

# NEWSLETTER

October 2010—ELECTION SPECIAL

## City of Ottawa Municipal Election—issues of concern to landlords

On Monday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, residents of the City of Ottawa will elect a Mayor and City Council that will govern us for the next four years. All individuals who have an interest in the rental housing industry and can vote in Ottawa should carefully consider their choices when they approach the ballot box.

The municipal level of government has become increasingly more important to our industry in recent years. The City has a significant effect on landlords and on how we can operate our properties.

As a policy, the Eastern Ontario Landlord Organization (EOLO) does not endorse candidates for political office. However EOLO does want all voters to know the major candidates' positions on two issues of interest to landlords, namely housing policy and property taxes.

This report will focus on the platforms involving rental housing of the major candidates in wards where an incumbent is not running. Only one candidate (in the Capital ward) said anything relating to the higher tax ratio on rental property.

### **EOLO's Housing Policy**

The City is responsible for social housing, and oversees some 24,000 social housing units. The City had set a goal of building 500 additional units of social housing per year. The City has fallen short of that goal, because building new housing to expand the social housing stock is an incredibly expensive proposition. Meanwhile, the current social housing stock is in need of hundreds of millions of dollars in unfunded repairs. The smarter idea is for the government to provide housing allowances directly to tenants to help them pay for the rental units they choose, and focus new construction on supportive housing. Instead of spending money trying to make brand new apartments affordable to a handful of social housing tenants, governments could provide meaningful assistance to thousands of low income tenants, governments could

provide meaningful assistance to thousands of low income tenants, who now rent in the private rental market. Housing allowances and rent supplements are both cost-effective choices. Rent supplements work well for moving people from homelessness into housing.

Homelessness is often the result of mental health problems and/or drug and alcohol addictions. Keeping low-income people with such problems housed usually requires social service supports as well as financial support. The classic example is supportive housing. More recently there is a growing trend to provide social service supports for people to live in dispersed rental units where the financial support is in the form of a Rent Supplements. This is the one way to implement the "Housing First, but not housing only" model, which shows considerable promise.

Our sources include the candidates' websites and surveys by housing advocates including the Ottawa Child/Youth Housing Advocacy Initiative ("OCHAI") survey and a survey by the Alliance to End Homelessness.

**See the regular October EOLO newsletter for the platforms of the major mayoralty candidates.**

### **WARD 9 - KNOXDALE - MERIVALE**

(seat formerly occupied by Gord Hunter)

**James Dean**, a high-tech worker, argues for getting social programs off the property-tax base, expanding transit using existing rail lines, improving city-run community centres and expanding programs for youths. In an effort to boost voter turnout around the city, he's challenging other candidates to get residents to take a pledge to vote on election day. He appears to be on the left-side of the political spectrum.

Mr. Dean does not have a formal housing policy. He is the

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president of his housing co-operative where he lives. He is also a part-time property manager.

**Keith Egli** is a local lawyer whose practice focuses on employment/labour law, education law and commercial litigation.

Mr. Egli does not have a formal housing policy. He appears to be a centrist candidate.

**James O'Grady**, presently an elementary school teacher, has worked for the Liberal party during the 1993 federal election campaign and in 2007 for the Green Party as Director of Campaign Communications for the provincial election. Mr. O'Grady appears to be campaigning as a right of centre candidate.

Mr. O'Grady does not have a formal housing policy. He indicates in a survey by the Ottawa Taxpayer Advocacy Group that he is in favour of social housing tenants having the right to buy their social housing unit after 3 years occupancy through a city co-ownership program "... but not at the expense of existing social housing stock which provides a turnover supply of housing to address populations in core need."

**Rod Vanier**, a local lawyer, ran unsuccessfully in the last Provincial election for the Liberal Party.

Mr. Vanier stated on the Ottawa Child/Youth Housing Advocacy Initiative ("OCHAI") survey that the three top housing issues in Ottawa are "Sufficiency, with 10,000 on the waiting list, there needs to be more housing stock constructed. Affordability, rental supplements need to keep pace with rising rents; and Respectful, that is, clean, free of mould, safe for children, free of crime and pestilence and the like."

### WARD 13 - RIDEAU-ROCKLIFFE

(seat formerly occupied by Jacques Legendre)

**Richard Cannings** was the Ottawa City Councillor for the area from 1991 until amalgamation in 2000.

On his website, Mr. Cannings writes that "homelessness and housing poverty discredits our character and reputation for tolerance and equitable distribution. Leaving thousands of families on the waitlist for social housing because market housing is unaffordable is not an option ... If you elect me to be your councillor, I will explore ways of getting back on

track [in building social housing] to address the affordability factor and try to prevent bad outcomes.

**Peter Clark** was the Chair of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton for two terms prior to amalgamation. Prior to that he was the Mayor of Cumberland for nine years.

Mr. Clark is running for Council on the platform of promoting economic development to increase the tax base, controlling taxes by tightening expenditures and opposing the Kettle Island bridge. Mr. Clark has not released a housing platform.

**Sheila Perry** is the ward 13 candidate endorsed by "Our Ottawa", a left-of-centre advocacy group.

Responding to a recent questionnaire by the Alliance to End Homelessness (the "Homelessness survey") Ms. Perry has stated that increasing affordable housing by 1,000 units a year is essential for long term, sustainable planning and would commit \$13M to 15M to do so. *Editorial note: She does not appear to recognize that, based on recent city projects, \$15M in government subsidies would likely only result in 375-500 "affordable housing units." To create 1,000 units would require \$120M in government subsidies of which the City's share would be \$30M to \$40M.*

**Bruce Poulin** was the unsuccessful Progressive Conservative candidate during the 2007 Provincial election. He ran for City Council in 2006 in Lowertown, being defeated by Georges Bedard. Mr. Poulin has not released a housing platform.

### WARD 17 - CAPITAL

(seat formerly occupied by Clive Doucet)

**Bob Brocklebank** is a past president of the Glebe Community Association and was very vocal in his opposition to the Lansdowne redevelopment project. He is also the ward candidate endorsed by Our Ottawa, a left-of-centre advocacy group

On his website, Mr. Brocklebank writes as his platform: "Housing is essential to rescue people trapped in cycles of poverty. Living on the street does not lead to a good job offer and costs all taxpayers. The city cannot be a neglectful absent landlord. Problems in social housing need to be addressed quickly and effectively. Just as importantly, the city needs to look at affordable housing as

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provided by the private sector. An adequate supply of rental housing is a requirement for a dynamic city."

In the survey by the Alliance to End Homelessness, Mr. Brocklebank noted that the proposal to spend \$15 million would not result in sufficient subsidies to build new affordable housing units. He stated his support of increasing funding for affordable housing but indicated there may be other and better alternatives to building new housing. *Editorial note: He may mean mandatory inclusionary zoning, under which developers have to build low-rent units or low-price units in each development.*

In the OCHAI survey, Mr. Brocklebank appears to lean towards supporting more active tenant advocacy groups to pressure landlords to maintain properties better and act in a responsible fashion.

Mr. Brocklebank also answered a question about the affordability gap between the cost of rent and what some families can afford to pay that "... more attention needs to be directed to the private housing market, to determine if policies are driving up the cost of such housing and if policy changes are needed. If those policies are under the control of the city (or can be influenced by municipal authorities) changes need to be pursued." That may mean he would vote to reduce the current over-taxation of rental properties.

**David Chernushenko**, a well-known environmental activist, was the Deputy Leader of the Green Party of Canada, running as their federal candidate in the Centretown riding 2004 and 2007.

Mr. Chernushenko's affordable housing policy states his belief that "... the City of Ottawa needs to make a significant additional investment in affordable, environmentally sound housing, and should collaborate with other levels of government, as well as faith groups, co-operative housing associations and others interested in providing access to housing." He also advocates keeping "... a close eye on further conversions of rental apartment buildings to condominiums in our ward."

**Isabel Metcalfe** is a lobbyist and former staffer for Liberal Prime Ministers, Pierre Trudeau, Jean Chretien and John Turner. In 2006 she ran for the Federal Liberals in Carleton-Mississippi Mills, losing to Gordon O'Connor.

In the OCHAI survey, Ms. Metcalfe states that "we have to mandate a system that when any development is built

that social housing be included. And to spread out the units allocated to this housing as not to create any slums."

In the Alliance to End Homelessness survey, Ms. Metcalfe states that she is committed to increasing the number of affordable housing units and to investing municipal resources in address the problems faced by people who are homeless or in difficult housing situations, but is not prepared to commit to a fixed number of units to build without having a more complete understanding of the issues. She also indicated that she believes "... the solutions to homelessness must be broader than housing."

### WARD 23 - KANATA SOUTH

(seat formerly occupied by Peggy Feltmate)

**Marc Favreau** is the president of the Carleton-Mississippi Mills provincial Liberal Association. He has received the endorsement of current west end councillors Marianne Wilkinson and Eli El-Chantiry.

In the OCHAI survey he states that he will review the City of Ottawa Incentives for Affordable Housing Development program to determine if there are additional incentives to encourage developers to build and maintain low income housing.

**Aaron Helleman**, a high-tech worker, has received the endorsement of the outgoing ward councillor Peggy Feltmate. Councillor Feltmate has endorsed Mr. Helleman as carrying on her views (just as she has carried on the views of her predecessor, Alex Munter). Mr. Helleman is also endorsed by Our Ottawa.

In the Alliance to End Homelessness survey, Mr. Helleman stated that he supports committing \$15M per year to creating 1,000 new affordable housing units, but understands that would be conditional on using the funds to leverage federal and provincial dollars. *As noted above, \$15M of City money is likely to be enough to build 375 to 500 "affordable housing units," but not more.*

**Allan Hubley**, President of his community association, and Vice-Chair of the City of Ottawa Accessibility Advisory Committee, ran unsuccessfully in the last municipal election. His website states that he was an active volunteer for Conservative candidates Gordon O'Connor and Norm Sterling. Mr. Hubley does not appear to have a specific housing policy.

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