To: Chair and Members
   Emergency & Community Services Committee

From: Vicki Woodcox
      Acting General Manager
      Community Services Department

Telephone: 905 546-4839
Facsimile: 905 540-5608
E-mail: Vicki.Woodcox@hamilton.ca

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Re: Rent Supplement/Housing Allowance Program - Phase 2 (ECS08007(a))
   (City Wide)

Council Direction:

On March 26, 2008, Council approved Report 08-004 of the Emergency and Community
Services Committee; specifically, Item 11(d), which reads as follows:

11. Developing Opportunities for Ontario Renters (DOOR) Funding
   (ECS08007) (City Wide) (Item 8.2)

   (d) That $1.29 million of the $6.58 million of the federal funding for the
       Developing Opportunities for Ontario Renters program be utilized for
       rent supplement/housing allowance.

Information:

In addition to the $1.29 million of the $6.58 million of the federal funding, $1 million was
made available from the Future Fund, for a total of $2.29 million to be utilized for the
rent supplement/housing allowance.

The Rent Supplement/Housing Allowance Program is available to tenants who are in
need of a rent-geared-to-income (RGI) subsidy, but are still on the waitlist for social
housing. The units are available in private market rental projects, which are secured by
the Housing Division staff. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to lower-
income households on the waitlist and within five years secure a permanent RGI social
housing unit.

These additional dollars are being used to fund Phase 2 of the Rent
Supplement/Housing Allowance Program. Phase 1, which was funded through the
Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program, has been very successful with one of the
highest take-up rates across the province. Phase 1 of the Program is set at a monthly allowance of $200. As of January 2009, the Program is at capacity with 250 tenants housed (80 tenants through the Hostel to Homes Program, 156 chronological, and 14 Victims of Abuse).

Phase 2 of the Program also has a set allowance of $200 per month, which became effective October 1, 2008 and has an end-date of September 30, 2013. Approximately 190 tenants can be housed, of which 40 are allowances for the Hostels to Homes Project. As of March 10, 2009, a total of 95 of the 150 units, as well as 35 of the 40 allowances, which was set aside for Hostels to Homes - Phase 2, have been successfully utilized.

Some examples of situations in which these programs have made a difference in the lives of our applicants/tenants are noted below:

1) A woman was living with her parents in their home on a temporary basis, waiting to find a one-bedroom apartment. She had selected several properties on the Access to Housing waiting list, but was having difficulty finding a non-profit housing provider that would accept her based on her financial situation and her housing history, which was unstable. She had been declined once and it was clear that she would have the same experience with other non-profit housing providers. She was staying with her parents on a temporary basis, but as a mature woman she wanted her own apartment.

Housing staff called one of the private rent supplement landlords for a one-bedroom apartment, and set-up an appointment the next day. Together, the landlord, applicant and staff reviewed the situation and the applicant was accepted. Today, she resides in a secure and safe building and no longer has a financial burden because her rent is geared to her income.

2) A single woman who had relocated from the east coast was on the waiting list for a rent supplement apartment. Her rental history was limited in Ontario. Prior to coming to Ontario, she had not heard of non-profit housing/rental supplements. She was separating from an abusive partner, but had difficulty obtaining a landlord reference because his parents owned the apartment building that they had lived in. The credit history was poor, and her name was attached to several debts. She was referred to a nice apartment building overlooking the city. Staff called the owner to advocate and to explain the poor credit history. At the apartment viewing, the superintendent was understanding of the past situation and wanted to give her a new start. The superintendent called his head-office to advocate for acceptance. The applicant was accepted and she is now living in a beautiful building because of the Rent Supplement Program. A few months after moving in, she decided to go back to school to upgrade her courses, with plans of re-entering the workforce in the future.
3) A social worker called to advocate for her client who had lived in the same apartment for 14 years, paying the market rent. His Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) cheque did not cover the shelter allowance rent, which was $200 more than he could afford.

He was receiving support from several agencies (CNIB, home visiting nurses, and life sustaining treatments), in addition to being an insulin dependent diabetic. Through the joint efforts of the owner, supportive housing staff and the rent supplement staff, he became part of the Rent Supplement Program. He did not need to relocate or disrupt his living environment. His rent is now affordable and he is very happy to have a familiar residence with the existing supportive services continuing.

The Federal government recently released its new budget with $2 billion allocated for housing. It is very important for the Provincial and Federal governments to align these new housing supply programs with a rent supplement/housing allowance initiative. This will assist in ensuring that lower income households in Hamilton have access to safe, appropriate and affordable housing.

Report ECS08046(a) “Financial Exposure to the Potential Increase in Demand for Affordable Housing Due to the Recession” went forward to the Emergency and Community Services Committee on March 25, 2009, with the following recommendation:

a) That the Mayor correspond with the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to request that an increase in Federal and Provincial funding be provided for housing allowances and/or rent supplement programs to assist the thousands of existing renter households in Hamilton that are paying in excess of 30% of their income on rent.

As demonstrated by the above success stories, additional funding from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for these programs will make a significant difference in the lives of the individuals and families in Hamilton who participate in these programs.

Vicki Woodcox
Acting General Manager,
Community Services Department