

Resident not happy with city's water billing policy

Ray Martin, Times Staff
April 26, 2012

When it comes to the city's policy on water billing, apartment tenant Maggie Barrett doesn't mince words.

"It's just ridiculous," said Barrett. "My beef is that I'm going to be penalized because some deadbeat doesn't pay their water bill," she said. "The city is passing the costs on to people in good standing."

Barrett objects to tenants having to pay \$230 upfront when they go to the city to set up a new water billing account. That money helps cover the costs to a landlord should a tenant skip out without paying the water bill. The current policy puts the burden on landlords to pick up the tab.

Barrett is also unhappy with the monthly fee of \$8 that the city has all tenants paying to cover the added administrative costs of collecting the \$230 fee.



Resident not happy with city's water billing policy. Tenant Maggie Barrett says the city's water bill policy is ridiculous and needs to be changed. *Ray Martin, Times Staff*

"How dare you (the city) inflict further financial hardship upon low-income citizens that are already utilizing the food bank and are hard pressed to find affordable housing," she states in a letter to the Times.

Cambridge landlords rallied together to fight the city's water billing policy when it first came forward prior to the last municipal election. They failed to get the policy overturned at city council. Kayla Andrade and a growing group of landlords across the province are now fighting to change the Ontario Municipal Act, which enables cities to add unpaid water bills to a property owner's tax bill.

"Kayla is doing a great job, but it's about time that tenants also stand up to tell everyone this is wrong," said Barrett.

Working with members of the landlords' group, Barrett is trying to set up a website and rally tenants to her cause.

"I'm really just getting started, but I've been attending the landlords' meetings with Kayla and seen the support she is getting. I think tenants should be doing something similar," she said.

But Barrett is not going to limit her protest over water billing to tenants and landlords.

"There's a lot of peed-off people out there," she said.

"I don't want to make this unfair water billing strictly a tenants' issue. Since the city has taken over the accounts, citizens have seen, in some cases, substantial increases in their water bills and are having great difficulty getting answers.

"This issue needs to be addressed in its entirety with the taxpayers no longer accepting the brush off and demanding answers that actually make sense."

Meanwhile Andrade is expanding her net. Last week she attended a landlords' rally in Aylmer.

This weekend she'll attend another rally in Oshawa and is working with the Ontario Landlords Watch to set up a June rally in London.

Landlords in Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes are also picking up the torch and are planning a protest in Peterborough this spring. Andrade said her supporters are now making donations to help with the costly battle to change the provincial legislation.

For further information, visit www.ontariolandlordswatch.com. Barrett can be contacted at 519-580-6546 or prettkitty01@ymail.com.

The risks of renting

April 25, 2012

My situation may be the state that more landlords will find themselves in. One rotten apple ruins the barrel – an apt saying, if it were just one welfare tenant not adhering to their financial responsibilities. Unfortunately, that's the norm and the risk. But four out of the last four welfare tenants makes for a different perspective altogether.

At the track, there wouldn't be any takers on this horse. I am not a "slum" landlord, nor am I a charitable hostel. This is a business.

Here's some history behind the last four welfare tenants.

1. Landlord Tenant Tribunal ruled in favour of landlord. Owe landlord one month and tenant evicted. Still trying to collect from tenant.
2. and 3. Moved out on mutual consent. Threaten with tribunal. Lost a month's rent, but worth it. My sympathy to landlord who ended up with these tenants.
4. Moved out March 1, owing a month's rent. Move in date was Nov. 1, 2011, complete with a good reference from welfare worker. Now in small claims court.

Also, calculate in the time of the apartment being vacant while advertising for new tenants. It usually sits empty for one month.

Whatever happened to tenants giving 60 days notice? It's difficult to enforce. Maybe locals Patrick Walters or Kayla Andrade can give me advice on how to handle that situation.

Also, this use of last month's rent. The concept is quite simple – the tenant uses this deposit so the tenant will give the first and last month's rent to the new landlord. The deposit is to cover a non-payment of a month's rent.

Now, this bill on water fees. In the last few years, how many apartment building, condos and lofts have been built? How many are in the works? Will that have an impact on the number of good tenants? Will they or will they not buy instead of rent?

The price of a house might not be in their budget, but these are. Shouldn't our property taxes be going down, now that there are more property taxpayers? I've always wondered about that. Will I rent again to a welfare recipient? What do you think?

Doug Lamb
Cambridge

Landlord crusade 'snowballing', says Andrade

Ray Martin, Times Staff

March 21, 2012

Landlord Kayla Andrade's crusade to bring changes to the Ontario Municipal Act is starting to gather steam.

Tuesday night, more than 80 landlords, some representing associations in Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Brant County and the London area rallied at the Galt Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in support of Andrade's bid to axe legislation which makes landlords responsible for the unpaid utility bills of their delinquent tenants.

"People are really starting to get on board and this thing is really snowballing," she said Wednesday.

"We had people here from all over the province, some from as far away as West Elgin (near St. Thomas), Scarborough and Peterborough come for this meeting."

Andrade said the landlords from West Elgin told her they have had policies making landlords responsible to tenants' debts for nine years.

"They've told me it has driven investors away and they know this because there has been a decline in investment in their community, but an increase in communities next door to them that don't have it," she said.

Andrade said the response she received from across the province "has been amazing".

"The more the people hear about what's happening the more they want to know," Andrade said.

At Tuesday's meeting, Andrade's supporters were even giving her donations to help offset the costs of her campaign.

Andrade's goal is to get the provincial government to amend the Ontario Municipal Act, taking out provisions that allow municipalities to change landlords for unpaid water and sewer bills.

As part of her campaign, she has put together a petition: <http://landlordrescue.ca> or contact Kayla Andrade at 519-740-7903.

Landlord escalates water fees fight against the city

Ray Martin, Times Staff

March 19, 2012

Cambridge landlord Kayla Andrade is taking a new tack in her fight against municipalities making landlords responsible for paying the water bills of their delinquent tenants.

Tuesday, Andrade will be holding a meeting at the Galt Branch 121 of the Royal Canadian Legion, at 4 Veterans Way, where she will be asking people to sign a petition to get the province to amend the Ontario Municipal Act.

"We think everyone should be responsible for paying their own bills," Andrade told the *Times*. "We don't want landlords to become dinosaurs."

When the Municipal Act was amended in 2001, it included provisions that allow municipalities to charge a landlord for a tenant's unpaid utility bills. Municipalities, like the City of Cambridge, have utility contracts with tenants and realize the tenants are the end users, however, should a tenant default on their payments, the landlords potentially then become the bill collectors for the municipalities.

"This is an outrage," Andrade said. "Many small landlords can't afford this additional burden."

Andrade believes that the city's move to charge all tenants a \$4 administration fee on their water bills is unfair. The city is also charging a \$230 fee for new tenant accounts to help offset potential cost to landlords should a tenant default on their bills.

Andrade said that many people have been unaware of the changes in the provincial legislation and it is now a growing concern for landlords and realtors across the province.

"I have spoken with many groups about this already. This petition has been circulated to more than 100 municipalities across the province," she said. "I've had all sort of people calling me about it – landlords, tenants and even two Toronto realtors who were concerned about the impact it might have on investors."

Andrade said that tenants are voicing concern that landlords may now feel they must tighten up on tenant applications. The landlords may also feel they have to hike rents for new tenants to cover potential losses resulting from the city billing policy. Some landlords are getting out of the business altogether. This has the potential to harm lower income families who already struggle to find affordable housing.

"It could mean that anyone considered high risk could have problems finding an apartment," she said. "This could be seen as a potential human rights violation."

Andrade said it is her hope that the Ontario Municipal Act is up for review later this year.

"This may be our best chance to have it changed," she said.

Tuesday's meeting starts at 7 p.m. Andrade said hundreds of landlords and tenants will be represented. Keynote speaker for the evening is Marc Kemerer, former city solicitor for the City of Waterloo.

Among those expected to attend the meeting are: Jim Walker, president of Brant County Landlords Association; Glenn Trachel, president of Waterloo Regional Apartment Management Association; Mike Chopowick, manager of Policy for the Federation of Rental housing providers of Ontario; and a representative of the Cambridge Real Estate Board.

The petition can also be found online at: <http://landlordrescue.ca> or contact Kayla Andrade at 519-740-7903 or by email at andrade_k1985@hotmail.com.

Local landlord starts petition to fight policy

Ray Martin, Times Staff
February 9, 2012

Kayla Andrade is one city landlord who won't take no for an answer. After Cambridge council failed to overturn its decision which made landlords responsible for paying water bills of delinquent tenants, Andrade wants to change the law.

"I'm now working with Rob Leone (Cambridge MPP) on getting a petition going and I want to let all three parties know what's going on," said Andrade.

Since she started working on the petition earlier this week, Andrade said she has been getting great support.

"I've been getting calls from all over since I went online with my petition. I've heard from a former councillor from Niagara that totally gets it and another one from Alberta who wants to take this to some conference out there," she said.

She has already received online support from 215 landlords, but in order to make her petition valid, she must get their signatures.

"More people are seeing the bills hit them now," she said. "They now have a better understanding of what's going on and they want something done about it."

Andrade made a presentation to the local landlords association in Kitchener Wednesday night, where she said she received a standing ovation.

"It was amazing, fantastic," she said. "Landlords feel like they have no rights. I was not only getting support from landlords in Waterloo and Cambridge, where this is in place, but also from landlords in Kitchener and Guelph who don't want this to happen to them. I got 73 signatures and could have gotten more if I could have gotten to everyone."

She is now working with Cambridge landlords to stage a meeting in town. Details have yet to be worked out. Andrade said she has also met with the local Liberal riding association, which has also lent support and put her in touch with representatives from the ministry in charge of rental housing. She has already received a letter from Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Rick Bartolucci which states he is having his staff look at her issue.

Andrade said she would like to get enough support to make changes to Ontario's Municipal Act, which is reviewed and updated every five years. The next review is slated to take place later in 2012.

Water billing policy all wet

December 14, 2011

City landlords are getting shafted when it comes to water billing. For the past year, landlords have been held responsible for unpaid water bills by their tenants.

It doesn't make sense to expect landlords to pay. As local landlord Kayla Andrade stated during her address to council last week, why put the burden on property owners.

She also made a good point when she asked why water billing isn't a contractual service like hydro, gas, telephone and cable.

And it doesn't just stop at paying for a water bill if a tenant skips out. There are other fees to consider, including administration, post-dated cheques, late payment, taking out and reinstalling water meters, and the final meter reading.

Landlord Norm Warren would like to see changes to water bills on city applications – providing some kind of warning before a tenant's bill goes into arrears.

To its credit, city council is reconsidering its policy after Coun. Rick Cowsill brought forward a recommendation on the issue.

City staff will now review the process and report back to council next month. It would be a good idea if staff include landlords during their fact-finding mission.

After all, landlords are the experts on the subject.