

DEPUTATION

To: Executive Committee, Toronto City Council

DATE: Monday, June 19, 2017

RE: Tenants First – Phase 1 Implementation Plan

EX26.2.19

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 includes over one hundred members working to end chronic and episodic homelessness in our city. We are also the City's Community Advisory Board on housing and homelessness issues.

Our members represent a broad and diverse network including people with lived experience of homelessness, service delivery agencies, research and policy organizations, consumer driven organizations, businesses, associations, advocacy groups and community organizations. We have worked productively and effectively with members of Council and city staff, developing over the last two years, an increasingly respectful and trusted relationship.

We know that Council wants to continue to make progress towards ending homelessness. We also know that you know that homelessness in Toronto remains a critical problem. By way of example, on June 15 2017 the occupancy rate for the whole shelter system was at 95% with most sub-sectors such as women, men, youth and families ranging between 96 and 100%. The demand for mental health and addiction supportive housing in Toronto is equally acute. Over 12,000 people had been deemed eligible for the service and placed on a waiting list. The waiting list for affordable housing in Toronto is in a worse state. In 2017 over 97,000 households, or 177,000 people, were on the waiting list.

In this trying context, we recognize the important role that Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) plays. TCHC houses many of the city's most vulnerable and marginalized people, including those that would otherwise be homeless. Therefore we were pleased to see in the report before you today, which we urge you to support, that the emphasis is on a systems wide approach to social housing in Toronto.

As you know, our municipality is the service system manager for housing. This means that the City plan for meeting the diverse housing needs of its residents, including for those that face homelessness, must include not only the TCHC but also the roughly other 30,000 units in the non-profit and co-op sectors. The TAEH strongly supports the vision in both today's report and the 2016 Eggleton task force report, that the City take full advantage of its full power as service system manager and set strategic directions and secure enough sustainable resources to fund its entire local system.

Regarding funding, therefore, we also agree with the advocacy strategies for the federal and provincial governments to “confirm shared funding commitments” and will continue to work with the City to do our part to keep this a priority with other orders of government. We will also harness our large and city-wide network to support City action, as the front-line funder, to invest more significantly itself.

The TAEH also supports of key points in recommendations #5 and #6. Recommendation #5 speaks to the TCHC scattered housing portfolio. The Alliance and its many diverse partners applaud the report’s acknowledgement that these houses are and must continue to be a vital component of an affordable housing stock in the public realm. We strongly support staff’s recommendations to transfer operations of this stock to the non-profit, co-op and land trust sectors.

Almost 700 public properties with over 1000 units in them are at stake. Thank goodness this phase of the Tenants First implementation plan recognizes, despite the significant financial pressure the TCHC continues to grapple with, that we can’t lose any more of them.

This stock supports Toronto’s commitment to inclusive communities as the houses are spread across Toronto and are in neighbourhoods that are rapidly gentrifying. They are also, no doubt, part of the strategies to fight poverty and exclusion in this city.

These houses are also ideal for families, for whom we simply do not have enough affordable and/or supportive options for right now in Toronto. It is no coincidence that Toronto’s family shelters have been at 100% capacity for months now, if not longer.

The TAEH is deeply rooted in the non-profit housing sector in Toronto – a diverse sector including supportive housing, transitional and alternative housing programs and shelter agencies working actively to house vulnerable people across many different communities. If operations are transferred, this sector will not only ensure that the TCHC housing stock is effectively sustained, repaired where needed, and integrated in the communities the homes are situated within, but that they will be thriving assets creating and returning value to our communities for decades to come.

In addition, TAEH members have already come forward with proposals to work with TCHC to repair vacant units with their available capital reserves in order to create more access to people experiencing homelessness served by their agencies. The implementation of Phase 1 of Tenants First is a great opportunity to make this happen in a strategic and systematic way.

Regarding recommendation #6, we believe that a decentralized approach to community development and local action plans is part of a strategic, system-focused approach and speaks to the importance of continuing to create strong local partnerships with your community resources, both those that the City funds directly and with provincially funded organizations.

For example, the report identifies that 30% of the stock are bachelor units that are hard to rent resulting in higher vacancy rates and lost revenue. We believe there are individuals who are

experiencing homelessness who would be thrilled with an RGI bachelor unit, and would be quite successful if provided with local individual and community supports. Most of these buildings have community spaces that are ideal for fostering a supportive community.

One of TAEH's partners is Covenant House. They are currently in an agreement with TCHC to access bachelor units for youth and they then wrap services around these kids to support their transition. Currently 10 people are supported in this way at Gordon Ridge and it is working very well. Scaling up partnerships like this must be part of this phase of implementation.

Many other examples of strong and successful partnerships are found in the supportive housing sector. It will be important to recognize these and to work with the sector as welcoming and innovative landlords to leverage available supports through their largely Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) funded services to ensure successful tenancies.

In addition, by working together, we can use the opportunity this implementation phase offers to finally coordinate Housing Connections and other access systems that try to match people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing. A priority for the city's access protocols is addressing homelessness and a strong partnership with the TAEH and our partners can ensure that more TCHC units with appropriate supports are available to house people directly from shelters or the street.

Finally, the TAEH is also in support of rooming house revitalization as suggested in recommendation #6. You are all probably aware of the current example where Margaret's Community Services is involved in the transition of a rooming house in the Winchester (Parliament & Wellesley) area. A TAEH Coordinating Committee member recently spoke with the Winchester Residents Association, which is working with the local Councilor to find better options for the people who live in these rooming houses and identified a good model to replicate. This model includes a strong partnership between a local non-profit agency, the TCHC and the City, the neighbourhood association and the police.

Conclusion

As an important next step, or tool, in our shared goal of ending homelessness in this city, we urge you to support the Tenants First Phase 1 Implementation Plan tabled today, with an emphasis on a systems-wide approach.

TCHC assets must remain long term community assets. Transferring the scattered site portfolio in particular to the non-profit, co-op and land trust sectors and creating ever-stronger partnerships to create coordinated, tenant-focused solutions for those currently homeless are key strategies in reaching this goal.

Thank you.

Kira Heineck, Executive Lead, TAEH