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To: **Community Development and Recreation Committee, Toronto City Council**

DATE: **Monday, November 20, 2017**

RE: **2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report – CD24.7**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Kira Heineck and I am the Executive Lead of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). Our alliance represents a broad and diverse network including people with lived experience of homelessness, service delivery agencies, research and policy organizations, businesses and community organizations. I am here today to speak in favour of the update and recommendations in the 2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report.

Overall the Plan provides long needed changes and new resources that will allow all of us - City Council as a whole; each Councillor individually in serving local constituents; service providers; and communities – to work together to address homelessness by helping house more people faster and more sustainably.

It is critical that we have new tools to respond to the entrenched and serious state of homeless in Toronto. This is why the TAEH supports the changes and improvements in the Infrastructure Plan before you today, and why we urge you to support its recommendations.

Key improvements to highlight include:

- 1 – The move to **an annual city-wide Shelter Infrastructure Plan** approved by Council with financial impacts approved through the budget process.
- 2 – The **early and continuous engagement with Councillors** and **Community Engagement on Shelter Development**. These are excellent step towards a more collective approach to understanding and serving the needs of everyone in our community. The latter also supports the good Council decision to adopt an enhanced Community Engagement Process in April of 2017.

We at the Alliance want to be a part of this too and understand that when Councillors, their constituents, and those serving and representing people experiencing homelessness work together the most positive and constructive results can occur. It will also allow the City and each Councillor to continue to support access to services and supports for all Torontonians, no matter where they live.

- 3 – Creating an administrative role to **approve shelter sites as per annual Shelter Infrastructure Plans** that meet the requirements of municipal by-laws and are supported with the commensurate funding approved in budget processes.

The TAEH was part of the consultations undertaken by the Facilitator noted in this report earlier this year. I can tell you from first-hand experience therefore that everyone agreed that embedding administrative authority within a framework that respects and upholds the accountability and authority of City Council is the single most important thing needed to increase the City's ability to respond constructively and nimbly to shelter needs in Toronto. This is a mature approach that best reflects the City's responsibilities as the Service System Manager for Housing and Homelessness as well.

4 – The **New Shelter Service Model**. The model being piloted in 2018 is focused on housing. In other words, every person walking through the door of these smaller shelters across the city will find more individualized help – and time spent with them – to find the permanent housing with the supports that they need. This new model employs proven strategies of enhanced case management and the provision of integrated health services.

We agree that the changes noted above will allow the City to respond faster and more successfully in securing appropriate sites for needed new shelters. The increase in speed is critical and we believe can also help address – finally – the capacity issues in the existing shelter system.

Working towards ending homelessness

There are other important ways that the recommendations and information in this report can help us deal with the current state of our shelters, including the update that new shelters and beds will be coming on line in 2018. These include beds needed to support the George Street Transition, and are in addition to the much needed increase in Winter Readiness responses that the City has already begun implementing.

This year sees a significant increase in the City's ability to serve unsheltered people over the winter. The Councillors and city departments, as well as the community voices calling for an increased winter response, deserve credit for it. This is an example of the community working well and in partnership with the City and wouldn't be possible without the hard work and commitment of those operating the services – Margaret's Housing and Community Support Services, St. Felix's Centre, Warden Woods, Fred Victor, Homes First and the Salvation Army and the City Councillors who have championed them: Krystin Wong Tam, Joe Cressy, Glenn DeBaeremaeker, Gord Perks and Lucy Troisi.

Of course, while winter readiness is welcomed by many, including the TAEH, it is still a response that manages homelessness instead of ending it. We believe that we must stay focused on ending homelessness, even when striving to do a better job of supporting people experiencing homelessness right now. We also believe that the new elements of the Emergency Shelter Development Process and the New Service Model can help us do both at the same time.

We have been talking for decades about the crisis of homelessness in Toronto – and it is still a crisis and a disaster. The only thing we have learned during this time is that focusing on the shelter system – and calling for its continual expansion – does not end homelessness.

Yes, our current system is full beyond what experts consider safe and what City Council itself set as a baseline for acceptable capacity levels. But we won't fix it by diverting more and more resources – this

winter or next – into it. We need to dramatically decrease demand for emergency shelters by putting those resources to work on actually ending homelessness instead. We all know that this is a much more effective use of tax-payer dollars as well, creating significantly higher return on investments that creating more permanent shelter beds.

What will end homelessness in Toronto? We don't have all the answers yet, but we do know that increasing the amount of deeply affordable housing is part of the solution. So is adding needed supports to allow people to move from homelessness into housing. SSHA and the City are doing these things right now, and can do more if the plan before you is approved, including using the 10-year capital plan within it.

Taking these steps will get us closer to ending homelessness. Building more units through the upcoming Homes For Good program and through the initiatives of the City's Affordable Housing Office such as Open Door is another. One more is having better data on who is homeless and more information on what different needs are. The TAEH is working with SSHA to improve our access to real-time data and how to, in turn, apply this to improving coordinated access to speed up how quickly people can get the right housing and supports for their needs.

Another solution is recognizing that not every person experiencing homelessness will use a shelter – even in the harshest conditions – and that other responses are sometimes needed. This is why the flexibility of the range of additional supports provided by the City in this year's winter readiness plan is encouraging. It puts a variety of additional responses in place that agencies serving people who are homeless can use to support them over the winter.

Conclusion

The vision, goals and strategies recommended in the 2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan fortify the groundwork for the longer-term approach we need to make real gains in reducing and ending homelessness – so that less people need emergency assistance every year going forward.

The TAEH asks Committee members to approve it. We are willing to assist you, your colleagues and city staff in any way we can to ensure its successful implementation.

As noted in earlier communications with the City, the TAEH is also happy to partner with you in our efforts to secure more resources and action from the provincial and federal governments to end homelessness. I am sure that we are all looking to National Housing Day later this week and announcements it may bring to learn more about the opportunities for Toronto in the National Housing Strategy.

Thank you.

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