

OTTAWA ACORN

Ottawa Tenant Survey

TENANTS' BIGGEST HOUSING
ISSUES & SOLUTIONS



Written by Ottawa ACORN - June 20, 2023

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Introduction



Ottawa ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent organization of low and moderate income families with over 32,000 members in every corner of the city.

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.

Since our inception in 2006 in Ottawa, our membership has been pushing property owners, management companies, and the City of Ottawa to ensure that all Ottawa tenants have better protections against renovations, demovictions, and getting repairs addressed by landlords.

In 2019, ACORN won with our allies \$15 million in the City's affordable housing budget. In

2020, ACORN won Rental Management & Pest Control Bylaws which introduced timelines for repairs and requirements for landlords to have pest control and maintenance plans. In June 2022, ACORN convinced City Council to strengthen its draft recommendations for Inclusionary Zoning - a policy that would mandate affordable housing in new developments- as well as to study an Anti Displacement Policy predicated on a bylaw that would ensure the replacement of demolished affordable housing.

But the housing crisis continues to worsen. And in October 2022, Doug Ford announced Bill 23. The bill caps affordable housing through Inclusionary Zoning at 5% for just 25 years and threatens to weaken cities' rental replacement bylaws.

In response, ACORN opted to revisit our municipal housing campaigns to identify what were Ottawa tenants' biggest priorities for change at the city level, while we continue to fight back provincially.

Summary

Ottawa ACORN has been fighting for protecting and building more affordable housing since we started organizing in low income renter communities back in 2006. Along the way, ACORN members were successful in winning more protections for tenants including \$15 million in the City's affordable housing budget in 2019, and Rental Management & Pest Control Bylaws in 2020.

While these are major wins for tenants, market rents continue to increase dramatically and less than 3% of all developments were affordable rental units in the last decade. Between 2017 and 2021 the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) saw a 132% increase in N13 applications, which allow landlords to evict tenants for major renovations (renovictions) and demolition (demovictions). These evictions allow landlords to circumvent rent caps on older buildings by pushing out long term tenants protected by rent control and increasing the rent for new tenants who can afford to pay more.

Over the past 2 months, ACORN responded to Ottawa's worsening housing crisis by launching our Housing Justice Priorities Project. The goal of this project was to determine Ottawa tenants' top municipal housing solutions based on their biggest concerns as renters. ACORN organizers and members knocked on hundreds of doors, made countless phone calls, held 5 tenant meetings in different neighbourhoods across the city, circulated a Tenant Survey with 145 respondents, and organized a 100+ person townhall called the 'Tenant Rights Council'.

Some of the key findings of the tenant survey are as follows:

- 32% had received an eviction notice
- 60% have struggled to get repairs done
- 30% have struggled to get a pest infestation (ex. bedbugs, cockroaches) addressed
- 30% have struggled to get a rodent infestation (ex. rats, mice) addressed
- 51% struggle with their apartments being too hot in the summer & 71% live or have lived without AC
- 25% have been harassed, intimidated or threatened by a landlord
- 17% have received an Above Guideline Rent Increase (AGI)
- 16% have received a rent increase they could not afford
- 34% have lived in a building/complex without regular cleaning or maintenance
- Only 11% had ever called Bylaw, but of those that did, only 55% had their maintenance issues resolved

The top 3 municipal housing solutions voted on by ACORN members and other Ottawa tenants are (in order of priority): a Renoviction Bylaw, \$40 million in the affordable housing budget and Landlord Licensing.

Campaign Demands to Build & Protect Affordable Housing

Over 350 Ottawa ACORN members and other tenants across the city voted on what they want ACORN's top housing priorities to be. The results show the Top 3 Housing Campaigns are:

- Renoviction By-law
- \$40 Million in the city budget for Affordable Housing
- Landlord Licensing

Renoviction By-law

Ottawa ACORN demands city hall to establish a licensing system for landlords to effectively ban renoventions by removing landlords' financial incentive to renovict tenants by providing clear requirements that the landlord must adhere to before any evictions can take place. Ottawa ACORN demands developers to obtain all permits from the city needed to do the renovation. 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 to ensure that tenants are not displaced:

- 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
- 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 must face escalating fines by the City. In addition to the licensing system, include a strong Standards of Maintenance bylaw that is now enforced through the landlord licensing system. Landlords are required to keep their buildings up to stringent minimum standards or face penalties.

In New Westminster, BC where this bylaw was first introduced, the City had done outreach to tenants, informing them of their new rights, making it difficult for landlords to circumvent the rules by misleading tenants.

Ottawa ACORN members are also calling on the City to track new building ownership as in many cases renoventions soon follow the the sale of older apartment buildings. This would allow the City to take a proactive approach when it comes to informing tenants of their rights and provide resources for tenants and tenant groups to respond to threats of displacement, neglect of maintenance and above the guideline rent increases (AGIs).

Campaign Demands to Build & Protect Affordable Housing

\$40 Million in the city budget for Affordable Housing

In 2019, Ottawa ACORN with our allies won \$15 million and the following year the City declared a housing emergency. Yet up until this year we continued to only spend \$15 million a year on building affordable housing.

In 2023, the affordable housing budget was increased to just \$16 million. The City should match what it spends on emergency shelters on long term solutions such as building more affordable, non-market housing.

Landlord Licensing

Ottawa ACORN has fought for landlord licensing since 2008. In March 2017, ACORN Ottawa released its 'State of Repair Report' which was evidence for the need for the municipal government to move forward on landlord licensing. Ottawa ACORN was able to push landlord registration onto the City Hall agenda in late Dec 2017. In 2019, City council voted against landlord registration after being convinced by the landlord lobby's fear-mongering.

After the mass efforts from ACORN members through countless actions outside bad apartment buildings, 100 person rallies outside City Hall multiple times, meeting with city councillors, and tons of press coverage, the Rental Housing Property Management Bylaw was passed in 2020. While the new bylaw requires landlords to do repairs in a given timeline and have plans for pest control and maintenance, it's not enforced. Instead, all the onus is on tenants to report their bad landlords to the City. Many won't do this for a variety of reasons. Including but not limited to fear of retaliation, language barriers, and distrust in the system.

Licensing landlords would mean treating landlords like every other business. Licensing would allow for proactive inspections to catch problems tenants aren't reporting and rate buildings based on their performance so tenants know what they're getting into before signing a lease.

Tenant Survey to assess Ottawa Renters' Top Housing Concerns

Ottawa ACORN has been conducting surveys to understand the top housing concerns of tenants across the city.



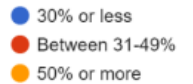
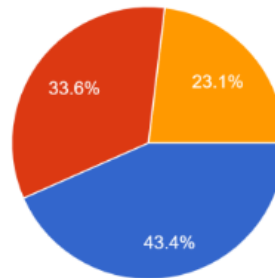
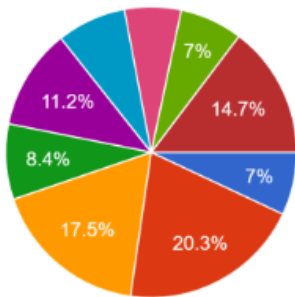
Methodology

Ottawa ACORN created a survey to hear from tenants directly about 1) the housing issues in their buildings and neighbourhoods, and 2) the solutions they'd like to see City Hall use to address them. This survey was conducted online, sent to Ottawa ACORN's membership and tenant contact lists by email and social media. Responses were also gathered by doorknocking and flyering apartment buildings. 145 responses were collected.

The survey included sections such as demographics, rent/type of building, quality of the unit and building, common tenant experiences, and experiences with escalating their concerns to By-law and the LTB.



Survey Findings: Demographics

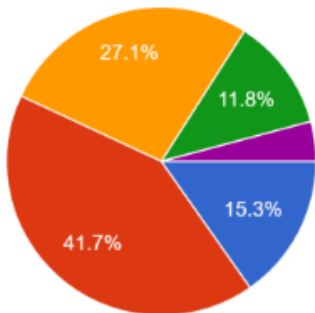


64%

ANNUAL INCOME IS BELOW \$50,000

57%

PAY OVER 30% OF ANNUAL INCOME ON RENT



42%

LIVE IN A 1 BEDROOM APARTMENT

OTHER STATS:

- **88% RENT FROM A PRIVATE LANDLORD OR COMPANY**
- **12% LIVE IN SOCIAL HOUSING, CO-OPS OR NON-PROFIT HOUSING**
- **72% LIVE IN BUILDINGS WITH AT LEAST 10 UNITS**
- **71% EARNING LESS THAN \$50K PAY 30% + ON RENT COMPARED TO 33% OF THOSE EARNING MORE THAN \$50K**

Survey Findings: Common Tenant Experiences

25%

HAVE BEEN HARASSED, INTIMIDATED OR THREATENED BY A LANDLORD

32%

HAD RECEIVED AN EVICTION NOTICE

16%

HAD RECEIVED A RENT INCREASE THEY COULDN'T AFFORD

36%

HAVE PROBLEMS WITH HEAT IN THE WINTER

34%

HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THEIR WATER TEMPERATURE

71%

DON'T HAVE AC CURRENTLY OR IN THE PAST

60%

HAVE STRUGGLED TO GET REPAIRS DONE

17%

HAD RECEIVED AN ABOVE THE GUIDELINE RENT INCREASE

30%

STRUGGLED TO GET A BEDBUG OR COCKROACH INFESTATION ADDRESSED BY LANDLORD

17%

STRUGGLED TO GET A RODENT INFESTATION ADDRESSED BY LANDLORD

51%

HAVE APARTMENTS THAT ARE TOO HOT IN THE SUMMER

13%

WERE CHARGED EXTRA FOR AC

Survey Findings: Experiences with LTB & By-Law

6%

HAD GONE TO THE LTB AND WON THEIR CASE

9%

HAD GONE TO THE LTB AND LOST THEIR CASE

5%

HAD CALLED CITY BY-LAW AND HAD THEIR ISSUES FIXED

6%

**HAD CALLED CITY BY-LAW AND HAD THEIR ISSUES WERE NOT
RESOLVED**



Conclusion & How to Get Involved

Conclusion & How To Get Involved

The results of the tenant survey found 32% of tenant respondents had received an eviction notice and 60% have struggled to get repairs done. In addition, nearly 60% of respondents are paying over 30% of their income towards rent. This shows that there is an urgent need for the city to move forward with a Ottawa ACORN members' campaign demands for:

1. A Renoviction Bylaw
2. \$40 Million in the city budget for affordable housing
3. Landlord Licensing

Too many tenants live in fear of being evicted at any moment, struggle to find housing they can afford, and despite recent changes to property standards bylaws, tenants continue to suffer with substandard housing conditions.

Ottawa ACORN's Tenant Survey serves as an important reminder to Ottawa City Council and the new mayor that there is a pressing need to do something real to address the housing crisis that low and moderate income renters are facing the brunt of.

How to support:

1. Join ACORN as a member: <https://acorncanada.org/join-us/>
2. Donate to ACORN here: <https://acorncanada.org/contributions/>
3. Send an email to the Mayor and your City Councillor in support of a Renoviction Bylaw using our online action here: https://acorncanada.org/take_action/stop-renovictions-in-ottawa-2/
4. Sign up for ACORN's e-newsletter to stay up-to-date on campaign developments and to receive invitations to actions, meetings and events: <https://acorncanada.org/newsletter/>