

UNIT IMPROVEMENT GUIDELINES POLICY

(to accompany Maintenance and Improvement By-law #7)

ST. GEORGES HOUSING CO-OP INC.

Approved by the Board of Directors: 17 May 1994

A General Discussion of Considerations

1. Does The Co-op Approve?

The co-op, while not encouraging major unit alteration, is sympathetic to renovations that will enhance the 'marketability' of the unit, providing that the co-op has confidence that the renovations will be completed with reasonable taste and quality. Some of the considerations are:

- (a) Will the renovations reduce the number of rooms in the units? Renovations, which will reduce the bedroom count of a unit, may violate agreements with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation or affect the co-op's status with the Ontario Ministry of Housing. Many such renovations will also reduce the efficiency of the unit and make it less desirable to families who are the target group of most co-ops.
- (b) Will the renovations run contrary to local or provincial building codes? Most of the items listed as examples of alteration requests require some type of permit. Other items such as stripping plaster from brick walls may violate building codes by reducing the fire rating of mutual walls.
- (c) Will the renovations enhance the unit? 'Marketability' of units is an important consideration in reviewing plans for alteration. The Maintenance Committee will insist on the applicant submitting clear detailed plans for analysis by the committee.
- (d) Will the work be of acceptable quality and will it be completed within a reasonable period? The committee will assess whether the means, the method of the applicant and the scheduling of the work are acceptable. The member must convince the committee that s/he can do the work, and has the time and energy to do the work in cases of major alteration.

2. Quality of the Workmanship

There are several ways to protect the co-op against incomplete or poor unit alteration by members.

- (a) The first way is to require the member to live in the co-op for a given time before engaging in major renovations. If a co-op has, for example, a year's experience with a member it will help the co-op to decide his/her trustworthiness.
- (b) A second way is to require the member to enter a simple contract with the Co-op,

promising that the work will be completed and will be of a quality acceptable to the Co-op. This simple contract should name the remedies possible if the alterations do not measure up to the agreement. For example, the member could be required to return the unit to its original state, the unit would be repaired at the member's cost, etc.

- (c) The third way is to require a security deposit. The security deposit could be held until the work is complete, and could be used in case of abandonment or poor workmanship by the member. This of course, would apply only to large alterations. It could be considered to be prejudice against lower income members, however.

Inspection of plumbing, electrical and structural modifications by a municipal inspector, or appropriate renovations expert, plumber, electrician, respected tradesman, is recommended. This may help to ensure that at least the work done by the member that is critical has been done properly.

The degree of caution exercised by the maintenance committee will depend on each case -- the complexity, size of the alteration and the skills and reliability of the member. The committee must protect the co-op while not acting like a landlord and strike a balance between being arbitrary and being overly bureaucratic.

3. Who Pays for Materials?

One further issue associated with major unit alterations by members is 'Who pays for materials?' It could be argued that, since the co-op will be the ultimate beneficiary of any substantial improvements to the units, the co-op should at least pay the material cost of those improvements. However, it is pretty obvious that it could cost a co-op a great deal of money if people started to do a lot of renovation work in their units. Other members may resent spending money on 'frivolous' alterations. It would be those members who had neither the time, the skill nor, perhaps, the inclination to undertake such alterations who would be paying for the alterations of the others.

Some factors that should be considered when deciding if the co-op will ever contribute to the material cost of a members' renovation project are:

- (a) Is the work necessary or only cosmetic?

If it is probable that the co-op would eventually have to spend money on the unit for repairs that are part of the member's proposal, the co-op may be more inclined to pay for the materials or part of the materials. For instance: the kitchen cabinets in a unit are old and rotten and need to be replaced. The member would prefer to make or buy quality cabinets rather than have the co-op purchase economical cabinets, if the co-op will

supply the lumber cost. Then the committee might consider an allowance for lumber and hardware up to an amount equal to the cost of cheap cabinets.

(b) How much will it cost?

The exact cost of material requested should be examined considering the budget and available cash. Improvements to a unit by the member are a manifestation of that member's sense of ownership and pride in the unit, which should not be disregarded.