



AUGUST 2022

# Ottawa ACORN Agenda for Change Platform



## Introduction

Ottawa ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), is a membership based community union made up of low-to-moderate income people. ACORN's Ottawa office was founded in 2006, with the first organized group being formed in Vanier. Since then, ACORN has spread to every part of the city with five organized chapters and over 37,000 members in Ottawa.

ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a city-wide membership who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change.

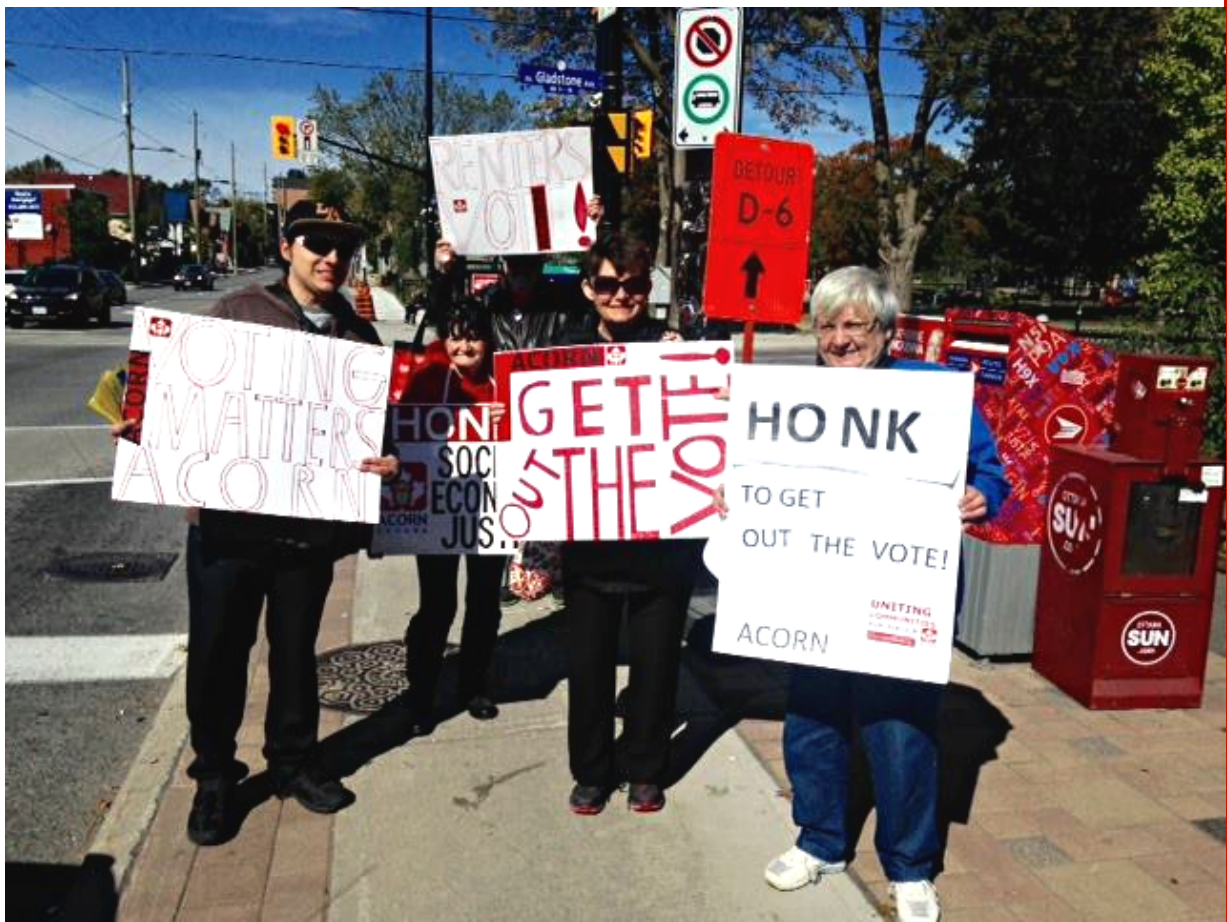
The Ottawa municipal election is on October 24, 2022. In Ottawa, approximately 42% of tenant households spend more than 30% of their pretax income on shelter costs or to live in unaffordable housing.

This document provides a summary of the local campaigns Ottawa ACORN members need candidates to commit to champion if elected! ACORN members need to see the following changes to make Ottawa an **affordable and liveable city**.



## Improving our Democracy

- Implement an **Access to Voting Policy** that ensures section 6.1 is enforced (Province of Ontario, Municipal Elections Act) where polls are advised to be present “in buildings containing 100 or more dwelling units”. A policy should also include:
  - Reducing barriers to voting and ensuring equal citizen access to polling stations.
  - Population density should inform where polling stations go
  - Polling stations should be open from a minimum of 10am-8pm.
  - The city should bring back door to door to find eligible voters.
- **Ban developer lobbyist donations to city councillors**
- **Split the Planning Committee** into separate urban-core and suburban committees similar to Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee



## Build Affordable Housing

- **Inclusionary zoning** by-laws are a way for municipalities to use their development regulation and approval process to have private developers provide affordable housing in private market projects. Inclusionary zoning increases the amount of affordable housing stock and Ottawa needs help more than ever with a growing wait-list of over 12,000 families for affordable housing.
- An Ottawa Inclusionary Zoning Policy should include:
  - 25-35% affordable housing citywide.
  - Affordable housing should be defined as 30% of a household's income and include income targets for low to moderate income households in core housing need (prioritising deeply affordable housing and those on the waitlist for social housing).
  - Include minimum requirements for accessible units and 3-4 bedroom units for families.
  - Affordable housing in perpetuity.
  - Fully phased in by 2024.



## Build Affordable Housing

- Convert empty office buildings to deeply affordable housing forever.
- Any developments getting municipal public funds must have **rent control on all units** (not just the affordable units).
  - This is in addition to Vacancy Control on all units - so when the tenant leaves, the landlords can't double the rent.
- Reserve public land for affordable housing

## Fund Affordable Housing

- While we recognize that the City since 2019 has increased its affordable housing budget significantly, it's not near enough to tackle our ever growing housing crisis. As such, we are calling on the City of Ottawa to **dedicate \$40 million to building affordable, non-market housing** to match its budget for emergency shelters.
- **5% Vacant Unit Tax** with revenues funding affordable housing
- projects
- **Tax all luxury homes**- increase property taxes on houses worth more than 2 million.



## Protect Affordable Housing

- We need the City to enact an **Anti Displacement Policy** so in the case of redevelopment of affordable housing, such as in Herongate, Manor Village, Manor Park and elsewhere, affordable market rental units are not lost and replaced with higher market rental units. This would allow families to remain in their communities and prevent increasing waitlists for affordable housing. An Ottawa Anti Displacement Policy should include:
  - Units lost to redevelopment must be replaced at a ratio of 1:1 or 25% of the total number of proposed units, whichever is
  - greater.
  - Tenants who are evicted should have the first right of refusal to
  - move back into the units created in the new development at the same rent (with allowable provincial increases) and number of
  - bedrooms.
  - Rent Stabilization: Tenants can choose between accepting temporary accommodation of comparable size and location at the same rent they were paying before OR a rental top up should the tenant choose to find their own temporary accommodation. A rental top up should cover the difference between their current rent and median market rent for the area + 30% as seen in Burnaby, BC.
  - Tenants must be given 4 Months notice
  - Moving costs assistance
  - Special considerations be used for tenants with disabilities
  - Continued maintenance of units while units are still occupied
  - This should apply to all tenants at risk of displacement living in privately or publicly owned buildings with 3+ units (including townhomes)

## Protect Affordable Housing

- The rise of renovictions in our nation's capital is disturbing. This is why Ottawa needs an **Anti-Renoviction Bylaw** similar to New Westminster, BC's where the bylaw effectively ended renovictions. Highlights of the bylaw included:
  - Once all permits are obtained, and it is proven that tenants must vacate in order for the renovations to take place, the landlord must do either of the following steps:
    - 1) Enter into a new lease with the tenant that is identical or more favourable to the tenant, with provision of a comparable rental unit in the same building OR;
    - 2) Agree that tenants can move back under the terms of the existing lease AND find temporary accommodation for the tenant during the renovation period. If a landlord violates these rules, they will be fined by the City and lose their business licence
  - Standards of Maintenance bylaw



## Protect Affordable Housing

- **No public funds, or permit approvals, to predatory landlords.**
- The impact of COVID19 has been particularly difficult on renter households, many of whom lost income during the pandemic and were unable to pay rent. This is why the City should expand its existing programs to introduce a **Rent Bank** like other Ontario cities. During COVID19, a rent bank should offer non-repayable grants to tenants at risk of eviction or who need assistance covering first and last month's rent. After the COVID19 recovery period, the grants can be converted back to 0% interest loans as part of the City's long term strategy to reduce homelessness.
- Explore a **Non-Profit Acquisition Strategy** that would give non-profit, social housing providers, co-ops and land trusts the right of first refusal to purchase at risk apartment buildings on the private market similar to Montreal.



## Tenant Engagement

- Ottawa ACORN is calling for a **proactive education program** to inform tenants about their rights/resources when:
  - A building changes ownership (the City would be notified by the change in licence)
  - Reports from community members or tenant groups of “buy outs” or N13 notices
  - When the city receives a building permit application for a multi-residential property
  - Properties that trigger tenant education should also be visited by by-law staff to ensure property standards are being enforced, recognizing that landlords who are seeking to displace tenants are likely not maintaining units, common areas or grounds.
- In addition, we want to see a **public registry of tenant buyouts, building permits, home and rental building sales** so the City can inform tenants of their rights.



## Tenant Engagement

- Tenant groups and community organizations are often at a disadvantage if in front of the Landlord Tenant Board. One of the reasons is because landlords can afford high-paid lawyers while tenants or community groups are often left without legal representation because of the high cost. We want to see Ottawa follow the lead of cities like Toronto and Hamilton by creating a **Tenant Defense Fund** that would include:
  - Support for the creation of a tenant hotline
  - Assistance for tenant groups to dispute an AGI
  - Assistance for tenant groups to challenge a demoviction/renoviction
  - Assistance for tenant groups to do tenant outreach and education
  - Assistance for tenant groups to file T6s and rent abatement applications over neglected maintenance

## Healthy Homes

- While the City has made some progress with higher standards for pest control and rental management bylaws, enforcement is still a huge concern. Our current property standards are reliant on a complaint-based system where all of the onus is on tenants to report their landlord to the City. However, there are many reasons why issues are not reported (language barriers, don't know their rights, time, distrust in the system etc). We need **Landlord Licensing**, similar to Toronto, which would include a landlord registry, proactive inspections, increased enforcement and better standards of repair.
- **More funding in the city budget for repairs and maintenance in Ottawa Community Housing**

## Infrastructure & Employment

- The City should support community organizations advocating for **Community Benefits Agreements** during development projects. Community Benefits Agreements should include:
  - Living Wages for all workers during and after construction
  - Local Hiring from low-to-moderate income communities, including job training.
  - Local decision making powers for community to decide what types of businesses, and community infrastructure (childcare, community centres) are put in post development
  - Deep Affordable Housing provided to local residents
  - Accountability measures in order to track and report progress to the community
- The City of Ottawa should create an **Ethical Purchasing Strategy** for when looking to employ outside services that protects workers' wages, benefits and avoids contract flipping. All employees working on city grounds should be paid a living wage.



## Internet for All

- Internet is a lifeline, and we need it more than ever during COVID - for school, work, health services, keeping in touch with loved ones, etc. Yet, so many people are living without internet access because they can't afford it or they're making sacrifices just to be able to pay for it. The federal government has failed to force big telcoms to provide affordable internet which is why the City must step up to fill in the gap. Toronto city council recently approved a plan to build a municipal public internet network that leverages the city's own assets. Ottawa ACORN members would like to see a similar **municipal broadband program** in our city. It should include:
  - A municipal broadband program that is publicly owned and retains public or community control, permanently
  - That provides internet services at the CRTC's recommended speed of 50mbps for downloads and 10 mbps for uploads
  - At \$10/month for low income households and \$30/month for moderate income households



## Internet for All

- Ban big telecoms like Rogers, Bell and Telus from participating or lobbying in the creation and implementation of this program
- Privacy protection - users' data cannot be sold
- Citywide program that prioritizes low and moderate income neighbourhoods during its rollout
- Expansion of programs that offer **free or subsidized devices to low income people**
- **Provide FREE public wifi in all public spaces** such as bus shelters, parks, community centres and more

## Community Services

- Prioritize **city funding for youth services, street lighting, mental health supports, addiction supports, sidewalks and traffic controls** in underserved, often low income & working class communities
- Many low income neighbourhoods in Ottawa are plagued by fringe financial institutions, like payday and installment lenders, that charge obscene interest rates and trap borrowers in a cycle of debt. We commend the City for taking steps to stop the clustering of these predatory lenders in low income communities over time. However, without real alternatives our most vulnerable neighbours will still be forced to take out high-interest predatory loans to pay for basic necessities. This is why we need City Council to **support ACORN Canada's calls for the federal government to crack down on predatory lending**. ACORN's Anti-Predatory Lending and Fair Banking campaigns are calling for:
  - Lowering the criminal interest rate from 60 percent to 30 percent for installment loans.
  - Ensuring that the maximum rate includes all associated lending costs: Fines, fees, penalties, insurance, or any related cost.

## Community Services

- The federal government must mandate banks to provide an affordable loan for low- and moderate income people backstopped by the Government of Canada, so they can avoid predatory lenders in a time of personal financial crisis.
- The federal government must support other alternatives like postal banking.
- The banks must lower the NSF fees from \$45 to \$10.



## Childcare

- We need funding for **affordable daycare spaces to be prioritized in lower income neighbourhoods** and communities.
- Parents need easier access to information in order to understand Ontario's patchwork childcare system. We need transparency and accountability to parents through a **simplified online process and face to face assistance when applying for subsidies**.
- **Expanded programming** for parents who work non-standard hours (ie. shift work, overnights).

## Affordable & Reliable Transit

- Many low-income earners need public transit in order to survive. **We believe transit should be free - starting with those on social assistance.**
- Until we have free transit, **Presto passes should be free** for anyone under the low income measure, and there should be **no minimum payment** to upload Presto passes for people under the low income measure.
- Transit also needs to be reliable. **Increase bus service in underserved neighbourhoods.**

## Climate Change

- Retrofitting Canada's aging highrise communities from a tenant led perspective is an important step in reducing Energy Poverty. 55% of emissions in cities come from buildings and 29% of that is from large apartment buildings and condos from their use of old appliances, leaking windows, old electrical systems and natural gas heating. Further, there is a big risk of retrofit costs being passed on to lower income tenants. Ottawa needs an **Energy Equity Program** that targets the lowest-income and least Energy efficient private apartment buildings across the city. Including:



## Climate Change

- Mandatory minimum efficiency standards that have categories similar to jurisdictions in Europe to ensure that ageing apartment buildings undertake retrofits to improve energy efficiency in a tenant centric model.
- Retrofit funding targeted for low end of market private apartment buildings with financing conditions for landlords contingent on no costs passed onto tenants. Also require landlords to demonstrate that no additional costs as a result of retrofitting have been passed on to tenants.
- Create funding for tenant engagement and tenant representation to ensure tenants are central in decisions around their homes.
- **Financial support for low and moderate income households impacted by natural disasters**
- Ensure low and moderate income renter communities have **access to green space**





## How to Get Involved!

ACORN's grassroots municipal election campaign - The Agenda for Change (AFC) - is getting out the vote in low income communities and making our members' issues, election issues!

Learn more about the Agenda for Change here:  
<https://linktr.ee/agenda4change>

Leading up to the election on October 24th, the AFC will be organizing community events with candidates for our members, doing outreach through doorknocking, phone calls & flyering, surveying candidates to find out where they stand on the issues in this platform and sharing the results with our membership.

Sign up to volunteer for the AFC here (training is provided!):  
<https://bit.ly/AFCVolunteer22>

## More Information:

How to find out your ward/city councillor: <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/mayor-and-city-councillors>

Find out who is registered to run for city council: <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/elections/2022-municipal-elections/nominated-candidates-and-registered-third-party-advertisers>

Join ACORN as a member: <https://acorncanada.org/join-acorn/>

Join ACORN as a community ally: <https://acorncanada.org/donate/>

**Contact ACORN at (613) 746-5999 ext 2 or [ottawa@acorncanada.org](mailto:ottawa@acorncanada.org)  
[www.acorncanada.org](http://www.acorncanada.org) - @OttawaACORN - 404 McArthur Ave unit A**