



Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto Inc.

December 3, 2007

Deputation to:

**Community Development and Recreation Committee
City of Toronto**

**Tied in Knots: Unleashing the Potential of Social Housing in
Toronto**

Brian Eng, Government Relations and Communications Coordinator

Who we are

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to address them on matters contained in this report.

Our organization represents housing co-ops in the City of Toronto and York Region. There are one hundred and seventy co-ops in the City of Toronto that are members of CHFT. This includes sixty-seven co-ops that have units administered by the City of Toronto under the Social Housing Reform Act. These co-ops are voluntary members of our organization.

CHFT provides education for members, boards and staff of housing co-ops. We provide support for co-ops in operations and working with their administrative partners at all levels to create vibrant, safe, affordable co-op housing communities. We engage in advocacy work at all levels to try and enhance co-ops abilities to meet our mandate to provide affordable housing to low and moderate income Canadians.

The upload proposal

Today, we would like today to talk about one part of the report before you. It's a part we consider to be of vital importance to the continued success of housing co-ops in Toronto. That is the Co-operative Housing Upload Request that appears on page 7 of your report. We are proposing that the administration and funding of co-ops in Ontario be uploaded to the province and that the administration of the program be handled by the Agency for Co-operative Housing.

The report before you clearly outlines the funding and operating challenges that have resulted from the downloading of social housing. When the federal government announced that it was going to download its social housing to the provinces in the 1990's, the co-op housing sector engaged in a successful campaign to prevent this from happening to the federally funded co-ops. As a result, the federally-funded co-ops in Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia were not downloaded to provincial jurisdiction.

There was a need for a new system to handle the administration of these co-ops on behalf of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and after several years of intense negotiation the Agency for Co-operative Housing was born.

The Agency for Co-operative Housing

The Agency has one purpose – to administer co-op housing programs. Its staff has expertise in the unique challenges of co-ops as resident-managed communities. It is client-centred and works closely with co-ops to achieve their goals as strong, self-

managed communities that are financially sound and accountable to governments for the effective delivery of affordable housing.

Co-ops believe that the best way for us to be healthy, dynamic communities is to have a policy framework that allows us to manage with as much autonomy as possible and to work with an administrator that understands the unique challenges that come with resident-controlled, democratic, self-management. The Agency for Co-operative Housing provides that kind of specialized service.

Why upload?

Co-ops are experiencing significant stresses in their communities for two major reasons.

1. The funding and regulatory framework of the Social Housing Reform Act doesn't work well. This is true for most social housing providers, but there are particular problems as they relate to co-ops.
2. There are widely varying and hugely inconsistent applications of the program and support for co-op operations across municipalities. In larger municipalities these inconsistencies can sometimes extend to different program staff at different times.

CHFT would like to acknowledge the efforts that have been made by staff at the Social Housing Unit in Toronto to understand and address the particular needs of co-op housing. However, problems remain and will continue to remain as long as the Social Housing Unit is mandated to administer a program in which there is a mix of non-profit providers, with appointed Boards of Directors, and co-ops, with their model of resident control and member-elected Boards.

Uploading the co-op portfolio will go a long way to solving these problems. Working with an administrator with a clear mandate and the expertise to assist co-ops will mean that we can all do our jobs better. All co-ops, federal and municipal, will be stronger together and will be able learn and share resources.

We also believe that this upload provides an opportunity for the city to expand and strengthen its capacities in the rest of the social housing portfolio. We are sure that staff at the Social Housing Unit will agree that working with co-ops is an intensive and often time-consuming experience. We understand this, but we also know that this work pays off in terms of housing that is less expensive to run. Our residents have opportunities for community experience and personal growth that are unique to co-ops.

CHFT and co-ops in Toronto are asking for this upload as part of a province-wide campaign. We believe that it will be easier for co-ops to lobby the provincial government to make changes to the SHRA as it affects co-ops. Co-ops across Ontario

are asking the province and municipalities to support a change that will make us stronger and better able to serve our communities.

Strong co-ops make strong communities

Healthy, well-run co-ops are important to strong communities across this city. From the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood to the lake shore in Etobicoke to Malvern in Scarborough, co-ops are working to provide affordable housing and working with their neighbours to create safe and healthy communities for people to live, work and play.

We believe that uploading co-op housing and having it administered by the Agency for Co-operative Housing will only make this more effective.

We know that the city is asking for a number of changes to the financial and administrative arrangement between itself and the provincial government. We would ask that the city include the uploading of the administration of co-operative housing as part of its negotiations.

Thank you for the opportunity to address these issues.