

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON, AUGUST 13, 2019
FROM:	SANDRA DATARS BERE MANAGING DIRECTOR HOUSING, SOCIAL SERVICES AND DEARNESS HOME
SUBJECT:	RESPONSE TO LIFE*SPIN’S REPORT “AFFORDABLE HOUSING, A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE”

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>
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That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home, Civic Administration’s Response to Life Spin’s Report ‘Affordable Housing, A Community Perspective’ **BE RECEIVED** for information.

<b>PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER</b>
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- Housing Services Act (CSC: December 19, 2011)
- Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan – Council Approval (CPSC: November 25, 2013)
- Housing Services Act Requirements Related to a Local Housing and Homelessness Plan (CPSC: June 17, 2013)
- London Housing Advisory Committee Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> and 5th Reports (CPSC: May 28 2019)
- Homelessness Crisis - M. Wills - Request For Delegation Status (CPSC: May 28, 2019)
- Delegation - M. Wills - Homelessness Crisis in London (CPSC: June 17, 2019)

<b>BACKGROUND</b>
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On June 11, 2019, Municipal Council received the April 10, 2019 (4th) Report of the London Housing Advisory Committee (LHAC) and directed Civic Administration to review the concerns set out in Life\*Spin’s presentation ‘Affordable Housing, A Community Perspective’ as presented to LHAC and report back to the Community and Protective Services Committee, attached as Appendix A.

LIFE\*SPIN is a London-based organization providing programs geared to enhancing the lives of low-income families through education, advocacy, and community building. Civic Administration appreciates LIFE\*SPIN’s presentation and the organization’s role in providing supports to those most vulnerable in our community. City staff met recently with representatives of housing advocacy service providers, including LIFE\*SPIN to discuss concerns more fully.

**Civic Administration’s Response**

Civic Administration acknowledges the issues facing our community and the impact being experienced not only by individuals and families but also by the support and service agencies like LIFE\*SPIN that assist them. LIFE\*SPIN's presentation was informed by the first-hand experience of community agencies dealing with the impacts of housing needs in London and provides recommendations and potential solutions to respond to these needs. It is also of note that LIFE\*SPIN has provided feedback on policies and programs that are managed by various municipal services, including London Middlesex Community Housing and the Housing Development Corporation, London.

The timing of LIFE\*SPIN's presentation is critical as the City has been consulting the communities of London and Middlesex County to develop a new strategic plan to address these challenges. It is important that the challenges faced by individuals and families and

support agencies like LIFE\*SPIN are reflected in the City's new Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan (HP&H Plan).

In response to LIFE\*SPIN's presentation, this report will focus on three broad housing related themes discussed:

- Monitoring and Accountability;
- Affordable Housing Development and Planning Tools; and,
- By-law and Residential Licencing Programs.

### **Monitoring and Accountability**

**Issued Identified:** LIFE\*SPIN indicated that there has been an oversaturation of planning and re-envisioning exercises conducted by the City of London within the community.

**Response:** Civic Administration recognizes that there have been multiple and, in some cases, concurrent strategic planning and community engagement sessions that have included housing.

For many of the documents and related public engagements identified in the presentation (e.g., the London Plan, and the City's Strategic Plan, 2015-19), some are required to be in place under provincial regulation and/ or by direction of City Council. Civic administration also recognizes the importance of consistently engaging with the community on an on-going basis, particularly when the issues facing the community, such as housing, continue to evolve and change. It is valuable to be connected to front-line, grassroots organizations, such as LIFE\*SPIN on the challenges they are seeing with the individuals and family's using their services.

The need for ongoing consultation is important, especially as circumstances continue to change. Over the last five years, the vulnerability of the individuals in search of housing supports and the need for housing stability has increased significantly, as evidenced as follows:

- The need for community housing (also known as social housing) has increased 70% in the last two years alone;
- An increase of applications from individuals fleeing sex trafficking and domestic violence;
- An increase in the number of individuals applying who are currently experiencing homelessness;
- Individuals and families staying in community housing longer; and,
- Private rental market that continues to become more unaffordable to individuals on social assistance or who are low wage earners

The implementation of the five year HP&H Plan consultation process also represents an effort to engage the community not only under the requirements of the *Housing Services Act*, but also with an intent of obtaining important community advice on housing needs. Existing government-supported housing programs are not able to keep up to the challenges being experienced within the local housing market and the demand from our community for permanent housing solutions.

The implementation of various engagement sessions also reflects how housing is an overarching community need that is directly associated with a number of sectors, service areas, and a wide range of strategic planning activities. The most important function of these engagement and planning activities is to ensure policies and programs are well informed and are as impactful as possible in actions and responses.

In addition to consultation activities, Civic Administration also engages regularly with community service providers in the homeless and housing serving sectors through membership on several community discussion groups: London Homeless Coalition, London Housing Advisory Committee, Social Housing Operational Advisory Committee, London Coordinating Committee to End Women Abuse, Age Friendly Network, and the Ontario Works/Ontario Disability Community Advocates Network to name a few.

**Proposed Action:** Civic administration recognizes LIFE\*SPIN's desire to promote increase communication efforts as it pertains to housing. The HP&H Plan will recommend a heightened role for community communication and engagement related to Homeless Prevention and Housing and to implement a regular reporting back function.

This action is intended to:

- Better co-ordinate and engage the community in mandated and non-mandated public participation in housing plans;
- Increase information sharing on the housing sector in London (by City as well as other sector leads);
- Focus on individual and family needs and actions and not programs and funding sources; and,
- Ensure open feedback for housing related matters.

### **Affordable Housing Development and Planning Tools**

**Issued Identified:** Focus on developing more mechanisms for accountability as it relates to affordable housing development. LIFE\*SPIN has identified a number of existing reports and plans pertaining to affordable housing development with associated questions and issues.

**Response:** Affordable housing related tools, policies and actions have evolved in recent years as all levels of government explore new programs, permissions, and regulations. These initiatives include Secondary Dwelling Units, new regulations to support Inclusionary Zoning, the recent City policy for the municipal evaluation and acquisition of closed school sites, approval of the new Official Plan (The London Plan), and changes to the Federal Government's National Housing Strategy (NHS) programs and requirements. These changes directly impact both the municipality and community stakeholders collective ability to develop affordable housing.

The focus of the Affordable Housing program and regulatory framework is generally to increase available housing stock by reducing barriers and incentivizing development. The need in London is not specific to stock in general, but rather the matching of stock to the needs of our local communities.

London has very low vacancy rates in rental housing. Combined with a new market for both ownership and rental from the greater Toronto and Hamilton area has resulted in rapid changes to monthly rental rates, especially within the portion of the market that included lower cost units. An approximate estimate of the current gap in affordable housing in London is approximately 3,000 units across the city.

In response to the increasing need for affordable housing and changes to planning legislation, the City is preparing an "Affordable Housing Development Toolkit" of planning tools that can be used to encourage the development of affordable housing units. The Toolkit identifies a number of existing City policies, practices, and programs, as well as new initiatives, including a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for Affordable Housing. Through a CIP, the City may offer financial incentives, which may include grant or loan programs that could decrease costs associated with the development of affordable housing, such as Development Charges, increases in property taxes arising from redevelopment, or municipal permit and fees. Such new programs would be introduced to encourage affordable unit construction within identified CIP program areas. Subject to the programs' guidelines, the incentives could be available to non-profits, public agencies, private developers or landowners who are constructing the affordable unit(s).

The CIP is targeted for finalization by the end of 2019, while certain other initiatives of the Toolkit are targeted for finalization in 2020. A report that further identifies the planning Toolkit was presented to the Planning and Environment Committee on June 17, 2019. Each of the above strategies have already been approved as part of the City's Strategic Plan 2019-2023 and will be expanded in greater detail within the HP&H Plan.

The above strategies will be further supported through other National Housing Strategy programs including a recently announced homeownership program and a National Housing Benefit, which will be launched in April 2020.

**By-Law and Residential Licencing Program**

**Issued Identified:** Concerns with individuals and families living in sub-standard dwellings which could result in a property standard violations.

**Response:** The following provides an overview of the programs in place to manage vulnerable tenancies:

Property Standards

Property standards complaints are addressed on both a proactive and reactive basis. City Council or management can determine that a particular area would benefit from proactive enforcement, however in most cases the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers will respond reactively to community complaints. The process involves providing the property owner a reasonable time to address the issue prior to any enforcement actions being taken. If tenants are concerned with the safety of their building, they are asked to inform the city immediately.

Informal Residential Care Facilities

The City of London regulates Informal Residential Care Facilities (IRCF) for the purpose of protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of residents, care providers, and neighborhoods where such facilities exist.

IRCF are homes that are licensed by the City of London to provide care services for three or more persons. This care revolves around the provision of a variety of support necessary to the daily lives of the occupants. This can include housing, meal preparation, administration of medication, provision of transportation, and other care services. They are considered "informal" because they are not funded or licensed by the federal or provincial governments, nor regulated under either level of government.

Vulnerable Occupancy Protocol (VOP)

The Vulnerable Occupancy Protocol establishes a closer direct working relationship between services providers most closely engaged in responsive approaches to vulnerable occupancy. It is intended to address the safety of individual tenants or occupants or a group together in one residence where the physical state of the residence or the behaviours within it are putting existing vulnerable people at risk. A core group of agencies and service providers’ work together to address occupancy and health/safety issues.

Residential Rental Unit License

The Residential Rental Unit License (RRUL) By-law was adopted in 2011 and has since been amended to effectively address sub-standard housing conditions in rental units and to protect the amenity, character, and stability of residential areas.

At the time an application is submitted, a self-certification checklist is completed for each unit. Municipal Law Enforcement Officers proactively confirm the check list and identify any Property Standards matters which need to be addressed.

<p><b>CONCLUSION</b></p>
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Housing is a vital community resource that provides long-term stability to individuals and families. Civic Administration wishes to recognize the efforts of LIFE\*SPIN’s in developing this presentation and providing first-hand experience of community agencies dealing with the impacts of housing needs in London. Civic Administration will continue to work with LIFE\*SPIN, and others, to develop solutions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in the community.

<b>FINANCIAL IMPACT</b>
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This report and attachments have no related financial impacts.

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