

Church backs call for homelessness action

Letter to the editor, Spectator, December 3, 2020

The Board of the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton endorses the call of the city hall protestors to increase government investments in affordable housing. And we urge other measures to speed production of thousands of units of affordable housing needed to meet the city's aspiration that "everyone in Hamilton has a home."

Lack of affordable housing contributes to homelessness and creates stress and health challenges for thousands of Hamiltonians. A quarter of Hamilton households—55,000—pay unaffordable housing costs; 16,000 households pay at least *half* their income for housing.

Despite significant initiatives, subsidized housing waitlists, which the city committed to reduce by half by 2023, are up 13 per cent. Annual targets of 300 new affordable units haven't been met. Evictions are rising. Affordable rental units are hard to find, even for fulltime workers.

We urge much greater investments by the federal and Ontario governments and faster approvals.

We urge the city to fast track all approvals for new affordable housing; fully or partially match the \$10.8 million from Ottawa's Rapid Housing Initiative; sell surplus city lands for \$1 to non-profit and co-operative housing providers, allowing lower rents and leveraging more federal investments; reconsider a city land transfer tax on expensive homes, to pay for rent supplements; make grants or loans for secondary dwelling units conditional on keeping rents affordable; and ensure tenants' *Residential Tenancies Act* rights are met when landlords apply for building permits for renovations.

Irene Laurie, president, First Unitarian Church of Hamilton