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February 2019

Deputation to the Special Governance Committee meeting of City Council:

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to provide my suggestions on the new council's role and how you can organize to achieve the kind of outcomes that Toronto residents expect.

My comments are specific to the need for a Standing Committee on Housing, acknowledging the historic change of council's size, I ask you to consider this as an opportunity of architecture so that the design achieves the outcomes we need.

My experience is one of contrasts and contradictions.

To begin, I am a Torontonian, born at the Wellesley Hospital. I have spent most of my adult life in this city. I have many perspectives on the housing needs of my fellow residents: I have worked in the community sector for over thirty years, I have helped to build and open supportive housing, I have witnessed hundreds of people die prematurely either living in precarious housing or on the street and I have a family member who is homeless.

Toronto is one of the greatest cities to live in if you have enough money or if you have been lucky enough to acquire a house or condominium. Toronto is also a city with an increasing divide between those that have and those that do not, whether it is a city report like "[The Unequal City 2015](#)", the United Way's [Getting Left Behind](#), U of T's "[The Gap is Growing](#)" or the Wellesley Institute's "[Thriving in the City: What does it Cost?](#)" among many others that point to an ever-increasing disparity.

And yet in the past 25 years the city has added over 250,000 condominium units...with more to come. As I move around the city, I see cranes everywhere!

These developments are not actually solving the housing shortage.

"[Better Dwellings](#)" has a map of unoccupied (but owned) dwellings in Toronto with Statistics Canada data from the 2016 Census: 99,236 homes are not **regularly occupied** (as defined by the owner of the home) compared to roughly 25,000 in Vancouver. This is 4.5% of all homes in the city, a 10.5% increase from 2011. While an earlier [Better Dwellings](#) identified that 1 in 3 listings being resold have never been occupied.

The most recent [Toronto Street Needs Assessment](#) shows the fairly staggering growth of homelessness from 2006 to last year when 8162 people stayed in a shelter (2618 of which were refugee claimants). While in 2013 it was 4,806 (342 of which claimed refugee status). This is roughly 30 people per 10,000 in Toronto (if you're wondering, just a little under Vancouver and Philadelphia). It should be noted that the population change from 2011 to 2016 was only 6.2%, far less than the increase in homelessness during this time.

So, Toronto's new City Council and Mayor have been explicit that housing and homelessness are priority issues. The recent release of City lands through the Housing Now initiative and the calls for increased action on supportive housing are two clear examples.

It is now well understood, including current Councilors and the Mayor who supported a new Standing Committee on Housing in June, that it is a continuum of services - from street outreach and shelter responses to affordable housing and planning for good quality of life in all our neighbourhoods needs to be addressed as a whole in order to better meet housing needs across this city.

City Council, therefore, must have an integrated approach to governing the necessary inter-sector and inter-divisional discussions, learning, evidence sharing, debate and decision-making that has to take place with an eye to both short- and long-term strategic action(s).

Ultimately, the success of Toronto City Council to effectively govern and address the complexity and continuum of issues, resources and interests that are part of a modern housing strategy will be measured by the outcomes of people experiencing homelessness in our city.

City Council has been reduced almost by half, making strategically designed governance decisions to ensure success in priority areas even more important...you have fewer decision makers and bigger problems.

Take a lead from Vancouver where council has made housing and homelessness a fundamental priority across all divisions that the issue touches.

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As you prepare to solve one of the biggest challenges facing Toronto please consider this as an opportunity of architecture; design our governance structure so that everyone is housed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'V. Willis', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Victor Willis  
Executive Director  
PARC (the Parkdale Activity – Recreation Centre)

<https://betterdwelling.com/city/toronto/toronto-has-over-99000-unoccupied-homes-heres-where-they-are-interactive/>

<https://betterdwelling.com/city/toronto/1-in-3-homes-listed-for-resale-in-toronto-havent-been-occupied/>

<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/99be-2018-SNA-Results-Report.pdf>

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