



January 23rd, 2019

To: Executive Council

RE: Housing Now Initiative

From: Brian Davis, ED, Houselink Community Homes, Chair of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) Housing Development Working Group

Dear Executive Council Members,

My name is Brian Davis, the Executive Director of Houselink Community Homes, a Ministry of Health and City funded supportive housing provider for people with serious mental health challenges, addiction issues, often coming to us with histories of chronic homelessness. I am deputing as the Chair of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH)'s, Housing Development Working Group.

The TAEH Housing Development Working Group is a group of non-profit providers in Toronto who are actively and collectively identifying resources, strategies and solutions to spur the acquisition, development and renovation of quality, rental housing stock accessible to individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

Supportive housing is a significant part of what the City must support in the Housing Now Initiative and we believe there is an opportunity here to utilize these 11 surplus lands and the accompanying recommendations, for the City to not only make good on its commitment to create 18,000 supportive housing units over the next 10 years but do some catching up on previous years of serious neglect.

TAEH commends the Housing Now Initiative as a big and bold step forward; significantly more land, stronger interdivisional support, new staffing to shepherd the projects, funding for pre-development work for non-profits housing providers which we know to be a systemic barrier to the existing Open Door Program.

We hope that these 11 surplus lands and the accompanying funding is just the beginning of many initiatives in the coming years to move us away from just managing homelessness - to actually building a solid exit strategy at a scale to match the emergency we face here in Toronto

To this end, regarding:

The Targeted Portion for Deeply Affordable (Item #8) - We believe the City is missing an opportunity to target a full one third of the estimated 10,000 units to those who are experiencing chronic homeless. This means that a third of those units have to be accessible at a level for someone who is likely relying on social assistance.

This could be achievable on a variety of fronts:

- Reflect supportive housing best practices in some of the building design
- stack operational and/or capital funding from other provincial/federal programs such as Reaching Home/LHIN or Homes for Good. We know that the National Housing Strategy programs are aligned with the goal of ending homelessness across Canada
- seek partnerships with the MOH and health service providers to provide rent supplements as well as support dollars in concert with the Local Health Integrated Networks.
- allocate more of the city budget to rent supplement or portable housing benefits
- consult and partner with TAEH members to ensure the best use of the new Non-Profit Housing Capacity Fund

Finally, we strongly recommend giving preference to mission driven non-profit housing providers which have expertise in fostering inclusive and integrated communities. This will ensure that affordable housing units are secured in perpetuity, supports are able to flex up or down as the need arises, and landlord functions are conducted in a manner that maximizes housing stability.

New Housing Secretariat and staff roles (Item # 16) – We welcome the increase in staffing and the development of a Housing Secretariat – along with the new role of the Planning and Housing Committee. We hope that these new roles will engage TAEH as a key stakeholder when doing its site-by-site business case development in order to maximize the overall number of units targeted to people coming from homelessness (ie. determining sites best suited to dedicated/high support housing).

How these lands are developed can marshal in a fresh approach to how the City creates new rental supply that in turn addresses the urgent crisis of homelessness. One in which all City departments see their role in moving supportive housing through the planning and approval process. This includes: transforming the Annual Open Door Program into a revolving door, making the appropriate planning compromises where applicable, mandating CreateTo to continue to prioritize lands for deeply affordable units, and allowing the Affordable Housing Office or Housing Secretariat to play a stronger convener role in fast-tracking supportive housing. This should also include the repurposing, renewal and expansion of existing non-profit housing assets, which we know to be substantial in Toronto.

There are exciting Canadian examples, such as the 600 modular, self-contained supportive housing units currently being built in Vancouver to learn from. In a housing market just as expensive as Toronto, they built self-contained supportive housing units from site identification to occupation in 5 months. The development of those units required dedicated city staff to push the projects through design, rezoning and permit approvals – processes that typically take months. They had a willing for-profit developer to construct the units and finally, they entered into long-term agreements with non-profit organizations.

This kind of momentum is a great start to 2019! Housing Now is the kind of bold initiative that will bring the City closer to meeting its goal of creating 18,000 units of supportive housing over the next 10 years - as well as respond to the overall affordable housing crisis in our city.

We at TAEH look forward to working with the City to meet this goal.

