



ACORN Canada

Uniting communities for justice | acorncanada.org

Aug 25th, 2021

Dear Planning Committee members,

Please accept Ottawa's ACORN's official submission in response to Hazelview's Official Plan Amendment application for Herongate.

Ottawa ACORN is 32,000 members strong in the city of Ottawa. We are comprised of low to moderate income families working on issues of social and economic justice. We have been organizing with tenants in Herongate since 2007.

Like any union or association, our membership decides the drives of the organization, while determining that the vast majority of our resources go towards organizing door to door, block to block, and city to city. We've been organizing in Ottawa for the past 15 years and consistently the number one issue that comes up when we speak with residents at their door is housing.

The recommendations in the current City Staff report regarding Hazelview's plans for redevelopment do not protect or create affordable housing, nor does it reflect the desires of the community.

40 Members of the Herongate ACORN Tenant Union met in Sandalwood Park in Herongate on Tuesday, August 17th. Members discussed the staff recommendations at length and were extremely disappointed that after years of community struggle, their issues were being ignored.

Herongate ACORN members' biggest problems with the application are:

- 1. After total build out is complete, only 16% of the neighbourhood will be "affordable housing"**

In March 2021, ACORN organizers surveyed Herongate tenants through multiple days of street outreach in the community. Out of the 100 respondents, 92% said the Herongate redevelopment should be 20-50% affordable housing, with nearly half calling for over 50% affordable housing.

Herongate ACORN since 2018 has been calling for 25-35% affordable housing with an emphasis on deep affordability. The City declared a housing and homelessness emergency in 2020 and the City's current Official Plan aims for 25% of development to be affordable housing. The community needs Planning Committee to take the housing crisis and the

Official Plan seriously by not passing this OPA, amending it or at least delaying a decision until the affordable housing requirements can be renegotiated.

2. However, the “affordable housing” units are not affordable for low income and working class families

The two definitions of affordable housing recommended in the report are not affordable for the low-income and working class households who make up Herongate. The report defines “affordable housing” in the existing high rises as below average market rent. Yet the City of Ottawa declared a housing and homelessness emergency back in January 2020 because the market has failed to provide affordable housing.

CBC reported that the majority of Herongate households earn less than \$45,000/year and the ones most impacted by this redevelopment live in 3 unit townhomes. The staff report says that average market rent for a 3 bedroom is \$1,850. However, for this to be affordable (30% of one’s income), the household would have to be earning \$74,000/year. As such, average market rent is NOT real affordable housing.

Worse is how the report describes affordability for the new units that would be constructed. New units Hazelview constructs are deemed “affordable housing” if rents are 30% of average income by household income deciles. 30% of one’s income is a good definition of affordability but the income targets are completely unrepresentative of Herongate and who is in core housing need in our city.

Herongate residents fall within the 5th-30th income percentile while the affordable units in new construction are meant for those within the 20th-50th income percentile. In 2018, Ottawa ACORN released a report on the state of affordable housing in Ottawa using Housing Services’s own data. The report found that 83 per cent of households earning less than \$10,000 live in severely unaffordable housing, spending more than half their income on rent, compared to 0.2 per cent of renter households earning over \$60,000. It is clear there is an affordability crisis facing low-income renters yet the current recommendations only support the middle class.

3. The “affordable” units will only be “affordable” for 10-20 years

Our housing crisis will not be over in just a decade or two, nor will poverty be eradicated. We need affordable housing in perpetuity.

4. The new units will not be subject to rent control therefore rents will sky rocket after they reach their “affordability” term

The designated “affordable housing” units in the new development will only have to meet these terms for 10 years, after which they are not subject to rent control. This means that Hazelview will not be subject to the annual provincial rent guideline and will be able to increase rents by whatever amount they like, forcing any low or moderate income family out of those units.

5. The only options for existing tenants is to either move their families into one of the current high rise apartment buildings or to move into one of the new units where rents will only be affordable for 10 years.

This is not the rental replacements that ACORN had been calling for. Moving large families of 7+ into high rise apartment buildings is not suitable for their needs or their neighbours. Moreover, many of the large families living in townhouses in Herongate have been there for many decades meaning they're planning for the long term. Therefore, they will not be able to accept units in the new construction as those rents will sky rocket after just 10 years.

6. No replacement units are being offered to previously evicted tenants who wish to return to the community

This is crucial for the community that was destroyed during the mass evictions in 2016 and 2018. Not everyone wants to return, but there are tenants who desperately miss their community and support systems. These tenants should be given the right to return to an affordable unit at a similar rent and number of bedrooms as their original home.

7. Hazelview's 2019 commitments to housing diversity, social enterprise, and green space are not included in the memorandum of understanding (legally binding agreement)

The current agreement, if passed, is a rubber stamp for Hazelview's mass redevelopment plans with next to no benefits for residents. This is why the Herongate ACORN Tenant Union is demanding that the City of Ottawa do one of the following:

1. Go back to the table with Hazelview and re-negotiate a deal that reflects the needs of the community
2. Amend the agreement to reflect the community's demands
3. Delay the agreement through a holding symbol with the MOU as a baseline until the affordable housing requirements are strengthened

Background

ACORN members in Herongate have been organizing for tenant rights in Herongate since 2007. When the mass evictions were announced in 2015, ACORN members from the neighbourhood fought to keep their homes. While the evictions still happened in February 2016, their efforts did result in some concessions for the second wave of evictions in 2018.

During this time, ACORN organizers and leaders knocked on 1000s of doors in the neighbourhood, organized tenant meetings, developed new community leaders and held direct actions to address this immediate eviction crisis as well as advocate for long term solutions like inclusionary zoning and rental replacement bylaws.

Hazelview has mass evicted over 180 primarily working class, racialized, immigrant families from the neighbourhood. Their OPA application meant that even more families would be at risk if tenants were not organized.

In the Fall of 2018, Herongate ACORN members (current tenants and those who were previously evicted) held a series of tenant meetings and came up with the following demands for any future redevelopment:

- New affordable housing units in the redevelopment must be offered to current tenants as well as the families previously evicted in 2018 and 2016 at the same rent/number of bedrooms as before.
- 25-30% affordable housing in each phase of the development with an emphasis on deep affordability
- Social enterprise and local hiring from equity seeking groups living in Herongate
- Community benefits that include a community hub with childcare space
- Annual proactive inspections by City By-law to ensure enforcement of property standards

Over the past 3 weeks, ACORN organizers have knocked on 1300 doors, generated 100 calls to the CEO of Hazelview and collected almost 500 petition signatures in the neighbourhood in support of ACORN's Alternative Vision For Herongate. None of which is included in the final plan. More petition signatures and phone calls are being generated every day.

For more information click here:

<https://acorncanada.org/resource/alternative-vision-herongate>

Sincerely,

Herongate ACORN Tenant Union

Staff Contact: Kyla Szustaczek (613) 410-4587 organizeott@acorncanada.org