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CC: <cdrc@toronto.ca>, <mvarey@toronto.ca>, <randrea2@toronto.ca>, <brootmc@...
Date: 3/13/2013 5:30 pm
Subject: To CDRC re: March 18th Meeting Agenda Item on Shelters

Dear Community Development and Recreation Committee Members:

For your upcoming meeting on March 18th and the agenda item 'Update on Emergency Shelter Services' we are calling for three specific measures to be dealt with by your Committee to address the shelter crisis and deaths of homeless people in this City.

Despite the conclusions by the Mayor's office and management of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration that everything is under control, the facts and figures within SSHA's own report, and the daily experiences of those on the streets and in the shelters tells us otherwise. People who are homeless, respected advocates, and front-line workers have all spoken out on this issue and will surely do so again at Monday's meeting as deputants. The inescapable truth is that this City's shelter system is overloaded and in crisis.

We are calling on the Committee to take these immediate measures to respond to the crisis:

1. A hostel system operating at an acknowledged occupancy rate of 96% is one that can't provide shelter, safety and dignity. People are being turned away and others are sleeping on the floor in the Referral Centre. Unhealthy conditions of overcrowding are creating tensions that cause conflicts that force people onto the streets from fear or because they have been subjected to disciplinary barrings. In 1999, City Council adopted a position that staff could open additional space if the system reached 90% capacity. This policy has never been revoked but it is not being implemented. We call on your Committee to recommend that Council instruct staff that they must ensure capacity levels do not exceed 90% for all shelters and act as necessary to achieve this goal.
2. In the summer of 1999, Metro Hall was opened to provide emergency space for homeless people when shelter occupancy reached 90%. Your Committee must call upon Council to instruct that this building or an equivalent facility be opened immediately.
3. The economic situation and the general climate of social cutbacks we live in make it almost certain that pressure on the shelter system will increase in the period ahead. Your Committee must call for the restoration of all beds that have been lost in the system and, specifically, the return of the 41,172 bed nights eliminated in the last City Budget— a decrease of 2.9% compared to 2012 (Despite what has been said publicly, here are the City's own numbers: http://www.toronto.ca/budget2013/pdf/op13_an_ssha.pdf). Since 2006, we have seen a loss of approximately 400 shelter beds (146 000 bed nights) in the system with the closing of shelters such as Council Fire, 60 Richmond, 110 Edward, Riverdale Salvation Army, CNH Metropolitan Shelter. We call for the restoration of those shelter beds.

It must be said that the course that the City has charted in the recent

period and its acceptance of such deplorable conditions for the homeless in this City is not something that decent minded people in the community can accept. We are not prepared to sit by while social abandonment becomes the de-facto policy of the City of Toronto. Your Committee must act to-day and Council must take the measures necessary to ensure the basic human right to shelter is there for all who need it.

If Committee members wish to speak to us before Monday's meeting, we can be reached by email at this address or by phone at: 416-925-6939.

Sincerely,

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty