

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

Housing York Inc.

May 7, 2008

Report of the
General Manager

RESIDENT PROFILE UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an update on the development and implementation of an action plan in response to the fall 2006 Tenant Survey findings.

3. BACKGROUND

The 2006 Housing York Inc. Business Plan included an initiative to complete a resident profile to better understand and serve Housing York Inc.'s tenants. In order to meet this objective, the staff of the Housing Services Branch and Policy and Program Support Branch partnered to conduct a survey of Housing York Inc. tenants.

The survey results reported on the demographic profile of Housing York Inc.'s tenants, their desired service needs, and rates of satisfaction with current service delivery.

Overall, Housing York Inc. tenants were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their housing units (83%) and the services received from Housing York Inc. (76%). While these are favourable results, a number of opportunities for service improvements were identified. These have been evaluated and categorized into three major areas:

1. Communication
2. Maintenance
3. Safety/Security

It is important to note that the majority of suggested improvements in the maintenance and safety/security areas have a communications element. Feedback in these areas focused on increasing efforts to clarify and communicate service standards, maintenance activities and general procedures and guidelines for Housing York Inc. buildings.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Tenant survey feedback results in several Housing York Inc. initiatives

Tenants overwhelmingly indicated that enhanced communications is the key area that they would appreciate as an initiative for our action plan.

Employee feedback session initiates immediate service changes

A staff education and brainstorming session was conducted to review the findings from the tenant survey. Staff added their insight based on front line interaction with Housing York Inc. tenants. A number of opportunities for immediate service enhancements were identified and implemented including:

- Reorganization of the Property Management unit to create a single point of contact for all maintenance and tenant relationship needs.
- Posting of staff contact information in a public location in all Housing York Inc. buildings.
- Development of a plain language standard for all Housing York Inc. tenant communications.
- Implementation of new software to automate the management of work orders and improve response times.
- Introduction of “While you were out” service cards to notify tenants that a maintenance request has been completed while they were not home.
- Installation of lobby cameras in 2008 for those thirteen seniors’ buildings without cameras.

Several other staff suggestions are also identified for inclusion into longer term action plans.

Tenant focus groups supplement survey findings and provide recommendations for long term action plan

To fully understand the tenant feedback, tenant focus group sessions were organized. The tenant focus groups had four objectives:

1. Clarify survey feedback in the key areas of Communications, Maintenance and Safety/Security.
2. Keep the visibility of the project high to assure tenants that Housing York Inc. is taking action on their comments.
3. Provide opportunity for tenants to comment on service changes already made.
4. Seek tenant recommendations for future service delivery improvements.

The last objective was seen as a critical step to marry Housing York Inc.’s contemplated plans with what tenants are expecting.

A total of 74 tenants participated in one of seven sessions held in the Towns of Georgina, Newmarket and Richmond Hill, and in the City of Vaughan.

All of the findings were documented in detail and prioritized to set the stage for developing an action plan. A summary of the highest priority, recurring tenant recommendations is outlined in *Attachment 1*.

A strategic communication plan will aid in closing the communication gap identified by tenants

Throughout both the survey and focus groups, tenants consistently expressed a desire to be better informed. A strategic communications plan provides a standard framework for staff and tenant interaction. It bridges communications gaps by delivering consistent communications at predictable times and locations thereby strengthening tenants understanding of the Housing York Inc. policies and key business processes.

The benefits of a communication strategy include:

- Recognizing that all of Housing York Inc.'s services have a communication element, and that the resulting communication effort must meet the needs of both tenants and staff.
- Helping tenants better understand what they can expect from Housing York Inc..
- Aligning communications with Housing York Inc.'s Statement of Principles and York Region's Customer Service Standards.
- Working to create proactive and strategic communication instead of reacting to the existing environment.
- Integrating various channels of communication to further maximize the use of current resources, such as bulletin boards, tenant newsletters and Housing York Inc.'s website.
- Ensuring effective, consistent and timely communication activities by establishing procedures and standards.
- Standardizing the look and style of messages in a plain language format so they are recognizable and easily understood.
- Beginning to address language barriers where English is not spoken or written, to the extent possible.

Policies and procedures for individual communication activities will be drafted within the context of the communications plan. Additionally, research will be conducted to examine the diverse language challenges of Housing York Inc.'s tenant population. The need for introducing universal symbols and translating specific messages is an expected outcome.

Policies identifying service standards will establish a mutual understanding in the Housing York Inc. and tenant relationship

Specific needs of tenants relating to maintenance and security will be addressed through policies and procedures aimed at standardizing and strengthening Housing York Inc.'s customer service role. Standards for response timelines will provide tenants with accurate expectations of service delivery. A safety and security protocol ensures that security initiatives are implemented consistently in every Housing York Inc. building. Through the development of policies and procedures tenants can anticipate an increasingly dependable and higher level of service, which is the cornerstone of Housing York Inc.'s Statement of Principles.

Tenant Reference Group set to engage resident leadership

Staff have begun an initiative to engage our resident leadership by establishing a Tenant Reference Group. The Tenant Reference Group initiative will assist in building a stronger sense of community by providing a forum to exchange feedback. It is hoped that participants will gain a better understanding of Housing York Inc. operations and the factors influencing business decisions. The Reference Group will also provide valuable and ongoing insight on what tenants experience when they use our services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Proposed service improvements are not expected to generate additional costs. Nominal costs will be associated with multi-language initiatives, namely the translation of standard messages into multiple languages, but these will be managed within the operating budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Housing York Inc. tenants live in all nine local municipalities in York Region. Responding to the needs of Housing York Inc.'s housing communities strengthens the relationship between Housing York Inc. and tenants. By providing high quality customer service that is sensitive to local variations, tenants are acknowledged as valued and respected members of their communities.

7. CONCLUSION

Housing York Inc. is moving forward with a comprehensive long-term action plan designed to meet the needs of tenants through a strategic communications plan, policies addressing service standards, and the implementation of the tenant reference group.

For more information on this report, please contact Sylvia Patterson, Assistant General Manager, Housing York Inc. at Ext. 2091.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

Reviewed by:

Recommended by:

Sylvia Patterson
Assistant General Manager

Joann Simmons
General Manager

April 29, 2008

Attachment - 1

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