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A Betrayal of Trust:

Exploring the Financialization of Lions Place in Winnipeg as a Case of Organizational Elder Abuse



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This research was conducted on the original lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Anishinewuk, Dakota, and Dene peoples and the homeland of the Métis Nation on Treaty 1 Territory. Although the focus of our study was on one particular building in Winnipeg, it is important to note that access to suitable housing as we age is a particular challenge for aging First Nation, Métis and Inuit persons in Winnipeg. We all have a responsibility to contribute to solutions to the problems caused by past and present colonial policies in Canada by building on the strengths of Indigenous communities, and respecting the spirit and intent of Treaties.

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Executive Summary

THE FORMER LIONS Place was a 287-suite ‘55+’ community that opened in 1983 in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba, with federal government funding (under an operating agreement that later transitioned to the province). Formally classified as ‘independent living,’ Lions Place provided housing for older adults within a supportive community, with in-house amenities promoting quality of life. The building was owned and operated by the registered charity and non-profit organization Lions Housing Centres Inc. (LHC), consisting of members of the Lions Club of Winnipeg. On July 26th, 2022, tenants learned their building would be up for sale on the private market. That fall, a tentative offer was accepted, and in 2023, the building transitioned to ownership by a real estate operating company.

Prompted by tenants’ concerns about the sale, this research sought to:

- a. understand and contextualize what contributed to the sale and its impacts on tenants, and
- b. explore the extent to which what happened can be conceptualized as a form of organizational ‘elder abuse.’¹

The case of the sale of Lions Place represents both a major net loss of affordable housing and an example of the targeted dismantling of community for older adults in Winnipeg. We conclude that it can also be conceptualized as organizational elder neglect and abuse in a community setting, reflective of a

broader problem of mistreatment of older adults more generally, manifested here in mistreatment by a non-profit charitable organization.

Our analysis is grounded in a review of scholarly research, media coverage of Lions Place, and most prominently, in-person interviews conducted in 2023 with 35 participants: 22 current tenants, one former tenant, two family members, six former LHC staff, and four community stakeholders.

Our data document numerous harms related to the sale that have affected tenants, their quality of life, and their community. In addition, we document how the LHC organization appeared to develop a life of its own or *sui generis*. Older adults the organization purported to serve at Lions Place, especially those with multiple overlapping challenges and vulnerabilities, became neglected as other matters took precedence for key stakeholders in the organization. Although broader contextual factors shaping the capacity of both service clubs and non-profit housing organizations were indirectly involved, the response to contextual pressures over time by the non-profit organization/charity played a significant role.

A key factor in this regard is the structure and culture of LHC especially in the immediate years leading up to the sale. The organization operated according to the logic of a for-profit institution and there was a growing separation between the interests of management and tenants. The board and management became increasingly insular and narrow-minded, at times demonstrating disregard for tenants and their quality of life. Yet the consequences of management decisions were always shouldered by tenants.

Our data further indicate these harms occurred in the context of a clear and long-standing existing relationship of trust that had previously existed between the community, tenants, and the LHC organization and board. The foundation of that trust was the Lions mission and values, their non-profit and charitable status, and the designation (until recently) of Lions Place as a building for persons over 55 years of age.

Moreover, tenants had little to no say in the operation of the building or organization apart from organizing social activities, even though these activities contributed to the community (or as participants termed it, a “vertical village”) and therefore improved the building and its operations. Their involvement being limited to social activities, however, can be understood as condescending because tenants were simultaneously unable to make decisions concerning their home, and because their abilities to contribute to the sustainability of the building and its operations were disregarded by management.

Our research further indicates a demonstrable lack of due diligence by LHC to find alternatives to the sale, which, in the context of the lack of other similar options for many of the low and fixed-income tenants, can also be regarded as an abuse of power and trust. This is concerning since this organization is still operating and receiving public funds to assist seniors, particularly at Lions Manor, where they provide the necessities of life for many residents receiving personal care.

The financialization of seniors housing is not only part of a broader process threatening non-profit and affordable housing in Canada — our analysis suggests this process is also tied to deep rooted ageism and ableism. In the case of LHC, it represents an overwhelming failure of their mission and values that harmed tenants and their community.

Recommendations From this Study Include the Following:

- 1. Launch an immediate public inquiry, investigation and/or audit** into management and spending of LHC and Lions Club of Winnipeg members. This is particularly urgent given that LHC is still currently responsible for operating Lions Manor and Lions View wherein over 200 older adults live with their support and/or care.
- 2. Reinstate supports for tenants of the former Lions Place.** Many tenants are struggling with mental health and system navigation challenges, compounded by the loss of the tenant resource coordinator. Access to a similar support is imperative alongside informal gatherings between tenants to collectively problem-solve. Although extending the moratorium on raising rents would also help tenants, ideally the sale to and purchase of the building by another non-profit or government would be the most ideal outcome.
- 3. Expand and protect affordable non-profit and social/public housing options for older adults in Manitoba.** This should include implementing legislation that would prevent buildings that are non-profit from being sold to the private market, especially buildings that have received substantial public support for their initial development. Steps could also be taken to ensure greater accountability and reporting requirements for the non-profit seniors housing sector,

although this can be more challenging for organizations without funding agreements.

4. **Promote accountability and capacity in the non-profit housing sector.** This could include improved supports for workloads at Manitoba Housing, and legislation similar to the B.C. Societies Act that applies to nonprofits that, for instance, can support mandatory board training. Government funding is needed for capacity development and support in the sector, including enhancing training of boards, management, and staff in seniors housing. Training could support appropriate management strategies including trauma-informed approaches that are responsive to needs and issues faced by older adults, especially those with different forms of disability and intersecting forms of marginalization.
5. **Establish formal mechanisms for involving older adults in management and decision-making control in seniors housing.** Older adults need to be involved in housing policy co-design – in planning processes around future builds, active resident advocacy groups, and in non-profit seniors housing boards (as tenant decision-making members).
6. **Revisit provincial legislation around elder abuse.** Clear legislation around elder abuse in Manitoba that accounts for indirect and more organizational harms experienced by older tenants in a clear relationship of trust, alongside clear legal and financial consequences, could have helped prevent this situation. Legislation recently introduced in Quebec is a promising and innovative model.
7. **Establish an independent Seniors Advocate** office in Manitoba (similar to that established in B.C.). An advocate could help identify and distill key issues and concerns and prompt policy and legislative response around housing, human rights, and related issues.
8. **Improve policy planning capacity for an aging population.** Efforts to expand/protect affordable housing for older adults should occur as part of a broader expansion of provincial policy capacity in planning for an aging population including needed supports alongside efforts to address broader, structural forms of ageism in policy and practice.

Introduction and Aim

THE FORMER LIONS Place was a 287-suite non-profit seniors' community that opened in 1983 in downtown Winnipeg with funding from the federal government. Though formally designated as 55+ 'independent living,' Lions Place was built to provide not simply housing, but housing for seniors within a supportive community with in-house amenities to promote quality of life. The building was owned and operated by the charitable, non-profit organization Lions Housing Centres Inc. (LHC). The board of directors of LHC consisted of members of the Lions Club of Winnipeg. In 2023, the building was sold by the non-profit agency to a for-profit real estate operating company.

Prompted by tenants concerned about this sale, our study sought to:

- a. understand and contextualize what has happened at Lions Place, and
- b. use this example to problematize existing definitions of 'elder abuse' and propose a reconceptualization that accounts for these kinds of structurally generated harms.

The project idea originated with the Lions Place Residents Council Seniors Action Committee that consists of building tenants and their family members. They partnered with Professor Laura Funk and PhD student Rachel Dunsmore (Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba), and Professor Shauna MacKinnon (Chair, Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies, University of Winnipeg).

Context, Rationale and Existing Research

THE INCREASED PRIVATIZATION and loss of affordable housing across Canada has been well documented. Martine August (2022) explains how existing housing policy has created the opportunity for this to emerge. Briefly, the financialization of housing involves ownership and operation of housing by companies that treat it as an asset for financial investment with the driving goal of maximizing shareholder profit. Housing in Canada has been primarily privatized (that is, owned and operated by private landlords) for decades, albeit with shifts in the proportion of government investment in public and non-profit housing. Housing financialization marks a contemporary trend of growing dominance of financial actors, such as private equity firms or Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), that use housing as a financial instrument for profit through en masse purchases of “undervalued” affordable housing, often supported by federal CMHC mortgages and then repositioned by the firms as higher-end rentals for significant return on profit (Brown & Simms, 2023). Displacing low-rent paying tenants is central to this business model and provides the biggest revenue gains. However, these practices undermine the integrity or quality of housing since the goal is shareholder profit rather than tenant quality of life.

To illustrate the extent and growth of this public problem across the country, Canadian REITs’ total assets grew from \$80 million in 1993, to \$4 billion in 1998, and then to over \$75 billion in 2023 (Simms, 2023). REITs and

similar financial actors are deeply transforming the rental housing sector, just as they are transforming the long-term residential care and retirement residence sector (Brown, 2022).

At the same time, however, Canada's population is aging, a development requiring careful policy planning alongside investments in housing with supports for fixed and low-income older adults. In Manitoba, around half of non-profit housing, along with a significant portion of public housing, is aimed at older adults, with major public investments in non-market options in the 1970s and 1980s. Community clubs and church groups were particularly influential in those decades in developing seniors housing with varying levels of supports (from independent living to residential care homes) as a response to the housing needs of older adults alongside limited capacity in the private rental market to meet those needs (Smith, 2023). In contrast, although we have seen the expansion of market-based models of housing with supports for older adults (including but not limited to assisted living or 'retirement homes') that are idealized for promoting aging in place, these often entail high financial costs for tenants. Moreover, research into other models of cohousing, coliving, and homesharing suggests these tend to be primarily geared towards middle and upper-income persons (Hou & Cao, 2021; Pearson et al., 2019).

Financial insecurity creates a particular challenge to people's ability to "age in place" (Pearson et al., 2019), and affordable housing is a key determinant of healthy aging and social inclusion, especially for low-income older adults (Vega & Wallace, 2016; Sylvestre & Cristall, 2017). Although older adults as a group are neither homogenous or inherently vulnerable, older adults on fixed and low incomes, and those with other intersecting marginalities, are particularly at risk of strain, distress, and disrupted support networks (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010) when facing displacement, involuntary relocation, or eviction. Psychological and emotional harms of involuntary relocation can negatively impact health, push some into homelessness or unsuitable housing, or even precipitate premature entry into long-term residential care (Aubry Klodawsky & Coulombe, 2012; Grenier et al., 2016; Doupe et al., 2016; Morales & Robert, 2020).

Although *elder abuse* itself is not recognized in federal criminal law, non-criminal legislation tends to focus either on abuses in legislated institutional care facilities, or within community (non-institutional) settings in situations of guardianship arrangements or specific interpersonal relationships (James, 2009). In general, both scholarly and legal conceptions largely focus on specific actions between persons in relationship to each other that

cause harm and/or neglect of needs, and where a particular older adult is targeted for victimization (Manitoba Law Reform Commission, 2021). For instance, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority² defines “abuse towards older adults” as “any action or inaction by a person in a position of trust that causes harm to an older adult.”

The term *institutional elder abuse* has typically been used by gerontologists when describing mistreatment of older adults within long-term residential care, or similar settings where care services are provided and where facility management assume some legal responsibility for the well-being of residents or patients. Extending beyond the idea of person-to-person abuse in interactions, the term *institutional* abuse arguably aligns more with concepts like *structural violence/abuse* or *corporate neglect*. What these concepts have in common is that they consider indirect harms resulting from embedded policies, processes and practices within organizations; organizational action and inaction; and broader-scale social practices that can prevent people from meeting their basic needs and generate suffering (Banerjee et al. 2012; Burstow, 2013; Galtung, 1969; McDonald et al., 2012; Penhale, 2021; Parker, 2011). In this way, the term institutional abuse has helped illuminate how funding, short-staffing, ageism, failings in relation to organizational culture, staff recruitment, training or supervision, and ineffective management can contribute to set up an abusive situation, even if particular individuals within the institution are not ageist or ill-intentioned (see Burstow, 2013; McDonald et al., 2012; Penhale, 2021). Indeed, Parker (2021) and others have argued for a broad conceptualization of abuse along these lines that would help address forms of abuse and ageism that are embedded in taken-for-granted policies and practices.

Approach and Method

OUR CRITICAL GERONTOLOGICAL perspective attends to issues of ageism and marginalization among and within older adult populations. It assumes that public narratives of an “aging crisis” that problematize individual aging can more appropriately be reframed as a “crisis of governance” in the context of insufficient infrastructure, public services, and insufficient cultural and material resources to support dignity and quality of life (Saunders, 1996). Our case study methodology is an approach to research “that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon [or situation] in its naturalistic context” (Piekkari et al., 2009, p.569), aiming for nuanced understanding through contextualized description and analysis. Case study research and extended case methodology seek to unpack the multilayered complexity of deep causes by connecting everyday local observations in the case to broader socio-historical and political contexts and forces (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Lai & Roccu, 2019). In this way, resulting explanations are contextualized.

The analysis presented in this report draws on:

1. **Scholarly review** of the existing research, grey literature, and legislation relevant to housing policy, planning, and older adults, as well as institutional or structural forms of elder abuse.
2. **Case study data collection** that entailed a review of media articles and email communications, as well as qualitative, in-person interviews with 22 current³ and one former tenant, two family members, six former staff of Lions Housing Centres, and four other community

TABLE 1 Brief Summary of the Tenant Participant Group

Age Categories				
60s	70s	80s	90s	
1	7	10	5	

Years of Living at 610 Portage Ave.				
60s	70s	80s	90s	
1–2 years	2–5 years	5–10 years	Over 10 years	

Demographics				
Female	Racialization or Indigeneity	Some or Great Difficulty Making Ends Meet*	Living With a Disability	LGBTQ+
11	4	5	9	1

* This may be an underestimate given the question phrasing. Overall we estimate the group could be described as low to moderate and fixed income. Tenants with more limited incomes may have been less likely to have been interviewed (e.g., may have moved out before the interviews, increased feelings of vulnerability or confidence in self-expression, etc.).

stakeholders (total of 35 participants). For a brief demographic overview of the tenant group, see *Table 1*. An informed consent process was used and researchers secured approvals from the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. Interviews with tenants focused on the personal impacts and their perceptions of interactions with management over time. Interviews with others focused on their experiences with LHC and perceptions of the factors leading up to the sale. Interviews were conducted by the report authors in 2023. Although not advertised as part of recruitment, tenants were provided a \$30 honorarium at the time of the interview as an appreciation for their insights and time. Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed using AI software and proofed for accuracy.

Our qualitative, case study analysis drew on the above sources to provide a contextualized explanation of the case, informed by the broad framework of critical gerontology and using the case to test the viability of an adapted conceptualization of elder abuse.

Findings

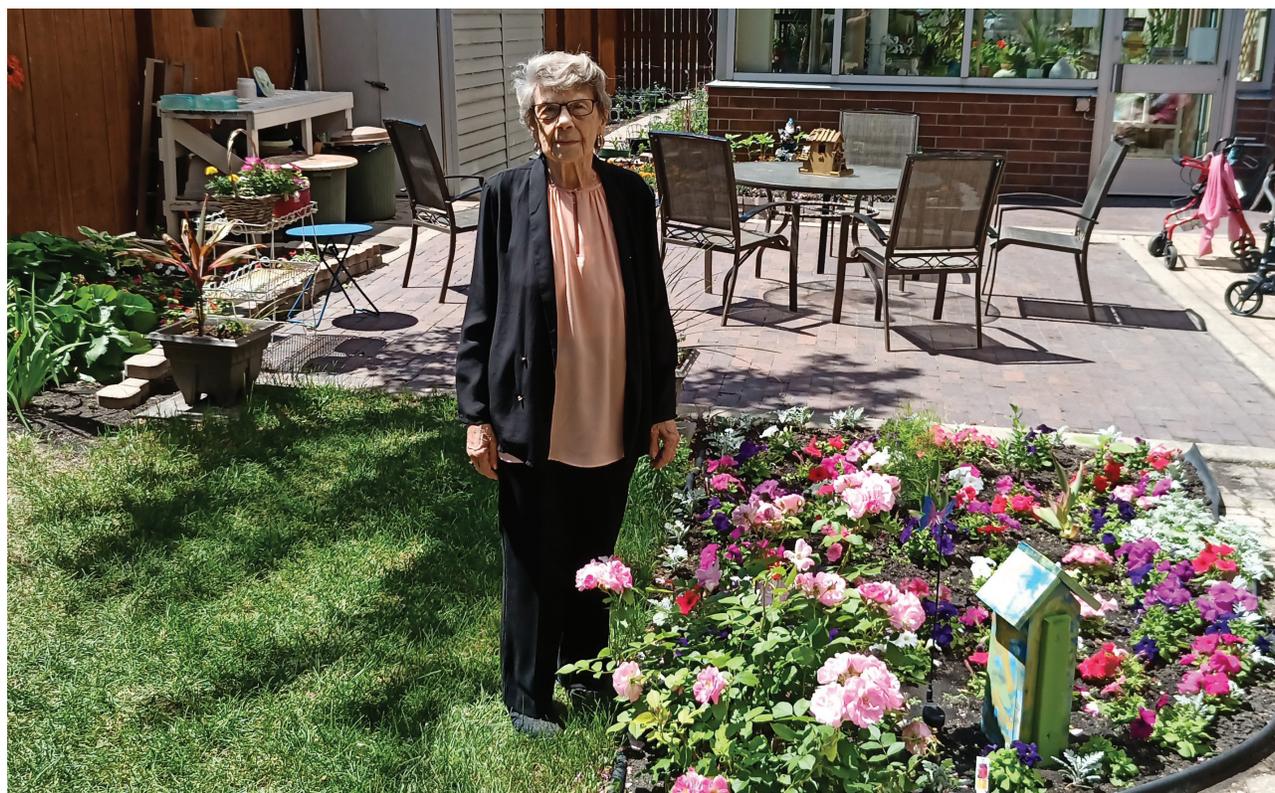
IN THE SUBSECTIONS below, we first explore the drift of mission within an unhealthy LHC organization over time before detailing participants' concerns about a lack of transparency and due diligence related to the sale. Following this, we document impacts on tenants' well-being and on the broader community. We end by exploring the case as an example of organizational neglect and abuse to older adults.

Mission Drift: Neglect and Betrayal of Trust

When construction on Lions Place began in 1982, more than 2000 people applied for one of the 287 units.⁴ Lions Place opened in 1983 as an independent living community for older adults, with a funding and operating agreement for social housing from the federal government (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation). This agreement transitioned to the province (Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation) in 1998/1999 before expiring in 2018 when the mortgage was paid off. The expiration of operating agreements is a point at which many non-profit housing organizations can struggle if appropriate steps are not taken to manage this transition (Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association, 2018).

On their website, the stated mission of LHC is “to serve the evolving needs of seniors, families and the community through specifically designed facilities, personalized services, and quality programs.” The site also lists

PHOTO 1 Dorothy Wilk, tenant and greenhouse volunteer (with permission).



LHC values of dignity, respect, “care,” (that is, “the health and welfare of our residents is our foremost concern”), and integrity and honesty (“taking ownership and being accountable, saying what we mean, and following through on our commitments”). The vision: “to care for all to create a healthy and vibrant community!”.

Over the decades, older adults have been drawn to the stated mission, vision, and values of LHC, and to its amenities, affordability, and vibrant social community. Many tenants we interviewed sought a sense of security for their aging years.⁵ Such features were particularly important for those who were widowed or divorced, low-income, socially isolated or geographically distant from family, as well as those with mental health or cognitive challenges and experiences of significant previous life disruption. In addition, on-site amenities and supports (e.g. grocery store, cafeteria, library) have been essential particularly for tenants with limited mobility and transportation options, and for most tenants in winter.

Especially in earlier decades, Lions Place was described as having a tangible, discernable emphasis on supporting well-being and helping older

adults with a rich network of supports available within the boundaries of a setting designated as “independent living” for those 55 and older.

One stakeholder described Lions Place as “hustle and bustle” in the 1990s in terms of recreation: “a *booming place*. The main floor lounge was always busy. There were singalongs, there was something going on”. Early years included physical fitness classes, exercise equipment, a therapy pool, and other specialized services for purchase at reasonable cost. Until recently, there was also a recreation and volunteer coordinator, and some support for resource navigation and mental health. The overall model, as study participants indicated, was distinctly community-oriented rather than institutional. Non-tenant community members were welcomed into the building for programming. One stakeholder recalled how one of their university professors in the 1980s singled out Lions Place as “the place to live” and an innovative new model for older adults. A former staff person indicated that built-in and on-site supports were:

...definitely a selling point too, for folks that were just feeling a little more isolated, a little more lonely at home? That you’ve got these additional people on site, a recreation coordinator. All the different programs. It was kind of a nice community feel, that you could participate if you wanted to.

A former staff person indicated that into the 2000s and 2010s, LHC management and staff seemed united in their vision of Lions Place as more than an apartment building, and in their commitment to tenants’ well-being. However, as they and another staff person indicated, in subtle and gradual ways over time the supports started diminishing, and questions would periodically arise within the organization about how many services LHC should provide at Lions Place.

“They had more of a well-being [focus], [in the 90s] and then things started diminishing. And we (staff) kept saying they changed their definition of independent living and cut the services out.” (Former staff person)

Another former staff person also suggested that in the more recent years leading up to the sale, management had insufficient staff and unsuitable workloads at Lions Place to effectively help tenants. This participant and others indicated that many tenants were low income and had high needs of mental health and system navigation support.

Another former staff person maintained that the LHC board members never understood the supports that may be needed by aging persons, and perhaps some only ever regarded Lions Place as “just a regular apartment

PHOTO 2 Grocery store or “mini-mart” at Former Lions Place.



Gerald Brown

building to begin with”. Several former staff also perceived board members as uninterested in and lacking knowledge about older tenants’ housing or support concerns or needs.

Former staff further described a shift away from a non-profit mission and vision within the LHC organization that was particularly pronounced in the decade or so leading up to sale. Participants described the board as narrow-mindedly focused on generating surpluses and not investing in needed repairs or maintenance. They said that, since 2021, upper administration manifested a business mentality and narrow-minded focus on the bottom line, cutting costs anywhere possible without demonstrable concern for tenants. Reactive rather than proactive approaches to issues were described as dominant.

Indeed, participants identified a more pronounced and perceptible shift within LHC at the leadership level since 2021 in the organizational culture and approach to the older tenants. This shift roughly coincided with a new Executive Director (ED), although in 2018 the operational funding agreement with the province had also ended.⁶ The new ED publicly committed to organ-

izational restructuring and scrutiny of “every aspect of the organization”⁷ while pledging that the Lions mission would remain unchanged.

Subsequently in June of 2021, tenants learned that the recreation coordinator⁸ would now focus on Lions Manor, a licenced Personal Care Home also owned by the organization, rather than Lions Place. In a letter to tenants (June 30, 2021), LHC emphasized that Lions Place is “an independent living facility which would not normally have organized recreation”.⁹ The tenants’ association was offered \$1000 every six months and told they could organize their own events. One tenant described their interaction with the ED on this issue:

I said, you’re taking our recreation away from us. He said, you’re independent living. You should be able to do these things for yourselves. Well, that’s fine to say if you’ve got the leadership to go organise them. And that’s what was making it work before. The recreation director was involving many, many, many people in these activities. He didn’t understand that. He thought she was doing them all by herself.

As a result of the loss of the recreation coordinator, tenants’ volunteer labour, including fundraising for activities, became crucial to maintaining the social environment. Tenants now not only volunteered in activities but had to actively coordinate and organize them.¹⁰ Other activities were lost altogether, such as social outings outside the building.

One stakeholder further identified how, since 2021, LHC adopted a distinctively “hard line with folks that do not quite meet what they believe their criteria should be for independent living”. According to this participant, LHC began refusing to provide tenants with reasonable supports to age in place or accommodate those facing particular challenges. The participant believed LHC started evicting tenants “for things that they would be able to, they *should* be able to manage on site” with reasonably simple practice accommodations. Their interactions with external community programs and agencies appeared to become antagonistic and aggressive. A former staff person indicated something similar, describing a shift away from being tenant-focused around this time:

I think the spirit of the building changed, like, and I suspect it’s more from leadership and the culture change. But I [had] always found the building was pretty focused on serving the tenants. What are the tenants needs? How can we help them? How can we make this place the best possible place for them to live in? Within our means, right? Like it wasn’t anything that was excessive or over the top. But then things started getting pulled back. And it became less about the tenants and more about what makes it easier for us

[the organization]. We've got to get that person out because they're asking too many questions or they're a little too difficult to deal with and we just don't want to do that anymore.

In 2021, the "55+" designation of Lions Place was also removed, with the rationale that this was necessary to fill empty suites. Although generally welcoming of younger tenants, participants were concerned that newer tenants tended to be less likely to reach out, converse with others, or participate in the social activities and community of the building.

We've had people moving in who are either working people or university students, so they're not interacting in the same way that we do. I mean, they're perfectly pleasant. They always have a nice good morning, good evening and have a good day, whatever. But it's *not the same*. So the community has changed. (Tenant)

People have been doing community building with creating a library and creating a greenhouse and creating green spaces. The Residents Council has all sorts of monthly programs and specials that they do for different holidays. They know about community building and they pass that knowledge on from one elected council to the next. And by bringing in folks who are simply looking for a cheap and easy place to live, that's a way of dismantling community. (Tenant)

These various developments (alongside other factors explored further in the next section) culminated in the 2022 announcement of and 2023 completion of the sale of Lions Place to a for-profit corporation. When speaking of the sale, tenants expressed feelings of betrayal and abandonment by LHC in phrases like "threw us under the bus" or "they bailed out," or more directly, "the feeling around here generally is that there's been a betrayal by Lions". Many tenants had sought out and found a sense of security for their later life planning in the non-profit and/or 55+ designation of the building. Feeling betrayed generated anger and disappointment, even as some tenants simultaneously sought to remain stoic.

Several participants emphasized how LHC and Lions Club of Winnipeg betrayed their own stated mission, values, and legacy, as well as the values of a non-profit: "non-profit has to feel that that is their duty or their priority"; "I thought [a non-profit] would be ethical"; "to me, they dishonoured their own ethical, moral model". As another example:

That was the big fear, that they'd sell to a for-profit, which is exactly what they did. And that has a bad reputation. We read stuff in the paper all the

PHOTO 3 “A place for fitness” at former Lions Place.



Gerald Brown

time. You know, some for profit company takes over your building, in many cases some people all of a sudden their rent goes up as much as \$1,000 a month! And then what do you do? I mean, it just leaves you in the lurch. And we thought we were protected from all that. Ah, there's no such thing, is there? I guess I've been pretty naïve. (Tenant)

Some participants referred to never wanting to live in another Lions Club building or expressed mistrust of LHC in relation to Lions Manor and Lions View (other LHC-owned buildings). As examples:

“I wouldn't go live (in a LHC building) again. No. Because you don't know when the bottom is going to fall out. That would be my feeling.” (Tenant)

“I personally would never move into another Lions house. I wouldn't. Because I wouldn't. I don't believe they have the integrity that they once had. They don't have it anymore.” (Tenant)

“I really fear that they're going to mess up Lions Manor.” (Tenant)

An Unhealthy Board and Organization

BACK IN 2001, the Auditor General of Manitoba released a report on what was then called Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centres.¹¹ The Special Audit covered the period between April 1997 to September 2000, and was limited “by numerous inadequacies in the financial records of LHC, absence of key documentation in certain cases and the inability of staff to provide us with the rationale for certain transactions” (pgs. 69–70). The investigation concluded that “through poor and questionable management, an organization that was in excellent financial health a few short years ago, finds itself close to financial failure” (p.70). The report revealed numerous serious issues including “comingling of funds” between for-profit and not-for-profit entities (p.72), and likely misuse of donations, as well as breaches of operating agreements with Manitoba Housing and Manitoba Health, financial losses, and conflicts of interest including board members profiting from public monies.

The report made 41 recommendations specific to the organization, and the Province put in interim management. Initial follow-up three years later identified 32 of the recommendations had been cleared. In 2009, the Auditor General concluded¹² that, based on information provided to them by LHC in 2005 and 2008, the remaining recommendations for which LHC was responsible had either been implemented or resolved, with one (the overall strategic plan) still in-progress. Nonetheless, some participants in

our study argued the problems identified in that report were never fully resolved in the long-term.

In our interviews in 2023, former staff, stakeholders, and some tenants collectively provided a picture of the LHC board as: reluctant to consider new ideas, information, or training, as insular and homogenous (with many members being frequently reappointed or on the board almost permanently¹³), hierarchical and reluctant to consider constructive criticism or take accountability, and as a close-knit group of friends and relatives. Some participants raised concerns with the board and the LHC organization more broadly regarding what they viewed as conflicts of interest and nepotism.

Former staff and tenants alike described a high turnover of both staff and managers at Lions Place over decades but especially in the years leading up to the sale, with some elaborating how this negatively impacted tenants who needed reliable staff. Around the time of the sale in particular, former staff also described a toxic work environment within LHC involving deflected responsibility and a lack of collaboration, alongside manipulative, demeaning, and bullying behaviour of staff. For example, one former staff person stated: “the toxicity of the work environment was starting to kind of permeate”. Former staff also spoke of being overworked and short staffed with increasing job responsibilities, while facing micromanagement and unrealistic expectations, especially from 2021-on. Staff morale was described as poor, and former staff cited denied requests for overtime pay, additional help and/or pay raises. They also cited resistance within the organization to pay out sick time.

Given LHC’s public claims of a pressing financial need for the sale linked to needed repairs, several tenants and former staff believed poor management over the years created this problem. For instance, tenants noted that empty suites did not appear to be well advertised, and that significant repairs and maintenance on the building had long been neglected or entailed patchwork fixes. Inadequate or problematic pest control processes were also noted.

Multiple participants believed that money had not been well managed at LHC, and/or raised concerns about how maintenance and other contracts and bids were awarded and handled over the years. Many also believed that repairs were neglected because the board was reluctant to spend millions in reserve funds. In regard to the management of LHC prior to their position, the current ED said in an email to a tenant (that he encouraged him to distribute) on November 4, 2022:

I accepted and inherited Lions Place with: numerous vacancies (41 empty suites in Oct 2019), 65 rooms with bed bug infestations, security was virtually non-existent, lighting was burnt out, unrentable rooms which had never been repaired, heat pumps in many suites which were breaking down at a rate of 18 a day, cooling towers that were non-functional.

However, from participants' perspectives, management problems persisted after the introduction of the new ED. One tenant described the ED as saying he disliked the strings attached to government grants that could be used for additional upgrades in the building. At the same time, costly positions were also being added at the upper management level, including a new director of operations position. Moreover, when a suite was vacated, management required it be fully remodelled at \$10,000 per suite.

“Why are we renovating suites like this? We’re charging them \$844 a month and they’re spending \$10,000 on each suite. Well, of course they’re going to lose their shirt!”¹⁴ (Former staff person)

After the 2001 audit was shared with the ED by one tenant, the ED replied to them (Sept 19, 2022) that “the worst part is the board never straightened themselves out” and implied they kept making “bad decisions”: “I wonder why more wasn’t done to straighten them out”. Simultaneously, however, and especially in interactions with tenants, the ED blamed tenants themselves:

[The ED] just bluntly stated that it was our fault, we had run the place down, we were such a great expense to Lions, they had to pay for ambulances, they had to fix [the building]. Well of course! A 40 year old [building]...I mean they started five years, five or six years ago and they started suddenly getting new elevators, fixing the water system, doing this and that. But why did they leave it go for 30 years? And then we were blamed. (Tenant)

Another tenant spoke disapprovingly of how LHC blamed tenants by conveying to them that “we haven’t raised your rents in ten years, like this is your fault. We can’t afford it”.

Likewise, in an email communication to the head of the Lions Place Seniors Action Committee on January 24, 2023 (that the ED encouraged him to distribute), the ED again wrote in a way that invoked images of greedy older adults draining Lions Place reserves:

The building is in dire need of major repairs which Lions cannot afford simply because residents benefited too long from low rental housing. It is selfish

to think the building can be maintained with rental income, utilities, and laundry totalling hundreds of dollars less than the average market price.

Moreover, countering the dominant narrative of fiscal drain, some tenants and staff challenged the claim that there was strong financial need for the sale, insisting the building had been making money all along (that it was the ‘cash cow’ or ‘best producer’ of all properties owned by LHC, with a healthy surplus in reserves)¹⁵—or alternatively, could have done so if suites had been filled. As such, some tenants and former staff wondered about possible alternative motivations for a sale.

A Lack of Transparency and Due Diligence

IN THE YEARS leading up to the sale, tenants had growing concerns about communication from the LHC organization. For instance, tenants never received formal notice of the lifting of the 55+ designation, nor were formally introduced in a timely manner to some managers as well as the newest ED. There was also pushback when tenants wanted to publish a regular newsletter, and during COVID-19 public health restrictions tenants were often sent important memos on Friday afternoons before a weekend when staff would be unavailable.

Many tenants also believed important facts and information about the sale had repeatedly been withheld from them both before and after the sale, including when it was being planned. Tenants who had moved into Lions Place a year or two prior to the sale felt particularly betrayed as they believed the sale was being brokered behind the scenes for months or years before tenants were notified, meanwhile they had moved in under what turned out to be a false pretense of non-profit seniors-oriented housing.

Other participants spoke of their questions not being adequately addressed at key meetings with LHC about the sale. Some interpreted the lack of transparency as indicative of ageism and a lack of compassion:

I think that was for me, that made me the most angry, that we were just like, Oh, all you old people don't count. We don't have to tell you things.

It's like parents not telling their little children exactly what's going on you know. That's how *I* felt about it. I'm not dumb, I'm not stupid. I'm old, but I'm managing my life. And I'm paying you my goodness! I'm paying you every single month. I never missed a payment. Like ok treat me like I belong here. (Tenant)

It *bothers* me that those who could have given us answers didn't have the consideration, the compassion, the *humanity* to do that. ... Dealing with people they *knew* were vulnerable. (Tenant – italics represent strong emphasis on those words)

For some, the lack of information further eroded trust in LHC and the process of the sale.

(The ED) said, I'm going to come over and I'm going to make a presentation. Well it was the exact same presentation you made six months ago. You didn't change anything. You're not updating us. You're just refreshing what you've told us to start with. But we know there's been progress made. So they were rather secretive about it. And when people do that, I think they're being very duplicitous. There is things going on that they don't want us to know anything about. (Tenant)

Moreover, both tenants and former staff commonly expressed that LHC lacked due diligence in engaging alternatives or options that might have prevented the need for the sale. For tenants, this only compounded their sense of betrayal. Both tenants and former staff argued that not enough had been done to:

- a. bring in revenue (e.g., applying for grants, funding or remortgaging; increasing tenant rent; hiring a professional management company);
- b. find acceptable nonprofit buyers, including asking for help from and partnering with organisations;
- c. allow for the 90-day extension on bids as requested by community organizers and the Seniors Action Committee, which would have allowed them to work on promising avenues they had identified to prevent financialization of the building.¹⁶

About a month after the closing date for bids, tenants learned an offer had tentatively been accepted for the building. In a *Winnipeg Free Press* interview November 29, 2022, the ED stated that he was never contacted by any level of government to discuss other solutions. Rochelle Squires, representing the

PHOTO 4 Gerald Brown, tenant and library volunteer, in ‘Serenity Corner’ (with permission).



provincial government at the time, stated “it’s very unfortunate that Lions Place did not come to the Province of Manitoba prior to decisions being made about the future of Lions Place”.¹⁷

In a memo to all tenants (July 28, 2022), the ED stated (in rationalizing the sale) that although 3.6 million was already spent, “we still need many more millions in general renovations”.

In an email to Gerald Brown that he encouraged him to distribute (Nov 4, 2022), a few months later the ED indicated other non-profits did not bid on the building “because they indicated the rental rates were too low” and asserted that affordable rents created the problem that led to the sale. This point was reiterated in an email dated January 24, 2023 that he again encouraged him to widely distribute. The ED stated that in the absence of any existing reserves (“simply not enough rental income to build any type of reserve funds to fix the building”), LHC needed to sell to recoup the \$3.6 million dollars they had spent in less than three years on repairs at Lions Place (“The sale... give Lions Housing Centres financial resources to pay back our 3.6 million expensed on Lions Place”).

Notably, about a year before the sale and after the expiry of the operating agreement, the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association reached out to Lions Place management and board to offer the support of their organization to help, yet received no responses. They again reached out when they heard the building would be for sale, offering support in advocacy or bringing government to the table, and indicated that they believed a solution could be found. According to a MNPFA representative: “They didn’t return my calls and return my emails. Nothing. Silence”.

Several research participants expressed disappointment with the sale to a company that would not be in tenants’ best interests. One participant even considered knowingly selling to a real estate operating company as in itself abusive, given it would likely lead to the displacement of lower income older adults.

Like if you want to talk about systematic or organizational abuse – that’s it. That’s it. Because they knew what they were about, they knew they [the new owners] were not a non-profit, they knew all the seniors had low fixed incomes – the majority. (Former staff person)

Impacts on Tenants' Well-being and Community

THE TENANTS APPRECIATED and were drawn to the stability and security of the community at Lions Place. This helps us understand the impacts of the sale in terms of increased worry, distress, and sense of precarity about personal futures. Tenants typically reacted to the initial announcement of the sale as a shock and disruption to their sense of security and plans for their final years:

“I think, like most of the people who are already here, we thought the future was very, very solid. Yeah, basically guaranteed. But then all of a sudden that ended.” (Tenant)

“So for me, it was, wow, I’m here, and I’ll stay here until I have to go to assisted living. This would suit me just fine. So this (sale) really kind of disrupted my thinking.” (Tenant)

“I’m starting to feel really quite overwhelmed by the prospect of all this. We thought we would leave this building feet first.” (Tenant)

Our findings also suggest the sale compounded and re-traumatized those tenants who faced other life struggles including the long-term effects of

foster placement, family breakdown, and domestic violence, among other challenges:

It was a terrible thing because we never thought in a million years they'd ever sell this place. I mean that's such a shock. Of course we never thought [former employer] would close either (Laughs). So we've gone through quite a few shocks. And then we find out [former employer] didn't pay up our pension fund and all these things, I mean, it's been quite a *drain*. And you figure you can't work anymore (laughs) to change that. Like they say, 'plan for your retirement.' Well, we did. But the extenuating circumstances were a bit severe. (Tenant)

It sort of reminds me of being in a foster home and people wondering, why do you keep on wearing a jacket? Because the way I was brought up, I didn't know when I was going to leave. I was always the last one to know, right? But it brought back some of those feelings. And I've dealt with a lot of those feelings. But you can't avoid that, you know, so. But that's what it reminds me of a bit. And there wasn't a whole lot of love, care and respect in what was going on either. And I'm going, Oh, gee, I'm (in my 70s) now and it's still happening (laughs). I'm going, that's crazy. (Tenant)

Tenants expressed fears and worries around possible future above-guideline rent increases that could generate financial strain or precipitate a need to move. Given the stresses involved with moving, this generated insecurities especially for older and more physically frail tenants and those with limited incomes. In addition, from the perspective of the family member of one tenant with cognitive impairment, a move would be particularly disruptive.

Participants' sense of precarity was compounded given the dearth of other affordable housing options suitable for fixed and lower income older adults, especially those with similar activities and amenities. Tenants emphasized their lack of other options. One former staff noted that in the past, some tenants who were evicted due to financial troubles had to go to homeless shelters.

Most tenants further expressed concern and sadness that the sale had pushed many longer-term tenants to move (including those who were highly active as volunteers in social activities), and resulted in the loss of most building staff that tenants often considered part of their community.

Participants also expressed concern about their future access to amenities as well as more formal supports. According to one former staff person, the sale can be considered abusive in part because it would mean that tenants

PHOTO 5 Display of artwork from tenants' art class.



would lose access to support staff and resources (tenant resource coordinator,¹⁸ wellness checks, potentially 24 hour security and inhouse pest control).

Many participants detailed how they believed the announcement and finalization of the sale affected their well-being, including: sleep disruptions, shingles, increased blood pressure, depression/apathy, anxiety, headaches, and lack of appetite. Stress was exacerbated among tenants who were simultaneously undergoing other significant stressors such as cancer treatment, bed bug infestations, and lingering effects of stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants also spoke of observing distress and decline in other tenants. One described how difficult it was to watch “people literally diminishing. Physically, emotionally, mentally in a lot of cases”. Other examples:

“You could just see it in people in the way they’d stiffen, the way they would sometimes break down and cry.” (Tenant)

“They got *worries* about it. But, you know, at their age and our age, that’s not another worry you need put on top of you. And it’s affecting- some of

PHOTO 6 Shuffleboard table with view of second floor atrium plants.



Gerald Brown

them it's affecting, you can see some of them are getting a little depressed and things like that? You can sense that in them.” (Tenant)

The tenants' association typically holds an annual memorial service for tenants who died within the past year. One tenant explained that the service was not held during 2020, 2021, and 2022 due to pandemic restrictions. In preparing for one held in spring 2023, the association collected the names of all tenants who had died during the preceding years when the memorials were not held. They discovered, as one tenant told us, that “there were more deaths between June 2022 and December of 2022 than was matched in the previous years in terms of that space of time”.

Although beyond the scope of this study, one could also consider the potential for physiological and health impacts of the sale as it involved a loss of tenants' familiar home. It was evident that the entire building was considered home by how participants spoke of the building (e.g., as “vertical village”), as well as in their investments of time and energy into careful keeping and use of the common, display, and seating areas of the building.

Yet the sale has served to erode this sense of home and community in various ways, the full impacts of which may never be fully known.

Although to some extent the agreement between the new owners and the provincial government to maintain current rents for two years was interpreted by most tenants as a reassuring reprieve, it has also created a kind of 'liminal' or in-between period during which, as one tenant expresses, "we don't know what's the next step". For some tenants, this extends anxiety and uncertainty. Tenants described coping with this anxiety through various means, predominant of which were efforts to brush off the worry and adopt a stoic, "wait and see" attitude. For some this was nonetheless tinged with apprehension (e.g., "waiting for the next shoe to drop"). A few tenants also expressed dismay that public money was benefitting a private corporation (in contrast, for instance, to a mandated rent freeze wherein the company would have absorbed the cost).

Broader Community Impacts

FAR FROM A private financial transaction, the sale of Lions Place is a multi-faceted public problem that will have widespread consequences in the community. At the most basic level, it represents a significant net loss of affordable non-market housing with supports for older adults.

Moreover, in a context of heightened concerns over costs of healthcare and hospitals in Winnipeg, the ongoing displacement of so many older tenants, many on low fixed income, will likely generate urgent health problems down the road if their needs for affordable housing, mental health supports, and supports with system navigation remain neglected.

There are also implications for the non-profit housing sector in Manitoba. One stakeholder identified the sale as problematic in this regard, characterizing it as a “stain on the sector” and adding:

We advocate too, that the non-profit sector, we have this mandate, we have these moral obligations, we are developing good communities, and then this sort of rogue organisation goes and sells their building without good process, without good communication. And it does make everyone in the sector look bad.”

This stakeholder elaborated that the sale has affected government ministers’ attitudes towards funding the non-profit sector. Moreover, other non-profit housing organizations who are struggling, they added, may have viewed this

‘consequence free sale’ of Lions Place as a potential option now whereas they may not have considered it previously, which “is a big problem for the sustainability of the sector”.

An Example of Organizational Neglect and Abuse to Older Adults

In our analysis, what happened to the tenants at Lions Place can be conceptualized as a form of organizational elder¹⁹ neglect, mistreatment and/or abuse. We acknowledge that the current legal landscape is somewhat unclear in this regard, however, and tenants at Lions Place would not be considered ‘in care’ or ‘under care’ or protection in a legal sense (except for those under Public Guardianship). The lack of legal clarity is further compounded by some lack of conceptual consensus in existing scholarly research and policy (Penhale, 2021).

The definitions of institutional elder abuse reviewed earlier in this report indicate how the features, processes, and practices of organizations can even inadvertently generate situations that could be abusive or neglectful of older adults. We argue that there is a need to conceptualize and address *organizational* abuses that occur within community settings that are not necessarily considered spaces of institutional care. Notably, a Private Member’s Bill (213) in Manitoba, which did not pass, refers to neglect as an act or omission that deprives an older adult of ‘adequate care, adequate medical attention or other necessities of life’ *and* ‘is reasonably like to cause death or serious physical or psychological harm to the senior’. Considering housing as a life necessity, and given the socio-emotional, psychological, and in some cases health-related harms documented in this study (from an organization whose mandate was to serve older adults), if we apply such a definition to organizational actions, the sale of Lions Place could be conceptualized as constituting neglect or even abuse, especially insofar as LHC had purposefully developed an environment in which tenants came to rely on them over time for supports, and tenants had a reasonable expectation to trust in the values and mission the organization set out.

The sale also highlighted tenants’ lack of control over their living situation. Tenants were not involved in decision making about what was happening to the building, and their concerns were addressed either with coldness, hostility, or non-response by management. Although some tenants mobilized and voiced their opinions to the public and policymakers, others felt

too vulnerable to express themselves (e.g., “I wanted to write a letter to the editor. But I was afraid of the repercussions.”). Although some participants expressed concerns that Seniors Action Committee meetings and rallies fuelled tenants’ anxieties and created disappointment when the sale was not stopped, as one tenant indicated, the underlying problem is the lack of control: “it showed them ...that you really don’t have much to say when you’re renting”. Another tenant added:

The tenants were absolutely, completely disregarded. They were not involved in the planning. They were not involved. If they were involved in the discussions, it was just to tell them what was happening. It was not – What do you need? What do you want? What would you like? And so that collaboration piece was *definitely* missing from what happened at Lions Place.

Several participants interpreted what happened to tenants as exemplifying an even broader structural or societal ageism and neglect of older adults (i.e., beyond the organization), with some tying this to broader social changes they associated with an increasingly uncaring and individualistic society that puts profit before people, with housing sector financialization as symptomatic of this broader problem. Ageism, which can involve both attitudinal and behavioural components, involves a lack of appropriate support and understanding for the aging process, often resulting in social exclusion of older adults and positioning them at increased risk of experiencing neglect and abuse. Ageism also makes it difficult to recognize and address abuse when violations of older persons’ human rights are often re-framed as sad situations resulting from complex care needs or vulnerability, which can be considered victim-blaming (Herring, 2012).

Indeed, the sale of Lions Place to a for-profit real estate operating company can be understood in a context of profound ageism whereby the needs and assets of older adults are neglected and subsequently pathologized (Calasanti, 2020; Meisner, 2021), medicalized (Estes & Binney, 1989), and exploited for personal or third party gain, whether financial or otherwise (Funk, 2016). In this case, older persons living at Lions Place, as well as the building itself, became neglected over time, culminating in major problems that tenants were then blamed for while they largely shouldered the consequences. More broadly, and in this particular case, older adults tend to be routinely scapegoated for preventable social problems and viewed and treated as burdensome. Ageism manifested here not only through LHC’s actions, but also by the failure of all levels of government to intervene to stop or slow down the sale despite the legal means and public pressure to do so. Indeed,

the trend towards financialization that is manifesting across the seniors' housing continuum is a large-scale practice involving powerful vested interests that is facilitated by existing housing policy (or policy inaction) in Canada (Brown, 2022; August, 2022). Broad concepts like *structural elder abuse* or *neglect* can be helpful in explaining how political and economic processes like financialization serve to prevent older adults from meeting their basic needs, generating suffering (Banerjee et al. 2012; Burstow, 2013; Galtung, 1969; McDonald et al., 2012; Penhale, 2021; Parker, 2011). This is of particular concern not only because of the increased rents and renovations that accompany financialization, but also when these processes also involve the dismantling of important formal and informal supports.

Conclusion and Recommendations

TO SOME EXTENT, the sale of Lions Place reflects challenges facing the broader non-profit seniors housing sector, including the expiration of operating agreements, aging buildings, and a dearth of board members with time or interest in active governance or strategic planning. In the context of broader devolution of responsibilities to non-profit organizations in the housing sector, “the stability of the board and its capacity to manage its responsibilities is thus critical and, in the case of low-cost housing, has implications for thousands of households across Canada” (Cooper & Zell, 2023; p.6).

As such factors manifested in this *particular* case, poor management within an unhealthy organization led to a clear betrayal of ethical and moral obligations to tenants through divergence from the LHC mission and a lack of due diligence in relation to the sale of the building. Throughout, tenants were excluded from the process despite their attempts to help find alternative solutions and advocate for themselves. The process of the sale traumatized (or re-traumatized) many tenants and disrupted their community in significant ways. This can be regarded from a gerontological perspective as a form of organizational elder abuse, as it happened in the context of a relationship of trust between LHC and tenants.

Recommendations listed below are informed primarily by direct input from tenants and stakeholders, as well as from the authors’ own analysis.

Recommendations:

- 1. Launch an immediate public inquiry, investigation and/or audit** into management and spending of LHC and LHC members. Given concerns raised by several tenants and staff about the management of Lions Place over the years leading up to the sale, alongside their concerns about the lack of transparency related to the sale, a public inquiry, investigation and/or audit into spending and dealings at LHC and of LHC members is recommended (and was indeed requested by several tenants and staff). Analysis of what happened at Lions Place is always grounded in relation to its impact on tenants whom the organization is funded to serve and currently still claims to serve via other residences such as Lions Manor and Lions View. Given both the extensive use of public funds and the significant number of older adults who are under their care, there is a clear justification for immediate further review of Lions Housing Centres Inc. by necessary authorities.
- 2. Reinstate supports for tenants of the former Lions Place.** Our research indicated that many tenants are struggling with mental health and system navigation challenges, compounded by the loss of the tenant resource coordinator.²⁰ Access to similar support is imperative alongside informal gatherings between tenants to collectively problem-solve and connect with those who might serve as informal or formal advocates. Although extending the moratorium on raising rents is another possibility that would be welcomed by some tenants, ideally the sale to and purchase of the building by another non-profit would be the best outcome in this situation, if it could be achieved.
- 3. Expand and protect affordable non-profit and social/public housing options for older adults in Manitoba.** The benefits of Lions Place as a community for older adults was emphasized by all tenants we spoke with, and several recommended the development and expansion of similar non-profit options. Bernas and colleagues (2023) also recommend capital maintenance and operating subsidy funds²¹ for existing social housing, and subsidies for “rent-geared-to-income” options to protect affordability. Other avenues include strengthening rent control legislation and tenant protections (August, 2020; Bernas et al., 2023), or implementing legislation that could

prevent a building that is non-profit from being sold into market housing. Québec's Bill 37 Chapter 25,²² for instance, assented in June 2022, revised various legislation to provide lease protections for those in dwellings "formerly intended for seniors" as well as providing a "pre-emptive right" of municipalities to acquire housing "that was financed by public funds" from non-profit organizations.

4. Promote accountability and capacity in the nonprofit housing

sector: Greater accountability and reporting requirements for the non-profit seniors housing sector could be achieved through improved supports for workloads at Manitoba Housing, and through existing funding agreements. However, not all non-profit organizations have funding agreements in place, making reporting processes more challenging. Legislation that applies to nonprofits, similar to the B.C. Societies Act²³ could be developed in Manitoba. This could be used to require board members of seniors housing to complete training, and review and sign conflict of interest policies annually. However, regulations need to be thoughtful and involve consideration not only of spending but of outcomes, and should be balanced with government funding for capacity development and support in the sector. This should include training and support for appropriate management strategies such as trauma informed practices that acknowledge intersecting forms of marginalization and facilitate trust, safety, respect, collaboration, hope, and shared power (Levenson, 2020).

5. Establish formal mechanisms for involving older adults.

This includes involvement in planning processes around future builds, active resident advocacy groups, and non-profit seniors housing boards (as members, supported by appropriate training). In the context of wide-spread societal ageism, older adults' human rights, particularly those with intersecting vulnerabilities, are often wilfully or inadvertently disregarded and dismissed both by individuals and within broader sectors and institutions. Involvement can help address this. For instance, boards of non-profit seniors housing could be strongly encouraged or required to designate one or two seats for trained tenant representatives with voting control. These could be developed in ways similar to that proposed by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association²⁴ and Québec's Popular Action Front in Urban Redevelopment.²⁵

6. Revisit provincial legislation around elder abuse. Although clearer legislation around elder abuse in Manitoba is required (Manitoba Law Reform Commission, 2021), it is imperative that such legislation be developed in ways that account for indirect and more organizational harms experienced by older tenants in a clear relationship of trust with an organization (in the community) that could have helped prevent this situation. Innovative responses in other provinces could serve as models. In particular, in 2022 Quebec introduced innovative legislation around mistreatment of older adults, that defines elder abuse not only within interpersonal relationships but also in relationships with a “community or institution where there is an expectation of trust which, whether deliberately or not, causes harm or distress to an older adult.” The Act not only requires mandatory anti-maltreatment policies in a variety of settings including private seniors’ residences, but considers harms arising from situations created or tolerated by the practices and procedures in these settings.²⁶

7. Establish a Seniors Advocate office in Manitoba similar to the model used in B.C.²⁷ This office could also help identify and distill key issues and concerns, and prompt policy and legislative response around elder abuse, human rights, housing-related concerns, and ageism, among other issues (Rawsthorne, Funk, & Goertzen, 2020). This is particularly important given the disbanding of aging-related advisory councils at the provincial and municipal levels in the last decade.

8. Improve policy planning capacity for an aging population. Efforts to expand and protect affordable housing for older adults should occur as part of a broader expansion of provincial policy capacity in planning for an aging population including needed supports alongside efforts to address broader, structural forms of ageism in policy and practice (Marier, 2021). Ideally, policy planning around housing for an older population would include proactive engagement of older adults (Wyndham-West et al., 2022), particularly those who face intersecting forms of marginalization.

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Endnotes

1 The terms ‘elderly’ and ‘seniors’ are used in a limited way in this report, as existing recommendations (e.g., Lundebjerg et al., 2017) advocate for the use of the more inclusive and neutral term “older adults.” However, ‘elder abuse’ and “seniors housing” are still commonly used in practice, so we retained these at times to avoid confusion.

2 Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA). Abuse Towards Older Adults (wrha.mb.ca) Accessed on December 10, 2023. Although this definition focuses more on limitations to rights and freedoms arising in interpersonal relationships between an older adult and someone in a position of trust or authority, for the purposes of the present study, it is notable that they include ‘landlords’ in their conceptualization of elder abuse.

3 Several of these interviewees moved out of the building since the data were collected.

4 *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 26, 1982 “Lions Club strives to meet seniors’ housing demands.”

5 When asked how they came to live at Lions Place, tenant participants in this study typically described needing to sell or move from their former homes due to challenges upkeeping the space (i.e., wanting “a place that was easier to manage”), often coupled with declining health or death of a spouse; others were leaving a relationship. For many, a formerly rented apartment was no longer suitable due to physical layout coupled with health or mobility limitations (e.g., uphill inclines or stairs), or due to crime or drug use in the building, new building ownership, pests, or increases in rent (including renovictions).

6 The spring of 2021 also saw the end of LHC subsidies of rent at Lions Place that had been in place since July 2018 when the operating agreement expired and the mortgage had been paid off. In the absence of a new subsidy agreement, alongside tenant concerns about increases in rent, LHC covered the gap between Rent Assist and current income for tenants at the time.

7 “Lions Housing, becoming an even better choice for seniors” (by Lions Housing Centres for Senior Scope Magazine, March-April 2021) https://seniorscope.com/images/pdfs/v19n9_mar10_21_lores.pdf

8 Earlier in the spring of 2021, the Recreation Coordinator prepared a report for LHC on Lions Place recreation, outlining the numerous programs and activities she helped support. She states that recreation programming helps Lions Place seniors ‘age in place,’ enriches their lives and

that “quality recreation programs promote health, wellness and community.” This report did not, however, save the position from being cut.

9 However, the next sentence in the letter seems to indicate awareness of challenges commonly faced by tenants: “however due to the many elderly Residents in Lions Place, the emphasis of support has to be with the Tenant Resource Coordinator (TRC) and the LifeSmart Health Program.” The letter dismisses health promotion (through social activities and recreation) as unnecessary in contrast to other forms of support. A former staff member indicated that around this time the TRC was so overworked as to be almost ineffective in providing the needed supports. The “LifeSmart Health Program” was a clinic that started up in the fall of 2021 and did in-suite visits. However, around the fall of 2022, tenants were informed the clinic would no longer have space in the building.

10 For example, since the launch of the renewed library program by tenant-volunteers in 2017, there have been 54 visiting authors/artists, 24 armchair travel tours, and 24 “a day in the life of” speakers. There are also book discussions, storyteller Mondays, puzzles, display cabinet, exhibits, and more. Volunteers have contributed between 70 to 138 hours a month, a total of 1110 hours for the year (Source: Gerald Brown).

11 Accessed at: <https://www.oag.mb.ca/audit-reports/compliance-and-special-reports>

12 Accessed at: https://www.oag.mb.ca/_files/ugd/b32b68_8db402a9944d457dboeocce766bdf283.pdf

13 Because the LHC, until 2019, drew membership from the Lions Club of Winnipeg, several participants spoke to dwindling club memberships over time that may have contributed to increasing reappointment of the same members, potential decreases in board meeting frequency, and increasing reliance on the ED, although some believed the board was also reluctant to bring in outsiders. Bylaw changes in 2019 led to the appointment of others who were personal friends or family relations of existing board members. A Lions Club member commented that meetings rarely dealt with any matters of operation, instead tending to feature outside speakers or special events.

14 Some former staff and tenants believed that LHC wanted to upgrade the suites to raise rents and/or with an eye to selling the building (many also had similar reactions when retrospectively reflecting on the removal of the 55+ designation on the building).

15 Several tenants and one staff person also believed that Lions Place reserves may also have been used to subsidize renovations at Lions Manor.

16 Shortly after the Lions Place Seniors Action Committee (SAC) was established (7 September 2022), the group began communicating with non-profit housing organizations regarding potentially buying the building. They had connected with the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba Non Profit Housing Association, CMHC and both levels of government. The SAC also met with the acting president of LHC (29 Sept 2022) who also remained firm that Lions Place was to be sold, and was not interested in discussing alternatives. That month, the SAC had some promising results including potential partners and according to Gerald Brown, were “ready to roll – but when I called Mr. Verrier, he said 14 October was the final date with no extension. It would have been impossible for the groups above to hire a consultant (for which we had federal money) to complete the due diligence and report in this timeline. Verrier indicated a ‘notice of intent’ would not be good enough.”

17 Some participants also held current and former provincial governments in part responsible for the situation, primarily for not intervening to prevent the sale or holding LHC members more accountable for prior fund mismanagement. In this sense they also felt betrayed or let down by the province. Likewise a stakeholder also held the provincial government accountable, for not renewing the funding agreement when it expired around 2018, and for just sitting back and doing

‘nothing’ to stop the sale, instead providing a last minute subsidy to the corporation to maintain tenants current rents for two years (which the participant refers to as ‘corporate welfare’).

18 Initially LHC promised to fund the tenant resource coordinator to remain in place part-time for tenants after the ownership transition. By the summer of 2023, however, this position was no longer available for tenants.

19 Existing recommendations advocate for the use of the more inclusive and neutral term “older adults” (e.g., Lundebjerg et al., 2017) over ‘elder’ or ‘senior.’ However, the term ‘elder abuse’ is still commonly used in practice and policy, and we have retained the term below for this reason, while recognizing this issue of terminology.

20 Access to consistent system navigation supports is, according to one stakeholder, “a constant challenge for non-profit housing.” Some buildings have these positions funded through the health authority but funding varies between organizations, depending on when the building was built and what the needs of the tenants were at the time. There is no provincial program in place to make sure this is consistently available.

21 As of March 2024, some additional funding for non-profit housing has been announced <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=62497>

22 https://www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers_client/lois_et_reglements/LoisAnnuelles/en/2022/2022C25A.PDF
or <https://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-37-42-1.html?appelant=MC>

23 https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/15018_01

24 <https://qc.onpha.on.ca/2020/08/tenants-on-the-board-benefits-and-challenges/>

25 2013-DepliantLogSoc-VAngSansLignesDeCoupe.pdf (frapru.qc.ca)

26 <https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/violence/mistreatment-older-adults-vulnerable-people>

27 <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/>



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