To: Chair and Members
Social Services Committee
Outstanding Business Item No. J and Issue: Tenant Participation in the Electoral Process

From: Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager
Community Services Department

Date: September 14, 2006

Re: Tenant Participation in the Electoral Process (SSC06032) (City Wide)

Council Direction:
At its June 13, 2006 meeting the Social Services Committee passed a motion that directed staff to investigate the development of a strategy to improve tenant participation in the electoral process by partnering with Housing Advocacy groups and to report back to the Committee.

Information:
According to the 2001 Census, there are approximately 65,000 renter households in Hamilton. While staff is not aware of any existing research dealing specifically with tenant voter patterns, there is evidence that, more generally, people with lower incomes have a lower voter turnout than those of higher incomes, and people with lower incomes are more predominantly tenants.

Staff gave consideration to undertaking new research into the voting patterns of tenants in Hamilton and understanding why tenant voter turnout is low. Given the scope and potential cost of this research and analysis, staff are of the view that this would not be a feasible approach at this time. Rather, a more practical strategy should focus on information dissemination to the target audience of tenants to try and effect the desired change of increasing voter turnout.

Consultations on developing a strategy to increase tenant voter turnout were held with the Tenant Advisory Committee - a citizen volunteer committee of Council, and members of the Hamilton Tenant Education Project – an initiative of the Solutions for Housing Action Committee (a community housing advocacy group). Internal City consultations were also held with City Clerk and Communications staff.

Central to the strategy is the development and distribution of an information pamphlet that describes why it is important for tenants to vote in the municipal election. Key messages include: it is a tenant’s right to vote; many municipal issues directly affect
tenants (e.g. property taxes, municipal service provision); and tenant votes can make a
difference. The pamphlet was developed by members of the Hamilton Tenant
Education Project, a community advocacy group interested in providing information to
tenants on rights and residential tenancy issues. A copy of the information pamphlet is
attached as Appendix A to this report.

The Tenant Advisory Committee has committed $1400.00 to the initiative from its
existing 2006 approved budget to cover printing and distribution costs. Furthermore,
the City, through Corporate Communications in the City Manager’s office, is making
available $500.00 of in-kind printing services as part of its initiative to provide voting
information to people with low literacy.

The strategy calls for City staff to collaborate with the community to distribute the
information pamphlets, primarily to rental apartment buildings and at places where
services are offered to tenants. CityHousing Hamilton will facilitate access to its rental
properties for pamphlet distribution, and City staff will ensure that copies of the
pamphlet are made available through distribution by Ontario Works Case Managers to
tenant clients. It is anticipated that the distribution would occur through the month of
October, 2006.

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Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager
Community Services Department
Tenants Pay Property Taxes Too

Many tenants don't realize that they pay property taxes through their rent. Hamilton's 65,000 tenant households contribute around one fifth of their rent towards municipal services through property taxes. That means as a tenant, you have an important stake in the decisions that are made by your local government. It's your money...you should have a say!

City Services are Important

Local governments are responsible for many things that affect your lives including public health services, many social services, public transit, waste collection, park spaces and recreation, police and fire services and enforcing bylaws that protect your rights as a tenant.

You Can Make A Difference

You have a right and a responsibility to vote, but tenants do not vote as often as they should. If more tenants vote, it will send an important message that tenant issues should be considered by municipal politicians.
Some people think that tenants won’t bother voting in the municipal election. On November 13th, send a message:

I’m a Tenant...

And I Vote!

This information publication was produced by SHAC and the Tenant Education Project with support from Hamilton’s Tenant Advisory Committee and the City of Hamilton.