

# The London Free Press

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## OUR OPINION

### Cheyenne co-op plan still the best solution

**W**hy would any intelligent person continue to rent an apartment at the troubled apartment buildings at 95 and 105 Cheyenne St. in London?

It appears, from the latest reports given to city hall, that many of the tenants have given up the fight. Only half of the 40 units are now rented and of those, only 11 have joined a tenant-association plan to divert their rent toward paying off landlord Elijah Elieff's \$13,000 overdue utility bill.

But despite these numbers, simple resettlement of the remaining tenants to other apartments is not the answer.

For the past few years, most of the tenants have been Cambodian refugees. They have rented from Elieff because he will overlook regulations limiting the number of people

living in one apartment. Often, the Cambodian families are large and can span more than two generations.

Despite the departure of many tenants, the simple resettlement of those remaining to other apartments is not the answer.

Approximately 50 families, both current and former tenants of the Cheyenne apartments, have indicated an interest in a co-operative housing plan. Even though families move away, they see

Cheyenne as their home base. The recent Christmas party there drew 200 Cambodians.

There are two persuasive arguments for supporting efforts to buy the buildings from Elieff and renovate them, rather than develop a co-operative elsewhere in London. The support services for the Cambodian families are now set up in that geographic area. For instance, an English-language course for women is held in a church within eyesight of the location. The children are settled in a nearby school.

There's the fear, too, of history repeating itself. The building's difficulties predate the influx of Cambodian tenants. In the mid-1980s, most of the tenants were single-parent, white families. There were problems with the apartments' upkeep. With support, these Cheyenne residents formed the Genesis Co-Op in 1989 and moved to another part of London.

But that left two apartment buildings in bad condition that were rented to the next group of vulnerable tenants: the Cambodian refugees.

On another point, there is the worry that an ethnic-based co-operative might ghettoize a particular community. But then, other groups of immigrants have come to this city and, by choice, moved in near each other. Even today, Hamilton Road has strong Italian and Portuguese ties. The Cambodian co-op plan might be a way for those who come to Canada with limited financial resources to follow the same instinct.

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