

Speech Highlights

**Hon. John Gerretsen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Ontario Region Annual Meeting
June 17, 2005**

Changing the *Social Housing Reform Act*

Minister Gerretsen spoke at some length about the *Social Housing Reform Act* (SHRA). He agreed that the legislation passed by the previous government abandoned community-based housing, is overly prescriptive and has reduced the ability of members to make day-to-day decisions.

While he did not agree to a full scale review of the legislation at this time, the Minister did express his desire to make specific amendments to the Act and its regulations. The Minister stressed that he wants to fix the irritants in the SHRA by making changes that will allow co-ops to do their work more effectively. He said he would move forward in a couple of months on the first stage of improvements and he knows that more comprehensive change is required to ensure better, more effective social housing legislation.

Fixing rent-gear-to-income problems

The Minister recognized that the Act creates serious irritants for housing co-ops. As an example, he mentioned the problem market paying members have getting rent-gear-to-income assistance when they face financial hardship. He said he would fix the problem.

The impact of co-ops on the political process

The Minister acknowledged the effectiveness of the *Social Housing Reform Act* campaign. He noted the many letters he has received from co-ops. Minister Gerretsen also mentioned that many of his MPP colleagues had spoken to him about the concerns of housing co-operatives in their ridings.

The value of co-op housing

Throughout his address, Minister Gerretsen recognized the extremely valuable role co-ops play in providing effective and efficient affordable housing in Ontario. He emphasized that co-ops are home to many Ontario families from diverse backgrounds. The Minister indicated that co-op housing is much more than simply a place to live.

Preserving non-profit status

The Minister also discussed the significance of the Bridlewood legal case. He praised CHF Canada for working to make sure that community-based housing that has received public support remains non-profit. Minister Gerretsen noted how the Ontario government and the co-operative housing sector worked together in partnership to prevent the below market value sale of co-operative units to members.

Eviction law reform

Minister Gerretsen explained that he supports simplifying and reducing the cost of evictions for co-operatives. He pointed out that the current process is time-consuming and expensive. The Minister acknowledged some of the merits of the Ontario Region's proposal that includes moving the eviction process from the courts to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

Affordable housing

The Minister stated that the government believes in the importance of safe, decent, and affordable housing. He expressed his faith in the co-operative housing sector and said it is a vital component of Ontario's success. To illustrate the government commitment, he referred to the recent Canada – Ontario affordable housing agreement and noted that the provincial government is investing over \$300 million in this program. The government expects this will create 15,000 new affordable housing units including some dedicated to seniors.

Benchmarks

Minister Gerretsen mentioned that he wished to create a balanced approach to the setting of benchmarks. He explained that his goal is to balance the need of service managers for predictable subsidy costs with the need of housing providers to conduct business effectively. To ensure the process is balanced, he committed to a solid consultation process with stakeholders like the Ontario Region.

Conclusion

The Minister concluded with a number of positive remarks about how co-ops are strong communities – where members from diverse economic and social backgrounds work effectively to manage affordable housing. He also mentioned that co-ops are caring communities - where individual responsibility, mutual help, equality and good citizenship are important. The Minister said the government was very interested in working in

partnership with strong communities – such as those represented by co-operative housing. He concluded that when we meet in London next year his hope is that many of the issues of concern to housing co-ops will be resolved and dealt with to the satisfaction of co-ops and co-op members.