

## City Council

### Notice of Motion

MM22.17	ACTION			Ward: All
---------	--------	--	--	-----------

### **Ending Homelessness During a Pandemic: Calling for Immediate Action From the Provincial and Federal Governments - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton**

*\* Notice of this Motion has been given.*

*\* This Motion is subject to referral to the Executive Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

#### **Recommendations**

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton, recommends that:

1. City Council call upon the Provincial and Federal Governments to immediately establish an intergovernmental table to create emergency responses to the housing and homelessness crisis in Toronto exacerbated by the global health pandemic.
2. City Council call upon the Provincial and Federal Governments to immediately take action to provide the funding and policy/program tools required to augment services for homeless individuals and seek the support of community partners, including the Canadian Red Cross, in managing the harm inflicted by the housing and homelessness crisis, including supply of adequate water and sanitation supports at encampment sites until adequate new indoor accommodations are secured.

#### **Summary**

Homelessness remains a crisis in Toronto and a tent is not a safe and adequate form of housing.

Prior to the pandemic, there were more than 7,000 people staying in our shelter system (shelters, 24-hour respite sites, hotels/motels). When COVID-19 arrived in Toronto with the intensity that we had observed in other jurisdictions beforehand, many residents unable to maintain physical distance in the City's crowded shelter and respite system, took their few belongings and walked out of the buildings to avoid the transmission of the coronavirus. Others have no place to go due to Provincial services like crisis beds and detox facilities that are no longer available or were discharged from correctional facilities without an adequate housing plan. They were given tents by activists and faith organizations, then settled into parks and other public spaces.

At the start of the global pandemic, encampment clearing was paused due to the City's requirement to create physical distancing within the existing shelter and respite system.

During these past few months of the COVID-19 public health crisis, the number and size of encampments grew across the entire City. The crisis of people living in unsuitable conditions continues to grow as homelessness overwhelms the region and existing municipal resources.

When the crisis started in mid-March, City of Toronto staff worked non-stop to prioritize creating distance in the shelter system and managed to open and operationalize 33 temporary facilities in hotels, community centres, and other expanded facilities. This is on top of the 70 shelters and respite sites that the City and its partners operate. The result of their hard work has moved 3,000 people from existing crowded spaces into the new sites as well as permanent housing.

With proper physical distancing achieved in the shelter system, the City of Toronto was able to turn their attention more fully to finding accommodations so everyone sleeping outdoors is offered a safer place inside.

As of June 16, 2020, the City has moved an additional 265 individuals from encampments to indoor spaces, mostly hotel rooms and transitional housing. Subsequent to the individuals being moved, the encampments are cleared of waste and debris.

Moving someone from a shelter or respite into a new space requires time, client choice, resources and has to be done with dignity. This starts with an individual assessment of each person to determine who is able to move, what supports they need, and what the appropriate place is for them to move to.

Staff have described the complexity of securing space, outlining that for each new site activated, it requires:

- Fire life safety inspections and site modifications to ensure adequate laundry and washroom facilities;
- Contracts put in place for cleaning, catering, linens, laundry and security; and
- Coordination of transportation to move people and their belongings.

More than 300 additional City staff have been redeployed from other divisions and trained to work safely and effectively in shelters.

Despite this herculean effort, our shelter systems saw over 600 positive cases of COVID-19 and four deaths, and the number and size of encampments grew across the entire City. The crisis of people living in unsuitable conditions continues to grow as homelessness overwhelms the region and existing municipal resources.

While the exact number of people living in encampments in Toronto is unknown, some estimates have put the number at over 2,000. Even if the City of Toronto was able to re-house people in encampments at 100 people a week, it will still be months before people are moved into suitable living environments.

In the meantime, people are living in abhorrent conditions, without access to running water, sanitation facilities. They are experiencing a spike in overdose deaths, violence, and fires. The encampments continue to reflect an increase in concerns about the safety and well-being of both the people living outdoors and the local community. We should all share these concerns,

and urge the City, the Provincial and the Federal Governments to come together to take collective action to rapidly house the homeless.

Issues contributing to homelessness, mental health and addictions are all within the legislative jurisdiction of the Provincial and Federal Governments. Without the active participation from the other orders of government, Toronto will be unable to meet the demand for affordable and supportive housing, an overdose epidemic, mental health and public safety issues.

Without financial and other tangible support from the Provincial and Federal Governments, the crisis in Toronto is going to get much worse. The City of Toronto is heading into an even larger disaster with a multi-billion deficit looming overhead at the end of this year, of which \$200 million is for unexpected COVID-19 spending to address the homelessness crisis.

Further to this, the community centres and schools that were used for temporary space in our shelter system will be taken back for regular programming soon, the hotel rentals will expire shortly along with the contracts of interim housing - all without a substantive plan or funding to address the where people living in those sites will go afterwards.

In 2019, the Federal Government brought into law that Canada recognizes housing as a fundamental human right. In the midst of this global pandemic, it is time that they honour that declaration, and support the cities who are on the front line of this humanitarian crisis.

### **Background Information (City Council)**

Member Motion MM22.17