



Community Development and Recreation Committee  
City of Toronto  
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

January 13, 2015

Re: Submission for January 15 CDRC Meeting Regarding Toronto's Shelter System

To: The Community Development and Recreation Committee

I understand that Councillor Mihevc will be adding an item to the agenda regarding Toronto's shelter system at the January 15 meeting. Please accept this letter as a written submission pertaining to that item.

Social Planning Toronto (SPT) is a nonprofit community organization that works to improve the quality of life of Toronto residents. We conduct community-based research and policy analysis, and support community development, capacity building and civic engagement. Our work focuses on income security, labour market issues, housing and homelessness, public education and the nonprofit sector.

I understand that Councillor Mihevc will be bringing forward motions to immediately address the crowding problem in Toronto's emergency shelter system and to open the 24-hour drop-in centre for women and trans people. The drop-in which is an essential support for homeless and street-involved women and trans people was scheduled to open by December but the opening has been delayed.

We strongly support immediate measures to reduce shelter crowding and achieve a 90% or less occupancy rate in Toronto's shelters, to quickly bring on line the 24-hour drop-in for women and trans people, and to fix the Extreme Cold Weather Alert system to ensure alerts are called when weather conditions present a danger to homeless people (as has been the case in recent weeks).

The recent and tragic deaths of three homeless men, Shabbir Jaffa, Sergio Escobar, and a third person not yet publicly identified, make painfully clear the urgent need for action.

First, public health officials need to use the flexibility available to them to call Extreme Cold Weather Alerts when dangerous weather conditions arise, such as the weather conditions in recent weeks. Warming centres and expanded outreach and support can and do save lives.

**Main Office**

2 Carlton Street, Suite 1001, Toronto, ON M5B 1J3  
T: 416.351.0095 F: 416.351.0107

**Community Offices**

ANC - Mount Dennis: 1336B Weston Road, Toronto, ON M6M 4R8 T: 416.242.7031  
Etobicoke: The Shaver Homestead, 450 The West Mall, Suite 205, Toronto, ON M9C 1E9 T: 416.231.5499  
York/West Toronto: 1652 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M6M 3W3 T: 416.652.0772



Second, immediate steps should be taken to ease crowding in the shelter system. In 2013, Toronto City Council wisely recommitted to maintain occupancy of the shelter system at or below 90% to ensure flexibility in the system to meet the need. This standard was first adopted by City Council in the late 1990s. Despite Council's recent reaffirmation of this standard, the city's shelters are packed with occupancy rates around 95% or more.

Immediate steps can be taken to ensure that people have access to shelter and to reduce pressure on the system. In the 1990s, the City opened temporary shelters to meet the need. The Moss Park Armoury, Fort York Armoury, Princess Margaret Hospital, Metro Hall, Doctors Hospital and Murray Street nursing home were all used to provide warm refuge for homeless people. The Moss Park Armoury provided shelter for over 200 people at the time. Fast forward 20 years, once again, there is an urgent need to open up additional shelter space. We urge Toronto City Council to take immediate steps to open shelter space to ensure access over the cold winter months.

A new 24-hour drop-in for homeless and street-involved women and trans people was supposed to open in December 2014. Presently, the drop-in is not expected to open until the Spring. This is an unacceptable delay. We support action to open the drop-in immediately to ensure that homeless and street-involved women and trans people have access to this safe, warm and welcoming space.

Next, the City of Toronto's budget process is set to begin on January 20 with opportunities for members of the public to have their say on February 2 and 3, and a final vote slated for March 10-11. Through the City budget process, Toronto City Council sets priorities and decides how our public dollars will be used to support public and community services. In the 2015 budget, Toronto City Council must prioritize the needs of our most vulnerable neighbours. We must ensure that the shelter system and related outreach and support services are appropriately funded. We urge City Council to pass a budget that supports the safety and well-being of homeless people in our city, and we encourage residents to make their voices heard during the budget process.

Ultimately, the solution to the crisis of homelessness is investment in affordable housing and supports by all three orders of government. We look to Toronto City Council to provide the sorely needed leadership at the local level. The cost of inaction has been made tragically clear this week.

Sincerely,



Beth Wilson  
Senior Researcher

Contact: 416-351-0095 x257 or [beth@socialplanningtoronto.org](mailto:beth@socialplanningtoronto.org)