



TO: **Economic and Community Development Committee**

DATE: Thursday, October 21, 2021

RE: 2022 Shelter Infrastructure Plan, Community Engagement Review and Amendments to Contracts and Purchase Orders to Support Shelter Services (**EC25.6**)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). My name is Kira Heineck, and I am the Executive Director of TAEH. We are a network of partners reaching across the city, all united in the vision of ending homelessness. We also serve as your non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA).

We are here today to speak in support of the recommendations in the staff report for this item. The TAEH is encouraged to see the continued focus on integrating housing solutions, with enhanced measures to further equity in serving Indigenous, racialized and communities that are over-represented in homelessness in Toronto, to the Infrastructure Plan. This includes the beginnings of the strategic conversion of shelter sites to transitional and supportive housing and the transfer of remaining funds in the previously named 1000 Shelter Beds initiative to the Housing Secretariat to create new supportive housing units. As you know, the TAEH has worked closely with the Housing Secretariat to maximize our collective ability to match non-City funded support services to provide the operating resources and services that support tenants to achieve and maintain successful housing, health, and well-being.

TAEH also supports the implementation of the 2018 plan to create new permanent shelter beds as outlined here to meet the George Street Revitalization Plan, including the decommissioning of Seaton House. We trust that these new shelter facilities will be designed with a built form, in accordance with the New Shelter Model, that allows for their eventual conversion to transitional and supportive housing. This is a welcomed and critical new model that allows the City to keep its commitment to a housing-focused shelter system.

What else can Toronto do to increase housing solutions to end homelessness

City Council's adoption in early 2018 of its goal to build 18,000 units of supportive housing by 2030 and reiterated in the Council approved Housing TO 2020-2030 Action Plan is significant. It marked the beginning of a renewed focus on housing as the solution to homelessness and investing to end it and not merely manage it. To get to the next level and achieve this commitment the other orders of government must be compelled to come to the table. This is particularly true of the Ontario government as, currently, the bulk of resources available to operate supportive housing are funded by them. TAEH continues to advocate to both orders to do just that.

But we must also take every opportunity to think differently and explore how the City of Toronto itself can develop and fund, at least in part, its own “made in Toronto” supportive housing operating model. The Plan before you today, along with the eventual end of the pandemic, gives us this opportunity. TAEH will continue to work with both SSHA and the Housing Secretariat in this area as well.

Another key component of an overall responsive strategy to end homelessness is income-side supports. We simply must find a way to create more housing allowances and rent supplements, including with additional City funds. The new 2021 Street Needs Assessment data show that 80% of respondents report the most important services to help them find housing were those related to increasing housing affordability and income. We also know from shelter use data that over two-thirds of people that use the shelter system every year are there due to income issues and often access housing again with income-side assistance to cover their rent.

With additional housing allowances we can quickly turn these people’s homelessness – or risk thereof – around, making rapid progress towards all three outcomes of City Council’s vision that homelessness be rare, brief, and non-recurring. We urge you and your fellow Councillors to seriously consider this role for Toronto. We appreciate that it is not the traditional area for the municipal order of government in Canada, and that the current fiscal structure vis a vis the other orders of government is a significant challenge. But we can work collectively to secure additional funding from Ontario and the federal government, while at the same time that Toronto leads by example with its own modest investment in additional, City-funded housing allowances.

The Alliance also supports the summary of the City’s winter plan in today’s report, noting its identification that it will evolve and adapt to need and circumstances as winter progresses. Similarly, we are pleased to see the recommended extension of hotel leases for the social distancing sites, the development of SSHA’s COVID-19 Transition and Relocation Plan with its identification of its coordination with new affordable and supportive housing. This will ensure that the City’s focus on housing to end homelessness is maintained and that more people will have housing opportunities. Therefore, we strongly urge this Committee and Council to ensure that SSHA and the Housing Secretariat have the resources they need through the upcoming budget process to deliver new affordable and supportive housing to meet the needs of those who will eventually have to leave the hotel sites.

Finally, we commend SSHA for undertaking the review of its engagement process for new shelter and related services. It provides sound advice and to be successful requires your support – and the ongoing support of every Councillor in every ward across our city.

CONCLUSION

It has been said many times, by Council, staff, and others, that we have learned some important things during COVID-19 that deepen our understanding of what works best in supporting health and wellness in vulnerable populations. This includes people experiencing homelessness of course and TAEH both supports, and urges us all to stay committed to, recent changes in how we address homelessness. This includes not returning to the dormitory style, congregate shelters and focusing on Toronto’s Housing

First model. The last 18 months has seen this model become more person-focused with increased individual case-management, the human rights principles of engagement and choice, and the better coordination of housing and supports to properly match to each individual's circumstances.

We look forward to continuing to work with, and contribute to, SSHA, the Housing Secretariat and all City divisions in implementing this Plan to increase our collective ability to respond to homelessness in Toronto in ways that lead to it becoming truly rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Thank you,

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