



Office of the Commissioner  
Housing York Inc.  
Community and Health Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Directors of Housing York Inc. Board  
From: Rick Farrell, General Manager  
Date: January 31, 2019  
Re: Housing Operations Activity Update

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### **Resident Engagement and Programs**

#### **Residents appreciate HYI Alerts**

Housing York Inc. (HYI) has buildings in every municipality in York Region. When a service disruption occurs, it takes time to prepare paper notices and deliver them to the building. In the summer of 2018, as part of HYI's student employment program, residents were invited to information sessions to promote HYI Alerts.

HYI Alerts is an electronic notification system that enables HYI to provide timely, more frequent updates to participating residents in their preferred format: telephone call, text message or email. Residents can also designate a family member to receive messages on their behalf. The four summer students, all of whom live in HYI communities, collectively were fluent in six languages. Thanks to enthusiasm of the students and the staff supporting them, more than 700 households registered to receive HYI Alerts. New residents will be encouraged to enroll as part of the leasing process and HYI will continue to promote resident enrollment at resident meetings.

HYI can now provide regular updates to participating residents. For example, when a power disruption occurs, HYI can let residents know whether the issue is specific to their building or part of an area disruption and can share information about when power is expected to be restored. This has the added benefit of reducing the need for residents to call the after-hours emergency service call centre for information purposes.

HYI began sending HYI Alerts in the fall of 2018 to keep residents informed of work underway in their buildings that may impact services. HYI has received positive feedback from multiple residents about this new communication tool.

### **Youth Basketball Program for Town of Georgina housing communities**

In April 2018, HYI was awarded a \$6,000 provincial Multicultural Community Capacity Grant. The grant's purpose was to help build diverse and inclusive communities by enhancing the ability of newcomers and ethno-cultural communities to participate fully in the civic, cultural, social and economic life of Ontario. With the funding, HYI offered a free basketball program to youth living in HYI's Glenwood Mews community and in the adjacent social housing community, Bethany Co-operative Homes. The basketball program focused on developing sportsmanship, teamwork and building positive relationships within the community.

The program took place in the fall of 2018 and welcomed youth between the ages of 10 and 15. A basketball coach taught participants basketball skills and organized basketball games. Participants also received a basketball, jersey and weekly dinner before practice. The program was well received and more than 15 youth participated each week in the drop-in basketball program. In the program's final week, each participant and a guest were invited to watch a Raptors 905 game in Mississauga. Overall, the youth basketball program helped increase access to indoor recreation and used the sport of basketball to develop skills, sportsmanship, teamwork, confidence, social connections and community engagement.



**Figure 1 Youth Basketball Program Participants**

## **Richmond Hill Residents Test their Fats, Oils and Grease “FOG” Knowledge**

HYI teamed up with York Region’s Environmental Services department to provide an educational session on Fats, Oils and Grease (FOG) to over 40 residents at the Richmond Hill Hub.

The presentation touched on the safe disposal of FOG to protect the Region’s water treatment system and prevent their building’s pipes from clogging. Staff engaged residents in a number of activities that tested their FOG knowledge and the potential impacts on resident building services when FOG are poured down sinks, drains or toilets, and prizes were awarded. In order to reach a broad number of residents living in the Richmond Hill Hub community, HYI and Environmental Services worked together to source staff to help deliver the presentation in Cantonese, Mandarin and Farsi.

HYI will continue to partner with Environmental Services on future initiatives on topics such as garbage and recycling, water and waste, and forestry.

## **Operational Update**

### **Stove Fire at 145 Essex Avenue, Town of Richmond Hill**

On Sunday, September 9, 2018, a fire occurred at Mackenzie Green, a 140 unit HYI building, located in the Town of Richmond Hill.

First responders were at the scene within minutes of the fire alarm, and staff arrived on scene quickly to support residents and fire officials. Mackenzie Green, as one of HYI’s newer buildings, was designed with a sprinkler system in every unit. The sprinkler system worked effectively and the fire was quickly extinguished. Most importantly, no one was hurt.

Although the fire itself caused minimal damage, the water from the sprinkler system caused extensive damage. The fire occurred in a sixth floor unit located across from the elevators. Water penetrated both elevators, damaging circuitry and leaving the building without elevator service for ten days. During the elevator outage, temporary support personnel were hired to assist residents with the stairs.

Resident units on floors two through six had varying degrees of water damage. A number of units experienced short term displacements while their units were repaired. Residents in the four most significantly damaged units left their units for an extended period of time. All displaced tenants returned to their restored units by the end of January 2019.

Throughout the restoration process, HYI worked with each affected resident individually to ensure their concerns were addressed. Staff provided extended office hours for several days after the fire to provide continued support as repairs to the building and units progressed. Residents were kept informed of the restoration progress through notices posted in the lobby and through HYI Alerts.

Consistent with insurance industry practices, HYI's insurance policy only covers HYI's losses. Tenant insurance is required to cover costs such as replacement of resident's personal belongings and temporary accommodation. In [March 2013](#) the HYI Board approved a policy requiring all new residents to carry tenant's insurance. Fortunately, most of the impacted Mackenzie Green residents were insured.

HYI is insured through the province-wide social housing group insurance program managed by the Housing Services Corporation. The total loss for this claim has not been finalized but is estimated at \$800,000. HYI has a \$25,000 property claim deductible and the balance of the cost is covered by the insurer. HYI's policy renewed in November 2018, the impact of this claim will likely be captured in the November 2019 renewal.

### **HYI is changing stove top burners to reduce the risk of cooking fires**

The Mackenzie Green fire was caused by an unattended pot of cooking oil. As cooking is the number one cause of residential fires in Ontario, HYI has been exploring technology solutions to reduce the risk of stove top fires. The stoves in a number of seniors' buildings have been equipped with specialized burners designed to keep the temperature below the ignition point of cooking oils. This technology is recognized by HYI's insurer as significantly reducing the risk of fire.

The specialized burners have received mixed reviews from residents, including complaints that it takes too long to cook and that the burners take longer to cool down than a conventional coil element. HYI has worked with the burner manufacturer to educate residents on how to adapt their cooking practices to most effectively use their stoves. Given the risks and impact of stove top fires, the specialized burners will be incorporated in all future kitchen retrofits. HYI will continue to work with residents to support them in adapting to the new technology.

### **HYI's Smoke-Free Policy and the Legalization of Recreational Cannabis**

HYI's Board of Directors approved a Smoke-Free Building Policy in [June 2014](#). As the *Residential Tenancies Act* prevents landlords from making changes to leases without the resident's consent, the HYI policy prohibits all households who sign a lease after November 1, 2014 from smoking in their unit. The lease language defines smoking broadly and HYI is applying the lease as prohibiting all forms of smoking, including cannabis. Moving forward, for greater clarity, cannabis is specifically referenced as prohibited. Currently, 45 per cent of all units have a smoke-free lease.

HYI also prohibits smoking of any kind in common areas and within five meters of windows, doors and vents. In addition to HYI rules and policies, the smoking or vaping of tobacco and cannabis (medical and recreational) are prohibited in indoor common areas such as hallways, elevators, party and common rooms, stairwells, lobbies, parking garages and exercise areas under the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017*.

In accordance with requirements of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, HYI accommodates medical use of cannabis.

Since the legalization of recreational cannabis, HYI has not received any cannabis related complaints. Information was provided to all residents on the legalization of recreational cannabis and HYI's smoke-free policy through the resident newsletter.

HYI continues to partner with Public Health to promote smoking cessation programs offered across several municipalities.

## **Capital Updates**

### **Oxford Village, Town of East Gwillimbury - Elevator Replacement**

Construction to replace the elevator at Oxford Village began in January of 2019, and will be completed by end of February 2019. The work includes elevator cab modernization with new interiors, new controls and power units including tanks, pumps and motors.

During construction, the elevator will be out of service for up to eight weeks. As this site has a single elevator, arrangements have been made for a support worker to be available to assist residents with stairs and to carry items such as groceries and laundry. Temporary seating is also provided in stairwells between floors.

The Town of East Gwillimbury Fire Department, York Region Paramedic Services and York Regional Police have all been notified of the elevator's out-of-service dates in the event of an emergency.

### **Thornhill Green, Town of Richmond Hill - Roof Replacement**

Construction to replace the roof shingles at Thornhill Green began in August 2018. A total of 101 townhouse units are included in the roof replacements. The work includes the installation of new asphalt shingles, ice and water shield membrane, underlayment, and new flashings.

Tenants are notified of work in advance of the construction activity for each unit. Overhead protection is installed at each townhouse entrance to provide tenants with a safe entry into their unit during construction.

The majority of the work was completed by the end of November 2018 with final work, including flashing, planned to be completed in February 2019.

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Rick Farrell  
General Manager

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