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Cambridge, ON, ██████████

April 13, 2025

Cambridge City Council
50 Dickson Street
Cambridge, ON, N1R 5W8

Dear Members of Cambridge City Council:

I am writing today to express my support of Councillor Sheri Roberts' motion that will be debated at Tuesday's council meeting that calls for the City Planner to investigate the feasibility and potential implications of instituting a rental replacement by-law.

Firstly, I need to acknowledge that I am writing this with immense privilege in that I own a home. However, I spent the majority of my adult life as a renter. Renting provided me with much needed flexibility to travel across the country while I was a studying and practicing classical musician, and provided stability for me and my young family prior to being able to purchase a home here in Cambridge

But for many, the flexibility and stability with reference to renting just is no longer possible. For example, now when an apartment is vacant in Ontario, landlords are free to increase rents by any amount, sometimes double or triple the previous price. And increasingly landlords are using apartment renovations as a tactic to evict tenants and increase rents. This is rendering apartments unaffordable to many.

Earlier this year, I had the honour of running as a candidate in the provincial election. I spoke to many members of the public about their concerns regarding rent controls, renovictions, and the availability of deeply affordable housing. When I discussed with renters that it is possible for governments to attach rent control to individual units to stop landlords from jacking up rent between tenants, and that they can crack down on renovictions, demovictions, and other such tactics, their eyes would light up. They would see hope. They would see that change might be possible. Their fears of the risk of potentially being homeless were lifted.

Housing is a right and it is worth fighting for.

The Waterloo Region rental market is currently experiencing a mixed situation with some signs of stabilization and slight relief for renters, despite ongoing affordability challenges. And while average rents have seen a recent decrease and vacancy rates are increasing, particularly in certain areas, the region still faces a high cost of living and homelessness issues.

We must not continue to prioritize profit over people when it comes to ensuring our population is properly housed. As noted by the Ontario Human Rights' Commission, "adequate housing is essential to one's sense of dignity, safety, inclusion and ability to contribute to the fabric of our

neighbourhoods and societies.” Yet low- and moderate-income tenants are bearing the brunt of the housing crisis.

Rental replacement bylaws are important tools cities can use to protect affordable housing. By mandating developers to ensure that the same number of affordable rentals are built and tenants provided the option to return at the same rent after redevelopment, these bylaws ensure that affordable housing is not lost and that low-to-moderate income renters are not rendered homeless. While provincial legislation does exist to address some of these concerns, such as the Residential Tenancies Act, they are often poorly and/or slowly enforced by the Ontario Land Tribunal. This puts peoples lives at risk. As such, cities and municipalities must pass their own bylaws with reference to housing, especially as they are best suited to address local concerns with reference to housing. For example, the City of Hamilton passed a Renoviction Bylaw last June, which requires landlords to apply for a renovation licence, produce a building permit and an engineer’s report stating the unit must be empty in order to do the work, and confirm a tenants’ rights and entitlement package has been provided to ensure fairness.

In other words, when upper levels of government fail to act, local municipalities can and should show leadership.

Truth be told, we will need to do much more to solve the housing crisis. This includes building permanently affordable rental homes in nonprofit and co-op housing so that we are not overly reliant on corporate landlords, and that we better work in collaboration with all levels of government in ensuring a range of housing is built. The enactment of a rental replacement bylaw for the City of Cambridge would be one tool in the city’s toolbox to assist with tackling the housing crisis. An investigation into this possibility is a fantastic first step.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Donkersgoed', written in a cursive style.

Jeff Donkersgoed
Ward 2 Resident - City of Cambridge
Former ONDP Candidate for the Riding of Kitchener South-Hespeler