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OUR OPINION

Cheyenne Avenue tenants need helping hand

Residents of four crumbling apartment buildings on Cheyenne Avenue in northeast London deserve a break. The provincial government should give it to them.

After years of battling cockroaches and fighting for liveable dwelling space, the tenants — many Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees — propose tearing down the existing buildings and putting up co-op housing. They want to improve their lives and they're willing to work on solutions themselves.

The city has already okayed the demolition of the buildings and a higher-population density for the new complex.

The province, while sympathetic, has a few problems with the proposal — most notably that it fails to meet several criteria for funding. Despite meetings between the tenants' group and ministry officials, the proposal still involves too much money for the property and too high a per-unit cost for the type of dwellings they want to build, says regional housing minister

Both tenants and province should make every effort to meet funding criteria that would allow the co-operative project to go forward.

official Peter Schafft.

However, he notes, if the tenants would just rework their proposal and reconsider the type of dwellings they want — perhaps a combination of apartments and townhouses rather than the stacked townhouses they are seeking — and resubmit the proposal under a different government program due to start next year, they would likely have no trouble getting funding.

Next year?

Unfortunately, says Schafft, there is no money left in the budget for such a project this year.

Next year is too long for these tenants to wait. The conditions under which they live are appalling. They need to begin work on new living space now. They need to rework their existing proposal immediately to meet the already existing funding criteria. That will likely mean cutting back on the type of dwellings they were hoping to build, probably more apartments and fewer townhouses. If they are able to do that, the government should be able to compromise too.

If the province can come up with the money for this project next year, maybe it needs to look a little harder to see if it can't find the money this year. This co-op should be a priority.

The tenants' association is seeking support for the project at a public meeting Sept. 15. That is the time to help send a message to the government of Ontario that this co-op needs to go ahead.

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