

December 07, 2020

Dear Nancy Martins

We would like to add the following item to the agenda for the December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Planning and Housing Committee Meeting.

## Emergency Housing Action

The City of Toronto has taken extraordinary actions to deal with the housing crisis during the pandemic, but hundreds of people are still living outdoors. As the cold weather approaches, we must do more. However we cannot do it without the assistance of other orders of government.

Since the start of the pandemic, the City of Toronto has created 2,300 spaces in new temporary shelter and hotel programs for physical distancing.

The City has also referred more than 2,500 people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through a combination of housing allowances and rent-geared-to-income units

There are more than 6,000 shelter spaces in the city today.

Through the City's Streets to Homes teams and partner agencies, the City has helped more than 1,100 people move inside from encampments since the pandemic began. In the past two weeks, alone, 110 people have accepted offers to move inside.

The City's winter services plan has also begun operations. Adding 620 additional spaces over the winter, this year's plan offers more space than any other previous year and includes shelter space, hotel space and permanent housing. For the first time, there are four warming centres, an increase from one, across the city when an extreme cold weather alert is called.

The City offers 24-hour respite sites and drop-ins for infection prevention and control (IPAC), personal protective equipment (PPE), and is distributing more than 100,000 pieces of PPE to the homelessness sector each week for use by staff. The City screens staff and clients in shelters daily and refers anyone with symptoms to provincial assessment centres. Clients awaiting test results and those who test positive are transferred to a recovery/isolation site with medical supports.

All of these housing, shelter and respite spaces include medical supports, like mental health and addiction counselling, meals, clean linen and access to showers, to ensure people don't return to living outside.

In April 2020, the City launched the Modular Housing Initiative that opens 100 new supportive homes by the end of the year. In 2021, an additional 150 modular supportive homes will also be created for people



experiencing homelessness. Through the federal Rapid Housing Initiative, the City will be able to add a minimum of 417 affordable and supportive homes ready for occupancy by end of 2021.

Despite all of this, hundreds of people are still living outdoors.

Living outside is not safe. As of December 2, the City has identified 395 tents in 66 sites in parks across Toronto. This number includes wooden structures, tents and green pods. Encampments in parks and other public spaces pose a significant risk of fire and other hazards to those living in an encampment, as well as to emergency responders when called to a site. Open flames, generators and unsafe wiring, combined with the storage of gasoline, propane and other highly flammable substances makes living outside extremely dangerous.

To date this year, Toronto Fire Services has responded to 216 fires in encampments. That is a 218% increase over the same period in 2019. Sadly, one person has died as a result of an encampment fire this year. Seven people have lost their lives as a result of encampments fires in Toronto since 2010.

The recent emergence of makeshift shelters and pods in encampments represent a significantly increased danger to those who use them and anyone in the vicinity if these structures were to be involved in a fire. These pods are highly combustible, particularly those constructed of polystyrene insulation. They do not meet the definition of a structure under the provisions of the Ontario Building Code or Ontario Fire Code, but regardless, the City is significantly concerned about the unsafe conditions living outside – be it a tent or other structure – presents.

The installation of smoke and/or CO alarms do not mitigate risks, and are insufficient in providing fire safety and, in fact, may provide a false sense of security for those in them. Any fire is a risk for those in these structures, as well as to the community. Early detection of smoke, fire and/or carbon monoxide in an outdoor environment is highly unreliable due to temperature and humidity fluctuations. Given the highly combustible nature of these pods, for example, escaping a fire without serious injury is highly unlikely.

Despite all this work and public investment, demand for housing and shelter remains higher than ever before, and the system is at or near capacity most nights. This is why the City continues to open new space and has renewed calls for government partners to continue the cooperative work to implement more housing solutions.

We therefore recommend that:

1. The Planning and Housing Committee direct staff report directly to the December 16 and 17, 2020 City Council meeting with a review of any programs, funding sources, and legislative tools available to the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto to provide housing in the next several weeks.

Sincerely,



Councillor Gord Perks  
Ward 4, Parkdale-High Park

Councillor Paula Fletcher  
Ward 30, Toronto-Danforth

Councillor Brad Bradford  
Ward 19, Beaches-East York

Councillor Jennifer Mckelvie  
Ward 25, Scarborough-Rouge Park

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam  
Ward 13, Toronto Centre

Councillor Ana Bailao  
Ward 9, Davenport