

PH13.5.3



DEPUTATION

To: **Planning and Housing Committee**
DATE: **Wednesday, February 12, 2020**
RE: **Plan to Create Supportive Housing Opportunities (PH13.5)**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). My name is Kira Heineck. As you are aware, the TAEH is a collective impact initiative made up of Community Partners focussed on systems changes and housing solutions to end homelessness in Toronto.

Many people experience chronic homelessness in our city, and the solution to end most of their homelessness is housing with supports – or supportive housing. It is with this in mind that we congratulate city staff on the progress evident in this report, and the Plan it lays out.

We are particularly encouraged by the following:

- **How the strategies in this Plan allow Toronto to “step up”** vis a vis the federal and provincial governments. Our city, the same as other municipal service system managers for housing and homelessness across Ontario, is not, nor should it be expected to be, the biggest player in funding the capital and operating needs of supportive housing. What we can do, and this Plan does, is make sure that Toronto leads by example, committing in new and focussed ways what it can do with it’s own resources. In so doing, this Plan bolsters Toronto’s call on the other two orders to do their part.
- The acknowledgment in this report that we still need **a further developed, joint multi-year supportive housing strategy and investment plan for Toronto**. A plan done in partnership with all orders of government and the community to reach our goals in both the immediate and longer term. We could not agree more, and will continue to support these efforts, including coordinating our own Supportive Housing Growth Plan, currently underway with our partners, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Toronto and the Wellesley Institute.
- The commitment to continuing to move towards **housing solutions to end homelessness**. This report demonstrates more clearly than any other report to date that SSHA and the Housing Secretariat understand how critical this shift is, and what they need to recommend is done to make it happen.

This includes the welcomed pilot initiative to convert an existing shelter to permanent supportive housing. It is hard not to underscore how important this commitment to try a conversion is. It truly takes us to the starting place of investing in housing to end people’s homelessness. This pilot is also conceived responsibly, seeking to create permanent homes with supports for people already “living” in shelters – some for 10 years or longer. It will not displace anyone, will create a more dignified and healthy environment for people, cost less money, and test out a new operating model to sustain permanent housing with supports for people experiencing long-term, chronic homelessness.

- How this report speaks to the central role of **Coordinated Access to Housing and Supports**, with its:
 - continuous streamlining of access and referral pathways for clients;

- ability to prioritize people experiencing chronic homelessness; and
 - collection and use of data to make responsive decisions in real-time about how to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness so that they get the right housing and supports at the right time.
- Its articulation of how **increasing access to permanent homes for people will increase the flow** that we need in our emergency shelter and respite systems. Flow allows us to move closer to our collective goal of homelessness, overall, becoming brief, rare and non-recurring in Toronto – this is what “functional 0” homelessness looks like and this Plan gets us closer to it.
 - The recommendation that the City Manager identify opportunities to **“improve coordination and expedite approvals for supportive housing developments on a priority basis across City Divisions.”** The TAEH strongly supports the urgency for more inter-departmental prioritization. It will not only speed up new development, it will also create more access to units right away.
 - Movement on a few of the recommendations from TAEH’s Housing Development Working Group. My colleague Brian Davis, Chair of this group, reviews these in detail in his deputation today, but I will underscore TAEH’s support for the creation of a **new approvals stream for non-profit developers** in Open Door along with a **facilitator for non-profit projects and capacity building**.
 - The identification of repairing and **using vacant Toronto Community Housing (TCH) units to increase immediate access** to additional housing and supports.

NEXT STEPS

Regarding what we’d like to see strengthened, or more of, in this Plan:

- **Increase the pressure on the provincial and federal governments.** This is a job for all of us, and the TAEH is pursuing meetings with representatives of both to help make the case for more investment in Toronto. The work to establish the intergovernmental working group approved during the December 2019 Council meeting, and noted in this report as well as in PH13.6, must take on even more urgency, with the City actively pursuing the engagement of their counterparts in the provincial and federal governments.
- **Additional commitments from Toronto.** While this report rightly identifies the responsibilities of the Ontario and Canada, which it is clear we agree with, we note that it also includes the City itself when it states that *additional tri-level government investments*” are needed. Toronto is rightly not let off the hook here.

One strategy that we urge this Committee to consider in this area, and to bring forward to the next City Council meeting, is to **set aside a dedicated allocation for permanent affordable, deeply affordable and supportive housing in the City Building Fund**. It is our understanding the \$20 million to be used over 4 years for the Housing Now initiative was the first and to date only time that this fund allocated resources for housing.

Now that Mayor Tory and Council took the bold step to extend the City Building Fund, with the stated aim to use it for transportation and housing, you have the ideal opportunity before you to ensure that a predictable, stable allocation be identified to augment the City's role in building new housing.

- **Improve the ability of Housing Now to create more supportive housing.** The TAEH continues to recommend that 30% of all Housing Now units be committed as such. We also recommend that Housing Now work with Toronto's Ministry of Health funded supportive housing providers who can make resources available to projects that will significantly reduce the cost to the City in capital and operating.

The reference on page 10 of this report to "enhancing consideration" for submissions that include supportive housing is worth noting, and we look forward to learning what this means and how it will work. We also look forward to seeing the results of the current call for proposals for Housing Now sites and will be looking to see how many new supportive housing units are approved for construction.

We welcome too the arrival of the new Executive Director of the Housing Secretariat, Abi Bond, and will work as closely with Ms. Bond and her team to keep leveraging as much new supportive housing as we can from Housing Now.

- Regarding the **planned new modular supportive housing units**, we continue to support this innovation and expect to continue to be part of its evolution as we head into March. Today's report seems to suggest that operating dollars are still needed to make this pilot work. This is of course a concern, and we refer to our earlier comments on the need for additional resources from all three governments.

CONCLUSION

In the end, this Plan makes significant progress towards a more housing-focused response to homelessness. It demonstrates City leadership and asks that the other two orders of government step up to fulfill their roles. Every person experiencing homelessness in Toronto is also experiencing it in Ontario and in Canada.

As noted above, we see areas where this Plan can be improved, and there are clear things that the City can do more of within current and pending opportunities.

The coming implementation plan for Housing TO, in which today's strategies to increase access to supportive housing units rightly sits, will be another critical opportunity to commit to what is needed to ensure our collective success in increasing supportive housing options in Toronto to end chronic homelessness.

Thank you.