To: Chair and Members  
Emergency & Community Services Committee  
Outstanding Business Item No. “I” and Issue: Plan on How to Redevelop the Oriole Crescent Housing Complex

From: Joe-Anne Priel  
General Manager  
Community Services Department

Date: March 9, 2009

Re: Plan on How to Redevelop the Oriole Crescent Housing Complex (CS09027) (Ward 4)

Council Direction:

At the August 8, 2007, Committee of the Whole meeting, Council approved the Motion that the CityHousing Hamilton staff investigate the Toronto Regent Park experience and report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee with a plan on how to redevelop the Oriole Crescent housing complex (with consideration to other CityHousing Hamilton developments).

Information:

CityHousing Hamilton Corporation owns and operates 1 and 2 Oriole Crescent, which is a 159-unit townhouse project constructed in the 1960s. It is located in the McQuesten Neighbourhood bounded by Queenston Road, the Red Hill Creek Expressway, Barton Street East and Reid Avenue South. There are other CityHousing Hamilton developments in this neighbourhood, including townhouses on Lang Avenue and Reid Avenue South, in addition to scattered single-detached and semi-detached units.

Over the next several years, the Regent Park Revitalization Program involves demolishing and reconstructing over 2,000 rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units with the intent to transform the development into a more traditional urban neighbourhood. This will include a variety of residential building forms with a combination of rental and ownership opportunities, a mix of resident households with varying incomes, and introducing retail, community, and other non-residential uses into the area.

Housing staff believe that Oriole Crescent represents a strategic opportunity in terms of redevelopment potential. The redevelopment of Oriole Crescent will not only impact the
tenants of CityHousing Hamilton Corporation, but its effects will be felt throughout the McQuesten neighbourhood and may pave the way for future social housing redevelopment initiatives throughout the City.

Before we can articulate our end-vision for Oriole Crescent, we need to embark on consultations to help us define our goals. Residents must be part of the process from beginning to end, through measures such as public forums, workshops, and focus groups. Staff will work with the residents of Oriole Crescent and surrounding communities, community agencies, financial experts, developers, architects, City of Hamilton staff, and others to determine a number of themes that will form the framework of the Oriole Crescent Redevelopment Plan (OCRP). Possible themes of the OCRP could include:

- Introducing market housing into the area as a seamless blend of market and RGI units;
- Minimizing tenant hardship through the redevelopment process;
- Maintaining housing affordability;
- Ensuring a mix of unit sizes for a mix of different households;
- Creating a forum for community interaction;
- Improving the health, security and safety of residents;
- Improving planning and neighbourhood design;
- Creating play areas for children and recreational spaces for seniors;
- Environmental sustainability;
- Encouraging retail, employment and economic development opportunities; and,
- Helping Oriole Crescent become a destination for neighbourhood and city-wide residents.

Consultation throughout the visioning and implementation process of the OCRP is critical to ensure buy-in of all key players, but most significantly of the residents themselves. Staff will create a consultation schedule that will encompass all phases of work as this initiative will take a period of years to complete and will likely be completed in phases. The importance of establishing a constructive, open and transparent relationship with residents in any redevelopment initiative is pivotal to success and viability, particularly during a long-term project such as this. The more information that staff can provide in advance of any redevelopment work, the higher the probability is that community residents’ potential concerns can be alleviated. To further enhance the consultation process, staff will look into the possibility of hiring Oriole Crescent residents to act as facilitators/interpreters as well as providing incentives for community participation. This has had tremendous success in increasing community engagement during the Regent Park process, as well as creating employment and networking opportunities for social housing tenants.

**Review of Other Social Housing Redevelopments:**

Before initiating the consultation process, Housing staff have researched the best practices of other social housing redevelopment projects. Examples of public housing
Redevelopments in Canada are the Regent Park project and South Riverdale’s Don Mount Court housing complex in Toronto. It will cost approximately $60 million to redevelop Don Mount Court. The redevelopment is occurring in two phases and once complete, it will include 232 RGI and 187 market condominium units and a two-acre neighbourhood park.

At Regent Park, the 2,082 RGI units will be replaced with 5,100 residential units (a mix of RGI and market priced units) over 10 years in six building phases. Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) plans to invest $412 million and anticipates that private developers will spend approximately $500 million to construct new residential units and commercial space. Housing staff met with City of Toronto staff to discuss their best practices. During TCHC’s Don Mount Court vision and planning process, successful measures included:

- Neighbourhood and stakeholder involvement from the beginning;
- A flexible planning process that allowed the area to respond to changing demographic and economic conditions;
- The creation of a neighbourhood association;
- Ongoing political support from councillors and representatives from senior levels of government; and,
- Connections with surrounding communities.

The Windsor Essex Community Housing Corporation has also begun work on the redevelopment of a seniors’ building in the City of Windsor. In partnership with George Brown College, they created a design charrette of what the redevelopment building could look like.

Internationally, in Victoria, Australia, the government is demolishing seven, two-storey blocks of apartments containing 28 units and replacing them with 39 new units more suitable for a wider range of tenants including singles, families, and people with disabilities. The old units were built in the 1950s and will be replaced by new environmentally-friendly units whose design will lower water and power costs for residents, as well as the impact on the environment. In addition, a community enterprise employing local people has been created to undertake fencing, house maintenance and landscaping works on public housing in the area – resulting in 45 new jobs and more than 213 training positions for local people.

Progress to Date:

Although a formal consultation process for the Oriole Crescent Redevelopment Plan has not yet begun, Housing staff have been involved with numerous social revitalization projects concerning Oriole Crescent residents. Housing Division staff attends meetings held by the McQuesten Community Planning Team that focus on improving living conditions at 1 and 2 Oriole Crescent. The McQuesten Community Planning Team is comprised of members of the Affordable Housing Flagship, housing advocates, not-for-profit organizations, and residents of the McQuesten neighbourhood, that include...
tenants from Oriole Crescent. These meetings have been productive and staff has responded to numerous concerns through two 90-day work plans that were implemented in 2007 and 2008. Examples include:

- Erecting signs, trimming trees, and changing lighting to 2 Oriole Crescent;
- Providing people with transportation to grocery stores through a Shuttle Program;
- Implementing community gardens; and,
- Promoting a range of services available to residents through a “Service Crawl”.

CityHousing Hamilton allocated over $250,000 to complete these improvements. Staff believes that by achieving these short-term objectives we are fostering trust and solidifying a harmonious working relationship with the McQuesten Community Planning Team and with the residents of Oriole Crescent.

There may also be opportunities to enhance employment prospects of Oriole Crescent residents through social enterprise ventures and partnerships with employers in the area. CityHousing Hamilton’s Board of Directors recently approved a staff recommendation to create a social enterprise pilot project at Oriole Crescent. As well, there is the possibility to integrate new employment-generating land uses within the neighbourhood recognizing the strategic proximity to the Red Hill Creek Expressway.

Although there are many similarities between Regent Park and a proposed Oriole Crescent redevelopment, there are also marked differences. The most significant difference will be overall land values. The value of the land in Hamilton is typically lower than that in Toronto. As a result, it may be more difficult to secure private sector interest in possible partnership arrangements. However, in another sense this lower land cost may encourage more innovative, creative and cost efficient redevelopment scenarios.

A key strength of the Regent Park redevelopment was that it represented a high profile strategic investment opportunity for the Federal and Provincial governments to allocate funding that achieved a number of public policy objectives including new affordable housing, residential intensification, energy efficiency and reduction of greenhouse gases and improved hard and soft infrastructure. Staff is confident that a solid and pragmatic business case, outlining the benefits of any initiative proposing the redevelopment and revitalization of Oriole Crescent, would be similarly attractive to the senior levels of government as a strategic investment opportunity.

Housing staff have also been liaising with colleagues in the Community Planning and Design Section of the Planning Division, Planning and Economic Development Department through the Secondary Plan review process currently underway. Planning staff will be advising the Economic Development and Planning Committee in the near future of a new 10 to 15 year work program. This work program will contain not only priorities for Secondary Plans under the Planning Act, but will also provide new directions in the preparation of “Community Strategies”. Working in conjunction with other City departments, these strategies are intended to address community and social planning matters that directly compliment the traditional land-use and physical planning
initiatives under the Planning Act. Although still under review by Planning Division staff, the intent is to establish a number of pilot project areas for these Community Strategies that may include the McQuesten neighbourhood as a potential candidate. The McQuesten neighbourhood includes the CityHousing Hamilton developments on Oriole Crescent, Lang Street and Reid Avenue South.

In addition, staff are aware of the opportunities presented by the possible construction of a light-rail transit (LRT) along major east-west arterials, such as Queenston Road or Barton Street, and will work closely with Planning and Economic Development Department staff in this regard. There may also be some remnant parcels available from the construction of the Red Hill Creek Expressway that could be used in the redevelopment. Housing Division staff has had preliminary discussions and will work further with Real Estate Division staff on this matter.

One objective of any future redevelopment scenarios will be to encourage and facilitate a greater number of homeownership opportunities in the area, through incentive programs offered through CityHousing Hamilton as well as through the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program. As Housing Division staff are directly responsible for the delivery and administration of the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program, staff can ensure maximum take-up and promotion of the program at Oriole Crescent. In addition, another objective will be to attract a higher proportion of tenants paying market rent in the area to promote an integration of different household incomes. There may also be opportunities to encourage a mix of residential and commercial growth in the area, particularly as the area is currently poorly-served in terms of retail amenities such as restaurants, banks, grocery stores, etc.

Next Steps:

In the third quarter of 2009, Housing Division staff will present a detailed report to the CityHousing Hamilton Board of Directors for consideration on the next steps of a proposed Oriole Crescent Redevelopment Plan. Staff are mindful that we need to build flexibility in the Plan to respond to varying socioeconomic and demographic conditions. If, for example, buildings are created with more than one use in mind, they will be able to respond to a changing mix of needs in future.

The first step of the Oriole Crescent Redevelopment Plan is initiating the consultation process. Once that is underway and as the Oriole Crescent Redevelopment Plan moves forward, staff will make every effort to achieve a diversity of built form, design, tenure, and mix of incomes, while keeping neighbourhood stability and community involvement at the forefront. We can encourage this by involving the community in our decision-making processes and continually emphasizing the importance of our consultation strategy.

Joe-Anne Priel,
General Manager
Community Services Department