



DARYL CHONG LEADING THE WAY IN THE GTA

Throughout his career, Daryl Chong has worked to find ways to balance the needs and opinions of very different groups. By understanding their motivations and requirements, he has learned how to process different sources of information and chart a course that enables him to achieve his goals. This ability has propelled Daryl to become president and CEO of the Greater Toronto Apartment Association (GTAA), which represents and protects the interests of owners, managers and professional service providers involved with the rental housing industry throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Daryl was born and raised in the Broadview and Danforth area of Toronto. He lived with his parents in an apartment above their dry cleaning business until finishing university. He spent much of his time at their family business where they worked seven days a week – it was open six days and on Sundays the Chong family would clean and maintain the machines and premises.

“My parents instilled within me a strong work ethic, as they worked tirelessly to support their family,” said Daryl. “Watching and working with them was a great experience, and I have carried these lessons throughout the rest of my life.”

Daryl’s education was conducted completely in Toronto. He attended a downtown high school, and then went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Toronto. His education in the pure sciences taught him how to methodically plan each step to reach the desired end result, while always being ready and able to handle unexpected events. Toward the end of his degree, Daryl realized that he would not pursue a career in molecular biology and genetics. After graduation, he worked at several different companies in a variety of businesses while trying to figure out what to do next. One of these jobs involved working as an executive assistant to an elected councillor with the City of Toronto.

Behind the scenes at City Hall

Daryl worked for two terms as executive assistant to a municipal councillor (first a Metro councillor and then a City councillor). However, the timing of his employment at City Hall is most interesting, and has perhaps contributed to his career path. He began at the former Metro government in late 1994. When the province recommended amalgamating seven

municipal governments into one, Metro Council supported the concept, while the six (former) cities and boroughs opposed the idea. It was an exciting time that resulted in a monumental change in local governance.

“It was an incredible experience being at ground level during the rationalization of amalgamation and then the subsequent restructuring,” said Daryl. “The business logic was solid, but time has now shown that the implementation has not been as smooth.”

Daryl continued in his role through the birth of the newly amalgamated city. During this time, he learned a lot about the new city’s inner workings, and how to get things accomplished at City Hall.

“Amalgamation taught me a lot about how the city functions, and how to work with the various groups within City Hall to achieve different goals,” said Daryl. “This helped me to better understand our municipal government’s bureaucracy and decision-making functions.”

At the end of the first term of amalgamation, Daryl decided to set out on his own to become a consultant, where he specialized in government relations and business development. Companies across various industries hired him to assist them with municipal government relations to promote policy issues, as well as to sell their goods and services to the cities and regions across Ontario. Daryl helped his clients to properly distill information in the appropriate technical terms required by bureaucrats, and in the best political terms for the elected decision makers.

“The role that I played is best described as a ‘translator’ who bridged the communication gap between the private sector and government officials,” said Daryl. “Even within the walls of government, there are often two distinct languages spoken – one spoken by the professional staff and another by the decision-making politicians. Clients need a trilingual interpreter that speaks private sector business, as well as these two languages.”

As a consultant, Daryl helped his clients to work with the two key groups of people working at City Hall – city council (including the mayor) and the City Hall staff. While the former made all the key decisions that affected the city, the latter were responsible for understanding the city’s procedures and regulations, and ensuring that decisions abided by these rules.

“These two groups don’t always agree with each other, so you have to learn to work with them and understand what can and cannot be done,” said Daryl. “To get business done with City Hall, I had to help my clients

relay information properly to the right bureaucrats, and translate the rules for my clients so that they could do business with the City.”

Greater Toronto Apartment Association

Daryl worked as a consultant for The Greater Toronto Apartment Association (GTAA) for more than six years. He worked closely with the former President directly on issues and as an advisor. He used his experience and skill set to help obtain the compromise of today’s apartment audit system. It took considerable time and many meetings with politicians, including the Mayor’s office on several occasions, and Municipal Licensing and Standards department staff, but in the end the result was much more palatable than the original push for full suite licensing.

When the association’s president left, the GTAA asked Daryl to assist their search committee with finding a suitable candidate to be the new president. Daryl asked the search committee about what was more important in a potential president – someone with years of experience in the apartment industry, or someone with government relations experience. They concluded that the new president wanted the latter, as he or she could learn about the apartment industry. Daryl began to think of viable possible applicants.

The search committee began compiling a complete job description to augment the process. Upon receipt, Daryl carefully reviewed the list of roles and responsibilities for the job and determined that he was the best candidate for the position. After due consideration, he contacted the search committee and put his name forward. The GTAA hired Daryl as president and CEO in July 2011.

The GTAA represents and protects the interests of companies involved in the multi-family residential housing industry throughout the GTA. The association serves as the voice of its members, and engages with municipal governments throughout the GTA to ensure effective representation of the industry. The GTAA also works to enhance communications between building owners/managers and their customers, and to ensure that its members properly and professionally manage their residential rental accommodations.

With a year under his belt, Daryl continues to learn more about the rental housing industry in the GTA. What has become apparent to him is the lack of respect for individuals and companies that own and operate apartment buildings and rental properties. One goal of the GTAA is to gain respect for industry members through education and promotion.

“The private sector apartment industry provides vital infrastructure for the City,” said Daryl. “Without the early visionaries taking the risk of investing in and building a large portion of the local apartment stock, where would Toronto be today? My guess is that without the thousands of apartments to house all the people, we would likely be only a mid- or small-sized city.”

When Daryl was consulting for the GTAA, he found that the association was primarily “playing defence.” The association tended to spend most of its time defending itself and its members against fallout from audits of poorly maintained buildings, which were very much in the minority. Daryl

feels that the association should “take the offensive” by stating their needs, as well as what their members require to be more effective, and be perceived as a serious partner with the City of Toronto in addressing its infrastructure needs.

“According to a 2011 United Way Toronto report, more than three quarters of tenants consider their apartments to be a good place to live, and nearly two thirds say it’s a good place to raise their children,” said Daryl. “Private sector housing providers deserve respect and meeting the challenge of maintaining and operating their buildings should not be undervalued. My goal is to increase the respect and reputation of our members in the public’s eye and at City Hall.”

The GTAA represents a wide range of members, from property owners who own just one or a few small buildings to corporations that own and manage multiple buildings with thousands of units. On top of learning about the industry, and what is involved in being its voice, Daryl has had to learn about and balance the needs of these different groups, as well as the other members of the association.

“It is necessary to take in everyone’s different needs, absorb them and then take a direction that satisfies most of those needs,” said Daryl. “It has also been quite the learning experience to figure out what different individuals or groups need, and then find ways to package a solution that is doable and amenable within the goals of the association.”

Rental housing issues

After speaking to GTAA members, Daryl is now promoting the construction of new purpose-built rentals. Most multi-family rental properties in the GTA were built more than 50 years ago. Due primarily to changes in federal tax rules and the imposition of provincial rent controls, there has been very little increase in the stock since the 1970s. Construction of apartment buildings virtually ceased around that time.

As Toronto continues to grow, there is an increasing need for rental properties. Much of the rental gap has been filled by the condominium industry, as investors are purchasing units and then renting them out for income purposes. The GTAA believes that a new wave of purpose-built rentals will help to address this growing need.

One possible solution is utilizing available space around buildings that were designed using the “tower in the park” model. Infilling involves constructing new multi-family rental properties on the greenspace and available land around existing rental buildings. Most of this space is vacant or not being used, and property owners already own the land. However, it is expensive to develop new apartment buildings, and they have a much longer payback than condominiums, which operate under a different business model than rental properties.

“Rental property owners need some financial incentives to make constructing a new apartment building viable,” said Daryl. “We need the City of Toronto to provide some financial help, such as delaying property taxes, reducing development charges, decreasing or eliminating the amount of financial remuneration required for Section 37, as well as some density or height increases.”



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Site-specific zoning is another impediment to development, as much of the zoning has not changed since the properties were built in the 1950s and 1960s. People’s needs have changed over the years, as renters want convenient amenities. Most rental properties do not have grocery stores, hair salons or other retail options on site, and they are not zoned to add these types of businesses. Some people also want the option of using their apartment for home-based businesses or other commercial use. However, changing zoning is a prohibitive process, and making it more accessible would help to alleviate these issues.

“This issue can be addressed in three stages,” said Daryl. “First, rezone the property to allow ‘as-of-right’ basic commercial uses within the building. Second, make it easier to build a one-storey addition to the existing building to allow for a coffee shop, convenience store or other commercial venture. Third, take advantage of available land to construct new rental infill apartments that include the addition of commercial space.”

Special interests

Daryl’s role as president of the GTAA includes running the GTAA Charitable Foundation, established by Founding Chair Sam Grossman in 2000. The association manages all aspects of the foundation, including paying for overhead and operating costs. The CRA-registered charity helps to raise money within the association and provides grants to community agencies that work with the homeless and “hard to house” through the GTA.

“The GTAA Charitable Foundation has grown quickly as a direct result of the generosity of our members,” said Daryl. “We now grant more than \$100,000 to community organizations each year.”

The GTAA Charitable Foundation accepts direct donations from members, and also raises funds through a series of annual events (golf tournament, night at the races, and Chair’s luncheon). Daryl works with the Charitable Foundation Board of Directors to determine worthy recipients of funds each year. All funds raised go to local organizations, such as Horizons for Youth, Massey Centre for Women, Street Haven at the Crossroads, St. Stephen’s Community House Drop-in and Street Health.

“Running the charity was part of the job description, and it definitely made me more interested in taking this job,” said Daryl. “There are a lot of very generous people in the rental housing industry, and most of their work is below the radar and not widely advertised. We have the same goal here – to make a difference and do more for the people who benefit from the charity.” **RHB**