

DEPUTATION

To: **Planning and Housing Committee**
DATE: **Tuesday, September 22, 2020**
RE: **Improving Outcomes for Toronto Residents through
Implementation of HousingTO 2020-2030 (PH16.5)**

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 and support solutions to prevent and end homelessness in Toronto.

As such, we are in support of the recommendations in the report before you today, in the staff report and the attached Housing TO Implementation Plan.

Attached to this deputation are the Alliance's Key Messages responding to the overall direction of the housing and homelessness related reports at Committee today. It is encouraging to see that the goal of homelessness being "rare, brief and non-recurring" stated throughout the reports today, and the expectation that this is a City-wide responsibility to which most divisions must contribute. Equally, the positive and coherent pivot in all reports today, with their recommended actions to permanent housing solutions to address and end homelessness, is very welcomed by TAEH and our many partners.

Regarding Item PH16.5 itself, and the Housing TO Implementation Plan, the priorities we support and look forward to continuing to work with the City on include:

- **Prioritizing purchasing properties for permanent housing models instead of temporary fixes;** bringing federal National Housing Strategy resources, including the new federal capital acquisition fund announced September 21, 2020, together with City housing policy to acquire significant more capital assets and renovate/repurpose and protect existing ones for permanent housing.
- The **24-month housing action plan** which includes key Housing TO targets in its goal of 3000 new homes in the next 2 years through:
 - 1,000 permanent modular homes;
 - 1,000 new homes through acquisitions, renovations and "shovel ready" projects; and
 - 1,000 additional new portable Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits (COHB) to help households secure housing available for rent.

The target of creating 1000 permanent modular housing units has been a TAEH position since the beginning of 2020 and we are pleased to see it become City policy as well.

- The **emphasis on ending homelessness** in the staff report for this Item. It is an important inclusion in the work of the Housing Secretariat and we are encouraged that specific City actions are identified here. And that targets are beginning to be attached to our goal. For example, PH16.5 states that by adding 1,800 new supportive housing units a year we can end chronic homelessness in Toronto in the next 3 years.

- The explicit reference to **the work on Coordinated Access**, with its By-Name List and Common Assessment Tool. The inclusion of the need for these tools in the Housing and People Action Plan (PH16.8 Attachment 1) is equally appreciated.

The TAEH has, and continues to work closely with SSHA in this area as we believe coordinated systems and a good, real-time data system from which to make informed decisions is critical to ending homelessness. On the latter we have to see more progress, understandably slowed down by the needed focus on COVID-19, and are willing to do what we can to help.

Related to this point, the TAEH is pleased to see the recognition and plans to address the need for a housing data strategy in the staff report for PH16.5 and that it will be part of the 2021 budget.

- **Moving forward to establish the Housing Commissioner**, and the increasing framing of housing as a human right and its progressive realization in Toronto in all today's reports. This is an important outcome of the Housing TO action plan and the TAEH will continue to our part in achieving its promise, supporting the positions of Right to Housing TO as well.
- That the process to review and **streamline the delivery of housing services across City divisions** is underway. The TAEH has advocated to this Committee and others for some time now that more coordinated and holistic we can be in addressing people's needs along the full continuum of housing the better.
- That the RFP process to **transfer over 600 single-family homes from TCH to the non-profit housing sector** is almost done. We understand that a report on the successful proponents and next steps is on the agenda at the October Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) meeting and look forward to learning more then.
- **Identifying small sites suitable for supporting housing** is a welcomed and effective strategy. The TAEH is glad to see it before Committee today and looks forward to working with the Housing Secretariat, SSHA and Create TO in maximizing its potential. Many TAEH partners are aware of smaller sites that could work, and through our *Supportive Housing Growth Plan* we have a useful inventory of assets across the city to share.
- **Creating an operating fund for supportive housing at the City**. This is a good idea and will require provincial cooperation for mental health and addiction supports and the TAEH supports and will advocate along with the City for the \$48 million identified for support services in the 24-month housing plan.

This fund must also be part of a broader strategy to make it easier to create supportive housing in Toronto through items such as those that address the power of Inclusionary Zoning policies, Section 37 provisions and a robust community benefits framework. We look forward to seeing the actions and targets on these and other related tactics in the full Housing TO Implementation Plan met.

Our concerns, or advice for next steps, for today centre on three key areas:

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.**

While this is realistic as municipal governments in Canada do not have access to the amount of capital needed for a robust housing program, it also problematic in terms of the lack of identified actions the City and community can take with our own resources right now.

There is risk to the success of all these plans if the federal and provincial governments do not come to the table. Of course, yesterday's announcement of additional federal funding mitigates this somewhat, and we appreciate City leadership in making this happen.

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

As noted above, there is a lot of progress in today's reports and the vision and action plan they lay out. The pivot to housing solutions for homelessness and the increased commitment to streamlining and City-wide approach is to be noted and congratulated.

The TAEH and our partners are encouraged by this, and we will continue to work with the City, as well as advocating to the province and federal governments to come together in our collective responsibility to ensure homelessness is truly rare, brief and non-recurring.

Thank you,

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Attachment:

TAEH Key Messages

Responding to proposed City of Toronto actions included in items at Planning and Housing Committee on September 22, 2020



GENERAL/OVERALL MESSAGES

The following key messages respond to the set of reports for Items PH16.5 and 8 in the areas of priority interest to TAEH. Issue and/or item specific key messages follow.

1 - Great to see goal of homelessness being “rare, brief and non-recurring” stated throughout the reports today, and the expectation that this is a City-wide responsibility to which most divisions must contribute.

2 - There is a positive and coherent pivot in all reports and recommended actions to permanent housing solutions to address and end homelessness. This includes:

1. shifting the emergency shelter system as we know it now to a housing-focused model;
2. prioritizing purchasing properties for permanent housing models; and
3. bringing federal National Housing Strategy resources, including the new federal capital acquisition fund (announced September 21, 2020), together with City housing policy to acquire significant more capital assets and renovate/repurpose and protect existing ones for permanent housing.

3 - These reports also, 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 and to reduce and end homelessness. One of the many quotes in the various reports 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.” ([Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy](#), Item 16.8 Attachment 2)

4 – There are two immediate action plans that articulate what the City can do to implement a housing-focused response to COVID-19 that also works to end people’s homelessness:

1. A [24-month housing action plan](#) to create 3000 new homes in the next 2 years through:
 - 1,000 permanent modular homes;
 - 1,000 new homes through acquisitions, renovations and "shovel ready" projects; and
 - 1,000 additional new portable Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits (COHB) to help households secure housing available for rent.

The target of creating 1000 permanent modular housing units has been a TAEH position since the beginning of 2020 and we are pleased to see it become City policy as well.

While this plan does rely on speeding up existing commitments from the province and federal government in future years, it also has clear actions and targets for the City once that funding becomes available.

2. An implementation plan for the City's role in making the shelter system changes recommended in the [Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy](#) a reality is underway and will be the focus of the October Committee and Council meetings.

It is critical that people using the shelter system, as well as stakeholders such as the Toronto Shelter Network, as well as stakeholders 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.

5 – All the reports and recommended directions call on, and rely heavily, on increased support (financial resources, policy changes) from the federal and provincial governments. While this is realistic as municipal governments in Canada do not have access to the amount of capital needed for a robust housing program, it is also problematic in terms of the lack of identified actions the City and community can take with our own resources right now. Our leading concerns here are:

- The risk posed to success of all these plans if the federal and provincial governments do not come to the table.
- The impact on the critical need for the immediate implementation of the shelter recovery strategies, particularly for: repurposing shelter space, redirecting current available resources to enable these strategies, impact on shelter staff and operators. In other words, how do we maximize what we can do without other orders of government contributing more now?
- 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.

6 - The role of housing benefits and rent supplements in allowing people to afford housing they otherwise could not is 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.

ADDITIONAL ISSUE SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Ending homelessness

- It is encouraging to see:
 - A full 3 pages of the [staff report for PH16.5](#) on ending homelessness and that the changes needed to do so are also increasingly a corporate-wide priority.
 - Repeated in the documents that “ending chronic homelessness is possible,” and
 - Specific things the City can and will do to pivot to housing-focused strategies and solutions, with targets beginning to be attached to our goal.

- For example, PH16.5 states that by adding 1,800 new supportive housing units a year we can end chronic homelessness in Toronto in the next 3 years.
- It is also always good to see explicit reference to the work on Coordinated Access, with its By-Name List and Common Assessment Tool, in staff reports. The inclusion of the need for these tools in the [Housing and People Action Plan](#) (PH16.8 Attachment 1) is equally appreciated.

The TAEH has, and continues to work closely with SSHA in this area as we believe coordinated systems and a good, real-time data system from which to make informed decisions is critical to ending homelessness. On the latter we have to see more progress, understandably slowed down by the needed focus on COVID-19, and are willing to do what we can to help.

Related to this point, the TAEH is pleased to see the recognition and plans to address the need for a housing data strategy in the staff report for PH16.5 and that it will be part of the 2021 budget.

- 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.

- Similarly, we were pleased and encouraged to read the overt emphasis on, and the prioritization of, meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness and other marginalized peoples in the [Housing and People Action Plan](#).

Housing TO 2020 targets/achievements and ongoing work on them ([Item PH16.5](#))

- Moving forward to establish the Housing Commissioner is good. It is worth noting that not only on this particular action, but throughout the reports today, that the framing of housing as a human right and its progressive realization in Toronto is becoming increasingly embedded. This is an important outcome of the Housing TO action plan and the TAEH will continue to our part in achieving its promise.

We also support the messages of [Right to Housing TO](#) and will work more closely with this network in the coming months.

- It is exciting to see that the process to review and streamline the delivery of housing services across City divisions is underway. The TAEH has advocated to this Committee and others for some time now that more coordinated and holistic we can be in addressing people's needs along the full continuum of housing the better.
- Positive that that the RFP process to transfer over 600 single-family homes from TCH to the non-profit housing sector is almost done. We understand that a report on the successful proponents and next steps is on the agenda at the October Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) meeting and look forward to learning more then.
- Identifying small sites suitable for supporting housing is a welcomed and effective strategy. The TAEH is glad to see it before Committee today and looks forward to working with the Housing

Secretariat, SSHA and Create TO in maximizing its potential. Many TAEH partners are aware of smaller sites that could work, and through our Supportive Housing Growth Plan we have a useful inventory of assets across the city to share.

Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy (under Item 16.8)

- TAEH was a member of this task force and support the final report attached today to Item PH16.8.
- 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.

Supportive housing

- Creating an operating fund for supportive housing at the City, as many of today's reports suggest, is a good idea. It requires provincial cooperation for mental health and addiction supports and the TAEH supports and will advocate along with the City for the \$48 million identified for support services in the 24-month housing plan.
- This fund must also be part of a broader strategy to make it easier to create supportive housing in Toronto through items such as those that address the power of Inclusionary Zoning policies, Section 37 provisions and a robust community benefits framework. We look forward to seeing the actions and targets on these and other related tactics in the full [Housing TO Implementation Plan](#) met.

Intergovernmental responsibility and action

- All three orders have contributions to make, and as when Housing TO first launched, the TAEH supports the call on our provincial and federal governments to do more.
- 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.
- Identifying the need for increased alignment and streamlining of the various federal and provincial programs that provide supports for efforts to end homelessness is also critical. Report PH16.8 does include this as part of the value of an inter-governmental approach.
- TAEH supports the 24-month housing action plan ([attachment 3 to PH16.8](#)) and will advocate to other orders of gov't alongside the City of Toronto to secure their commitments to making it happen.

The TAEH was and remains at the forefront of establishing the identified **Inter-Divisional Working Group to End Homelessness** under this Item. 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. It is great that it is now being established and we look forward to our engagement in this group.