



# Kingston's housing crisis won't be solved overnight, but it can be solved.

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*This web exclusive content is the counterpart to the print article "Kingston's housing crisis isn't just about economics—it's about power" from the Fall 2020 issue of The Skeleton Press.*

ARIC MCBAY is an author, organizer, and farmer. His recent book *Full Spectrum Resistance* (Seven Stories, 2019) is a two-volume guide to building more effective movements.



There are many solutions to Kingston's housing crisis, but these will require long term commitment and action, especially when housing and homelessness are not in the public spotlight.

Liz, a tenant in the Skeleton Park neighbourhood, says we need to move beyond just "acting in response to crisis. I think that's what we've been doing for a long time."

"Nothing happens until the situation is really dire, and at that point you're just trying to find some way through with the least harm," she says. "I don't think that affects the structure of what's happening."

Five years ago, Liz was evicted by a property management company in Skeleton Park – "they claimed to be moving in a relative but obviously didn't" – and had to scramble to find a place she could afford.

"My mom was sick and dying at the time. I wasn't in a place to make a lot of big decisions," she says. "You need to leave your place fast, that's all you can think about. All of your energy has to go into managing crisis."

So how do we move beyond crisis to put in place solutions that will work over the long term?



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Local tenant and housing advocates suggest the following:

**Raise incomes and support a basic income guarantee.** "People simply cannot afford market rent in most cases," says anti-poverty activist Tara Kainer. "So many people are working two or three jobs just trying to put food on the table. At the very least, we need a living wage."

The City of Kingston has committed to being a living wage employer, Kainer says, along with about 20 other employers in the area.

"It's really a win-win situation," she says. "Employees become more loyal. People who make a living wage don't have a lot of money. They spend money in the local community. Basic income would do something very similar."

Many housing advocates interviewed spoke in favour of basic income as a way to address the fundamental income inequality that makes housing unaffordable.

**Learn and connect:**

[Kingston Action Group for a Basic Income Guarantee](#)  
[Fight for \\$15 & Fairness Kingston](#)  
[Ontario Living Wage Network](#)

**Inclusionary zoning.** The City and the Province can mandate developers to build a certain percentage of affordable units in new construction. Kainer suggests 10-20%. Inclusionary zoning has been used in Montreal, Toronto, and

Vancouver, as well as a number of cities in the United States. This would also address the housing crisis without spending much public money.

**Learn and connect:**

[inclusionaryhousing.ca](#)

[Inclusionary Zoning: Best Practices by ACORN Canada](#)

**Build more affordable housing—and start by listening to tenants and low-income people.** "We do need to build housing that's affordable and that's geared to people who need it," Jeremy Milloy of Mutual Aid Katarokwi-Kingston. "The private market has shown over and over again that they won't do that." To achieve this, the City—and every level of government—must put the needs of regular people ahead of the profits of big developers. And that means listening to the voices of tenants and other people who need housing—people who were largely left out of the recent Mayor's Task Force on Housing and Homelessness.

"The process shut people out," says Councillor Jeff McLaren, who notes that the developer-heavy make-up of the task force meant that group came up with pre-determined answers and refused to consider more creative solutions like inclusionary zoning.

The problem goes back to decisions by previous mayors, McLaren says, who also prioritized the needs of developers: "Oh, we basically need to give rich people more money to make more money!" Those priorities, he says, trickle down to thousands of daily decisions at the City, and it is hard for minor adjustments to overcome decades of cumulative planning decisions. "Neoliberal economics just doesn't work here," says McLaren. "The simple answer would be socialism!"

**Building movements, changing systems.** Fixing the housing problem will require that we look beyond piecemeal changes, and to address the root problems that cause cities to put private profit ahead of public good. Jeremy Milloy argues: "Structurally, legally, politically, we need to build the power of tenants." He adds: "We need more people who are passionate—get in touch."



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It is not just tenants who can take action. Tara Kainer says that the City can stand up to the provincial and federal governments, and challenge them to do better. "I do think municipalities should stand up and challenge the province. Maybe as one municipality you don't have a lot of sway, but municipalities together have a lot of power."

"We can raise hell at the City," says Doug Yearwood of the Katarokwi (Kingston) Union of Tenants. "We can inform people of their rights. But all of that is incumbent on people organizing with each other. If I have one message, it's organize, organize, organize."

**Learn and connect:**

[Mutual Aid Katarokwi-Kingston](#)  
[Katarokwi \(Kingston\) Union of Tenants](#)