

Newsbriefs

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It was a good election campaign for co-op housing. For the first time in an Ontario election the platforms of all three major parties included co-op housing.

On top of this, co-ops also got endorsements from many candidates including several returning cabinet ministers. **Kathleen Wynne**, the Liberal Education Minister, said in her campaign newsletter that the Liberals were “committed to a housing strategy that will include increasing proven housing models such as co-op housing”. At election events, **George Smitherman**, **Michael Bryant** and **Madeleine Meilleur** all expressed their

strong support for co-ops as a model of housing that builds community.

Co-op activists across the province made sure that co-op housing got the attention of candidates. They wrote letters and e-mails, organized meetings with candidates, asked questions at all candidates’ meetings and engaged candidates at the door.

Co-ops in Ottawa were particularly active, setting up four candidate events including one in Premier McGuinty’s riding of Ottawa South, home to 13 co-ops with over 1,000 households.

The campaign, co-ordinated by CHF Canada’s Ontario Region, focused on two key issues important to housing co-ops:

Building more co-ops

Uploading housing co-ops

Continued [2] ▶

Ontario Liberals promise long-term affordable housing strategy that includes co-ops



1-2

Feature

Long-term affordable housing strategy

3

Feature

Eviction law reform moving forward

4

Feature

Court decision backs co-op, quashes receivership

5

Feature

New Ontario co-ops: Overnight successes

7

Noteworthy

Co-ops meet with Human Rights Commission, OnCoop’s Awards Gala

8

Council profile: Louise Taillefer

A special campaign action centre on CHF Canada's website provided resources and updates to help members get involved in the campaign.

Affordable housing, while not a frontline campaign issue like faith-based funding for schools or health care, had increasing visibility as the campaign progressed. "The issue of reducing poverty in Ontario got quite a bit of attention and almost always affordable housing was identified as a key part of the solution," says **Harvey Cooper**, the Ontario Region's Manager of Government Relations.

"It was also very encouraging that all the parties talked about the need to move away from short-term, quick-fix housing programs to long-term, sustainable solutions to the affordable housing crisis in Ontario," says Cooper. "This is just what Ontario members called for in a resolution passed at this year's AGM and a key message in our campaign." The Liberal platform also committed to ensuring that "the strategy contained a mix of non-profit and co-operative housing".

While uploading housing co-ops wasn't directly endorsed by any of the parties, the Liberals, Conservatives and NDP all made some sort of commitment to uploading the costs of social programs.

"We congratulate the Liberals on their election win," says **Amanda Yetman**, President of the Ontario Council. "We have spent a lot of time in the past four years working with the Liberal government to advance issues important to housing co-ops and we've developed a strong working relationship with many Liberal members who have won re-election. We look forward to continuing that work and to building on the commitments the Liberals made during the campaign to developing more co-op and non-profit housing and uploading the costs of social programs."

Upload campaign hits home stretch

STRONGER
TOGETHER



UPLOAD
co-op
housing

In February, the Provincial/Municipal review panel is scheduled to report with its recommendations on how to deal with the cost and delivery of a range of social services, including co-op and non-profit housing. "We're in the home stretch of the campaign," says **Harvey Cooper**, the Ontario Region's Manager of Government Relations. "We have a limited time to make the case that uploading co-op housing is the right thing to do."

Uploading of social services from the municipal level back to Queen's Park featured prominently in the election campaign. All three major parties acknowledged that it is unsustainable to continue to fund these services from a municipal property tax base.

In August, the Liberals committed to upload the cost of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB), over the next four years. These were two priority programs that municipalities wanted the Province to take financial responsibility for. "This development augurs well for our proposal to upload co-op housing," says Cooper. "The focus on the uploading issue during the election and the fact that the ODSP and ODB programs are now out of the way as upload targets can only help us."

The Ontario Region was assured in writing by the Liberal government before the election campaign began that our upload proposal had been tabled with the review panel and would be seriously considered.

In the final phase of the campaign, the Ontario Region will be setting up more meetings about the upload with MPPs, particularly newly-elected members, and efforts to meet with municipal politicians will be stepped up. "We think our proposal is a winner with clear benefits for municipalities, the Province and housing co-ops," says Cooper. "As the Review panel gets ready to make its recommendations, we need to make sure we have key provincial and municipal politicians on side. It'll be a busy few months."

To get involved in the campaign, please contact Harvey Cooper (ext. 237) or Simone Swail (ext. 239) at 1-800-268-2537. Or email, hcooper@chfcanda.coop, sswail@chfcanda.coop.

Mario Sergio, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, announced at the 2007 AGM that the government is prepared to move forward with changes to the eviction system.



Eviction law reform moving forward

Eviction law reform has been a top priority for Ontario housing co-ops since members passed a resolution at the 2003 AGM calling on the Ontario Region to look into ways of improving the eviction system. Co-ops are concerned that the current model is too slow and costly for both members and co-ops and not as fair to members facing eviction as it should be. In 2004 the Ontario Council submitted a proposal for a new approach to the Province and has worked since then to win political support.

Finally, at this year's AGM, the Parliamentary Assistant for Housing, **Mario Sergio**, announced a major breakthrough. He told delegates that his government is prepared to move forward with the changes that co-ops have been calling for.

The key elements of the government's plan include:

- a new Co-op Housing Tribunal, linked to the Landlord and Tenant Board, to deal with co-op evictions
- a common set of grounds for eviction set out in legislation. The Ministry will work with the Ontario Region to confirm the grounds. Co-ops will be able to use by-laws to set out other grounds for eviction but these cases would be dealt with through the courts

- streamlining of the requirements in the *Co-operative Corporations Act* concerning the internal co-op process, and
- legal clarification that the Tribunal will start over in its review of an eviction and make its decision based on the merits of the case with no examination of the internal process used by the co-op.

Just before the election began, Ontario Region staff met with Ministry staff to begin detailed work on the changes. Now that the election is over and the Liberals are back in government, work is expected to resume in the near future.

Dale Reagan, Managing Director of CHF Canada's Ontario Region cautions that a new eviction system will not be in place for a while. "It will take a number of months to complete the work with Ministry officials and then we have to get the changes onto the government's legislative agenda," says Reagan. "But real progress is finally being made and we can hope that a year from now a much better system will be in place." ☺



Unanimous court decision backs co-op, quashes “unjustified” receivership

Service manager seeks leave to appeal

Labourview Co-operative Homes in Chatham has won a landmark legal victory in its fight to get out of receivership and put the co-op back in control of its members.

The co-op was put in receivership by the Chatham-Kent service manager in October 2006. The reason given was that the co-op had an “accumulated deficit that was material and excessive having regard to the normal practices of similar providers”. This is a “triggering event” (grounds for action) under the *Social Housing Reform Act*.

In a unanimous decision issued on August 13, three judges in Ontario’s Divisional Court quashed the receivership and granted an order declaring that “a receiver or a receiver and manager over Labourview is not justified under the SHRA” and discharging the receiver.

The key finding by the judges was that the conditions for determining that a triggering event had occurred were not met by the service manager. In deciding that the co-op’s accumulated deficit was “material and excessive”, the Court found that the service

manager had not looked into the “normal practices of similar providers” as required by the Act.

CHF Canada helped the co-op with its case and provided evidence of significant accumulated deficits in co-ops in other areas where, as in Chatham-Kent, rents were not rising as fast as costs. We said that this was a common problem resulting from the co-op funding model and that the only solution was additional subsidy to bring the co-op’s base funding to an adequate level.

it must also be remembered that the applicant is a non-profit housing co-operative, democratically operated by its members It is not a mere agency of the municipality and its decisions must be given some deference by the municipality ...

The judgment includes some encouraging language about the unique democratic nature of housing co-ops and the approach that a regulator is obliged to take in administering housing programs

under the SHRA. It says: “In the present case, it must also be remembered that the applicant is a non-profit housing co-operative, democratically operated by its members who, largely, are its tenants. It is not a mere agency of the municipality and its decisions must be given some deference by the municipality for this reason, a deference markedly absent from the evidence before us”. The decision also states that the approach to regulation must be “consistent with the purpose of the Act – assisting and educating housing providers, rather than limiting or punishing them”.

While in charge, the receiver was not able to reduce the deficit. In fact substantial additional costs were incurred to pay for the receivership. CHF Canada’s Ontario Region is now working closely with Labourview’s board of directors as it takes back responsibility for running the co-op.

The service manager wants to appeal the ruling and has applied to the Court of Appeal for the right to do so. The Court’s decision about whether to grant the appeal is expected before year end. ☺

New Ontario co-ops: Overnight successes a long time coming

by Fiona Jackson

It took less than three months for **Raiffeisen Housing Co-op** in Sudbury to get the go-ahead to build a new 68-unit apartment building on a site next door.

It didn't seem likely that any new co-ops would get built in Sudbury under the Affordable Housing Program as funding was limited to \$20,000 per unit – far short of what is needed. But in late June the co-op learned that increased funding was available and Raiffeisen Housing Co-op President, **Barb Millsap**, went to work. She pulled together a development team that included the contractor who built the original co-op. By the July 24 deadline they presented a fully developed proposal to the City.



“Lo and behold, on August 8, City Council supported our proposal and sent it on to the Province for approval,” Millsap says. “By early September we’d received a conditional commitment from the Province.”

And Raiffeisen Co-op is not alone. In August, two other co-ops, including **Twin Pine Village** in London and **Needlewood Glen** in Waterloo, had funding approved to add a total of 36 units to their co-ops

to meet the changing needs of their membership. This spike in activity follows a decade in which almost no new co-ops were built. Two Ottawa co-ops – **Blue Heron** and **McLean** – and a 16-unit addition to **Margaret Laurence Co-op** in Toronto were the only exceptions.

But things have started to turn around. Pressed by CHF Canada and others, the Ontario Government made some changes to the program to make it work better for co-ops. And earlier this year, the Province set aside a number of units to be allocated to co-ops and community-based non-profits. Through the Partnership Agreement with CHF Canada and the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, they also provided [6] ▶

Above: A view of the co-op for hospitality workers being developed as part of the Regent Park regeneration project.

Left: Raiffeisen Housing Co-op in Sudbury was given the green light to build a new 68-unit apartment building under the Affordable Housing Program.



some pre-development funding to help groups put proposals together. Seed funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has also helped.

“It’s exciting to see a revival of co-op development after such a long gap,” says **Dale Reagan**, Managing Director of CHF Canada’s Ontario Region. “But it’s only a modest start. Now we have to hold the Liberal government’s feet to the fire and get them to act on their campaign commitment to put a long-term affordable housing strategy in place that includes co-ops as an important part of the mix.”

One brand new co-op is being developed in Toronto as part of the regeneration of the Regent Park public housing project. Sponsored by Unite Here, a hospitality workers’ union, the founding board is working with the **Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto** on a 12-story, 85-unit co-op to provide housing for downtown hospitality workers as well as a teaching kitchen and café.

About ten other co-op groups are working on funding proposals to add new units or develop a new co-op.

Back in Sudbury, Barb’s team works hard to make sure the Raiffeisen’s expansion stays on track and meets a March 1 target for construction start. “We’re sort of in shock because it’s happened so fast,” says Millsap. ☺

Good management

Responding to WSIB demands to register

Recently, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) has been contacting some co-ops with a demand that they register with WSIB. This action flows out of work by WSIB and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to share information in their databases. What should your co-op do if it gets such a letter?

CHF Canada’s Ontario Region encourages co-ops to have WSIB coverage for its employees but it is not mandatory. We can provide your co-op with a letter from WSIB that confirms that registration is not mandatory. In the past, when co-ops have shown this letter to their local WSIB office, the problem has been resolved.

After doing this, your co-op may also want to contact the CRA. The CRA classifies all employers under a system called the North American Industry Classification System. In at least one case the problem was caused because the CRA had classified the co-op as “Lessors of Residential Buildings excluding Social Housing Projects” rather than “Lessors of Social Housing Projects”. If your co-op has been incorrectly classified under this system, asking them to correct the classification should stop future demands to register.

The Ontario Region has been in touch with senior WSIB staff involved in the joint initiative with CRA and they are trying to resolve the classification problems.

You can get more background on WSIB coverage for housing co-ops on CHF Canada’s website. Go to the *Running your co-op* section and look under *Insuring Your Co-op*.

Complying with new asbestos rules

As reported in an eALERT this past summer, starting November 1, new asbestos regulations require building owners to determine whether they have asbestos-containing materials in their buildings.

The rules apply to all co-ops no matter when they were built. Although newer co-ops are less likely to have asbestos-containing materials, there is still a possibility they were used. See the July 13, 2007, eALERT on the CHF Canada website for more details on what your co-op needs to do.

Co-op Cost Cutters has put together a list of asbestos consulting companies that co-ops can contact. Check the Co-op Cost Cutters website at www.coopcostcutters.com for more information.





John Boyd, long-time member of Woodsworth Housing Co-op in Toronto, received the Distinguished Co-operator Award at OnCoop's Co-operative Spirit Recognition Awards ceremony on October 17.

staff in early September. "Hall is very knowledgeable about co-op housing, and her staff seemed to find the information shared at the meeting valuable," says **Scott Piatkowski**, Community Co-ordinator at **Beechwood Co-operative Homes** in Waterloo. "They were very interested and gave us a generous amount of time."

You can find a copy of our submission on CHF Canada's website at www.chfcanada.coop

Co-op Gala honours Woodsworth member

When **John Boyd** moved into **Woodsworth Housing Co-op** in 1980, he had barely unpacked before he was asked to join the membership committee. Almost three decades later, John remains fully dedicated to co-op living, both in word and in action and, at age 94, he has no plans to move.

An editor by profession, John began the co-op's newsletter, *The Woodsworth Weekly* and continues as one of the editors and regular contributors.

John received the Distinguished Co-operator Award at the Co-operative Spirit Recognition Awards banquet recently hosted by the Ontario Co-operative Association. Woodsworth Co-op nominated him for the award. **Carol MacEachern**, Vice-President of the Ontario Council, presented the award.

Housing co-op reps meet with Human Rights Commission

An Ontario Human Rights Commission consultation paper says that there is discrimination in rental housing, including social housing. In June, the Commission held consultations across the province to get public input.

CHF Canada and a number of co-op activists took part in the roundtable discussions in September and CHF Canada made a written submission. It provided background on the co-op housing sector and our work in promoting human rights and brought several issues to the Commission's attention including these:

- The scarcity of support funding for affordable housing is the greatest systemic human rights barrier in Ontario, and creates many human rights challenges for co-ops.
- Fulfilling our "duty to accommodate" those with disabilities depends on government fulfilling its duty to fund these accommodations.

- Ontario co-ops operate within a framework set by their funders, so many of the issues that may cause concern with the Commission are in fact imposed upon co-ops.

The paper urges the Commission to remind "the Ontario Government that the right to housing must be backed up by a coherent and predictable housing supply program" to assist in "overturning municipal policies and practices that allow NIMBY [not in my backyard] to flourish." It also calls on the Commission to "name the loss of existing affordable housing as a human rights issue affecting Ontario's most disadvantaged citizens".

"We expressed a strong desire to work together with the Commission to address human rights concerns," says **Karla Skoutajan**, CHF Canada's Director of Sector Development. "We specifically invited them to contact us should they ever hear of discrimination in co-op housing."

To help ensure that these points were heard, CHF Canada set up a meeting with Chief Commissioner **Barbara Hall** and other Commission

council profile

Louise Taillefer announces the staff long-term service award recipients at the 2007 AGM.



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Story ideas, comments or questions? Call Keith Moyer at 1-800-268-2537 or e-mail kmoyer@chfcanda.coop.

Editor: Keith Moyer
kmoyer@chfcanda.coop
Design and printing:
EGO Creative Solutions
design@egocreatives.com
Cielo Print Inc.
jim@cieloprint.ca

Contact information

National Office
311-225 Metcalfe Street
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1P9
Tel (613) 230-2201
Fax (613) 230-2231
Toll-free 1-800-465-2752

Ontario Region
313-720 Spadina Avenue
Toronto ON M5S 2T9
Tel (416) 366-1711
Fax (416) 366-3876
Toll-free 1-800-268-2537

Council profile: Louise Taillefer

Louise Taillefer was elected as the Northern Ontario representative on the Ontario Council at the 2006 AGM in London. She first got involved in affordable housing in 1991 when she began working at a non-profit housing project in Sudbury. In 1996, she started at **Silo Co-operative Homes**, the last co-op built in Sudbury before the provincial government cancelled the housing program. In 2001 she began working as the office manager at **Palace Place Co-operative Homes** in addition to her work at Silo.

One of Louise's goals as a Council member is to improve the visibility of CHF Canada in Northern Ontario and increase the knowledge of co-ops about CHF Canada's services. "It is very important that co-ops are aware of the programs and assistance that CHF Canada offers," says Louise. "I have often found that when I refer co-ops that are having difficulties to CHF Canada, they are surprised to find how much help is available."

During the time when housing was being transferred from the Province to municipalities, co-ops in Greater Sudbury elected Louise to sit on a working group advising the City on downloading issues. Since the transfer she has helped municipally-administered co-ops by hearing appeals and assisting at members' meetings.

Louise also volunteers with an HIV residence. "For the last nine years I have been part of the board of directors at Maison La Paix House," she says. "The organization is a residence for people living with HIV/AIDS. We are currently converting the residence to a 10-bed hospice."

Her first year on the Council was a good year. "I found that I really enjoy being part of the co-op sector in ways other than working in a co-op," says Louise.

In her free time, Louise enjoys fishing and spending time with her two granddaughters. ☺