

Members rally to keep Thornhill Green a co-op



Just days before CHF Canada's annual meeting in June, members learned that **Thornhill Green** housing co-op had to go to court to defend its very existence. York Region, which administers the Ontario co-op housing program in that area, was trying to force the sale of the co-op to its own housing company, at little more than half the market value.

"We've talked a lot at other annual meetings about the problems with Ontario's *Social Housing Reform Act*," CHF Canada director **Joanne Crouse**

told members at the AGM. "But we have never seen a municipal government make such an outrageous attack on a housing co-operative."

And they are doing it through a hurried legal process. York Region gave the co-op less than two weeks' notice before the first court hearing on May 29, even though the Region had decided to pursue this decision three months earlier.

CHF Canada members unanimously passed a motion of support and contributed

more than \$3,000 to a Legal Assistance Fund to help Thornhill Green defend itself.

The SHRA legislation makes it easy for the municipal service managers who administer the program to appoint a receiver if the co-op needs to borrow money for renovations or other repair work. CHF Canada members in Ontario have fought for years to win changes to the law that takes much of the decision-making out of the hands of co-op members and gives it to the municipal government.



Other Ontario co-ops, most recently Labourview Housing Co-op, have had to go to court to defend their rights. Labourview won a big victory that included a strong rebuke by the judges of the service manager's lack of respect for co-op democracy. York Region is going even further in trampling on the rights of co-op members by trying to actually close down Thornhill Green and take over its assets.

CHF Canada members in New Brunswick were so outraged that they took the time at their own federation meeting to pass a motion in support of Thornhill Green. They also decided to contribute to the Legal Assistance Fund to help the co-op with their legal costs.

CHF Canada and the co-op have joined together to take legal action and were successful in court on May 29 in winning a postponement on the hearing until July 18. On that date, the co-op was able to present its case. The judge listened very carefully to the materials presented and is currently reviewing the case before making his decision.

The co-op and CHF Canada have contacted municipal, provincial and federal politicians and have succeeded in creating media

interest in the story. A new section on CHF Canada's website includes a petition in support of the co-op and other background materials.

At a rally on July 15, CHF Canada President **Ken Elliott** told members, "I've come all the way from New Brunswick today to assure the members of Thornhill Green Housing Co-op that you are not alone." More than 300 people attended the rally, including many supporters from the neighbouring community. Busloads of co-op members came from Toronto and the Golden Horseshoe area. Co-op members and staff came from as far away as Sudbury and Ottawa. "All I can say to York Region is "you're wrong", Thornhill Green President **Jim Common** told the rally. " You can see we are a vibrant, engaged community

and we're good neighbours. We want to resolve this issue by sitting down, rolling up our sleeves and working out an agreement that works for all parties."

CHF Canada members have set up a Legal Assistance fund for Thornhill Green and other housing co-ops that have to go to court to protect their rights as co-ops. Visit www.chfcanda.coop for more information.

