

## Submission to the Economic and Community Development Committee on EC18.6 - Central Intake Shelter Access Data Indicators and Trends - Update

By Melissa Goldstein  
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This SSHA report here at Committee today is a result of direction that Councillors gave SSHA staff at the October 28th Council meeting, following a discussion of the Winter Service Plan.

To understand the implications of this report, I think it's important to review how we got here.

In response to criticism that the Winter Service Plan was inadequate, Councillors asked SSHA a number of questions about the shelter system and their plan and their capacity to meet the needs of those in need of shelter this winter.<sup>1</sup>

At that meeting, Councillor Layton asked SSHA what indicators were used to measure what would be needed to scale up the shelter system this winter.

They responded by noting that they created an estimate of the spaces needed to accommodate people in encampments, and built a plan to add additional shelter spaces to address that figure. They did not provide an indicator that would indicate when scaling up would be needed or what scaling up would require, because as I have learned, they don't have one.

Councillor Layton then asked about what the surge in shelter demand has looked like in previous years. They responded with the number of beds that they opened in previous years. They did not provide data about shelter demand in previous years because they did not collect data about shelter demand in previous years.

Councillor Layton asked about the discrepancy between SSHA's claims that there was sufficient bed capacity and reports from the public that people looking for a shelter bed were being told there were none available. SSHA responded by saying that they do have space in the system every night, but people don't always accept what's on offer and often the beds that aren't available aren't suitable to meet the needs of the person seeking the bed. They did not provide data about the number of people able to access shelter or the number unable to access shelter because they don't have that data. Furthermore, none of that information about the suitability of the spaces available to meet demand is tracked or investigated, and it's not used to improve service delivery.

Councillor Bailao asked for details about the net new pressure on the shelter system each year. Again, SSHA responded by pointing to how they track capacity and occupancy, saying, "the difficult thing to do is predict demand" Yes, it is difficult. But it's impossible when you don't monitor demand at all.

Councillor Bailao asked for information and analysis about trends in demand, explicitly asking, "have we done that analysis?"

And instead of giving an honest answer and saying "no," SSHA responded again about the number of beds in the system.

Councillor Thompson also asked about demand and asked about SSHA's forecasting for the number of people who will need shelter as we head into winter.

They responded by saying (again) that predicting demand is one of the most challenging things for them to do because there are so many things that could impact that measure. They did not acknowledge that they don't track demand and that their forecasting consists of counting tents in parks.

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<sup>1</sup> These questions and answers can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/0vv-9gsETik?t=27252>

Councillors took this information from SSHA and then drew their own conclusions about what SSHA was doing and capable of. Some of those conclusions were incorrect, including Councillor Thompson's assertion that SSHA has been doing an amazing job of providing shelter and support for those in need, an assessment that there is no possible way of proving one way or the other if your only source of information is SSHA's data.

Let me be very clear:

- SSHA does not track demand.
- SSHA does not have the data needed to analyze past trends in demand or predict future demand.
- SSHA does not track the particular needs of people calling for a bed and they don't track the shelter system's success or failure in meeting those needs.
- SSHA does not track the number of people who successfully secure a shelter bed and they don't track the number of people who try to secure a shelter bed but fail to do so.
- Until last month, SSHA did not track people all. They tracked calls. And they tracked beds. But they do not track people.
- And while SSHA have finally started coding calls that come in, they still aren't tracking the number of people who do and do not actually secure a shelter bed and they still aren't tracking demand in such a way that it will provide insight into whose needs are being met by the shelter system, whose aren't and how the shelter system could be improved.

The reason we have this nightmare situation today—and the reason each and every year SSHA comes up with plans that don't adequately address the need—is because SSHA is myopically focused on shelter beds and ignores the **PEOPLE** who are in desperate need of one.

A Winter Service Plan that promises to scale up the Plan as needed is necessarily a bad plan when you aren't tracking need and you haven't determined how to identify at what point it will be necessary to scale up. The reality is, the Plan will only be scaled up when people like me start screaming that we need more beds. In the absence of data, public pressure is the indicator.

As many, many people have been saying, shelter beds are practically impossible to access right now, and the thing is, SSHA can't actually prove me wrong. The City can't prove me wrong. And you can't prove me wrong. And until you can, it's important to recognize that you have access to credible information right now to fill some of SSHA's data gaps. This Central Intake report proves that what people on the front lines have been saying about shelter system access for months is true. The way through this crisis situation is to recognize that these people have valuable data and insight to help fill this gap in data and they should be believed and listened to.

And what they are **ALL SAYING** is that we are in such a crisis situation now that encampments are a sad reality. The City's aggressive efforts to deny that fact are only making life harder for people who are literally struggling to survive. To effectively address this situation and prevent more people from dying:

1. **We need you to implement a moratorium on encampment evictions.**
2. **We need you to direct SSHA to scale up the Plan and open 2,000 shelter-hotel rooms over the next 4 months.**
3. **And we need you to reiterate that SSHA should provide supplies to people in encampments instead of working to destroy the supplies that people have managed to secure themselves.**

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*Melissa Goldstein is an affordable housing and homelessness advocate with more than a decade of professional affordable housing-related experience through roles with the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, Houselink Community Homes, Toronto Drop-In Network, Wellesley Institute, TCHC, as well as volunteer with various housing advocacy groups, including Housing Action Now. She lives in Ward 9.*