should not only be committed to organizing these opportunities for discussion and input with the community, but this Council should also be held accountable to ensure that it actually happens. We believe that City Advisory Committees and public consultations are just some of the ways that can ensure that this type of dialogue occurs. Thus, we are troubled by recent discussions among City Council about dismantling public input mechanisms such as the City's Advisory Committees. We truly believe in a democratic process in which residents are actively involved in the future of the city.

An important component of ensuring that women and their communities have meaningful opportunities to actively participate in the City's decision-making processes, is City Council's commitment to following up on input and recommendations given by the public. A good example of this is the Ottawa 20/20 Official Plan. This recent priority setting process and draft strategic plan taken on by City Council should honour the commitments regarding safe and affordable housing made in the Ottawa 20/20 Official Plan, which includes:

- Protection of existing housing
- Addressing critical deficits, and
- Creating effective affordable housing solutions

We want our City Council to follow through with their responsibility to refer to and implement directions that were laid out in the Ottawa 20/20 Official Plan, especially since great effort, public engagement, consultations, and work from City staff, community based groups and residents were involved in creating this plan.

We need a Mayor and City Council that works with our communities to effectively establish housing priorities and appropriately directs funds to build new social housing, maintain the affordability of existing housing, and ensure proper repair and maintenance of the existing housing stock. Women and their families need safe and affordable housing, transit and public services that reflect the diversity of needs within this city. **Safe and affordable housing is an essential foundation for stabilizing people's lives. It is a basic necessity that significantly helps to ensure that we have a healthy, safe, clean and inclusive city for the full diversity of women, their families and communities at large.**