

James Pasternak, Chair
Members Community Development and
Recreation Committee

June 6, 2017

Re: CD21.16 Review of Current Winter Respite Services and Planning for the
2017/18 Winter Season

I want to begin by referring you to this document ['State of Emergency Declaration. An Urgent Call for Emergency Humanitarian Relief and Prevention Measures'](#) that was presented to committee and City Council in 1998. Nineteen years ago.

Here we are today.

Sadly, there is no vision in this report, which begins with a recommendation based on creating a winter response that focuses on “people experiencing homelessness who do not traditionally access shelter beds.” That staff can suggest this in the context of years of shelters being full and crowded where people cannot access shelter is a willfully negligent suggestion.

Others and myself have told the Mayor, the City Manager's office, SSH staff and yourself, that the situation is an emergency. **The shelter crisis is not now nor has it ever been just about the winter.** These are my concerns with the staff report.

1) A pilot expansion of warming centres will expand a model in which standards for basic human rights, including the City of Toronto Shelter Standards, are not necessarily upheld. This is problematic for obvious reasons including: inadequate washrooms/showers, more transmission of infectious disease/illness, lack of beds/cots, re-traumatization of people.

2) The addition of 'surge capacity' or flex beds (which are mostly mats on the floor) to existing shelters adds crowding to crowding. You've been doing this for years and it is a lousy solution for all the above reasons. **Seasonal surge capacity denies the problem is not just about the winter.**

3) To suggest that the 30-year-old OOTC program, run by volunteers, should be expanded is ludicrous. Again, these sites do not meet the City's Shelter Standards. **The crisis is not just about the winter.** Why do you think the city's streets, parks, ravines are sites of human suffering and death?

4) Nurses, social workers, faith leaders, family members and concerned community members have been attending funerals and memorial services of homeless people for over 20 years. **We have experienced dread, apprehension and suspicion over the links between homelessness and death – deaths that occur all year long.**

Suddenly we learn that the number of deaths is three, maybe four times then previously thought. We know that the three months of TPH data is solid because we helped you collect it. Even in rigorous scientific studies that are medication or treatment trials when the researchers see a red flag like this – there is a pause and an ethical examination of meaning. So, why wouldn't TPH staff create a brief report with the findings and make it public for discussion prior to 2018? Yes, and maybe do some healthy public policy work to convince Mayor Tory, the City Manager, SSH staff to maybe, just maybe, institute some prevention measures. **Now, not in 2018.**

Why wouldn't you?

Real research is meant to serve the community.

In closing, I fully support the recommendations presented by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty today.

Sincerely,

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Toronto Star – 27 homeless deaths

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/05/25/27-homeless-deaths-in-toronto-in-just-three-months.html>

Toronto Star – editorial

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2017/05/28/now-get-to-work-on-homeless-deaths-editorial.html>

Toronto Star – editorial

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2017/01/02/tracking-all-homeless-deaths-is-long-overdue-editorial.html>

Global News

<http://globalnews.ca/news/3479348/new-data-reports-27-homeless-deaths-in-toronto-so-far-in-2017/>