

Clause embodied in Report No. 2 of the Community Services Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on March 6, 7 and 8, 2001.

10

Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001

(City Council at its meeting held on March 6, 7 and 8, 2001, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Community Services Committee recommends:

- (i) the adoption of the report dated January 25, 2001, from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services;**
- (ii) that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be requested to continue to liaise with Federal officials regarding the assistance required in addressing challenges created by fluctuations in refugee claimants seeking shelter; and further that consideration be given to working with the Federal Government to create a facility that specializes as a holding centre for refugee claimants; and**
- (iii) that the Chair of the Community Services Committee be requested to meet with the Minister of Community and Social Services to request the Province of Ontario to increase efforts to expand the provincial shelter system for abused women.**

The Community Services Committee reports, for the information of Council, having directed that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be requested to report to the Community Services Committee on the status of efforts to establish a homeless infirmary to give shelter to homeless people while they recover from surgical procedures or non-infectious diseases.

The Community Services Committee submits the following report (January 25, 2001) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

To report on the findings and recommendations of the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) Council adopt the recommendations of the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001, specifically that the City of Toronto:
 - (a) forward this Report Card to the federal and provincial governments, municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area and community stakeholders including funders and service providers;
 - (b) forward this Report Card to all of the federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers with a request to join the City of Toronto in pressing for a National Housing Strategy;
 - (c) request that the Mayor present this Report Card to the Big City Mayors' Caucus and the Prime Minister at their meeting scheduled for February 25, 2001;
 - (d) continue to participate in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities National Policy Options Team and provide the necessary support for the Big City Mayors' efforts;
 - (e) urge all Toronto City Councillors to bring together groups in their communities to explore ways in which to provide further assistance in the City's efforts to help people who are homeless;
 - (f) reaffirm its commitment to maintaining a maximum 90 percent occupancy rate in the emergency shelter system as established by City Council in June 1999;
 - (g) continue to develop emergency shelter services for high risk and under-served groups including couples, gay and transgendered people, people with pets and people requiring harm reduction facilities;
 - (h) continue to support community participation and active involvement of homeless and socially isolated people in City committees;
 - (i) urge the federal government to:
 - (i) fund the proposed Assisted Rental Program at the level suggested in the FCM National Affordable Housing Strategy (October 2000), while maintaining the production volumes suggested in the election platform; and
 - (ii) recognize all non-federal sources as matching contributions in the proposed Assisted Rental Program, including provincial and municipal tax reductions targeted to affordable housing, provincial funding of supportive housing and private contributions;

- (j) urge the provincial government to:
 - (i) collaborate with the federal government, the municipal sector, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, to ensure delivery of the Assisted Rental Program as soon as possible;
 - (ii) provide funding for more hospital and community-based mental health supports and addictions services;
 - (iii) provide additional funding for supportive and transitional housing for people with mental health and addictions issues; and
 - (iv) restore rent control legislation to help protect affordable rental housing stock in Toronto;
- (2) Toronto Council approve production of the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness on a biennial basis with brief update reports in the intervening years; and
- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

In February 2000, the City of Toronto released the first Toronto Report Card on Homelessness. The purpose of the report card is to document the state of homelessness in Toronto and to outline action taken by each level of government to alleviate the problem.

An interdepartmental staff group produces the report card in consultation with a reference group from the City's Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons.

The report card contains a range of indicators that together describe changes in the profile of homelessness and the factors contributing to homelessness. They include data on the use of emergency shelters, Out of the Cold programs, calls to the Street Helpline, people living on the street and use of food banks. Indicators on factors contributing to homelessness focus on economic security and affordable and supportive housing.

The indicators are drawn from a variety of public, institutional and community sources and, as much as possible, reflect the most current data available. To ensure consistent monitoring over time, the indicators are generally the same as those used in the 2000 Report Card. Some have been improved, and a few new indicators have been added to increase our understanding.

This committee report provides an overview of the key findings of the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001 and makes recommendations for future action.

Comments:

The State of Homelessness in Toronto:

Homelessness in Toronto continues to rise – especially among families. Over the past few years, Toronto’s economy has been growing strongly and unemployment rates have been dropping. But, the number of homeless and low-income people in our City continues to grow.

The fastest growing groups of emergency shelter users are now two-parent families and couples. People are staying in emergency shelters for longer periods of time. This, combined with the critical shortage of affordable housing, is creating a “bottleneck” in the shelter system because people simply have nowhere to go. In effect, more people are being forced to use shelters as housing.

Tenants in Toronto still face a very tight rental market. Rent increases are severely outpacing tenant incomes. This places many people at risk of rent arrears and eviction. It means that people, especially families, who land in the emergency shelter system, have a harder time finding affordable housing and moving on. The housing shortage is worsened by the fact that almost no new rental housing is being built, and previously affordable units are being lost to rising rents.

Toronto’s Homelessness Action Plan:

Toronto’s Homelessness Action Plan is based on the work of the Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force. The plan consists of the following six strategies that, taken together, address the main barriers to solving the problem:

- (1) reduce poverty;
- (2) preserve existing and create new affordable and supportive housing;
- (3) adopt a comprehensive service planning approach and develop specific strategies for high risk groups;
- (4) shift from an emergency focus to prevention;
- (5) implement a comprehensive health strategy; and
- (6) commitment by all levels of government to work together to develop solutions.

Reducing Homelessness, Current Initiatives:

The Report Card describes recent initiatives by each level of government under each of the six strategies. The main focus is on action taken in 2000. Full details on these responses are discussed in the Report Card.

There has been more collaboration among all three levels of government on the issue of homelessness. There appears to be some renewed government interest in the area of affordable housing. The City's "Let's Build" program is up and running, and Council has set housing targets for the next few years. In the last five years, the federal and provincial governments have withdrawn from funding new social housing. The recent federal election brought promises from the Liberal Party for an assisted rental housing program. It is hoped that concrete commitments will soon be announced.

The federal government's Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative is underway. The City will administer \$53 million under this fund over the next three years. In consultation with the community, the City developed the Community Plan for Homelessness in Toronto. This plan outlines how the federal money will be spent. Priority has been given to capital funding. For example, 40 percent is earmarked to build transitional housing. Capital funds are also available for new emergency shelters and for physical upgrades to drop-in centres, shelters and other homeless services. Some funds will go to homeless programs and services, and community planning and research. This will increase the capacity of vulnerable and under-served communities across the City to provide homeless services and develop viable affordable housing proposals.

The Report Card describes a number of successful initiatives involving partnerships among all levels of government. The City will continue to pursue this collaborative governmental approach. At the same time, the City and its community partners will keep advocating for more aggressive federal and provincial action to address the fundamental problems: poverty and the need for more affordable and supportive housing.

Determining the Impact of Homeless Initiatives:

The 2001 Report Card concludes that homelessness continues to grow in Toronto despite the addition of new government and community initiatives. Are these initiatives making a difference?

Many of the homeless initiatives announced in the last couple of years are only now underway. They are in various stages of implementation and it will take time to measure their progress and impact. A number of initiatives, such as the new federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, have built in evaluation components. Many City initiatives also incorporate evaluation as a key element. Feedback from these evaluations in the next couple of years will be valuable in helping us to assess the impacts of these initiatives as well as to inform the development of new strategies. The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness is one of the mechanisms the City will use to report out on the progress and impact of these initiatives.

Much of the government funding in recent years is targeted to homeless services. While this is an important part of an effective homeless strategy, dramatic changes will not come solely from a service response. In order to effect any significant change in the number of people who are homeless, action must be taken to address the systemic causes of homelessness – poverty and the lack of affordable housing.

Addressing poverty requires targeted interventions by senior levels of government. Building housing on the scale that is needed also requires significant investments from the provincial and federal governments. It will also take time to feel the impacts. Even if a national housing program began tomorrow on the scale that is needed, it would take some years for the housing to be built.

Solving the homeless crisis requires long-term commitments by all three levels of government with strategies targeted at the causes, not the symptoms, of homelessness.

Timing of Future Report Cards:

A key component of the Report Card is the “indicators” section. The data for the indicators are drawn from public, institutional and community sources. As much as possible they reflect the most current information. However, many data sources are not reproduced on an annual basis (Census data for example). This greatly limits the amount of new data we can report on an annual basis.

It is therefore recommended that the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness be produced every two years rather than annually. In the intervening years, a shorter update report will be produced to ensure a continued focus on the issue of homelessness.

Evaluation of the 2000 Report Card:

Evaluation surveys were sent to about 300 individuals and agencies that had received the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2000. A total of 24 people responded, the majority of which were from community groups and organizations.

Most of the people who responded rated the 2000 Report Card as “excellent” or “good” in both documenting the state of homelessness in Toronto and reporting on the progress of governments in addressing homelessness.

Respondents found the information current and extensive and the format easy to follow. A key strength of the report card was its use as an advocacy tool by community groups. A key criticism, however, was that the report was not critical enough of the City’s actions.

There will continue to be an evaluation component to the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness in order to gather feedback to help inform the development of future report cards.

Conclusions:

The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001 clearly shows that despite improvements in the economy, homelessness continues to rise in Toronto.

All levels of government have contributed more resources to homeless initiatives in recent years. There appears to be some renewed interest by the provincial and federal governments in the area of affordable housing. But more aggressive action is needed if we are to meet the current or future demand.

The recommendations of the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001 highlight the urgent action needed by each level of government to reduce and prevent homelessness. It is, therefore, recommended that Toronto Council adopt these recommendations as part of its ongoing commitment to addressing homelessness.

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(A copy of the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001 was forwarded to all Members of Council with the agenda of the Community Services Committee for its meeting on February 12, 2001, and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk.)