

June 24, 2019

Dear Economic and Community Development Committee Members,

The *Downtown East 2023 Five Year Action Plan* identifies several important needs of marginalized people in the area, yet its recommendations and funding allocations cater to the anti-poor biases of the neighbourhood's wealthier property owners and businesses. The plan does not allocate any substantive resources to address the deadly service gaps that persist for poor and homeless people.

Our concerns with the report's key recommendations are as follows:

1. **Targeted by-law enforcement to intimidate poor and homeless parks users:** The plan allocates \$373,000 to increase policing of public parks in the downtown-east (DTE). Increasing the presence of 'Parks Ambassadors' in the area, will intensify the already uneven and unfair by-law enforcement in our City. This is a strategy aimed at dissuading use of public parks by poor and homeless people who have nowhere else to go.
2. **Business interests trump community needs:** The report requests an additional \$250,000 to be dedicated to the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Association, to increase their surveillance of poor and marginalized people instead of addressing the needs of poor and homeless people who use the area.
3. **"Safety walks" and "park safety audits" are for wealthier property owners:** Despite living under far greater stress and facing greater violence, poor and homeless people are cast as instigators of crime. The increased "safety walks" and "park safety audits" stoke the anti-poor biases of wealthier property owners in the area, and do nothing to address the material needs of the poorer residents.
4. **Continuing with the George St. Revitalization (GSR) plan despite severe shelter shortage:** GSR will result in the loss of over 600 shelter beds in the DTE in the coming year. The current plan restores only a fraction of those beds to the area sometime after 2020. The City is in the midst of a deadly shelter shortage and homeless people cannot afford to lose any more beds.
5. **No new funding for programs to improve living conditions for homeless people:** Initiatives such as increasing access to healthy food, safe indoor and outdoor spaces, overdose prevention actions, and addressing housing gaps have no funds attached.

This past winter over 1000 people were unable to access a shelter bed and were forced into the City's sub-standard back-up system of respite centres, drop-ins and the volunteer-run *Out of the Cold* program. Despite making a commitment to keep respite spaces open year-round during this emergency, the City's *Shelter, Support and Housing Administration*, shut down 400 respite

spaces this spring, effectively evicting residents back to the streets. Coupled with the overdose crisis, the brutal conditions homeless people are being forced into are claiming an average of at least two homeless lives weekly.

It is important that council refocus the 5 year plan for the DTE by addressing the needs of its poorest residents by:

1. **Shifting focus away from policing of public space to allocating resources for the provision of safer indoor and outdoor spaces** that are accessible to and designed for poor and homeless people in the area.
2. **Putting on hold the shelter closures resulting from the George Street Revitalization project** until the severe shortage of shelter spaces is addressed.
3. **Adding 2000 new shelter beds** to address the deadly homelessness crisis.
4. **Expropriating 214-230 Sherbourne St.**, a series of 7 adjacent vacant properties at Dundas and Sherbourne, and building public rent-geared-to-income housing.
5. **Building public housing on the 11-plus City-owned properties** to provide rent-geared-to-income units to address the housing and homelessness crisis.
6. **Expanding access to overdose prevention sites** in the area's shelters and respite sites, and advocating to the provincial and federal governments for program funding.

Sincerely,

Jessica Hales, Nurse Practitioner, on behalf of the  
**Ontario Coalition Against Poverty**  
157 Carlton St., Unit 201  
Toronto, ON M5A 2K3  
416-925-6939  
ocap.ca