



ALIV(e)
Awareness of Low Income Voices
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Dear Sir or Madam:

We are a group of people from Waterloo Region who are experiencing life while living with low incomes. Our group consists of people on pensions, people on assistance and people working in low paying and/or short term jobs. Many of us have struggled to find stability and are still living with fear of becoming homeless or homeless again! We are supported by the Social Development Centre who help us find sponsors and provide a place for us to meet once a month.

At our recent meetings we have discussed the new initiative that was launched in November ALL IN 2020 and the issues we have experienced and witnessed with housing. We understand ALL IN 2020 is an initiative to eliminate chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region by the year 2020. We also realize this is a very complex problem beyond chronic homelessness and requires a lot of collaboration that all governments and service agencies will need to be involved in for it to be successful.

We are concerned about the loss of low-cost housing, particularly in the ION corridor. We would like to see more inclusionary zoning everywhere with some hard targets for low cost housing. Clear plans for stock replacement when low cost housing is removed by new development. Shorter turn arounds when new affordable housing is being developed.

To summarize, we would like to see:

- Adequate funding and staffing for supportive housing, both in market units and purpose-built units.
- Fast creation of affordable housing where not more than 30% of the tenants' income is going to housing through inclusionary zoning with a minimum 10% units in every area being dedicated to that.
- Immediate replacement of lost low-cost housing that is removed through new developments.
- Ensuring supports for people without income and hard to house without cutting the supports to the people already receiving assistance.
- That we do no harm to other groups when working on one low-income group in particular or when planning for more affluent residents.
- The people hard to house have to help in shaping the solutions and the creation of adequate support programs.





In downtown Kitchener, many low income people need to spend 75% of their income on rent and are under constant fear of displacement to make way for the next condo. Gentrification has brought new amenities but it hasn't solved crises of poverty, exclusion & homelessness. The construction and build up along LRT has made this even more problematic. Many low income residents have already been displaced a few times by new development. This is going to be a continuing problem as the LRT expands into Cambridge.

We, as people living in low income housing, some of us having rent supports ourselves, are worried. It has been our experience that when one program is lifted, another one is cut. We are afraid that resources now used for rent subsidizes will be diverted and we might lose the ability to afford the housing we have.

We are afraid that some people in need will be overlooked as they have either given up on being on waiting lists or are reluctant to be in the areas where they can get on a list. The agencies that helped some of us get housing are no longer able to help the people as individuals because the system has changed and all need to be on one list, but no one seems to understand where that list is or how it works, only that those who are currently homeless have even less hope of achieving housing.

The people that are the hardest to house are the people who are living with complex needs; mental health issues; addictions; intellectual disabilities and acquired brain injuries. Most suffer from some sort of PTSD and very often with a combination of the above issues. Some of them also have histories that could indicate higher risks. These would include criminal behaviors that could affect those living nearby. There is also a broad range of the depth of these problems and that depth can change. How do we integrate people who, due to their unique needs, cause a great deal of disruption wherever they are placed?

We know that most of the placements will be into low cost housing. That is where we live. That means that the buildings where we live will face greater damages and many more incidents that affect our peaceful enjoyment and sense of safety in our current homes. It also means that we see, first hand, the need for these people to be successfully supported to maintain housing.

We recognize that all people should have the right to a safe home. Even those who are the hardest to house and the most in need have the right to be housed. By saying we are ALL IN, we need to learn how to do that. The reason we have not been successful with this population is that none of our current solutions work for them. Instead of trying to get people to fit into current programs, we need to develop places and programs that work for them. We also recognize that every time someone is placed in an inappropriate setting, we are setting them up for failure, and that is the last thing someone who is already vulnerable needs!





Our experience tells us that when supportive housing is done well, we, as neighbours are not even aware of the issues or supports needed. But when it is done poorly, or the person is being asked to handle more than they can, lives are disrupted and the individuals and their co-tenants end up with much more stress than they should. This is especially true when the vulnerable person housed has a history of behavior that is not conducive to living well with neighbours. We have experienced this with individuals involved with criminal activities that bring other undesirable people to our buildings; with a history of sexual or violence based inappropriate behavior; with those whose mental health causes them to have loud outbursts at all times of the day and night; and those who are known to have arson propensities.

We want to see that the people who are in need are supported to be successfully housed. While some people will eventually be able to live without supports, many will have ongoing issues throughout their lives. Success can only be achieved if there are the correct levels of support. Supports should also include full disclosure to everyone who is officially supporting these individuals. That would include landlords and other agencies, but not usually us as their neighbours. These supports need to be ongoing, coordinated and/or smoothly transitioned so that there are few or no relapses and gaps.

There has to be a way to think creatively to allow stability for those of us on low incomes. Being forced to move every year or so as our homes are gentrified, upgraded and replaced with high end condominiums is draining on our mental health and causes us to feel very less than appreciated citizens.

So, what we are really asking for is that in every decision you make, you remember not only who will benefit, but also what problems you will be creating for the people in place. What community will you disrupt to provide a new community? How will your actions benefit everyone in community and not just those who might move in? And, above all, we are asking that whatever you do you strive to do no harm!

Thank you for your anticipated consideration,

Cathie Stewart Savage, Secretary
Awareness of Low Income Voices

Cc:
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Region of Waterloo Chair and Council
Mayors and Councillors of Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge

