



DEPUTATION

To: **Planning and Housing Committee**
 DATE: **Tuesday, December 10, 2019**
 RE: **Housing TO (PH11.5)**

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.

As such, we are pleased to see, in the Housing TO 2020-2030 Action Plan before us, a clear and repeated articulation of the end goal of a city where **homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring**.

When this is possible – that almost no one becomes homeless (rare), and if so that they are homeless for only a short time (brief) and they never become homeless again (non-recurring) we will have ended homelessness as we know it.

This vision becoming reality depends on much of what is in the Housing TO plan now, and our collective commitment to strengthening critical parts of it. The key elements or directions that we support include:

- **The Right to Housing enshrined in an updated Toronto Housing Charter**
 Not only will the progressive realization of this right now be recognized by Council, but Housing TO makes this a directing principle and framework for all actions in all departments regarding housing going forward. This is a critical step forward to being the best city we can be.
- **Dedicated allocations and strategies for and with Indigenous housing and community partners**
 Housing TO includes long-overdue actions to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Therefore, the TAEH supports the actions in the plan recommended by Indigenous housing providers during consultations to:
 - Develop a dedicated allocation in housing and homelessness supports, as well as for the 40,000 new units;
 - Co-create a Toronto-specific Urban Indigenous Housing Strategy; and
 - Designing new housing to better meet the cultural and spiritual needs of Toronto’s Indigenous communities.
- **An “all-government” approach**
 This is a much needed tactic in our fight for access to deeply affordable, supportive housing and to end homelessness. It applies to both all City resources and processes becoming more integrated, but to the City’s leadership in insisting that our other two orders of government do their share too.
- **Re-defining affordability based on income, and not market forces**
 This has been a long-held position of TAEH and many others. We are pleased to see this in Housing TO and look forward to participating in future discussions.

- **Increased accountability**

Accountability and transparency are critical of course, and Housing TO includes good, new mechanisms to ensure them. We are encouraged by the increased attention to data and data-sharing, and the suggestion of a Housing Commissioner. We encourage Council to establish this Commissioner immediately.

- **Deeper engagement with and inclusion of people with lived experience**

Solving housing and homelessness issues must include and value the particular expertise of those that have lived, or are living, through them.

Getting to homelessness as rare, brief and non-recurring

Perhaps one of the most important elements in this plan is its recognition of Toronto's homelessness emergency as the complex, dynamic situation it is and committing to an integrated systems approach to dealing with it. The following actions look homelessness clearly in the eye and deal with it as sophisticatedly and confidently as we do other challenges in our city:

1. The strengthened focus on **prevention and diversion** tools and strategies to reduce the number of people flowing into homelessness to begin with. This, of course, goes a long way to reaching our goal of homelessness as *rare*.
2. The commitment to a system of **coordinated access to housing and support services**, one that leverages data to prioritize those with the highest needs. This is what is needed to keep every experience of homelessness as *brief* as possible.

As the report states, other cities have achieved reductions in homelessness through a coordinated approach to better understand, in real-time, what the needs of people and particular populations are, and then prioritizing and matching them with those needs. Investing in the data infrastructure to allow coordinated access to work is not a dry, removed way to tackle homelessness – it is its foundation and one of its most powerful tools.

A proper coordinated system such as this also allows for a successful Housing First model – one that delivers the right housing to the right person at the right time.

The TAEH truly applauds the pioneers at SSHA that first explored this approach with us, and we will continue to work closely with them, and all who are willing, to accelerate coordinated access to include the entire city. This is also why we urge the Committee today, and all Councillors next week, to insist on providing the resources – financial and human - to scale up the development of the data and coordination functions needed and to link them to a targeted action plan as soon as possible.

3. A **housing-focussed shelter model**. This critical shift where the goal of every shelter and the sector as a whole become agents of ending people's homelessness through supports to find and keep housing. This, coupled with increased access to more deeply affordable and appropriate housing units and support options, will ensure that a person or family's experience of homelessness is *non-recurring*.

An Emergency Task Force

Housing TO is a timely opportunity to kick-start immediate action to respond to the emergency that homelessness is in Toronto today. We strongly encourage a new, city-funded Emergency Housing Fund to be deployed by a new Emergency Task Force to:

- Bring together a table of government and community experts in rapid re-housing and other coordinated approaches to quickly move people out of shelter and into permanent housing;
- Produce a detailed action plan with designed program elements and targets within 30 days;
- Start implementing this action plan on day 31, if not sooner; and
- Track performance indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness of this emergency response and incorporate what is learned into next steps.

Housing and supports

In regards to increasing supply and access to the deeply affordable and supportive housing the following are our positions – actions that are either already in Housing TO or that build on some of its elements to strengthen actions and results. Other TAEH deputants will talk to this area in greater details as well, drawing on our current work – including mergers of non-profit providers to focus on development, inventory of assets and rent supplements, planned conversations about pooling assets – to develop a Supportive Housing Growth Plan. This plan will be ready in 3Q 2020 and we will share updates and key findings with City Council and staff as we go.

- Strategies to ensure that as much as is reasonably possible, new developments on public land or built with public subsidy stay in the public realm through non-profit ownership. This not only increases the chance for perpetual affordability, but as there are no shareholders, income is reinvested in services for tenants and community needs.

We note that the land bank initiative in Housing TO is such a strategy. Another is to set **targets for non-profit ownership of new development**, and enhance the capacity of the non-profit sector, over time, to take on more. We suggest that these strategies and targets be worked out in partnership with the non-profit sector and be incorporated into the welcomed new non-profit stream that Housing TO proposes, as well as introduce a new non-profit stream into Housing Now. Finally, we urge Council to consider adding metrics on non-profit capacity into the success indicators of Housing TO.

- While increased inter-governmental cooperation and solving-problem is critical to achieving our best results, Housing TO does need to **underscore what the City is doing and will do as well**. This is to both show strong City leadership on wrestling this housing and homelessness crisis to the ground, but also to head off impressions that Housing TO will only succeed if others contribute.

In other words, be crystal clear that the City funding and other measures committed to in Housing TO is not contingent on other orders of government; and that it is committed to keeping at least its current level of funding in the affordable housing system. City commitments to Open Door and Housing now and to their expansion in Housing TO is laudable and should not be overlooked.

On the affordability side, we simply must increase the amount of **income-based, housing allowances and rent supplements** available. Most people at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness first and foremost have an affordability problem. Ideally, the benefit would make up the difference between 30% of a household's

income and the cost of rent. In the absence of adequate funding for this in Canada Housing Benefit, OPHI, or other benefits from other orders of government, the City must be a leader and fund the gap. It can reallocate these investments to other priorities when other orders of government catch up.

We must also be clear here that it is a provincial responsibility to deliver social assistance and that they cannot be left off the hook for the hazardously low rates that Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits have been for far too long.

- **Permanent modular housing** is an encouraging new opportunity to build supportive housing quickly – housing that will be available for people currently in shelter. A target of 1000 units is a welcome addition to Housing TO.
- **New 10,000 supports for people** is also encouraging. Here, though, we need more detailed information on what these may be, how they will be funded and an action plan with targets and timelines to understand how they will be implemented. TAEH, as the City’s Community Advisory Board, is able to assist in these areas.

There are a few specific areas that warrant increased supports and/or direct focus here, including providing sufficient financial resources for intensive on-site high support housing and case management to help secure housing for people with high needs by agencies who do not receive provincial health funding; and youth in the transitional years of 16-18.

- Proceed with the recommendations in the **Community Housing Partnership Renewal Program** – Item PH11.7 – in front of you today, of which we are strongly supportive.
- A **Vacant Home Tax** for Toronto. This is a welcomed new idea, and we only encourage this Committee to recommend that this be fully committed to, and not simply its feasibility studied as is currently directed by Housing TO.
- Include in the plan a clear commitment to implement **Inclusionary Zoning**, with a policy implementation framework that is consistent with the principles and values of Housing TO.

CONCLUSION

Housing TO 2020-2030 is a good plan, and the TAEH supports it. We trust that the Committee and Council will consider our priorities and suggests to strengthen certain areas above. This is a rare opportunity to really put Toronto on a path to a healthy, vibrant housing market and a city where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

We congratulate everyone involved, including the hard-working Housing Secretariat staff that produced Housing TO, and look forward to each step along the way in the work to come.

Thank you.

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