

OTTAWA ACORN

CAPITAL TOWERS

ACORN TENANT SURVEY



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WHAT IS ACORN?

Ottawa ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent organization of low and moderate income families with 32,000+ members across the city. ACORN Canada has over 160,000 members in 24 neighbourhood chapters across the country. ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a wide membership base who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change.

THE CAPITAL TOWERS ACORN TENANT UNION

Tenants living in 1240 and 1244 Donald St (Capital Towers) reached out to ACORN in September 2022 regarding a myriad of maintenance issues, as well as a retroactive Above-Guideline Rent Increase (AGI) that their landlord, Q Residential, is charging tenants in 1244 Donald St.

The AGI covers the years 2019 to 2021 and impacts 103 units in 1244 Donald St. On average, the AGI amounts to approximately \$3000 per unit and management has demanded payment in full by November 1st. This totals roughly \$309,000 that tenants who are primarily low income, working class, people with disabilities, seniors, immigrants, refugees, students and single parents will be forced to collectively pay despite the horrible state of disrepair in their buildings.

So tenants quickly began to organize by forming a tenants union through ACORN. Over the past two months, members of the Capital Towers ACORN Tenant Union have held tenant meetings, organized a Tenant Speak Out, met with Q Residential Head Office (management has refused to move on the AGI), generated hundreds of emails to their landlord and they continue to take escalating actions to fight for healthy homes and fair rent.

One such action is the Capital Towers ACORN Tenant Survey. This survey was conducted to determine what issues with management, common spaces, and individual units tenants are experiencing. Additionally, the survey seeks to see how the \$3000 AGI impacts tenants, should they be forced to pay.

Survey Responses

Capital Towers consists of two high rise apartment buildings: 1240 and 1244 Donald St. 1240 Donald St has approximately 288 units, and 1244 Donald St has approximately 240 units, for a total of roughly 528 units.

Over the course of two months (September - November 2022), ACORN Organizers have knocked on every door in Capital Towers and **have connected with 180+ tenants in the buildings. These conversations in tenants' homes have overwhelming echoed the responses outlined in the survey results.**

The Capital Towers ACORN Tenant Survey was conducted between 15 October 2022 - 31 October 2022. In the span of two weeks, 20 responses were received. Survey responses were collected by door knocking, flyering, phone calls, and online survey submissions.

The three principle areas that the survey addressed were:

1. How much is the AGI and how will it affect your life, should you be forced to pay?
2. What is the state of repair in the apartment building you live in?
3. What has been your experience getting repairs done by your landlord?

Some challenges and limitations arose while conducting the survey. Firstly, Capital Towers consists of many Syrian refugees who primarily speak Arabic. Due to time constraints, no volunteers were available to translate the survey so language barriers posed a challenge for many tenants. Moreover, as the survey was primarily conducted online and distributed via QR code on flyers, many tenants could not complete the survey due to internet problems, technological issues, or lack of a smartphone. For this reason, ACORN volunteers went door to door and organized a table in the park to assist tenants in filling out the survey. Nonetheless, the digital divide still caused a barrier for many. Finally, our biggest challenge in gathering survey responses was the limited amount of time tenants had to complete the survey due to the urgency of the issues (AGI is due Nov 1st). Had the survey been open for longer, more responses would have been collected.

SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics:

- 80% of survey respondents pay less than \$1500/month in rent for 2-3 bedroom apartments
- Two thirds of survey respondents who knew their income made less than \$30,000/year

Above-Guideline-Increase (AGI):

- 55% of survey respondents are receiving the AGI. **100% say they cannot afford it.**
- Of those who received the AGI, 64% tenants said they would have to move out if forced to pay the increase. 27% responded saying they would have to put it on their credit card. The remaining 9% said they'd have to take out a loan.

Maintenance and Pests:

- 50% of survey respondents see cockroaches every day.
- 45% of survey respondents' maintenance complaints have never been resolved, and 15% of respondents' maintenance complaints took over a year to be resolved.
- 80% of respondents said repairs were needed when they moved in.
- 90% of survey respondents noted have problems getting repairs done in their unit.
- 60% of respondents said that the elevators are often broken and 30% think they are unsafe. 40% have even been trapped in the elevator in the past two years.

Management:

- 70% of respondents said that management does not treat them fairly.
 - 30% of respondents felt threatened when making a complaint to management.
 - 75% of respondents said that management does not act professionally.
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Checklists

How would you rate the elevators in your building?

- They are often out of order (60%)
- I think they are unsafe (30%)
- I often gave to wait more than 10 minutes for an available elevator (65%)
- They are unreasonably slow (40%)
- Sometimes they are slow, but that is reasonable (10%)
- They work perfectly (0%)
- Not applicable (5%)

I have the following issues with my unit:

- Peeling paint on walls or ceiling (55%)
 - Holes or cracks on walls or ceiling (60%)
 - Ventilation problems in bathroom or kitchen (40%)
 - Electrical sockets broken or don't work (45%)
 - Out of date appliances (fridge or stove) (40%)
 - Appliances do not work, or don't work properly (25%)
 - Countertops damaged or broken (40%)
 - Kitchen or closet shelves damaged or broken (45%)
 - Lights dont work properly (30%)
 - Balcony door is broken (10%)
 - Balcony has cracks or holes (20%)
 - Balcony paint peeling (20%)
 - Unfinished repairs in my unit (40%)
 - Cockroaches (50%)
 - Lack of water pressure (20%)
 - Too hot in summer (40%)
 - Too cold in winter (40%)
 - Floor is not smooth or is coming up (40%)
 - Water damage (35%)
 - Mould (35%)
 - Leaky faucets (35%)
 - Closet doors don't work properly (35%)
 - Drafty windows (60%)
 - I have no issues in my unit (20%)
-

Checklists

I have the following problems with the common areas in my building:

- **Hallway or lobby carpets do not get cleaned (65%)**
 - Hallway walls and/or ceilings have peeling paint (45%)
 - Hallway walls and/or ceilings have holes or cracks (30%)
 - Hallway ceiling have leaks or mould (25%)
 - Hallway lights are missing or broken (20%)
 - Stairwells have garbage or are unclean (55%)
 - Stairwells have feces or urine (40%)
 - Stairwells have peeling paint on ceilings or walls (35%)
 - Stairwells have broken railing (20%)
 - Stairwell lights are missing or broken (25%)
 - **Garbage chute is unclean or has bad odours (70%)**
 - **Front door does not lock or is often unlocked (60%)**
 - Lobby intercom/buzzer is broken (25%)
 - Parking garage walls or ceiling have cracks or holes (35%)
 - Parking area or driveway has potholes or cracked concrete (15%)
 - Security cameras do not work (40%)
 - Outside walls or balconies of building have cracks/peeling paint (15%)
 - **Elevators are dirty or are damaged (50%)**
 - Mice or rats in building (20%)
 - **Roaches or other bugs in building (60%)**
 - **Yard/outside areas are dirty or not kept clean (55%)**
 - Walkways/sidewalks on apartment property have cracks or holes (25%)
 - Laundry room has peeling paint on walls/ceiling (35%)
 - Laundry room has leaks or mould (30%)
 - **Laundry room machines don't work (55%)**
 - I have no issues with the common areas of my building (15%)
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COMMENTS FROM TENANTS

I live in this building because I have to, but I think humans should not live here.

Management makes us feel as if they don't want to fix the unit 'till we're out of it for good. We've lived here since 2013 and there's been maybe a handful of things that HAVE been fixed. We get blamed for ALL the things wrong with our unit because I have 4 kids. We're terrified of losing this place because we can't afford anywhere else but it's hell living here.

Look at what [Q Residential] is doing to people like me – I'm a war veteran, I'm on ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program), and I've been living in the building for over 10 years. I can't afford what they're asking. I get around \$1200 a month from ODSP. Where am I supposed to find \$3000 for November 1st?

PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY TENANTS



Capital Towers ACORN Tenant Union Demands & How to Get Involved:

The Capital Towers ACORN Tenant Union is demanding that Q Residential withdraw the AGI and fix the many outstanding repairs in 1244 & 1240 Donald St. Tenants cannot afford this major rent increase, nor does the state of their building justify such significant increase in rent. If anything, tenants deserve rent abatements for the years of disrepair and neglect they've had to endure!

ACORN members will continue to organize with their neighbours in order to get results. You can support the Capital Towers ACORN Tenant Union by:

Sending an email to Q Residential to support the campaign:

https://acorncanada.org/take_action/urgent-stop-the-3000-rent-increase-at-capital-towers/

Joining as an ACORN member: <https://acorncanada.org/join-us/>

Becoming an ACORN donor: <https://acorncanada.org/contributions/>

