Present: Chair B. Bratina, Vice-Chair S. Merulla
Councillors B. Kelly, B. McHattie, B. Morelli

Absent: Councillor T. Jackson (City Business)

Also Present: Councillor M. Pearson
J. Priel, General Manager, V. Woodcox, D. Brodati,
L. Gagne-Rennick, Community Services
I. Sturgeon, City Clerks

THE SOCIAL & SERVICES COMMITTEE PRESENTS REPORT 06-008 AND RESPECTFULLY RECOMMENDS FOR THE INFORMATION OF COUNCIL:

(a) Changes to the Agenda (Item 1)

The Clerk advised of the following changes to the agenda:

Nine various requests for delegation, numbered 4.1 through to 4.9 inclusive, were received and were requesting to appear before Committee this morning.

Members of Committee agreed to hear the delegations and waived the Rules of Procedure (Item 5.10).

Committee approved the agenda as amended.

(b) Declaration of Interest (Item 2)

None

(c) Approval of Minutes (Item 3)

The minutes of the May 23, 2006 Social Services Standing Committee meeting were approved as presented.
(d) Delegations (Item 6)

(i) Anel Gure, on behalf of Local Somali Refugees, respecting Difficulties with Translation Services (Item 6.1)

Ms. Gure appeared before Committee to ask for the City’s assistance in obtaining a funding source to get assistance for interpretation for the Somali refugees. She explained that they were experiencing language difficulties when they attend appointments such as the doctor, schools and various government agencies.

Joe-Anne Priel and Lynne Gagne-Rennick explained that in the near future, the City would be putting forward an R.F.P. to centralize our Interpreting Services, and felt that this action would help the situation. Ms. Priel noted that funding for interpretation services stops after one year at the Federal level and discussions to rectify this matter have not been successful.

Members of Committee concurred that this was the responsibility of all three levels of government and suggested that both the federal and provincial governments should be requested to respond to these issues. In addition, it was suggested that staff should meet with the community groups to determine what their exact needs were.

Staff concurred with these suggestions and agreed to review the situation.

Chair Bratina thanks Ms. Gure for her presentation and advised that he would follow-up with this issue in one month’s time.

(ii) Jeff Wingard, Affordable Housing Flag Ship and Frank Passaro, Scotia Bank - Update on the Affordable Housing Flagship (PowerPoint Presentation) (Item 6.6)

Jeff Wingard and Frank Passaro made a PowerPoint presentation to members of Committee regarding the Affordable Housing Flagship. They provided a brief history of the Committee, their membership, reviewed their goals and activities and noted the three priority areas which they were addressing; Creating Housing, Policy Advocacy and Community Development. A copy of the presentation was distributed to members of Committee.

Committee thanked Mr. Wingard and Mr. Passaro for their presentation and for the efforts of their Committee.
(iii) Tom Cooper, Community Development Co-ordinator, S.H.A.C.
Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Item 6.2)

Tom Cooper advised that Bill 109 will have a profound impact on the residents of the City of Hamilton. He noted the following concerns regarding the New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act;

- Bill being passed in one month’s time
- Little public consultation
- Vacancy de-control

Mr. Cooper noted the difficulty that residents were having to find affordable rental housing and urged members of Committee to re-consider implementing a Multi Residential Tax Reduction Program.

A lengthy discussion ensued. Members of Committee asked staff to report back to Committee with additional information regarding rent controls.

Chairman Bratina thanked Mr. Cooper for his presentation.

(iv) Vinay Jain, Dundurn Community Legal Services
Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Item 6.3)

Vinay Jain reviewed the Eviction Process with members of Committee and noted concern regarding the cost to request a review and felt that the fee would be prohibitive to tenants who lived in affordable housing.

(v) Hugh Tye, Executive Director, Hamilton Mountain Legal Services
Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Item 6.4)

Hugh Tye advised that Section 82 of the Act will now allow tenants to raise health and repairs issues in the Hearing of the Landlord Application for Arrears. He stated that the City needs to provide strong services to tenants who need evidence and suggested that the City needs to be proactive with respect to Building and Health Inspections. He suggested that the City should also consider waiving the fee for summonses. Mr. Tye requested that the City ensures that City Housing Hamilton Units are inspected when requested by the tenant.

Secondly, with respect to Section 203 of the new Act, and that the Board shall not make determinations or review decisions concerning “eligibility for rent-g geared-to-income assistance”, Mr. Tye suggested that an Independent Appeal Route is needed.

In closing, Mr. Tye asked the City to support amendments to the Social Housing Reform Act.

Council – June 14, 2006
(vi) Madhavi Reddy, Project Co-coordinator, Hamilton Tenant Education Program Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Item 6.5)

Madhavi Reddy spoke to the issue of newcomers to our City and the housing problems they encounter. One of the main issues is trying to locate affordable housing. In addition, she explained that many newcomers encounter problems with landlords with regards to their level of income, the source of their income and racial discrimination. She noted the importance of Tenant Education as many tenants are unaware of their rights and responsibilities.

(vii) Henry Aviles, Housing Help Centre
Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Item 6.7)

Due to time constraints, Mr. Aviles agreed to attend the next Committee meeting on June 27th, 2006.

(viii) Bob Wood, Executive Director, Housing Help Centre
Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Item 6.8)

Mr. Wood withdrew his delegation request.

(ix) Mary Todorow, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario

Mary Todorow spoke to the issue of the impact of rising energy prices on low-income households and how tenants pay for electricity in their rent. She explained that Section 137 of the Act deals with Smart Meters and felt that the majority of the decisions were in the hands of the landlords and was not fair to the tenants. Ms. Todorow suggested that if Smart Meters are installed then affordability issues could arise and put affordable housing at risk. Ms. Todorow presented members of Committee with a copy of her presentation and an information package by the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) and the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO).

Chairman Bratina thanked Ms. Todorow for her presentation.

(e) Staff Presentations (Item 7)

David Brodati, Manager, Housing, Policy & Programs (Item 7.1)
Re: The New Provincial Residential Tenancies Act (Verbal Update)

David Brodati provided members of Committee with an overview of the renter households in Hamilton and provided information regarding the average vacancy rate, the average rental rate and noted that affordability was still a main
Mr. Brodati also highlighted a few of the proposed changes to the new Provincial Residential Tenancies Act as follows:

- Maintenance
- Capital Expenditures
- Willful or Excessive Damage
- The Installation of Smart Meters
- The Landlord Tenant Board
- Hearing/Mediation
- Care Homes

On a motion moved by Councillor Morelli and seconded by Councillor Merulla, the Committee received the staff presentation.

(f) Tenant Participation in the Electoral Process Motion

Whereas tenants represent 65,000 residents in the City of Hamilton; and

Whereas historically Hamilton tenant voter turn out is very low in the City of Hamilton;

Therefore be it resolved that staff be directed to investigate the development of a strategy to improve tenant participation in the electoral process by partnering with Housing Advocacy Groups and report back to Committee.

(g) Property Tax Component of Tenant Rental Payment Motion

Whereas, tenants pay a significant amount of property taxes; and

Whereas, it is difficult for tenants to ascertain their own property tax impact as it is blended into their monthly rent; and

Whereas, high property taxes generally lead to significant citizen involvement in civic life;

Therefore be it resolved that staff investigate methods to determine and highlight the property tax components of tenant rental payments, and determine how to communicate that information to tenants and report back to Committee.

(h) Adjournment (Item 13)

There being no further business, the meeting of the Social Services Committee adjourned at 11:10 a.m.
Respectfully submitted,

Councillor B. Bratina
Chair

I. Sturgeon,
Legislative Assistant
June 13, 2006