

## REPORT

### *Faith in Action: A Dialogue with Your City* Opportunities for Creating More Affordable Housing

On April 8, 2010, ***Faith in Action: A Dialogue with Your City*** was held at City Hall. It was the latest in a series of steps taken by the MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness (MFATEH) to raise awareness among faith communities in the GTA about the need to develop more affordable and supportive housing and the role they could play in it.

Working together, the Affordable Housing Office (AHO) of the City of Toronto and MFATEH developed the Faith in Action forum to raise awareness and empower faith communities to renew their participation in the provision of affordable housing. In November 2009, MFATEH had held a forum that encouraged faith communities in the GTA to reflect and discuss how their specific beliefs challenged them to respond to the

needs of those who remain homeless.

The April 8<sup>th</sup> forum began with an opportunity for guests to network. Soon after a welcome by the MFATEH Chair, Jack Panozzo introduced the keynote speaker, Toronto City Councillor Joe Mihevc, who highlighted the City's current initiatives and long-time experience in addressing housing issues. As well, there were three additional speakers who highlighted past experiences and current initiatives being undertaken to address housing issues.

Participants then divided into focus groups and using a brochure prepared by AHO, *Affordable Housing and the Faith Community* as a guide, discussed ways they thought that faith communities could collectively address the housing needs of the City.



One of several focus group discussions on ways faith communities can create more affordable housing

## Panel Discussion

The chair of the MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness (MFATEH), Jack Panozzo, served as moderator for forum. In addition to keynote speaker, Toronto Councillor Joe Mihevc of Ward 21, St. Paul's West, he introduced three panelists:

1. **Sean Gadon** - Director of the Affordable Housing Office, City of Toronto
2. **Joan White** - Director of Housing & Support, YWCA Toronto
3. **Nancy Singer** - Executive Director of the Kehilla Residential Programme

### ***MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness urges faith communities to take action***

Mr. Panozzo, challenged faith communities to take action to ensure that all people in Toronto have safe, secure affordable housing.

He noted that housing prices have increased 13.3% this year alone and that there are more than 70,000 individuals on the Housing Connections waiting list in Toronto. More than half are women, many of whom are single mothers.

MFATEH has, and will continue to encourage representatives of all levels of government, federal, provincial

and municipal, to increase their commitment to develop more affordable and supportive housing.

- **Federal:** there is a need for a national housing strategy with long-term funding, as Canada is currently the only country in the G-8 without one;
- **Provincial:** the province needs to take greater action. Despite the expected release of the Province's long-term affordable housing strategy this year, efforts by the Provincial government in supporting affordable housing have not been sufficient; and,
- **Municipal:** municipal regulations such as zoning by-laws need to be implemented to encourage the provision of more affordable housing.



*MFATEH's Jack Panozzo urges faith groups to take action*

Mr. Panozzo said that faith communities have historically played a critical role in addressing social issues such as homelessness and housing affordability and that they still have a significant role to play in the provision of affordable housing.

He expressed MFATEH's hope that faith communities would move forward to find ways to engage government and encourage our own communities to develop badly needed affordable and supportive housing as a way to end homelessness in our midst.

**Keynote Presentation:  
Councillor Joe Mihevc – Ward 21, St. Paul's West**

Councillor Mihevc remarked that affordable housing is an issue that is dear to his heart. He spoke of growing up in a family that emigrated to Canada from Slovenia after the Second World War. He described how being raised and nurtured in a Catholic community had motivated him to become involved in issues affecting the community and ultimately to enter politics.

He also learned what a vital role a faith community can play when he did his PhD thesis on the Mennonites in Canada and their philosophy of promoting non-violence and peace. That research, linked with his own experience, reinforced for him what faith communities can achieve and how they can respond positively to real needs such as ending

homelessness and creating affordable housing.

Councillor Mihevc identified three key strategies that can be used by faith groups:

- 1. Go from being a movement of the minority to a movement of the majority**
- 2. Find their moral and ethical voice and convey it to governments**
- 3. Take action on issues such as ending homelessness**

*1. Go from being a movement of the minority to a movement of the majority*

Faith communities need to speak with one voice. Affordable housing in Toronto remains a major need for many, and many communities motivated by their faith have moved forward on it. The issues surrounding the provision of affordable housing are constant, and faith communities have the potential to be involved over the long term. Faith communities understand the recurring needs of housing and have taken, and will continue to take, action. To this end, faith groups need to collaborate in achieving this common goal.

*2. Find the moral and ethical voice and convey it to governments*

Different faith communities need to "weave" themselves together and find the common moral and ethical voice that says that homelessness and housing issues in our city need change. The City is still suffering from the 1995 cuts to social housing implemented by the Harris government. It has only been under the

current McGuinty government that we are slowly seeing the return of social services and housing. Faith communities need to reinsert the moral and ethical dimension of governance into our political system.

### 3. *Take Action*

Homelessness is “in our face”. Everywhere we go we see it. The City of Toronto’s Streets to Homes program is revolutionary as it focuses on ending, rather than managing, street homelessness.

In addition, the City’s *Housing Opportunities Toronto* (HOT) 10-year plan invites activism and advocacy and provides full-spectrum options on how to take responsibility for providing housing. Housing needs to be on the national agenda. The faith community needs to advocate strongly so that the federal and provincial governments maintain and enhance their commitment to affordable housing.

Councillor Mihevc reminded everyone that at the core of all faiths is the directive to help the poor and people living on the margins of society. If all faith communities were to join together to speak as one voice on the issue of homelessness and housing, they will make a difference. Canada would not be the country it is, nor would Toronto the “good”, without the contributions from its faith communities. He left forum participants with this challenge: Work hard out there and we can change the City, the Province and the Country.

## **Sean Gadon – City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office**

Sean Gadon told participants that we need to “make trouble for change”, that the process is not easy and often calls for going against the grain. However, we need to show appreciation and give thanks to the “champions” of change. Mr. Gadon said he was going to give everyone some “homework” - writing letters to:

- Mayor David Miller, for his work in providing affordable housing in the City of Toronto; the creation of Canada’s first Affordable Housing Office and Affordable Housing Committee
- Ontario Minister Jim Bradley, Municipal Affairs and Housing, for his efforts in creating the Province’s long-term housing strategy to be released in 2010

Mr. Gadon also brought attention to the population influx of the many thousands of people, many of them immigrants, who are expected to live in Toronto at some time over the next decade. Despite the growing concerns about our inability to house our aging population, housing providers should be aware that there will be more young families than seniors looking for homes. The City will have to welcome and provide for individuals and families by ensuring that they have a place to live.



## **Joan White YWCA**

Joan White discussed the planning and development of the YWCA Elm Centre. It will be a 300-unit affordable and supportive apartment complex for women and women-led families, in Toronto's downtown core. By establishing partnerships with Wigwamen Incorporated and the Jean Tweed Centre, this initiative will offer permanent homes for women and their families and the support needed to turn their lives around. This \$80 million development is supported by the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments.

In addition, YWCA Toronto is responsible for \$42 million, through financing and private philanthropy. Ms. White noted the importance of creating a variety of affordable housing types while maintaining a standard of quality and stated, "Why would I build a house that I wouldn't want to live in?" Her advice to the group on taking initiative was to:

- **create a vision**
- **make partnerships**
- **do it**

## **Nancy Singer – Kehilla Residential Programme**

Nancy Singer drew from her personal and Professional experience to explain housing issues affecting people in Toronto. Kehilla is a non-profit housing agency that works to identify and respond to the needs of the Jewish community. Ms. Singer said part of Kehilla's success has come from tapping into funding resources by building partnerships and collaborating with like-minded organizations and people. Ms. Singer expressed the importance of battling zoning restrictions and encouraging mixed communities. She encouraged advocating for the implementation of inclusionary housing, a cause that Kehilla has taken on. In addition, there is a need to increase opportunities for low-income individuals to build equity through the provision of affordable home ownership programs. Ms. Singer stressed that providing adequate housing has tremendous implications on an individual's future and stated "you can't do it by numbers. Housing just one person makes a difference."

## Focus Group Roundtables

Participants were divided into three focus groups for brainstorming and discussion on ways faith communities could help create more affordable housing. Each team was led by panel and staff from the MFATEH and the AHO. Each team provided suggestions for addressing housing needs. Valerie Elliott Hyman, MFATEH Coordinator, was the facilitator for the focus group portion of the meeting.

Each focus group was asked to identify and share their key ideas. Many of the ideas were similar to the four actions identified by the City of Toronto's Affordable Housing Office (AHO) in a special pamphlet, *Affordable Housing and the Faith Community*, distributed at the event. The four actions are:

1. **Advocate for affordable housing**
2. **Financially support housing and homelessness services**
3. **Create new affordable housing**
4. **Rally community support**



*A group discusses how to advocate and financially support affordable housing and homelessness*

### **Focus Group Roundtable Discussions**

Here are some ideas from each of the three focus group roundtables:

- More advocacy
- Build housing
- Creating home *and* communities - How physical structure can support communities
- Policy issues – Advocate for Government commitment to income supports

- Use health care arguments for housing
- Community engagement - Support other groups involved in affordable housing
- Housing for special needs groups i.e. francophones and people with HIV/AIDS
- Engage volunteers to build affordable housing
- Look beyond care of the needy to advocate for something more
- Enter into partnerships with other faith communities
- Social audit in 32 communities
- People need affordable housing
  - Advocacy campaign with federal and provincial governments
- Support for sanctuary model (1-5 people) of affordable housing
- Ownership housing options
  - Deeper subsidy to targeted lower income households
  - Below market sale of land to affordable ownership developer
- Rent subsidy fund for local households
- Join the MFATEH - expand capacity
- Focus on national housing strategy
- Support existing projects - Advocate against NIMBY-ism
- Create a central information system
- Maintain existing housing

## Focus Group Reports

Here is what each focus group reported from their roundtable discussion:

- Think of solutions to legal battles that make social housing more reasonable
  - Human Rights approach
  - Reforming Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) process
- Be visible during the G20 summit in Toronto June 26-27, 2010
  - Wear T-shirts and hats stating: "Canada - The only country without a national housing policy!"
- Support private members Bill C -304 for a National Housing Strategy
  - Faith communities should contact and lobby MP's and request support
- Need more advocacy, such as letter-writing campaigns, pooling resources (example land) and lobbying efforts
- Encourage education and advocacy through partnerships with smaller groups
- Create a new, more comprehensive definition of affordable housing
- Act as landlords for Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) properties that have been declared surplus
- Promote inclusionary housing; mixed income developments and ownership opportunities
- Improve recognition of, and outreach to, culturally and ethnically diverse groups

## **Moving Forward / Next Steps**

MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness (MFATEH) will encourage participants in ***Faith In Action*** to move their faith communities and groups forward on affordable housing. It will send to all participants a report on the ideas developed during the forum.

### **MFATEH Workshops**

MFATEH will help build the capacity of members of faith communities in Toronto and the GTA through a series of workshops. Participants will learn how to advocate and encourage faith communities to create affordable, supportive housing and homelessness services, and discuss collaborative efforts to create more affordable housing.

**The MFATEH Workshop series starts on June 30, 2010**

### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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