



Neighbourhood Legal Services

LONDON AND MIDDLESEX

By Email to budgetcommittee@london.ca

February 21, 2024

City of London

**RE: City of London 2024-2027 Multi-Year Budget Consultations –
Supplementary Submission**

Neighbourhood Legal Services (London and Middlesex) Inc. is a poverty law clinic assisting low income individuals who reside in Middlesex County with legal issues in the areas of Housing, Income Maintenance and Employment Law.

A large portion of our work is providing legal advice, assistance and representation to low income tenants facing eviction applications at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Through this work we have seen the importance of the Hoarding/Extreme Clean Program and the Housing Stability Bank in assisting numerous tenants to maintain their affordable housing units.

In our initial submission in the budget consultations, we outlined our reasons to support Business Plan #P15 Hoarding/Extreme Clean Program and Business Plan #16 Housing Stability Banks (HSB) Expenses.

We were dismayed to learn that these business plans were not included in the Mayor's budget and further that council did not vote to approve these business cases in their budget deliberations.

We are imploring councilors to reverse these decisions, as we adamantly believe that these two business cases would prevent an increase in homelessness at a low cost as well as maintaining much needed affordable housing units.

We would like to share our recent experience with both programs to show why council should approve these two business cases.

1. Business Plan Hoarding/ Extreme Clean Program – Business Plan # P-15

Our clinic has worked with Extreme Clean on numerous files over the last year. In fact, Extreme Clean has referred tenants they were working with to us as these tenants were facing eviction applications and were unaware that they could seek help from our clinic. Some of these clients were struggling with mental health and hoarding issues, but many others had problems preparing their units for pest management treatment and/or experienced difficulty maintaining their homes in a state of ordinary cleanliness due to age and/or disability. In the last couple of weeks alone two tenancies were saved due to the involvement of Extreme Clean. One tenant is blind and another suffers degenerative arthritis and is in her 80's. In both these cases we were able to mediate settlements (performance agreements) with landlords at the Landlord and Tenant Board to avoid the evictions of these tenants from their affordable units. These past/ongoing settlements are only possible because Extreme Clean was involved.

We also are aware that Extreme Clean involvement in tenant's homes is mandated in discharge plans from hospitals. Patients cannot be discharged from hospital if their units are not habitable or cannot be made to accommodate their transition from hospital. In some cases, people need assistance to de-clutter their spaces to make room for mobility equipment. In other cases they need to make the space safe for personal support workers to attend them. If they don't get that help they cannot be released from hospital, effectively blocking the beds for new patient admissions.

Unfortunately, the only source of funding for Extreme Clean comes from the City. Without this funding Extreme Clean will no longer be available to help very vulnerable tenants. These tenants do not have the resources to implement a different plan to save their tenancies. These tenants will likely become homeless and due to their disability issues will be extremely difficult to house, once homeless. They often face difficulties navigating digital systems and cannot locate housing online. We submit the cost to the City is high as these individuals will need resources through homelessness programs.

2. Housing Stability Bank (HSB) Expansion – Business Plan # P-16

Many of the tenants we assist are facing evictions at the Landlord and Tenant Board for rent arrears from affordable units. Tenants fall behind in rent for numerous reasons that include job loss or an unforeseen financial emergency. For example, this week we had a tenant fall behind in his rent as he had additional medical costs (cancer drugs not covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit plan). With the assistance of the HSB we were able to mediate a settlement, or repayment plan, with his landlord to save his tenancy.

We would like to highlight that in order to get assistance/funding from the HSB a tenant needs to demonstrate that they have the ability to pay the rent going forward. They must provide a realistic budget that takes into account all of their basic needs, and show that the landlord will accept the funds and isn't going to try to evict the tenant for another reason. The tenancy must be affordable and sustainable.

The need for the Housing Stability Bank has grown. This was highlighted by the HSB request for additional funding of \$500,000.00 from the City in 2023 to meet the increased demand on their program. The HSB did receive this funding in a one time installment. However, there was no increase to their base funding. This allowed the HSB to continue to provide much needed funding to clients without the requirement of implementing much stricter criteria before providing assistance. In 2023, for a short period the HSB did implement much stricter criteria which meant that in a number of cases our clinic was not able to mediate settlements with landlords.

The HSB has requested an additional amount of \$700,000.00 to their yearly base funding to meet current and anticipated demand. We again submit that this is a low cost tool/program to keep tenants in affordable units. Without this increase, we submit that many tenants will become homeless with additional costs to the City.

We know that people experiencing homelessness experience elevated rates of dangerous health conditions, injuries, violent victimization, and increased mortality. People experiencing homelessness are at an elevated risk of experiencing mental illness and/or substance use disorders. And for children and families, homelessness can lead to devastating consequences including developmental delays, disruptions in education, and family separation. All of these issues come with a price tag for municipalities and other levels of government. When people need to access the community hub system the cost

per homeless person is much higher than providing them with low cost support through the Housing Stability Bank and/or Extreme Clean.

Moreover, we also note that when tenants lose their affordable units, in most cases these units become no longer affordable due to vacancy rent decontrol; they are gone for good. This is because once vacant, the landlord can set any amount of rent, and this often results in the doubling of the rent and thus the unit is no longer affordable housing. London needs to protect our dwindling stock of affordable housing. Building new affordable housing is certainly an important objective to many members of London's City Council, but any housing built after 2018 will not be subject to Guideline Rent Increases and will take years to build. Protecting currently affordable housing stock is vital and in line with the City's objectives and responsibilities.

On numerous occasions, our clinic has requested additional funding from the Province for affordable housing initiatives, and to improve social assistance rates but for the most part of our requests have fallen on deaf ears. Some members of Council at the City of London have stated that they will not support these two business plans because they believe that other levels of government need to step up and provide support. Such an assertion does not help tenants facing homelessness, and just as important, it does nothing to preserve affordable housing units. The City of London needs to step into the breach in the short to medium term as the community, the one directly impacted, continues to press the Provincial/ Federal governments to adequately fund housing/ homelessness programs and significantly increase social assistance rates.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'K. Pagnello', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kristina M. Pagnello
Executive Director and Lawyer