

Excerpts related to housing from *A Just Recovery for Hamilton: Municipal Policy, Investment and Opportunities for a more equitable COVID-19 recovery in 2021*

The Just Recovery Hamilton Coalition consists of The YWCA Hamilton, Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton, Environment Hamilton, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, The Disability Justice Network of Ontario, SACHA, Hamilton ACORN, Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, Spectrum and the Hamilton Community Benefits Network as well as other community members.

Wages across the city continue to not keep pace with increases in costs, especially rent. Although Hamilton's preCOVID-19 unemployment rates are lower than the country as a whole, those statistics belay an unfortunate reality, a growing number of those jobs are precarious, non-union, low wage, and temporary leaving more and more residents of the City of Hamilton behind. A full 31% of jobs in Hamilton were precarious, higher than the GHTA average. A study released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives published July 18, 2019, called Unaccommodating: Housing Rental Wage in Canada, shows to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Hamilton making minimum wage (\$14/h) one would have to work 54h a week, or 65 hours for a two-bedroom. You need \$18.99/h for that same one-bedroom to work only 40 hours a week, and \$22.78/h for the two-bedroom. Rents continue to skyrocket: the average rent in the downtown core and the Mountain has risen 40 % in 8 years. Tenants of all kinds face increasing displacement and renoviction pressure from landlords to capitalize on the new higher market rates, pushing them into an already unaffordable market. 45% of tenants in the city are already living in unaffordable housing. (page 5)

The Ontario Human Rights Commission reports "Adequate housing is essential to one's sense of dignity, safety, inclusion and ability to contribute to the fabric of our neighbourhoods and societies... Without appropriate housing, it is often not possible to get and keep employment, to recover from mental illness or other disabilities, to integrate into the community, to escape physical or emotional violence or to keep custody of children." It is essential to the preservation of the dignity and health of residents of Hamilton. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the already untenable housing crisis in the city. Every effort must be made to increase the stock of real affordable housing in the city and to utilize creative municipal bylaws and bold policy to protect tenants from being displaced from affordable housing. (page 18)

Recommendations related to housing

Recommendations are divided into urgent COVID responses and continual responses.

Investing in Women: Continual response

14. Increase municipal investment in affordable housing specifically for women.

Disability Justice: Urgent COVID Response

38. Secure accessible temporary housing options specifically for people with disabilities immediately. These options should include harm reduction services and be rooted in a disability justice framework.

39. Advocate with the province for rent relief support specific for people on social assistance.

Continual Response

40. Assess how many accessible, temporary indoor housing options are available to unhoused people in Hamilton who cannot use stairs and/or have other physical disabilities.

41. Create and maintain a list of accessible housing units existing in Hamilton, making it easier for disabled people to move in when needed.

42. Incentivize the creation of more accessible housing units to coincide with the number of disabled people in our communities.

Housing as a Human Right: Urgent COVID Response

51. Prioritize healthy homes during COVID-19 and beyond, including resuming building inspections, enforcement of all property standards, and the implementation of all COVID-19 health and safety measures as recommended by Public Health.

52. Urge the province to suspend eviction enforcement, hearings and orders until the province has entered the post-pandemic recovery period and immediately bring in rent relief.

53. Implement a municipal 'rent bank' where any tenant in financial need can receive non-repayable grants, so tenants can get the funds they need without falling further into debt.

54. Use all of the city's regulatory powers to protect tenants from predatory renoviction practices and save Hamilton's affordable housing stock.

Continual Response

55. Make a deeper municipal capital budget investment in housing first placements to end homelessness.

56. Pass Inclusionary Zoning bylaws on Transit Oriented Development corridors (TODs) to facilitate additional affordable housing.

57. Change regulations on parking requirements to afford developers of not-for-profit homes more flexibility and cost savings.

58. Continue to advocate for construction of public affordable housing from other levels of government (provincial and federal), with marked increases in targeted funding to Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+ and housing for women.

59. Look to examples from other municipalities and pass a landlord licensing by-law with strong enforcement penalties.

60. Take a proactive approach when it comes to informing tenants of their rights and provide resources for tenant groups to respond to Above Guideline Increases and threats of displacement.

61. Commit to ensuring all persons eligible to vote have access to a voter registration card and are enumerated on municipal voting roles.

Urgent COVID Response

62. Coordinate with landlords, tenants and community organizations to develop a vital services bylaw for cooling of rental units during summer months and advocate with the provincial government for changes to provincial legislation to require landlords to install adequate cooling systems in residential units.

Urgent COVID Response

63. Meet with all long-term care homes in Hamilton to receive an update on the impacts of COVID-19 on people with disabilities in these homes.

64. Advocate to the province for more oversight of Long-Term Care homes given outbreaks across the country.

65. Develop a COVID-19 vaccine plan that prioritizes access for people with disabilities in long-term care Homes.

Continual Response

66. The City of Hamilton should invest in the development of multigenerational, accessible home options for seniors.

Urgent COVID Response

67. Ensure RCF [residential care facility] tenants, who live in vulnerable congregate living settings are a high-priority for distribution of COVID-19 vaccines - through mobile outreach at their homes.

68. Work with the Residential Care Facility Tenants Coalition on an RCF tenant engagement project to reduce social isolation and enhance community participation and active living for RCF tenants.

Continual Response

69. Permanently fund the RCF Liaison pilot project and adequately staff the office to ensure proactive outreach to RCF tenants, community advocates and families. can commence

Investing in decent jobs, decent wages & our local economy: Continual response

89. Use CBAs [community benefit agreements] to help residents secure more affordable and purpose-built rental units from developers.

Urgent COVID Response

94. Proceed with plans to create a Home Energy Retrofit Opportunity or 'HERO' program immediately, offering low-interest loans to homeowners to enable greenhouse gas emission reductions via energy retrofits of existing housing stock.

Investing in Green Infrastructure, Policy and Public Access: Urgent COVID response

145. Commit to piloting programs to incentivize homeowners who establish Secondary Dwelling Units to offer these units at below market rents as a way to increase the availability of below market rental units across the municipality.

146. Continue to retrofit existing and build new social housing that meets low/no carbon standards –

including passive house – to ensure that public housing is climate resilient and offers comfortable accommodation to tenants in extreme heat and cold.

147. Promote gentle density/missing middle development in neighbourhoods across urban Hamilton. This development might take the form of laneway housing or other ‘second dwelling units’ on residential properties across the city. It might also involve infill development that includes 3,4,5 storey apartments with commercial/retail at street level along major arterial roads like Upper James. Establishing missing middle housing helps to make better and more frequent transit service through these neighbourhoods viable. It also supports the business case for more neighbourhood amenities like grocery stores and banks.

148. Commit to ensuring that social housing/geared to income/affordable housing is provided along higher order transit lines – within walking distance of higher order transit stations.

Supporting 2SLGBTQQA+ communities: Urgent COVID response

151. Provide hotel rooms for unsheltered women and victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and sex trafficking, 2SLGBTQQA+ youth and others who are not able to access safe spaces when shelters are full.