



TO: Economic and Community Development Committee
DATE: October 24 2023
RE: Re: Item EC7.8 Shelter System Pressures and Responses, including Planning for Winter 2023/2024

The Toronto Shelter Network (TSN) represents more than 35 organizations that collectively deliver Toronto's 24-hour homelessness services, including shelters, respites centres, 24 hour women's drop-ins, transitional housing and the COVID-19 shelter hotels. We enhance the collective capacity of homelessness service providers in Toronto through knowledge sharing and learning, collaborative planning, research and advocacy, and champion access to housing with dignity for people experiencing homelessness.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) is a network of over 100 partners across the city, united in the vision of ending homelessness – a vision we share with the City. We also serve as the City's non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum alongside SSHA and the Housing Secretariat.

Over ten thousand people are staying in shelters, bridging hotels and other programs every night. Almost 300 per night are turned away from Central Intake and there are almost 400 families on the family placement wait list. Distancing measures between beds have been decreased and spaces have been added to support refugee claimants. The city has requested more support from both the federal and provincial governments, but they have not responded. We fully expect these numbers will increase as those sleeping outdoors want to come inside and as more refugee claimants arrive in the city.

TSN and TAEH are encouraged to see that the city is maintaining the number of shelter units and adding capacity to address the ever-growing pressure we are facing. Activating four warming centres and one 24-hour winter respite, as well as expanding street outreach will, alongside the additional spaces created through new supportive housing and social housing with supports, enhance our community capacity to care for people in the cold months, and we commend the decision to activate warming centres at -5 degrees and inclement weather warnings as people are facing increased challenges to health and safety in those conditions.

While these additional spaces will help, we are concerned that it will be insufficient to meet the increasing demand for shelter beds this winter. Adding 180 spaces to 3

existing locations, 170 warming spaces, 40 respite spaces and an additional surge space for the coldest weather and extreme weather events is still not likely to be enough to keep up with the demand.

Two hundred and seventy-five housing units are expected to become available, but this is a small number compared to the number of people experiencing homelessness.

The COHB has been a much used and effective program, but the investments must be urgently increased to meet demand and enhanced investments from the Province and Federal governments are needed. The City must continue to urge the federal government come back to the table to ensure that all orders of government adequately fund a sustainable COHB program to support people who are experiencing homelessness, and to expand the resources available for targeted benefits for refugees and asylum seekers.

The City has been working with Corporate Real Estate Management to find other sites and proposing a multiyear plan so that space is prepared and available as well as providing more cost-effective solutions, and we understand that the City is facing urgent financial challenges and that without the support of other orders of government or new revenue tools the City will have difficulty maintaining even current service levels in the shelter system.

Like the City, TSN and TAEH are committed to making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring but we continue to see demand for shelter space far outpace availability. Affordable and supportive housing is the only long-term solution but until we can achieve that, we need a stable, effective, supportive, low barrier, housing focused shelter and allied services system that supports people experiencing homelessness and transitions them into housing.

Thank you,

Leslie Gash
Executive Director
Toronto Shelter Network



Savhanna Wilson
Acting Executive Director
TAEH