

1499 Queen Street West,
Toronto, Ontario M6R 1A3

February 20, 2019

RE: Item GV.1.2 - Public Input on City Council's Governance System for 26 Members

Dear Chair and members of the Special Committee on Governance,

At the same time as Council grapples with how to govern with significantly fewer Councillors, it is working to address issues that are getting even bigger and more challenging. The solutions the Special Committee on Governance proposes will set the governance architecture for how issues are framed, understood, and dealt with for years to come. This is why we are speaking up.

Council has been clear that it considers housing a critical issue in Toronto. People who have worked in housing and homelessness, both on the front lines and in policy, will agree that it is also a complex issue that needs to be dealt with in a comprehensive and coherent way.

No serious effort to address housing and homelessness issues can be undertaken without recognizing that housing, homelessness, and affordability are inextricably linked, and no Council decision-making process that makes housing a priority should separate them.

The housing system, which is a continuum that includes homelessness, shelters, supportive housing, transitional housing, social housing, market rental, homeownership, market and non-market housing must be dealt with in a single committee that focuses on a single plan, with a cross-divisional lens, and reintegrates housing and social development so that we never consider housing development independently of its critical social function of providing homes for people in the city, so that tenant issues are dealt with in the same place as landlord issues and new development proposals, and so that homelessness is addressed by a Committee that has the capacity to simultaneously respond to immediate crises and move longer-term solutions forward.

The current temporary committee structure will not produce a positive solution to these problems, as it splits these tightly intertwined aspects of the housing continuum between several committees. Homelessness supports (operation of shelters, drop-ins, warming/cooling centres, etc.), eviction prevention, and rent subsidies (for example) are dealt with by the Social and Economic Development Committee, while housing policies related to new housing development (including Housing Now), TCHC, rooming house preservation, short-term rentals, building new shelters and inclusionary zoning are dealt with by the Planning & Housing Committee, and issues related to rooming house licensing and the enforcement of rental apartment building standards are dealt with by the General Government and Licensing Committee.

Past Councils of 44 Councillors have only gotten us to the point where housing issues have significantly worsened: the affordable housing wait list has grown, rental rates have skyrocketed, the rental vacancy rate has dropped, homelessness has ballooned, and land values have continued steadily upward.

In 2018, John Tory advocated for a standing committee on Housing, saying to his Executive Committee, "Housing is a priority for the City of Toronto. The importance of this issue cannot be understated as affordability is threatened for residents of Toronto. Therefore a standing Housing committee will give this issue the attention and cross-divisional planning it requires."

If it was required then, how could it be anything but even more necessary now?

Sincerely,

Joshua Barndt, Executive Director
Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust