Thank you Mr. Chair,

As part of the effort to develop solutions for homelessness and poverty for the Hamilton area, I am requesting that the E&CS Committee create a Task Force to study, define, and make recommendations for the creation of a professionally operated, non-profit "tenant supports" organization, and a fund-raising foundation, for Hamilton’s 13,000 social housing tenants.

This new organization would be a “one-stop” support system for social housing tenants who are vulnerable to a wide range of abusive and predatory situations, due to poor health and/or a lack of personal resources.

What does this mean and how would it work?

Hamilton has two non-profit children aid organizations that provides protection services and advocate for our kids.

Hamilton also has the SPCA; a non-profit organization that provides protection services and advocate for our pets.

I am suggesting that we adapt the mission used by SPCA and CAS for a new service and support organization for one of the largest and most identifiable groups of vulnerable citizens: the 13,000 social housing tenants who reside at CityHousing Hamilton sites.

For example, most of the time, CityHousing Hamilton has on-site support staff (social workers, PHN and guidance counsellors) for the tenants who live at the 181 Jackson and 95 Hess sites.
These on-site support staff advocate for tenants, prevent administrative evictions, prevent crisis situations from developing into assault or suicide situations, alleviate poverty by preventing the unfair or unjustified suspension of Ontario Works and ODSP benefits, and help tenants extract themselves from criminal entrapment.

Since 1998, I have been advocating for a more robust “tenant supports” regime that would maintain a consistent level of qualified staff and resources for tenant supports programs. I have made substantial efforts to work with the old “Hamilton Housing” group, and the new CityHousing Corporation directors, management, staff and others, in order to develop sustainable "tenant support" solutions, with limited or short-term results.

My experiences with CityHousing has lead me to believe that we should be aiming for a city-wide, social housing "tenant support" solution that is more stable, sustainable and comprehensive, better funded and more statistically accountable so we can assess and address the true cost of homelessness and poverty to the City of Hamilton.

I feel is time to assess what we have learned from CityHousing Hamilton's on-site “tenant supports” experience and take that operational model to the next level. I feel that the City of Hamilton needs a non-profit, institutional partner that can raise its own funding and become THE research expert and authority and that is able to create and execute solutions for homelessness and poverty for our area.

This non-profit service organization would be a hybrid, incorporating aspects of COAST, Public Health, ROOFS, tenant association, social center and community legal services; it would be a general mix of the community organizations and services that are needed and used most often by social housing tenants.

I am asking that this initiative NOT be shunted to CityHousing Hamilton.

I am asking the E&CS Committee to support my initiative directly by creating an Interview Sub-Committee for the purpose of defining, interviewing and forming an Advisory Committee or Task Force with strong, delegated authority needed to develop the vision and recommendations for achieving the above-mentioned goals.

...WAIT FOR QUESTIONS...

Considerations for the Emergency & Community Services Committee, the Interview Sub-Committee and the community Task Force

This new "tenant supports" organization would have the dual role of "protecting Cityhousing tenants from the community" and "protecting the community from CityHousing tenants." If this expression sounds familiar, it is because it is adopted from the operational mantra that is used by the SPCA and it partner, the City of Hamilton's Animal Services.
For the purposes of this presentation, I am defining CityHousing tenants as the "salvageable homeless" because the needs of this group of citizens are relatively the easy to identify and address, and because they are already "in the system" and are de facto charges of the City of Hamilton.

In order to achieve and ensure financial sustainability, this non-profit organization would limit its scope and focus on preventing homelessness and alleviating poverty for CityHousing Hamilton tenants, only!

According to City of Hamilton staff reports, there are an additional 5000+ people in the community who can be classified as "transient or chronic homeless." As part of the strategy to achieve sustainability, this group would not be covered. Also, seniors in "homes" and retirement villages would not be covered.

This “service” aspect of this new hybrid organization could be wrapped onto the framework of a professionally operated, non-profit social housing tenants association.

There would be a nominal "membership" fee of $1 per month that would be collected for the organization, by CityHousing Hamilton, as a part of the tenants rent and used to leverage grants and other sources of funding.

The City of Hamilton would provide at least two FTE staff positions that would be seconded to this organization, with the access and privileges and benefits and union membership and authority of City supervisory staff. These staff would report directly to the organization's board and to the E&CS Committee.

This new organization might achieve efficiencies by running off the administrative backbone of the CityHousing Hamilton Corporation and the City of Hamilton.

Each social housing tenant community would be an unincorporated chapter of a professionally operated, non-profit organization. This new organization would have a seat on the CityHousing Hamilton board of directors.

The organization will employ an aggressive, high performance Development Team.

This new hybrid organization must be seen, trusted and respected by tenants as a critical source of support. It must developing the "street cred" needed to address issues and problems in the social housing tenant community that are outside the mission, mandate and authority of the existing community agencies and the Police.

The working title for this Task Force: "Adult Services And Protection" or ASAP.

Tuesday June 21, 2011