



February 11th, 2021

Executive Committee EX21.2 - 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets

Dear Members of the Executive Committee

We are writing on behalf of the Right to Housing in Toronto (R2HTO), a coalition of organizations and individuals working to support the implementation of the human right to adequate housing by the City of Toronto.

We are writing today with regards to the Housing Secretariat's 2021 Operating Budget (Agenda Item EX21.2 - recommendations 13-15). We were disappointed to learn that the Budget Committee voted down a recommendation to allocate direct funding for the Office of the Housing Commissioner ("the Office") during their February 4th, 2021 meeting. We are further disappointed to see that the Housing Secretariat's budget does not set aside funds to establish the Office of the Housing Commissioner (the Office) during the 2021 budget cycle. We believe that the immediate establishment of the Office is an urgent matter and must be prioritized by the City during the 2021 budget cycle.

A human rights-based approach to housing policy is the key framework for the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan. The Office is a key element to this approach, and the city is already falling behind on implementing this key element.¹ The proposed elimination of funding for the Office in the 2021 budget, and the further delay of the City Manager's report on the establishment of the Office to the third quarter of 2021, will have the effect of delaying the establishment of the Office until 2022. This delay will make it more difficult for the City to respond to housing-related issues made worse by the COVID-19

¹ The HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan Implementation Plan specifically called for Staff recommended options and framework to establish the Housing Commissioner role/ function, to be reviewed by Committee and Council by the end of 2020.

pandemic in a manner that upholds human rights, and will jeopardize the City's ability to meet the agreed upon targets, deadlines, and commitments in the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the impacts of housing insecurity and has demonstrated that the right to adequate housing is of critical importance to the lives and wellbeing of all citizens of Toronto. Emergency housing issues such as encampments, access to adequate housing, evictions into homelessness, and access to shelters have reached critical status during the pandemic. Immediate steps must be taken by the City to ensure a coordinated and sustained effort, across City divisions and agencies, to address these issues for the duration of the pandemic and post-pandemic. An Office of the Housing Commissioner will be well positioned to provide critical oversight and guidance on this effort.

With regards to the City's long-term housing-related priorities, the HousingTO 2020-2030 Implementation Plan identifies a coordinated approach, a robust financial plan, strong collaboration, and accountability/transparency as the critical tools to meeting these priorities. The HousingTO 2020-2030 Implementation Plan recognizes the Office of the Housing Commissioner as a critical piece to ensuring the aligning of the above tools towards implementation of these priorities and the Toronto Housing Charter. The Office can act as a key accountability mechanism of the City's rights-based approach to housing policy while ensuring that correct measures are in place, targets are met, and proactive recommendations to guide sustainable, effective, rights-based housing policy are identified. Creating and adequately resourcing the Office of the Housing Commissioner will also allow the city to approach systemic and ongoing housing problems from a proactive position and with a focus on addressing housing inequity and inadequacy among the most vulnerable residents and communities.

We are calling on the Executive Committee to recommend City Council commit to establishing and fully resourcing an Office of the Housing Commissioner during the 2021 budget cycle. We are also urging members of this Committee to amend the Budget Committee's recommendation #15 and direct the City Manager to report back to City Council on the establishment and implementation of an Office of the Housing Commissioner by the second quarter of 2021.

We understand the City is facing unique and unprecedented challenges relating to their budget and, because of this, we echo the City's continued calls for increased support from the provincial and federal governments to assist with the housing challenges facing the City. Establishing a fully resourced Office of the Housing Commissioner is critical to helping navigate through these challenges. The Office is not a substitute for actual policies and programs to increase access to adequate housing. But without the

oversight, direction, guidance, and monitoring that the Office would provide, the progress generated by individual policies, however good, will be lost. We urge this Committee and members of City Council to establish and adequately resource the Office without further delay.

Thank you,

On behalf of the Right to Housing in Toronto