



REPORT
Meeting Date: 2020-06-25
Peel Living Annual General Meeting

For Information

REPORT TITLE: Peel Living COVID-19 Pandemic Response

FROM: Andrea Warren, General Manager, Peel Housing Corporation

OBJECTIVE

To provide a comprehensive overview of the actions that Peel Living management have taken in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Peel Living is committed to continuing to fulfill its core functions, to provide safe affordable housing, support tenants, and maintain assets during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Business policies and practices have been updated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to continue emergency and urgent operations while supporting tenant and staff safety and security.
 - Communication tactics and channels have been enhanced to ensure that tenants are informed of updated operations and safety recommendations.
 - Forecasting and modelling have been utilized to understand the financial impact of COVID-19 to the 2020 Budget and to establish structured rent repayment options for tenants.
 - Business continuity planning and response is ongoing and recovery planning is also underway.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

In March, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic in response to COVID-19. Peel Living staff responded immediately to mitigate the spread of the virus at Peel Living operated sites and to protect staff. To date, multiple actions have been taken to adjust operations to continue to deliver Peel Housing Corporation's mandate and core functions, to provide safe affordable housing, support tenants, and maintain assets, while ensuring tenant and staff safety. These actions have been categorized into the following sections; Enhanced Efforts to Safeguard Health and Safety, Tenant Education and Awareness Efforts, Business Continuity and Financial Impacts.

2. Enhanced Efforts to Safeguard Health and Safety

Peel Living staff have made safety and security a priority during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Cleaning service hours at Peel Living sites have been increased, focusing on extra cleaning to elevators and common high traffic/critical touchpoints.

Peel Living COVID-19 Pandemic Response

All non-emergency in-suite work has been cancelled and will be rescheduled pending direction from the Province, Peel's Medical Officer of Health, and the Regional Emergency Operations Centre. As a result, work orders have been restricted to emergency work only which includes requests to respond to serious leaks, floods, no heat, no lighting, no hydro, building and unit access, elevator outage, complete appliance failure, and urgent pest control. As a part of the recovery effort, repair requests will be triaged and prioritized prior to fixing. Additional resources may be required to support the backlog of repair requests.

Should work need to be actioned, tenant screening guidelines have been developed in partnership with Peel Health and Safety staff and the Regional Emergency Management team. Staff have been instructed to use the screening protocols prior to tenant interactions, use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and practice physical distancing. Staff have been trained on the proper use of PPE and social distancing practises have been reinforced by the leadership team.

All party rooms and common rooms have been closed, doors have been locked and programming cancelled. All playgrounds are closed. Laundry room operating hours have been extended (where possible) to accommodate physical distancing requirements.

Security patrols have been increased to provide a supportive and visible presence at buildings, particularly supporting sites with seniors. Security patrol routes will be continually assessed to ensure that the available resources are deployed throughout our entire housing portfolio, while continuing to provide visible support to our vulnerable tenant populations. The Region's Volunteer Program has been engaged, as a pilot program, to provide additional support to tenants through phone calls and connecting them to community agencies as needed, such as food banks.

3. Tenant Education and Awareness Efforts

Peel Living is increasing the number of communication channels available to tenants to ensure the timely sharing of updates on operations. Posters reiterating COVID-19 safety precautions were provided by Public Health and have been affixed to all common areas of buildings. Changes to business operations were also communicated.

Letters were sent to all tenants to inform them about their rent responsibilities and supports available should they be experiencing financial difficulties. An information flyer was also provided detailing community supports available (e.g. Food Map and food bank services).

Peel Living's webpage has been updated to provide tenants information and resources that are available to them. Staff have been instructed to refer tenants to the website during any interaction. On the Region of Peel COVID-19 response page, Peel Living has its own dropdown list of resources.

New communication tactics have been developed in response to COVID-19. Staff have contacted approximately 2,500 vulnerable tenants (seniors, those with known health issues) by phone to conduct a wellness check and provide information about available supports and resources. If staff were unable to connect due to language barriers or change of telephone numbers, letters will be mailed with the same information, offering additional supports, including translation services, should they request it. Tenants that self identify needing additional supports have been placed on a call-back list. Common requests from vulnerable tenants identified during the calls are for support with medication and groceries. Depending

Peel Living COVID-19 Pandemic Response

on the situation, Peel Living Tenant Support Agents will make an appropriate referral to community or local municipal resources.

Tenants that live in family buildings have also been contacted using voice drop (auto calls) and with almost 3,500 calls completed. The goal of the calls is to push tenants to the website and sign up for e-newsletters.

A hard copy newsletter will be provided to all tenants to encourage signing up for the e-newsletter. To support the e-newsletter campaign, social media ads have targeted Peel Living tenants through Facebook and Instagram. The e-newsletters will be helpful to send messages to tenants throughout the pandemic and in the future to communicate regular program information and resources available to them. Some tenants have already provided consent to Peel Living to communicate via email. For senior tenants who have done so, an email message was sent prior to the wellness phone calls, to provide information on available resources.

4. Business Continuity

In response to these unprecedented times, Peel Living staff has developed a multi pronged approach to meet our tenant needs and provide financial stability.

The General Manager has been connecting with industry peers to leverage best practices through associations such as Ontario Not for Profit Housing Association.

Staff are working to update a number of policies and business practices to safeguard tenant and employee health and provide additional support to vulnerable tenants. New policies have been established such as electronic signatures, move/ins and move/outs that consider physical distancing and updating building evacuations.

A pandemic continuity plan has been prepared and will be updated and revisited over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan will serve two key purposes: a repository of resources, tools and information for future reference and a roadmap to guide workforce planning and recovery of operations during and after a pandemic.

A compassionate approach has been utilized to support tenants facing financial challenges during this uncertain time. Collection plans and limited deferrals of revenue have already been accepted practices within Peel Living.

Flexibility for all tenants experiencing hardship is being accommodated by accepting personal cheques as rent payments, waiving Peel Living non-sufficient funds (NSF) charges and not taking legal action related to non-payment of rent during the period of the emergency. Existing arrears repayment plans are being monitored and renegotiated for tenants that are experiencing hardship. Former tenant arrears collections which were on hold, related to the conversion to the Housing Technology Initiative in May 2019, remain on hold considering the likely financial impacts of COVID-19.

For tenants receiving supports (such as Rent-Geared-to-Income assistance), a process for identifying the need for financial relief has been established to modify rent as needed. This process was done in consultation with the Service Manager.

Staff have developed a model that verifies the loss of tenant income and allows for the deferral of rent to be repaid through one of four payment plans up to a period of nine months. This

Peel Living COVID-19 Pandemic Response

process was done to maximize the flexibility of repayment options for tenants based on the anticipated increase to the number of tenants requesting deferral, while being mindful of the need for financial stability for the Peel Housing Corporation. Staff resources may be strained as a result of the anticipated increased repayment plan negotiations, additional resources maybe needed to support this initiative in the future. As a part of our recovery efforts, workorder requests will be prioritized to ensure that emergency and urgent workorders continue to be actioned in a timely manner. Staff are preparing communications and resource requirements to return to support requests for standard work order requests, that are neither emergency or urgent repairs.

Peel Living, in partnership with Region led task force, has worked to identify which projects might need to be suspended to comply with Provincial essential business orders. Peel Living will continue to take Provincial and Regional direction on business operations and will restart or initiate projects as possible to support tenant, staff and community safety. Peel Living will prioritize delayed projects to ensure that essential work to maintain State of Good Repair will be initiated as soon as possible. At the time of writing this report, in-suite and common area State of Good Repair capital project work at the Peel Living buildings have been paused due to the social distancing guidelines. Requirements are being actively reviewed to ensure that required in-suite work is completed when possible considering tenant and staff safety.

5. Financial Impacts

Peel Housing Corporation will experience a financial impact, both short and long-term, due to the economic uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following chart provides an overview of the possible revenue and financial impacts that PHC may incur. A high variance between budget and actual revenue is anticipated for 2020.

Residential rental revenue accounts for 70.5 per cent (\$70.5M) of the total budgeted revenue. Staff have built a model to forecast the impacts on four major areas of rent collected to understand the potential impact on the 2020 revenues. Peel Living is expanding the relief processes based on directives from both the Provincial Government and the Service Manager.

Below is a summary of the anticipated impacts of COVID-19 on revenue.

Summary of Revenue Impacts:

Revenue Stream	Total Forecasted Deferred Revenue	Total Forecasted Revenue Loss	Estimated Aears based on current rate of 20%:
Market Tenants	\$2.6M		\$.520M
Rent Supp Tenants	\$1.0M		\$.200M
Rent Geared to Income Tenants	\$.9M	\$2.5M*	\$.180M
Parking	\$.1M		\$.026M
Total	\$3.6M	\$2.5M	\$.926M

Peel Living COVID-19 Pandemic Response

* RGI rents once adjusted, due to change in tenant income, are permanent reduction in revenue.

Overall, Peel Living is expecting that \$3.6M of anticipated revenue will be deferred. Of the \$3.6M in anticipated deferred rent, there is the possibility that \$1M of this rent may not be fully collected through repayment plans. To the extent that we are able to offset RGI subsidies through the Service Manager, that will occur. The \$2.5M loss, is an estimated worse case scenario based on the assumption that relief measures would last for three months and additional subsidy would not be available from the Service Manager.

In addition to reduced revenue, operating costs to ensure that tenants remain safe in their homes, and staff remain safe in caring for our tenants, have increased in the following areas:

- Cleaning Supplies
- Cleaning hours at the site through vendor contract
- Additional Security Measures
- Additional communication costs
- Staff overtime in managing operational change requirements.
- Personal protective equipment.
- Operational expenses are anticipated to slow down however there are no anticipated savings at this point in the year. Historically, the expenditure distribution for operational expenditures are heavily weighted in the later half of the year.

Staff have developed a comprehensive overview of the potential impact of COVID-19 on Peel Housing Corporation revenues and the variances from the 2020 Budget. Based on our current understanding, it is anticipated that Peel Living will be able to manage without requiring a loan or generating a loss. The impact of COVID-19 related increased costs and decreased revenues will impact upon Peel Livings' ability to financially support future State of Good Repair costs, as surplus revenue is reduced. Estimates have been made on the assumption that a return to planned activities will be possible later this year, should the Pandemic continue longer, negative financial impacts will be greater.

CONCLUSION

Peel Living continues to support tenants by providing safe and secure housing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Agile and flexible operations and creative communication has allowed staff to continue emergency maintenance while safeguarding tenants and staff and to implement measures to safeguard financial sustainability.

For further information regarding this report, please contact Andrea Warren, General Manager, Ext. 4355, andrea.warren@peelregion.ca.

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Peel Living COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner, General Manager of Peel Housing Corporation and Financial Support Unit.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Polsinelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N" and a distinct "P".

N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer