

## MEDIA RELEASE

### INDEPENDENCE SQUARE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The HDC notes the public scrutiny surrounding its 2021 decision to revitalise East Port-of-Spain through urban development, and more specifically, its resultant requirement to relocate residents of the Independence Square Housing Development to facilitate the building's demolition and re-construction.

Consequently, the HDC re-affirms the fact that its intent in relation to the Independence Square Housing Development is consistent with its mandate and motivated by the need to develop sustainable communities. To accomplish the revitalisation of East Port-of-Spain, the Independence Square Housing Development and surrounding buildings, including the building commonly known as the "Workers Bank" must be replaced with upgraded, fully functional structures that can be used and enjoyed by members of the East Port-of-Spain community.

To this end, in 2021 the HDC re-engaged the residents of the Independence Square Housing Development and other stakeholders in a series of progressive open consultations to determine the most feasible way to advance the revitalisation project, in the best interest of all parties.

The HDC deemed the consultation process as integral, particularly in light of the fact that the residents were put into occupation of the Independence Square Housing Development housing units by virtue of traditional landlord and tenant rental Agreements that were expired. Being cognisant that: (i) the residents do not have title to the housing units, (ii) the residents do not have an Agreement to remain in occupation of the housing unit; and (iii) the HDC was not required in law to re-locate the residents to facilitate the demolition, the HDC considered it essential to communicate its decision to re-locate all residents and alleviate any concerns they may have about being evicted, in circumstances where they had no alternative housing option.

To date, the consultation process remains open. The HDC has identified alternative housing accommodation for the residents of each apartment that will be demolished. Indeed, residents were offered, and some accepted, the option to purchase an HDC housing unit. Others elected to enter into a new landlord and tenant relationship.

All but five (5) residents have already relocated to another HDC housing unit. However, regrettably, persons have entered into illegal occupation of those units that were vacated and they have refused to leave the units, despite repeated attempts by the HDC to have them so do.

The HDC remains committed to the revitalisation of East Port-of-Spain. Therefore, the HDC will ensure that the remaining five (5) residents assume occupation of their relocated housing units. The HDC will also act responsibly and within the parameters of the law to obtain vacant possession of the illegally occupied units to advance the demolition and restoration works.

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