

**Deputation to Toronto Community Housing Board of Directors
Councillor Vincent Crisanti
May 24, 2012**

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I would like to speak to the report on CCTVs as it relates to the experiences of the constituents I represent as City Councillor for Ward 1.

As you may have heard, there has been a spike in incidences of violence in and around Community Housing properties in North Etobicoke. Residents are living in fear.

They are afraid that when they exit their homes, they may become the next victim of gun violence, a problem that has afflicted certain neighbourhoods in Toronto over many years.

Residents have seen their friends, neighbours and even their own children fall victim to gun violence. The results are tragic in their own right.

But information on the ground suggests that for every person targeted by gun violence, hundreds more are put at risk. Residents are tired of finding shell casings on the ground.

They are afraid every time they find an errant bullet lodged in a wall or a front door.

Across the City, year-to-date shootings are up nearly 55 percent over 2011 (based on Toronto Police data retrieved April 25, 2012). Victims are up more than 79%.

Deaths have decreased compared with 2011 but injuries have increased 36 percent.

The most striking figure, however, is the number of shootings with no injuries. Compared with the same time last year, there has been a 242.9 percent increase.

I do not have similar statistics for TCH properties in Ward 1 but from my conversations with Toronto Police, residents and community groups, my impression has been that this increase in violence is also being felt in and around TCH properties in Ward 1.

A shooting with no injuries is not a victimless crime. The fear of a random bullet is a great intimidator within a community, and we can count ourselves fortunate the bullets have not connected with innocent bystanders.

Nevertheless, random shootings cause families to shut themselves into their homes and lead to isolation. They break already vulnerable communities.

They make people suspicious of their neighbours and of vehicles driving down their streets. They cause businesses to steer clear of certain areas.

Many Torontonians might be surprised to learn that TCH residents around Jamestown Crescent cannot even get a pizza delivered to their homes.

The type of shootings experienced in and around TCH properties in Ward 1 are linked to gangs. They may seem random or unexpected but long-time residents of North Etobicoke – such as myself, who has lived in the area for more than 30 years – know better.

These are specific individuals who choose to commit violence. They intimidate communities and victims are afraid to speak up. The only useful witness in many cases is a security camera.

Gang activity is a serious and complex problem within our communities and one that I do not expect law enforcement or increased security measures alone to solve.

However, we can identify best practices and opportunities for improvement. We must.

This is exactly what I did in 2011 when I requested an audit of the security cameras in Ward 1 properties.

As this report noted, this request came after a conversation with Toronto Police, where I learned officers would likely have been able to identify particular shooters had security cameras been operational/ in place.

A report completed in September 2011 indicated that 3 out of 39 cameras at Thistletown 1 were defective. Across all other TCH properties in Ward 1, a further 3 were defective.

TCH has recommended 11 additional cameras at Mount Olive, which currently only has 7 working cameras. Furthermore, 13 additional cameras have been recommended for Thistletown 1 and 2, as well as 6 new low light cameras to replace existing equipment.

I am not sure whether steps have been taken to take advantage of the opportunities for enhanced safety outlined in the report or only to note that there is a need.

Toronto Community Housing residents do not expect their landlord to eradicate crime but they do expect their landlord to seize an opportunity when it presents itself.

In this spirit, I encourage the Board to seriously consider the safety of TCH tenants in Ward 1.

I encourage the Board to invest in additional security cameras for properties in Ward 1, to ensure that all security assets are deployed as effectively as possible and to take appropriate steps to discourage known criminals from residing in or visiting TCH properties.

One way to go about this is to put more feet on the ground on TCH properties. For many tenants, Toronto Community Housing is a faceless organization.

There are no security guards. There is nobody employed by TCH that tenants see on a routine basis... people who monitor security cameras, who proactively seek out security concerns and listen to feedback from residents.

I encourage Toronto Community Housing to consider that an important part of community safety is maintaining a consistent presence of security personnel in the community.

I look forward to working with the Board and with TCH staff to ensure we are doing everything we can to keep our community safe.

Thank you.