

DEPUTATION

To: **Planning and Housing Committee**
DATE: **Tuesday, September 22, 2020**
RE: **Addressing Housing and Homelessness Issues in Toronto through Intergovernmental Partnerships (PH16.8)**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you again today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). It is a good day when there is so much happening in the area of housing and homelessness that we have many items to support and share our comments on.

I refer you to the attachment in TAEH's earlier deputation today outlining our response overall to today's agenda. Regarding Item PH16.8, we will address the intergovernmental strategy, and both of the accompanying reports.

These reports, together, communicate the real and, for the goal of ending homelessness, the strategic relationship between what is needed to minimize the impacts of COVID-19 on individual and public health while at the same time reducing and ending homelessness and ensuring good housing for all Torontonians.

The Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy report sums it up nicely: *"The solution for individuals experiencing homelessness during a pandemic is the same solution they need to avoid and exit homelessness: safe housing that they can afford, that provides them with the support they need."*

And the Housing and People Action Plan puts addressing homelessness and the needs of other communities hit hard by COVID-19 squarely together with economic recovery and resilience for our city. It is inspiring to read on page 8:

Stimulus measures are also needed to preserve and expand the existing supply of affordable housing including: supportive housing; accessible housing for our growing seniors population; culturally appropriate Indigenous housing; housing for Black and People of Colour; affordable rental housing that meets the needs of many key workers in our cities and affordable and market rental and affordable ownership housing to address the supply shortage. Building housing for everyone in our communities will be crucial in filling the gaps exposed during the pandemic.

Intergovernmental responsibility and action

- All three orders have contributions to make. It is positive that the City of Toronto has already committed \$5.5 billion of its own total 10-year commitment of \$8.5 billion. We understand that the remaining \$3 billion will be allocated over the next 9 years in annual City budgets and look forward to seeing that happen.
- The TAEH is pleased to see that the need for increased alignment and streamlining of the various federal and provincial programs that provide supports for efforts to end homelessness is again identified as critical.
- We support the 24-month housing action plan and will advocate to other orders of government alongside you to secure their commitments to making it happen.

In particular, we are glad to see that, despite the understandable delays due to the demands of responding to COVID-19, that the development of a formal *Inter-Divisional Working Group to End Homelessness* is under way. We see it as a triage-table for the housing and homelessness systems, quickly identifying and moving to fix problems, gaps and policies that stand in the way of Toronto's progress. We look forward to our engagement and participation in this group.

Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy

- TAEH was pleased to be a member of this task force and we support the final report and strategy.
- The priority actions for the next 12 months are sound and must be implemented. Highlights include:
 - Shifting resources from respites and shelters that are no longer viable to housing supports;
 - Developing and using an acquisitions strategy for hotels, rooming houses etc.; We are particularly pleased to see:
 - an emphasis on community partnerships to enable non-profit ownership of these assets; and
 - the suggestion that SSHA could re-profile operating and support funding to pair with capital funding for acquisition from the federal government.
- A redevelopment plan to repurpose shelter space.
- Expediting the 1000 modular housing target for completion in the next 24 months.
- Continuing to deepen collaboration with health partners.
- Updating how we provide shelter services to provide safe and dignified options. Critical here is the report's recommendation to address issues in shelter that create the perception that encampments are safer options, and to increase community-based, person-centered responses to serving people in encampments, minimizing the need for policing.
- Repurposing funding for services that are no longer feasible post-COVID. The Out of the Cold Program is a key example of this and TAEH strongly supports its replacement with a program that provides housing and support services that are low-barrier, consistent and operate 365 days a year.
- Decreasing inflow to homelessness through effective eviction prevention and diversion strategies. This is even more critical during COVID-19 and the raising of eviction moratoriums of course.
- Addressing the ongoing and pervasive legacy of racism and colonialism in homelessness and the shelter system. TAEH applauds the actions recommended in the task force report and will incorporate similar actions into our own work.
- Ensuring that the first wave COVID responses such as hotel programs, rapid re-housing etc. are continued and that no one loses their housing or is returned to crowded, dormitory-style shelter. And that those currently in temporary situations are matched to appropriate permanent housing as we move forward.
- Convening a regional table to coordinate discharge planning from provincial pathways including corrections, health and child welfare.
- Leveraging the role of drop-ins.

One critical thing that the TAEH will be emphasizing and advocating for in our work on next steps is that the changes towards more housing solutions from current shelter services result in a set of person-centred, flexible models that truly provide a range of housing solutions to meet different needs.

The importance of getting the implementation plan for the recovery strategy right cannot be overstated. There is heavy-lifting ahead for SSHA, the Housing Secretariat and the homeless-serving community.

It is critical that people using the shelter system, as well as stakeholders such as the Toronto Shelter Network, as well as others from all sectors that engage with the shelter system, are included in implementation discussions as soon as possible.

We understand that implementation planning and actions will be iterative, and the TAEH as the non-Indigenous CAB is ready and willing to assist in convening engagement in implementation work in a mutually effective way.

Housing and People Action Plan

- TAEH also had the opportunity to participate in the development of this plan, and are also in strong support of it.
- It is positive to see the framing of this plan, starting with the assertion of housing as a human right and emphasizing the opportunities to address and end homelessness through a continuum of housing solutions.
- We also support the identification and actions to address the need for a much more robust housing-development environment in Toronto overall.

Our concerns, or advice for next steps, for this Item echoes those raised in our comments on Item PH16.5:

1 – that most of the **recommended directions call on, and rely heavily, on increased support (financial resources, policy changes) from the federal and provincial governments.**

We understand how the City of Toronto is between a “rock and a hard place” here. The impact of the other orders of government not coming sufficiently to the table on the immediate implementation of the shelter recovery strategies is real. Particularly for: repurposing shelter space, redirecting current available resources to enable these strategies, impact on shelter staff and operators.

2 - That all shifts and new initiatives must recognize **the need for appropriately resourced support services for people exiting homelessness**, especially for clients with complex or higher needs. This includes investing in designing programs to meet all the diverse sets of clients requiring housing with supports to achieve success. If we do not commit enough funding for the real cost of support services, we and the people we are trying to serve will fail.

3 - The role of **housing benefits and rent supplements** in allowing people to afford housing they otherwise could not is rightly acknowledged in these reports. But, while the call for expedited delivery of COHB benefits from the province and federal government is appropriate, we must also face the fact that the City itself can do more immediately to create additional housing allowances.

The impact and value that additional City-funded housing benefits would have is particularly high right now, when part of the COVID-19 fallout is a rising vacancy rate and projected lower rents in Toronto. More City-funded housing allowances will ensure that more people have permanent, safe housing before the winter.

CONCLUSION

The thrust of the Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy is also to transform our emergency shelter system to a housing-delivery system and we are of course 100% behind this direction.

The challenge here now is moving system-changes forward over the next 12 months even as we remain responsive to the sector's needs with COVID-19. TAEH is here to help and in our role as the non-Indigenous CAB, we will do our part to ground the next 5-year service plan in the vision of the interim shelter strategy.

The Housing and People Action Plan is also a valuable tool here. It includes addressing homelessness as a key priority and component to a healthy housing continuum in Toronto to meet everyone's needs. It is fitting to conclude here with another quote from this Plan, one that ties all our responsibilities together:

Collaboration across governments is essential... The risks are too high to allow for funds to be deployed slowly, delaying economic recovery but more importantly, delaying the provision of affordable housing for those most vulnerable. It is crucial that stimulus measures include the necessary resources to meet housing needs across the housing continuum, most focused on those either without a home, or facing an immediate loss of housing. All orders of government have committed to significantly reducing or ending chronic homelessness by the end of this decade. By working together our immediate pandemic emergency and recovery responses can ensure these commitments are met.

Thank you,

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