

DEPUTATION

To: **Community Development and Recreation Committee, Toronto City Council**

DATE: **Wednesday, June 13, 2018**

RE: **2019 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and System Update Report (CD29.08)**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you again today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). As you are aware, the TAEH is a collective impact initiative made up of Community Partners focussed on what it will take to end homelessness in Toronto.

We are here today to speak in general support of the report and recommendation actions for Item CD29.08. The work it reflects and proposes responds constructively to the recent and current state of homelessness in Toronto, as well as to the discussions at Committee and Council meetings, including TAEH deputations, since the fall of 2017.

That being said, the TAEH remains frustrated – and galvanized against – the state of homelessness in Toronto that necessitate the measures outlined in this report. This includes having to add new shelter beds and new respite centres. We know that this Committee, Council and others in the community remain so too.

It is with the vision of finally ending this unacceptable situation that we focus on the following points before us today:

- **We must strengthen our focus on housing as the solution to homelessness.** It is the only proven way to end a person's homelessness, and the *Increasing Housing with Supports* section of this report is an essential part of Toronto's overall response to shelter capacity issues.

Toronto's use of the provincial *Homes For Good* program has produced good results so far. We cannot however count on program funding to continue past 2020. Therefore, we urge Committee and Council to send a strong message to Ontario's new Premier that it is exactly this type of investment in people and their housing that reduces both the experience of homelessness and the impact of more expensive responses on taxpayer dollars, such as emergency room visits.

- We agree with the position in the report that **more is needed beyond Homes For Good programming**. It makes sense to explore the recent Council motion that Toronto aim to build 18,000 new supportive housing units over the next 10 years. Part of this will come from renovations, new construction and the encouraging increased collaboration with Toronto Community Housing to support successful tenancies for people experiencing homelessness.

But it will also require significant new funding dedicated to housing, as today's report makes clear. On Monday this week we all learned more about the federal government's redesigned Homelessness Partnering Strategy – now called *Reaching Home*. In addition to doubling the funding that Toronto has received in the past, it requires that all communities who receive this federal funding reduce chronic homelessness by 50% by 2029.

This is a strong lever for the City to pull, even more so if linked to Toronto's portion of National Housing Strategy dollars for renovation and construction of new housing.

The next step is for City Council to commit as soon as possible a certain percentage of National Housing Strategy dollars to housing and supports for those currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We ask this of all orders of government and strongly encourage Toronto to take the lead.

- **We appreciate the City's efforts to develop innovation interim strategies for its 2018/2019 Winter Services Plan** as outlined to date in this report. As noted before, these strategies will serve more people better, but we stress that we must also keep our eye on the permanent housing solutions to ending homelessness even as we go forward into another winter.

The TAEH has supported the new shelter model. We agree with its vision to site shelters across Toronto's neighbourhoods, recognizing that people experience homelessness everywhere and their chances of diverting quickly back to sustained housing is much higher if served in their own local communities. And we support the increased emphasis on shelters as a key part of a housing delivery system, as well as the much-needed work to improve standards.

In order to meet its vision, and to bring about and sustain better standards, however, it is critical that City Council allocate enough resources to the new shelter model going forward as well.

- We applaud **the continued focus on improving data and reporting**, including getting at better, city-wide assessments of need. The TAEH participated in the development and delivery of the recent Street Needs Assessment and believe it will deliver useful results. This count is, however, only "point-in-time" data; therefore, we are also deeply encouraged to be part of SSHA's ongoing efforts to develop Toronto's own 'By-Name List'. This list is now a requirement of the new *Reaching Home* program and the SSHA's leadership on this sets Toronto up well for success in ending homelessness.
- The **increased inter-divisional work** laid out in this report, including co-locations and partnerships between departments such as SSHA, the Affordable Housing Office, Planning, Real Estate, Long-Term Care Homes and Services is very welcomed.

The TAEH looks forward to doing our part in making the fall charrette between housing and planning departments and sectors, as moved in the March Council meeting, a success. The possibility of a new standing committee on housing to the new Council is also good news. We note that more can be done in developing a strategically coordinated approach with the health sector, and that the Shelter Health Services Design Project is a good step forward.

- Increased focus on **developing and applying a gender lens** when planning and operating drop-ins and respite centres is an excellent development.

CONCLUSION

The TAEH recognizes the good, and monumental work ahead on the shelter infrastructure plan even as we repeat the call to strengthen our focus on housing as the means to reach zero homelessness. We look forward to continuing to work with all parts of the City on ending homelessness in Toronto.

For more information:

Kira Heineck, Executive Lead
heineck_k@cotainspires.ca taeh.ca