



My name is Leslie McDonald, Executive Director of Habitat Services. The Habitat program was created in 1987 to address concerns about the living conditions in boarding homes in Toronto. There are currently 40 properties in our portfolio, housing almost 900 low income tenants with mental health issues. Habitat has recently been asked to assist with the relocation of Seaton House residents, prior to its closure.

I agree absolutely that Council needs to adequately fund shelters for those who are homeless. Reliance on stop gap measures that have become permanent winter fixtures such as the Out of the Cold programs, is not a solution. Winter respite sites are needed and called for every year...why? A primary reason is because people who are poor and disadvantaged in Toronto cannot afford rental housing in this market.

City staff have been making extraordinary efforts to find locations for new shelters. But what happens when a site is suggested? In most instances there is a neighbourhood hue and cry that demonizes those who need those services. Reasons are found as to why the location is not suitable and appalling public meetings are held, at which vulnerable people are labelled as every kind of threat to the community.

Efforts to close Seaton House rely on the opening of 4 shelters to relocate 400 residents. So far, only one site has been secured, after much delay, which will initially house only 50 men. There is also hope that we at Habitat can find up to 150 units of supportive housing in the community, so that some residents will have access to housing rather than continued shelter living. Our search has begun; but we are limited to the "old city" downtown if we look for rooming or boarding home accommodation. Why?

Rooming house licensing has not yet been expanded from its pre-City amalgamation areas. I have made several deputations to committees of council in the past 10 years recommending that licensing be expanded, most recently in 2016. In 2018 we are no closer to a broad system of licensing across the entire City that would preserve affordable housing stock, and improve housing conditions.

Homeless citizens need emergency services and supports first, but ultimately they need housing. All relevant city departments should be aligned with a goal of increasing affordable housing. This means Planning, Zoning, Licensing, and the Affordable Housing Office, should be working with SSHA in efforts to facilitate the development of housing for those who cannot compete in the rental market. Available funding from the provincial and federal governments should be focused on this goal.

I hope that the genuine concern we have recently heard expressed by the general public about the need for winter respite sites will translate into public support for shelters, and for other types of affordable and supportive housing “In Their Back Yards”. I hope your constituents will convey to you their willingness to help, by supporting new shelter sites and housing developments for people who need affordable and supportive housing.

I urge members of this committee and of Council to be fearless in supporting both initiatives that make it easier to locate emergency shelters across the City, and permanent affordable housing options that can be developed with City support.

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